

2018 Census of California Water Transit Services

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The research team collected information from 25 water transportation operators throughout California and produced 42 accompanying maps that depict routes and terminals where the operators provide service. Tabular information for each operator catalogs their number of vessels, passenger counts, fares, seating capacity, route lengths and other data points.

Study Methods

Our first task was to develop a complete listing of all water transportation operators in the state. To identify an initial set of operator data, we searched a wide variety of websites using relevant search terms. We contacted each of the water transit operators in the state of California by telephone. Most of the operators gladly participated in this census, although a few did not return our calls despite many repeated efforts and numerous e-mail follow-ups.

Findings

The research revealed that water transit vessels in California provide services beyond what is commonly considered to be traditional “ferry” operations, and this necessitated the creation of three primary classifications of water transit service: commuter, non-commuter, and water taxis. Broadly speaking:

- commuter services are commonly understood as “ferries” and provide essential, “point A to point B” transportation such as traditional vehicle or passenger ferries.
- non-commuter services also provide “point A to point B” service on a scheduled basis but are typically used for recreation and tourism purposes. An example is service to and from Alcatraz Island provided by Alcatraz Cruises, owned by Hornblower.
- water taxis are small vessels that transport passengers on either a fixed-route or non-fixed route basis for on-demand, short-distance trips.

A wide variety of commuter-serving and recreational water transportation services are found throughout California's coastal metropolitan areas and the Sacramento Delta.

Policy Recommendations

It is expected that the next census will be undertaken in 2023.

About the Authors

Richard Kos is certified urban planner and geographic information systems expert. After earning a BS degree in Environmental Planning and Design from Rutgers University, Mr. Kos put his skills into practice with local governments in New Jersey and North Carolina, serving as assistant or senior planner for a number of rapidly-growing communities. He earned his master's degree in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In 2000, Mr. Kos served as a transportation planner and GIS analyst with the Metropolitan Transportation Commission in Oakland, California, where he produced numerous maps related to welfare-to-work and lifeline transportation projects. From there, Mr. Kos spent four years as GIS manager for DC&E, an innovative planning and design firm in Berkeley. In 2008, Mr. Kos decided to bring his skills into academia where he currently teaches graduate-level Geographic Information Systems and studio-based community improvement projects at San Jose State University. Mr. Kos also teaches short-term GIS workshops at City College of San Francisco and the California Academy of Art and offers his consulting services to a variety of clients including Mobility Planners, the City of Mountain View, and WorldLink.

Nick Frey, a North Carolinian by birth, a Californian by choice, and an Urbanist by calling, is a student of cities and the built form. With interests in land use and transportation and a deep environmental streak, Nick is pursuing a Master's Degree in Urban and Regional Planning at San Jose State University. He spends his free time on the trail or in the ocean, and loves traveling by train. He spent a month in India, a year in Germany and is always looking for the next adventure. Nick hopes to apply his education to crafting a denser, greener, and more equitable future for his home, California.

Mehedi Chowdhury, returning to San Jose State University, is working on earning his master's degree in Urban Planning with a focus on environmental planning. He received his bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies from SJSU with a concentration on environmental impact assessment. He is currently interning at South Bay Water Recycling, managed by the City of San Jose's Environmental Services Department. Mehedi is deeply interested in designing cities that will artfully integrate natural services and ecological functions with energy efficient and beautiful buildings to harmonize city and nature for both humans and non-humans. Mehedi hopes to one day influence planning decisions with green visions and to break through institutional and political barriers to optimize cities in the face of climate change at home – and to learn how it is being addressed abroad, particularly in his river-abundant, water-transit-ideal, ancestral homeland of Bangladesh. This 2018 Water Transit Census project became of interest to him when he was sitting in traffic and wished he had taken a ferry instead.

To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at transweb.sjsu.edu/research/1809



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