

PREPARING FOR THE BLATNIK BRIDGE CLOSURE

BUSINESS & CONSUMER INSIGHTS



THE
DEVELOPMENT
ASSOCIATION



Northwest Regional Planning Commission

NWRPC
Keeping your Future as our Focus



Sponsored By

WISCONSIN
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

WHO WE ARE

THE DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION & NORTHWEST REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION



The Development Association champions business growth, creation, recruitment, and retention, in the City of Superior and Douglas County, Wisconsin.



NWRPC is a multi-county regional planning commission serving 10 counties, five tribal nations, and 230 units of local government across Northwest Wisconsin.

A GENERATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE DISRUPTION

Approximately 33,000 daily trips currently occur between Wisconsin and Minnesota with Nearly 9,500 daily commuters impacted

Significant implications for:

- Small businesses
- Workforce movement
- Consumer behavior
- Tourism and hospitality
- Retail spending patterns



HOW WE GOT STARTED

How will this impact businesses?
What are the potential implications?
Where are the opportunities?

- WEDC \$50,000 grant
- Created Steering Committee
- Launched Bridge to Progress Program



STEERING COMMITTEE ROLE

SUPPORTING DATA DRIVEN PLANNING

- Survey development and analysis
- Identify key issues
- Data-informed planning support
- Focus on preparation before disruption occurs



STEERING COMMITTEE

BROAD CROSS-SECTION OF PERSPECTIVES

Area Represented	Business/Organization	Member	Title
Business Community	The Development Association	Jim Caesar	Executive Director
Business Community	The Development Association	Jenice Meyer**	Assistant Executive Director
Business Community	Chamber of Commerce	Taylor Pedersen**	President & CEO
Business Representative	Earth Rider & Cedar Lounge	Tim Nelson	Owner
Business Representative	Keyport Liquor	Mark Casper	Owner
Business Representative	Mix Cosmetiques	Lanae Rhoads	Owner
Business Representative	The Spirit Room	Lindsey Graskey	Owner
City of Superior	Economic Development	Jason Serck	Director of Ports & Planning
Business Improvement District	SBID	Kelly Peterson	Executive Director
Northwest Region	NWRPC	Sheldon Johnson	Executive Director
Northwest Region	Visions Northwest	Crystal Rohde**	Administrator
State of Wisconsin	Dept of Workforce Development	Thomas Michels**	Labor Market Economist
State of Wisconsin	Dept of Transportation	Stephanie King**	NW Region, Engineer
State of Wisconsin	Dept of Transportation	Marc Bowker**	NW Region, Engineer



** Data Subcommittee

BUSINESS SURVEY SECTIONS



CUSTOMER & REVENUE IMPACT



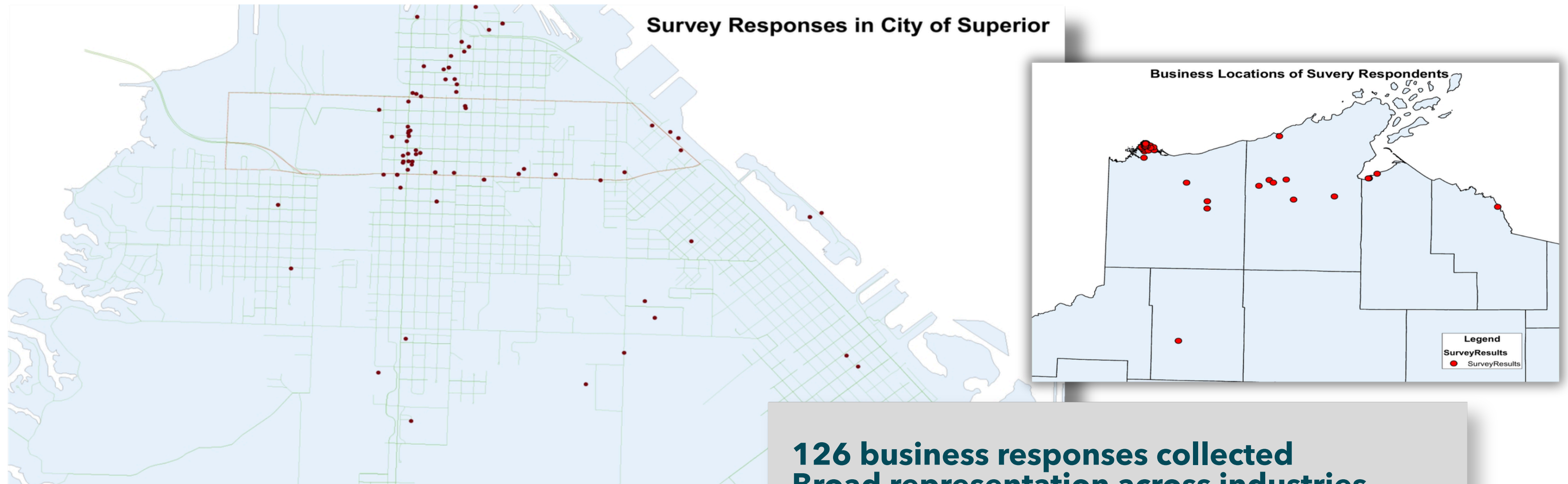
WORKFORCE & OPERATIONS



ADAPTATION & SUPPORT

BUSINESS SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

LOCATION OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

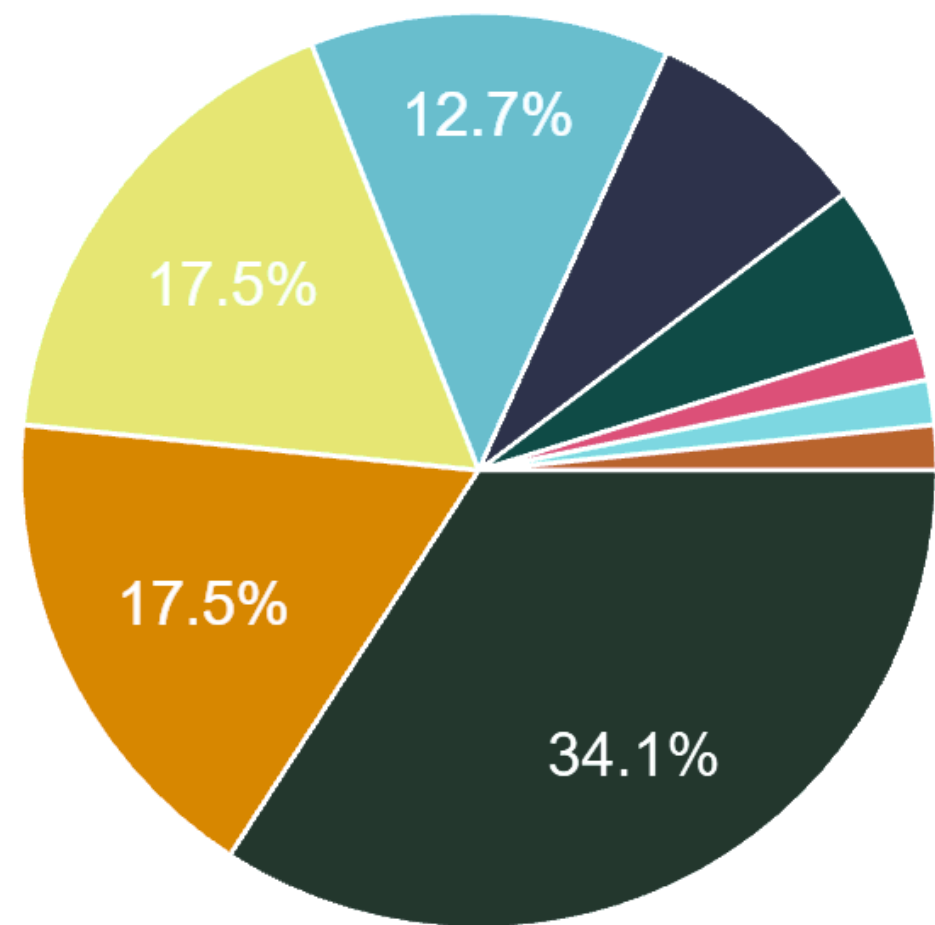


126 business responses collected
Broad representation across industries
Strong participation from small businesses

BUSINESS SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Size of Business/Organization

126 responses

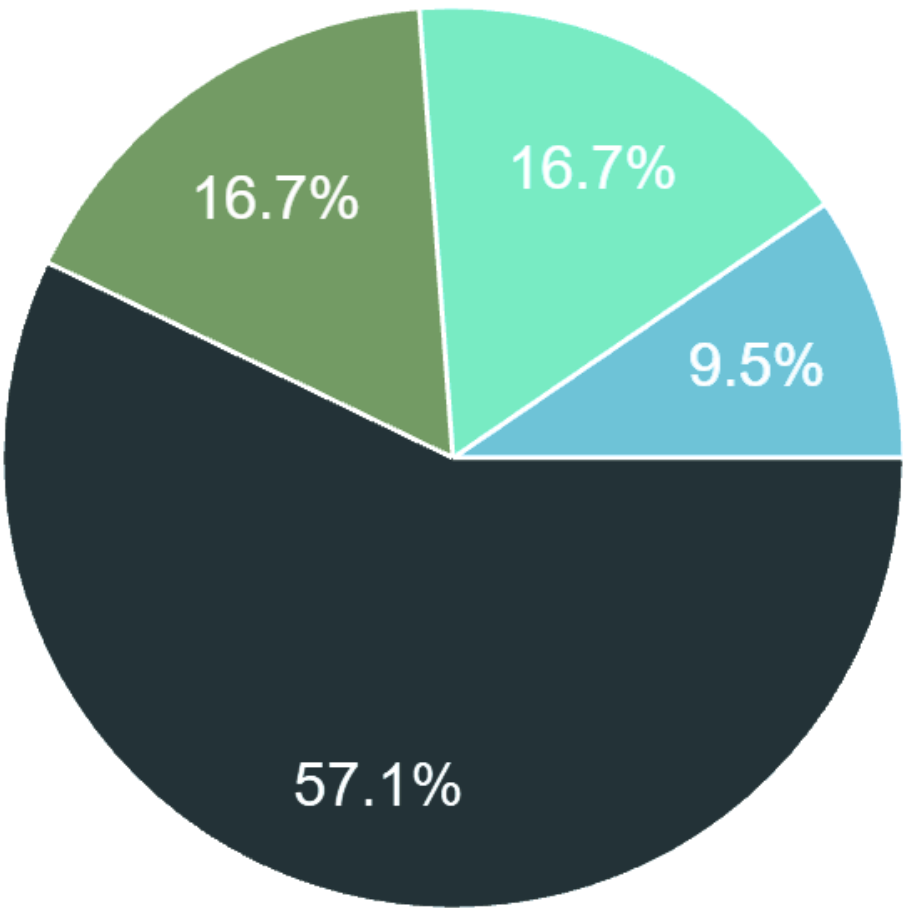


- 1-4 employees
- 5-9 employees
- 10-19 employees
- 20-49 employees
- 50-99 employees
- 100-249 employees
- 250-499 employees
- 500-999 employees

BUSINESS SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Please indicate your role in the business/organization.

126 responses

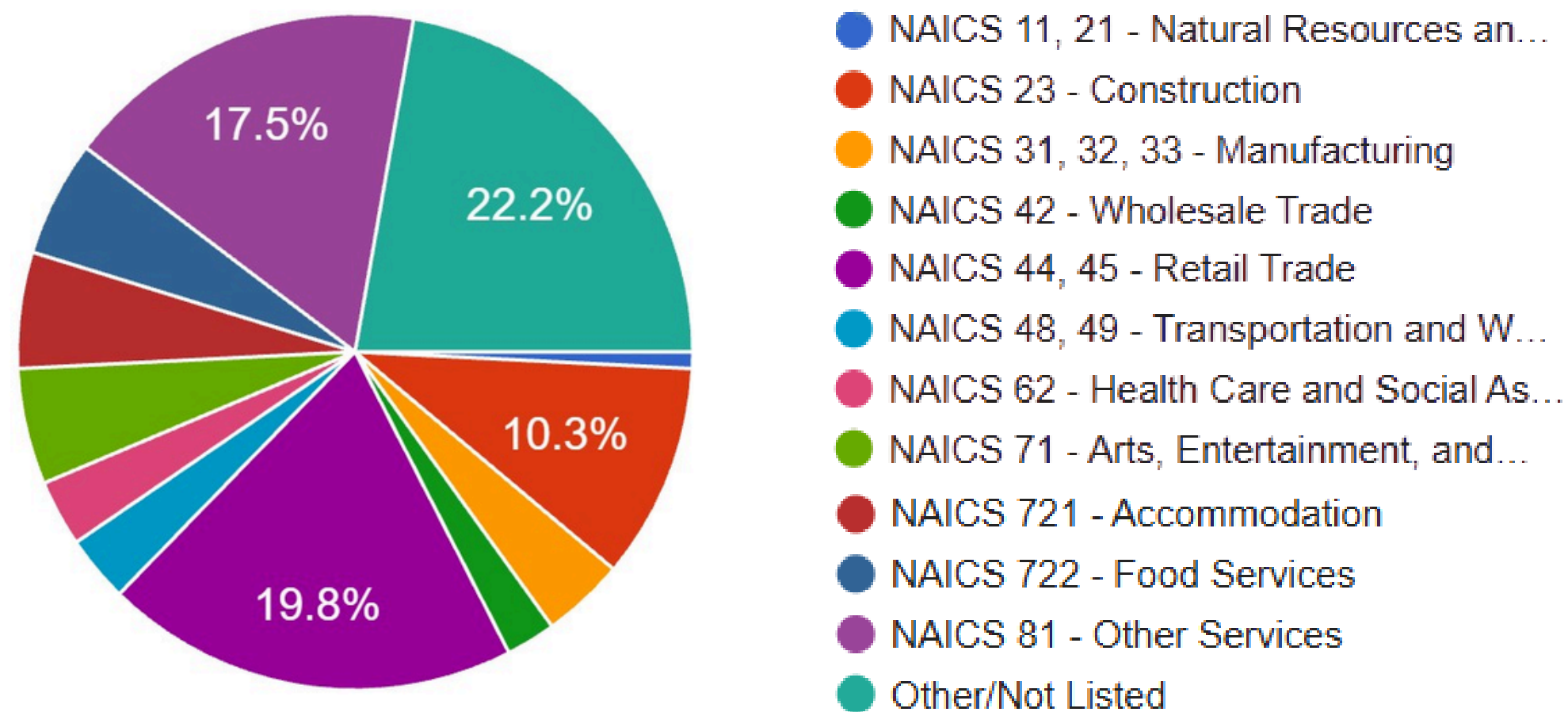


- Owner
- Lead Operator/CEO/President/Executive Director
- Executive Level
- Employee

BUSINESS SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

What industry best describes your business? (NAICS Code & SIC Identification Tools | NAICS Association)

126 responses

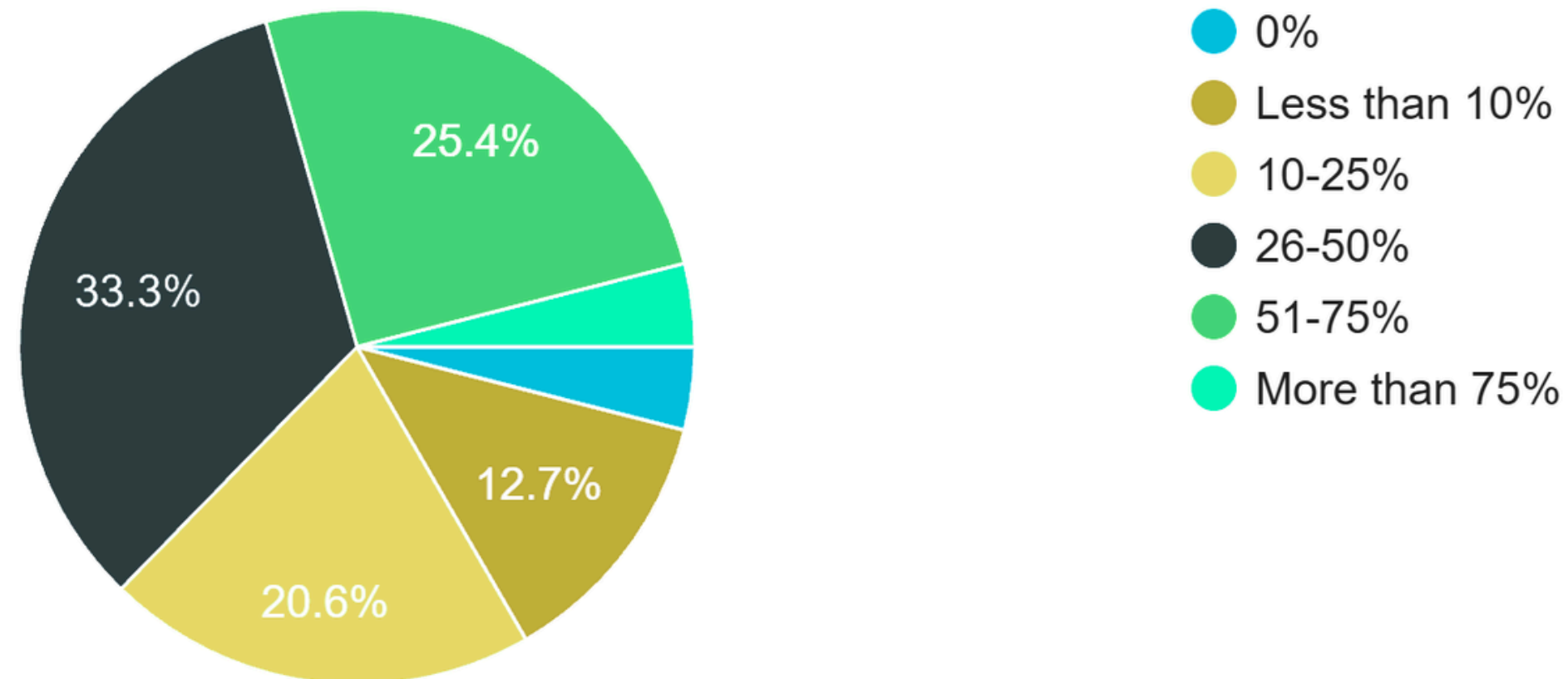


CUSTOMER & REVENUE IMPACT

CURRENT REVENUE FROM MINNESOTA

Based on your experience in the industry, how much of your revenue currently comes from Minnesota?

126 responses

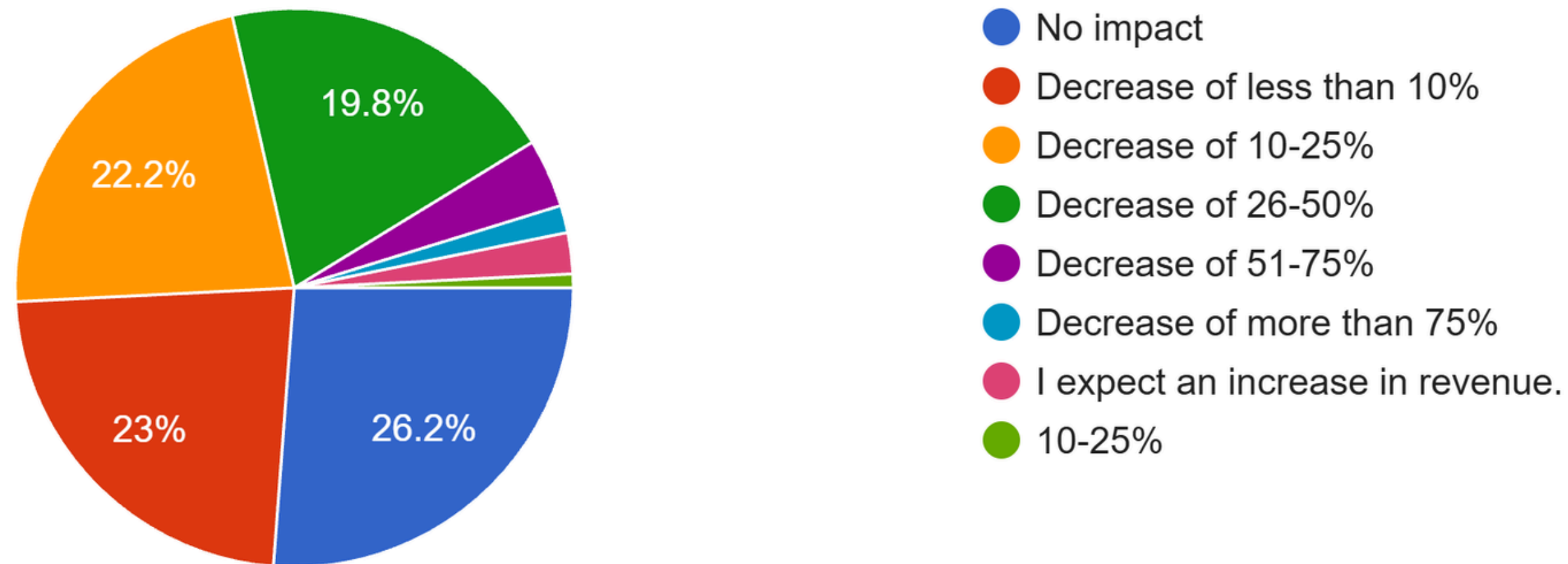


CUSTOMER & REVENUE IMPACT

ANTICIPATION OF CHANGE IN REVENUE

When the Blatnik Bridge closes, do you anticipate any change in revenue (if at all)?

126 responses



CUSTOMER & REVENUE IMPACT

THEMES OF ANTICIPATED CHANGE IN REVENUE

Businesses expressed concerned about:

- Reduced customer traffic
- Longer travel times and congestion
- Loss of spontaneous or convenience-based trips
- Increased congestion discouraging visits to Superior
- Consumers permanently change shopping habits

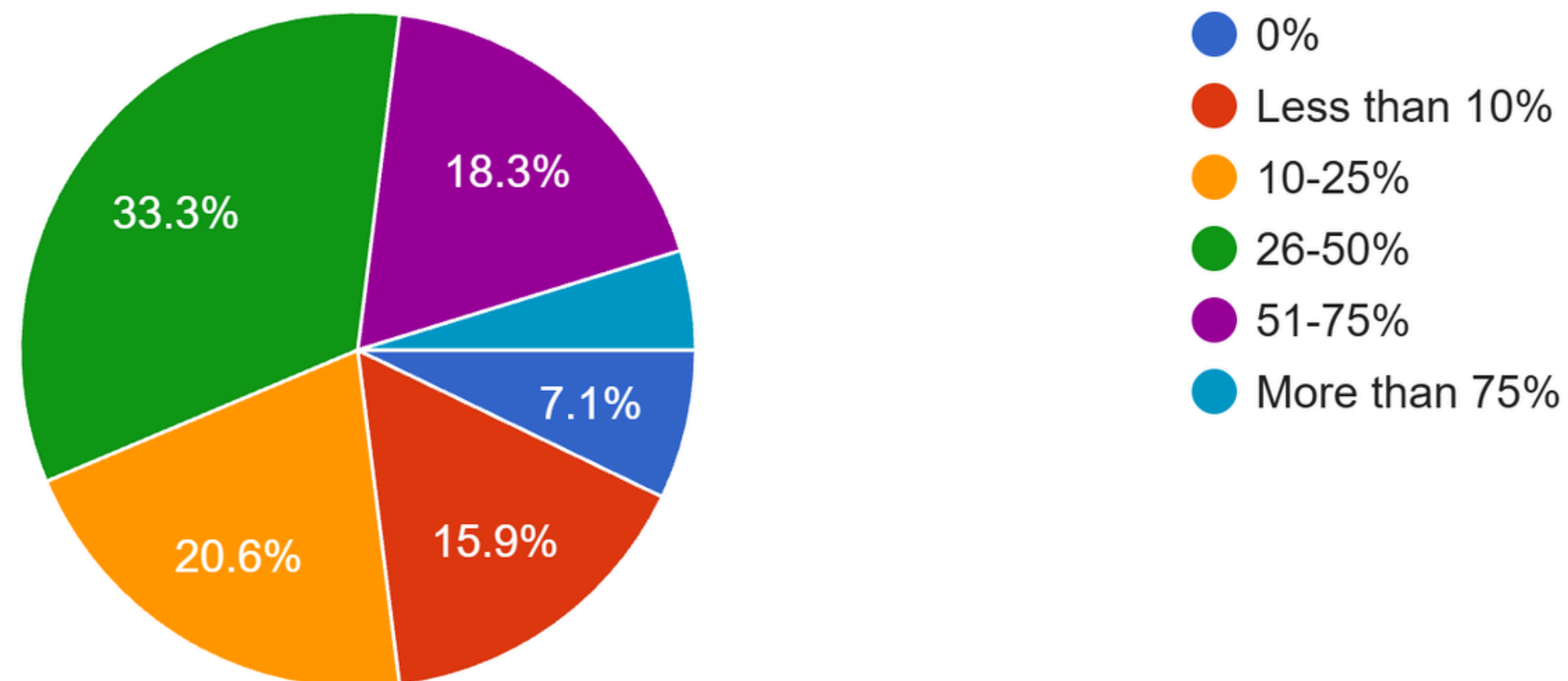


CUSTOMER & REVENUE IMPACT

PERCENTAGE OF CUSTOMERS CURRENTLY FROM MN

Based on your experience in the industry, how many of your customers currently come from Minnesota?

126 responses

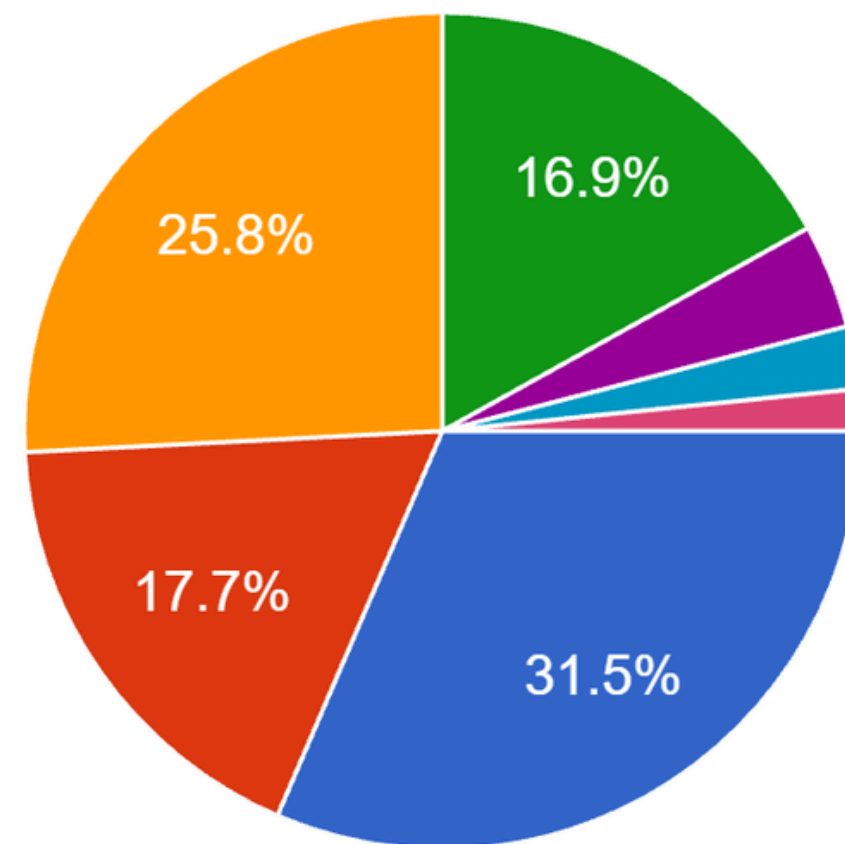


CUSTOMER & REVENUE IMPACT

ANTICIPATED CHANGE IN CUSTOMERS

When the Blatnik Bridge closes, do you anticipate any change in customers (if at all)?

124 responses



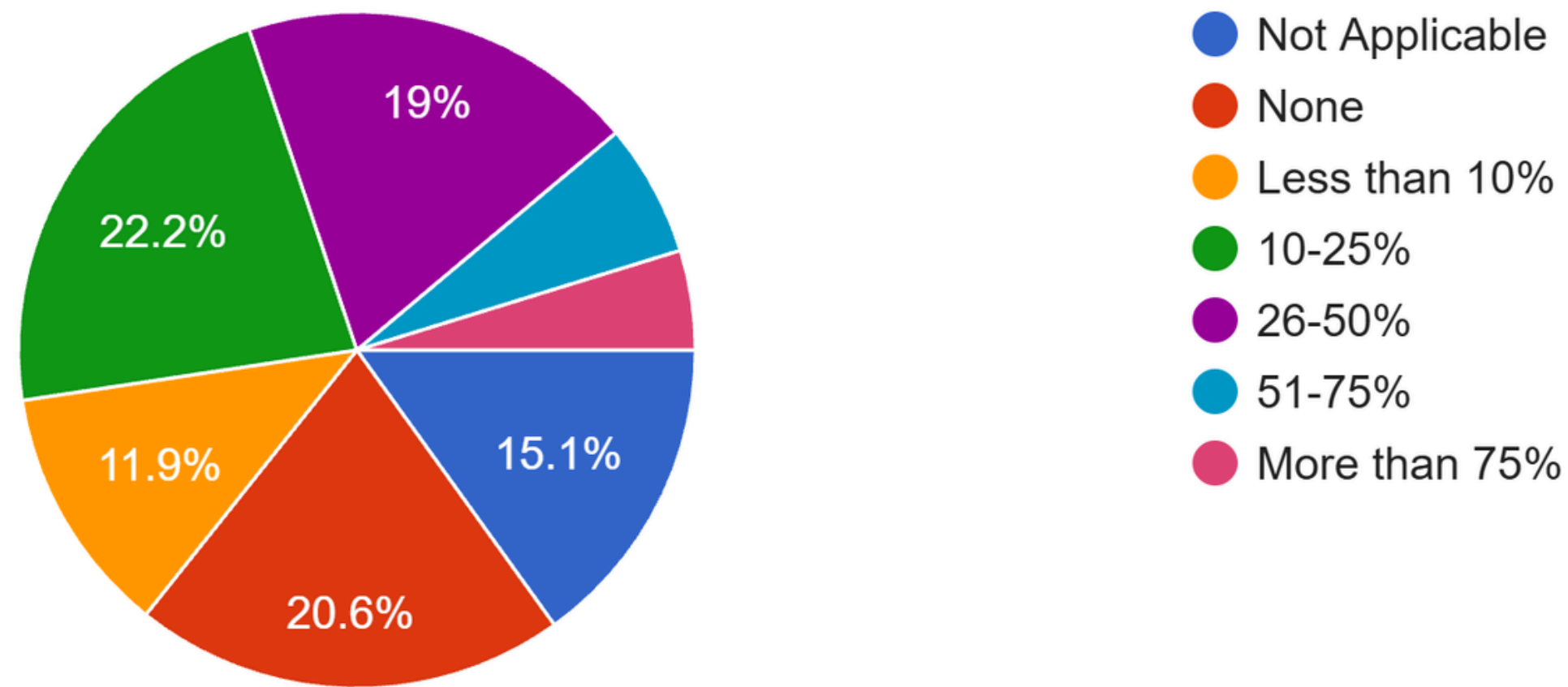
- No impact
- Decrease of less than 10%
- Decrease of 10-25%
- Decrease of 26-50%
- Decrease of 51-75%
- Decrease of more than 75%
- I expect an increase in customers.

WORKFORCE & OPERATIONS

PERCENTAGE OF EMPLOYEES WHO COMMUTE FROM MN

What percentage of your employees commute from Minnesota for work?

126 responses

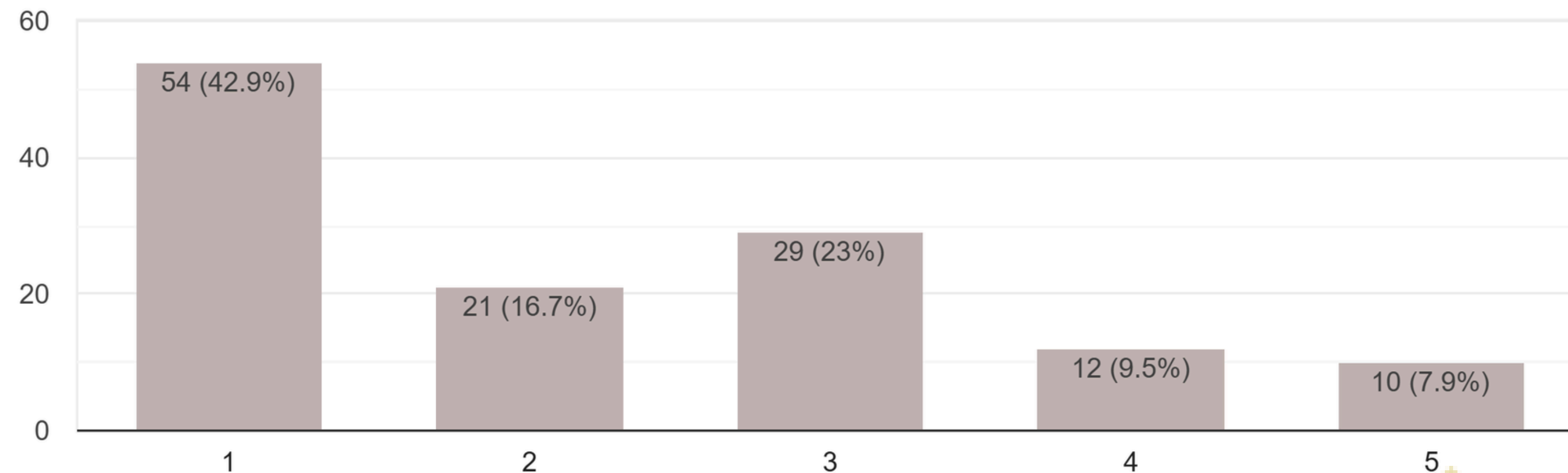


WORKFORCE & OPERATIONS

CONCERNED ABOUT RETAINING OR RECRUITING EMPLOYEES

Workforce shortages continue to be an on-going concern. During the bridge closure, how much more concerned are you about retaining or recruiting employees?

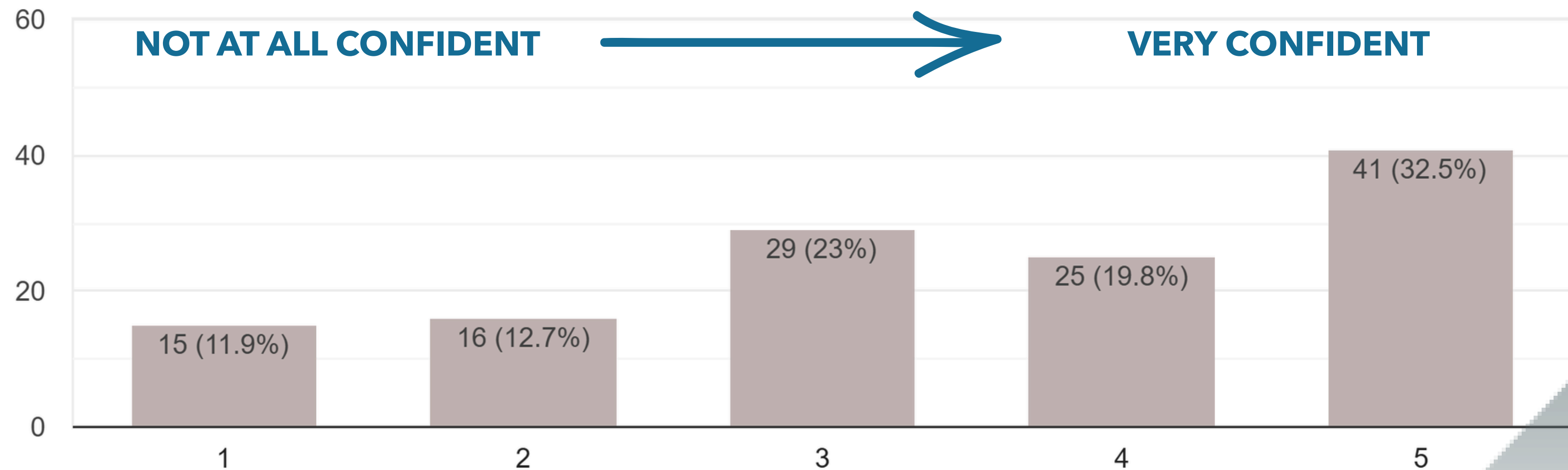
126 responses



ADAPTATION & SUPPORT

If no additional support were available, how confident are you in your business's ability to withstand the 5-year closure?

126 responses



ADAPTATION & SUPPORT

EMERGING THEMES

Top 4 Needs Identified by Survey Respondents

- Financial Assistance (Grants/Forgivable Loans)
- Customer Outreach & Marketing
- Community "Shop Local" Campaigns
- Business Networking & Shared Resources

Supporting Needs

- Transportation Solutions
- Supply Chain Support
- Technical Assistance & Training
- Clear Construction Communication

BUSINESS SURVEY

KEY PRELIMINARY TAKEAWAYS

- A large % of our revenue & customers are from MN
- However, closure will likely not impact all businesses equally
- Smaller businesses are more concerned about the closure
- Concern that increased congestion will discourage visits and result in less planned, spontaneous, or trips of convenience
- Not an increased concern about workforce
- Opportunity for long-term habit changes and focus for our collective efforts
- Seek funding in priority areas of what businesses identified as most helpful and needed



BUSINESS SURVEY

QUESTIONS?



CONSUMER SURVEY SNAPSHOT

Purpose:

- Understand current travel and shopping patterns
- Identify likely behavior changes during the closure
- Explore what may help retain local spending in Superior and Douglas County

Key focus areas:

- Cross-bridge travel frequency
- Shopping and dining patterns
- Long-term habit changes
- Consumer perceptions and barriers



Blatnik Bridge Closure - Consumer Survey

Purpose: This survey is designed to understand how the upcoming Blatnik Bridge closure (anticipated in early 2027 for up to 5 years) may affect travel patterns and shopping behavior in the Twin Ports region. Your responses will help local leaders and businesses plan and adapt. The Development Association, with generous support from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation and numerous business partners, is providing leadership for this survey.

Survey participants may choose to enter a drawing for one of ten \$25 to \$50 gift cards at the end of the survey. Providing contact information for the drawing is optional and will only be used to contact selected winners.

Time to complete: 8–10 minutes

CONSUMER SURVEY SECTIONS



AWARENESS & TRAVEL PLANS



SHOPPING & SPENDING PATTERNS



LOCAL SHOPPING CONSIDERATION



ANTICIPATED CHANGES DUE TO BRIDGE CLOSURE

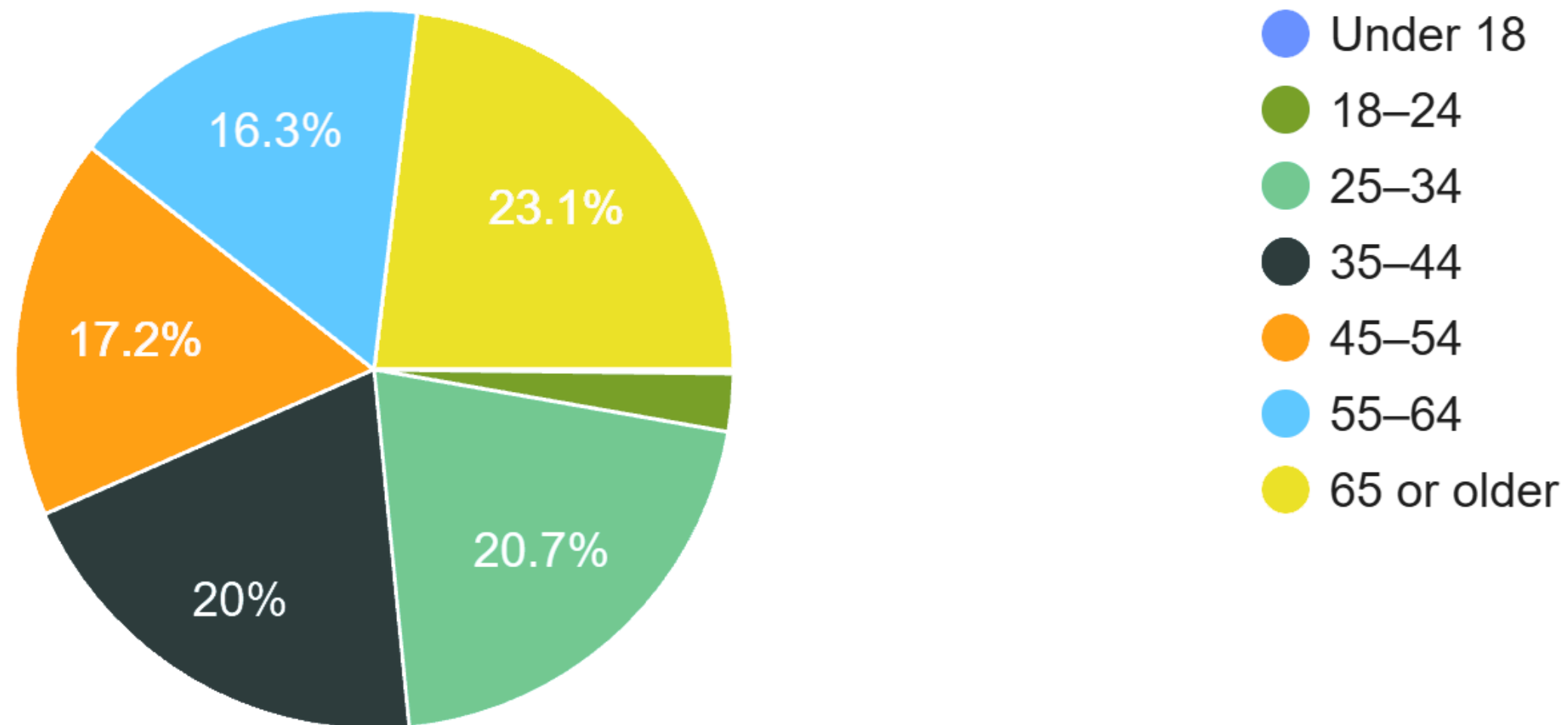


COMMUNITY INFORMATION & ENGAGEMENT

CONSUMER SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

20. What is your age range?

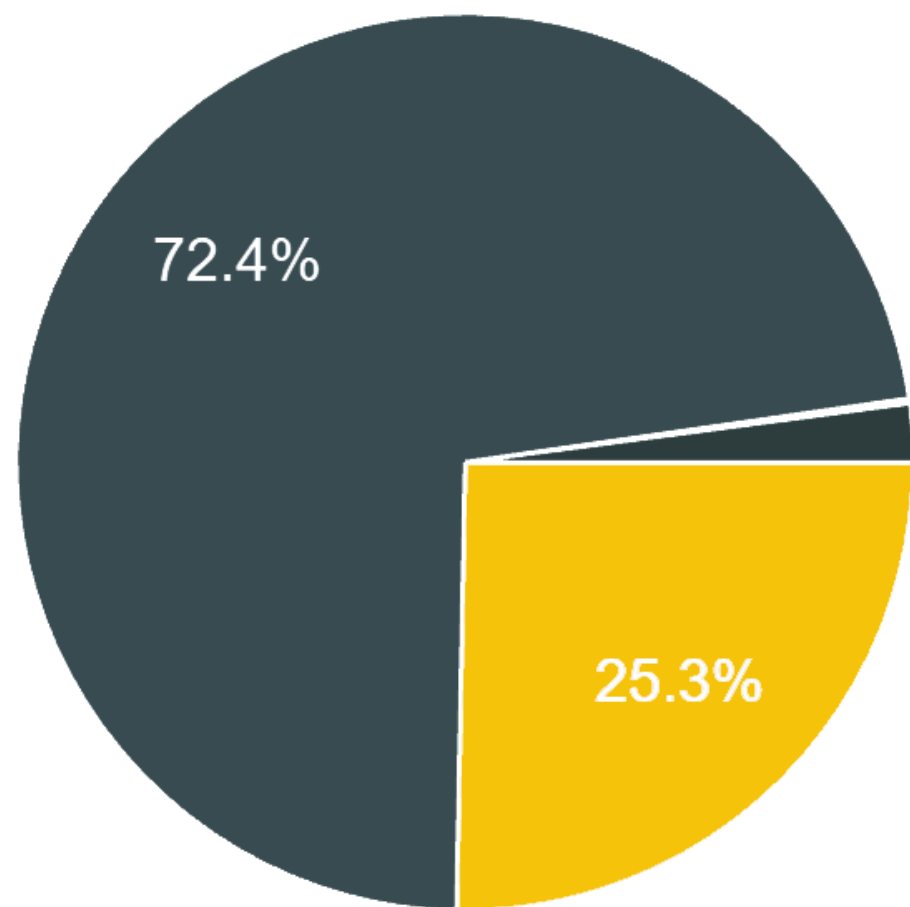
576 responses



CONSUMER SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

21. How do you describe your gender?

573 responses

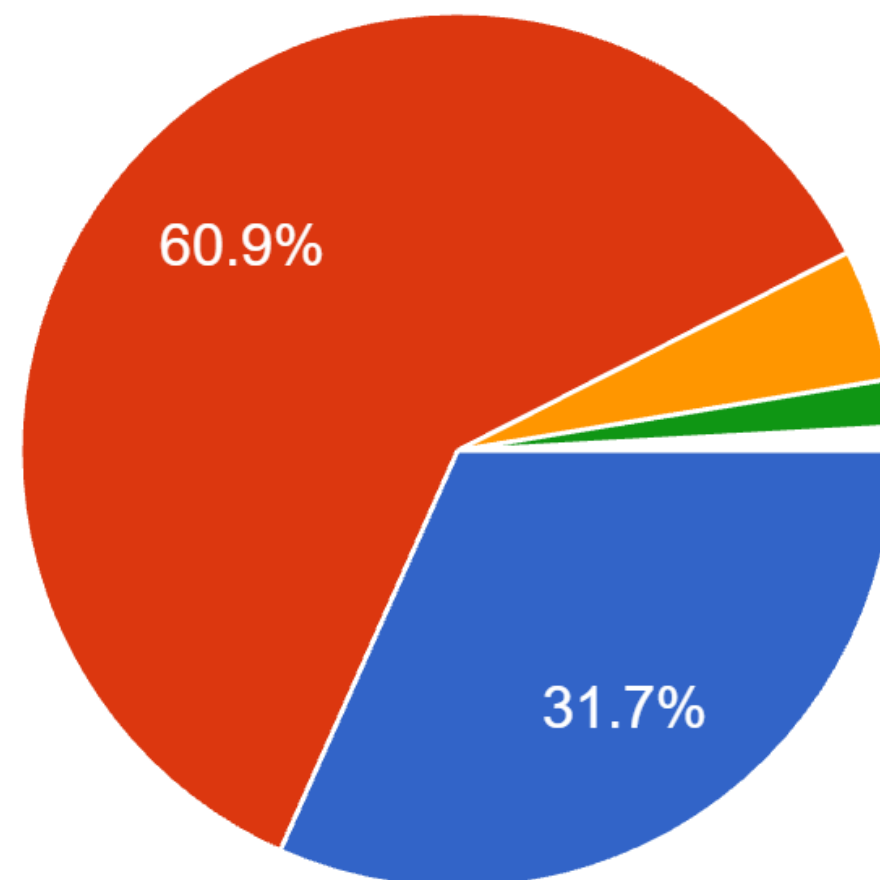


- Man
- Woman
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say

CONSUMER SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

22. What is your current residency?

575 responses

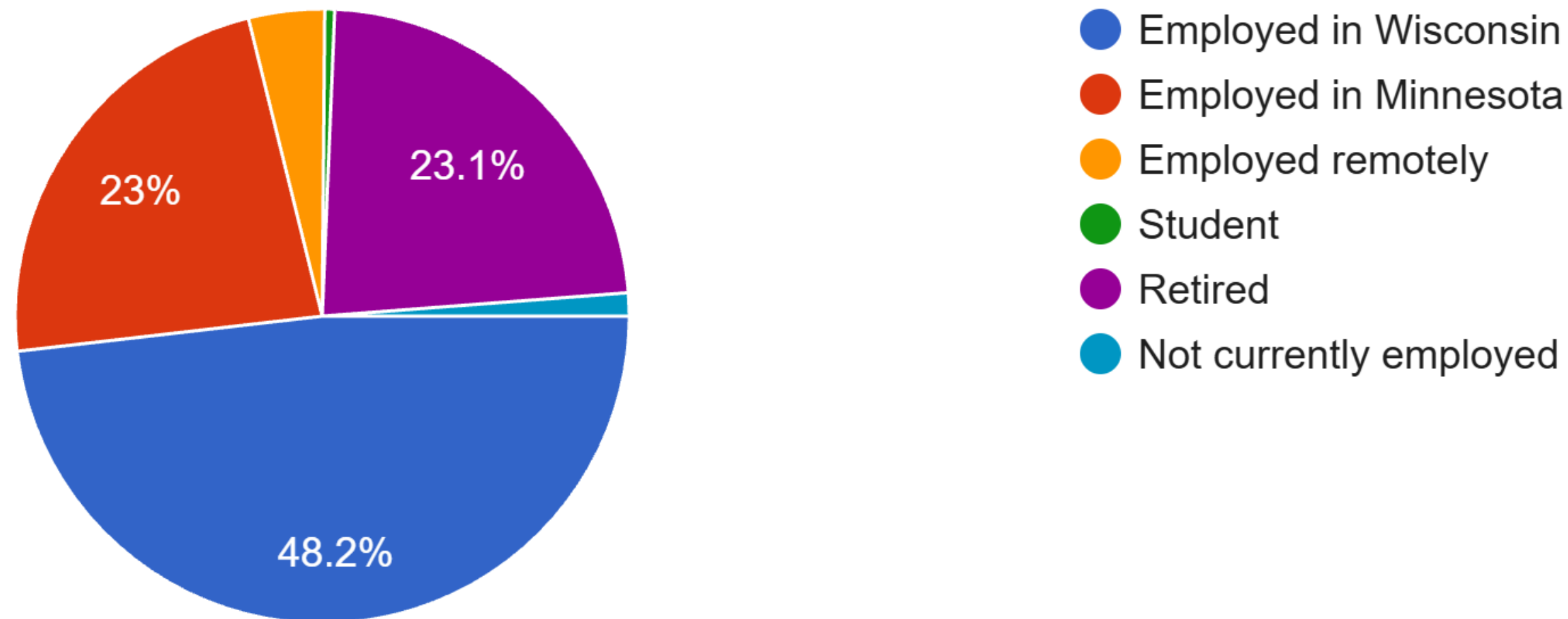


- In Duluth or St. Louis County
- In Superior or Douglas County
- Elsewhere in Wisconsin
- Elsewhere in Minnesota
- U.P. Of Michigan
- Cloquet or Carlton County
- Poplar wi.
- We live in "Superior" but out by Mont du Lac. That is why I talked about going t...
- 50% St louis 50% Superior

CONSUMER SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

23. Which best describes your current employment status?

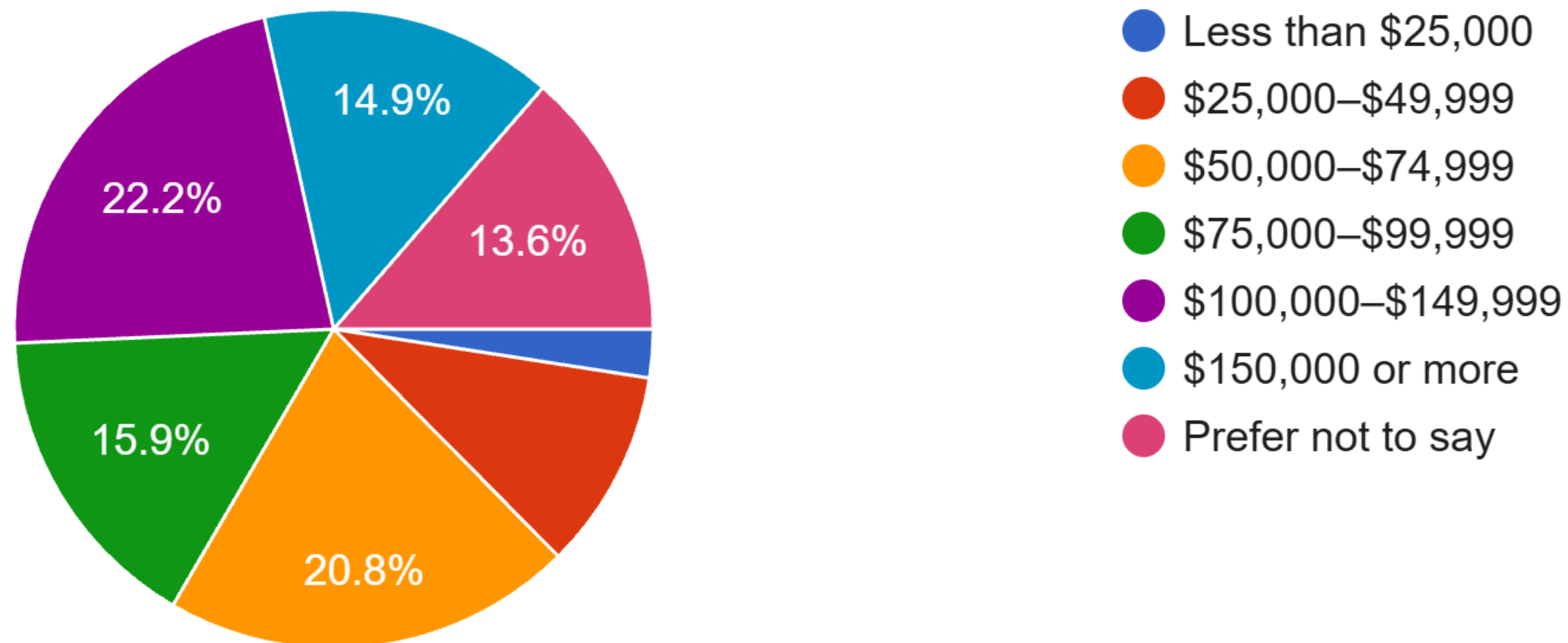
575 responses



CONSUMER SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

24. What is your approximate annual household income?

572 responses

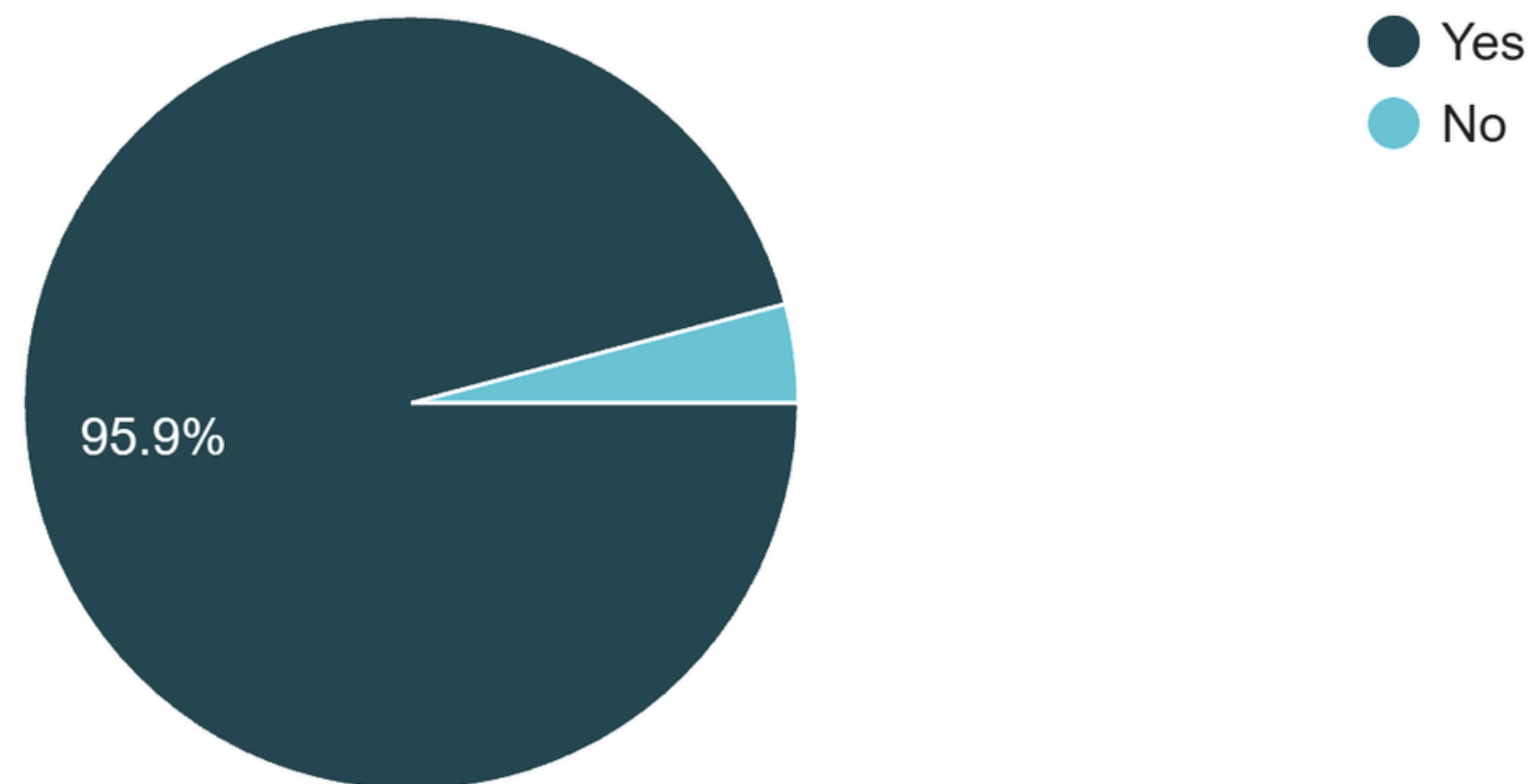


CONSUMER SURVEY OVERVIEW

AWARENESS OF BLATNIK BRIDGE CLOSURE

1. Before today, were you aware that the Blatnik Bridge is expected to close completely for replacement beginning in early 2027?

581 responses

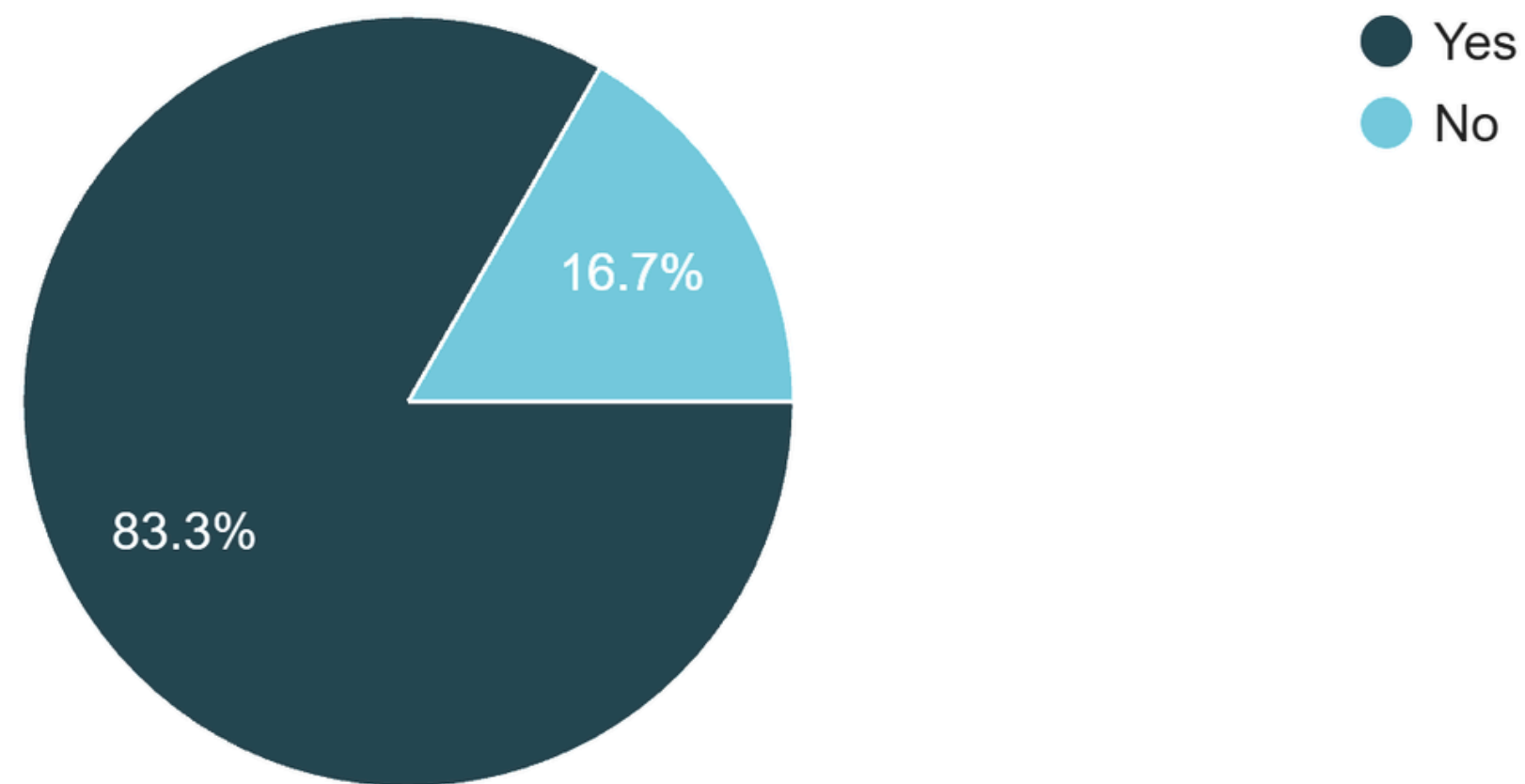


CONSUMER SURVEY OVERVIEW

AWARENESS OF FIVE YEAR BRIDGE CLOSURE

2. Before today, were you aware that the Blatnik Bridge is expected to close for up to five years?

581 responses

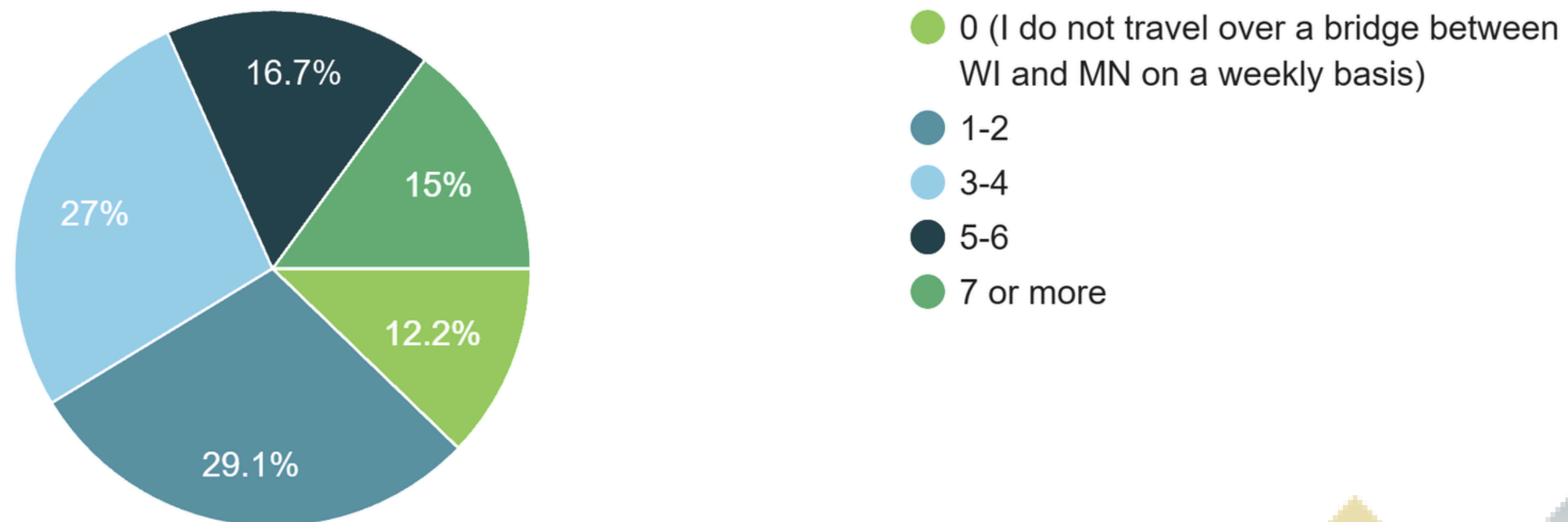


AWARENESS & TRAVEL PATTERNS

ROUND TRIPS IN A TYPICAL WEEK OVER BRIDGES

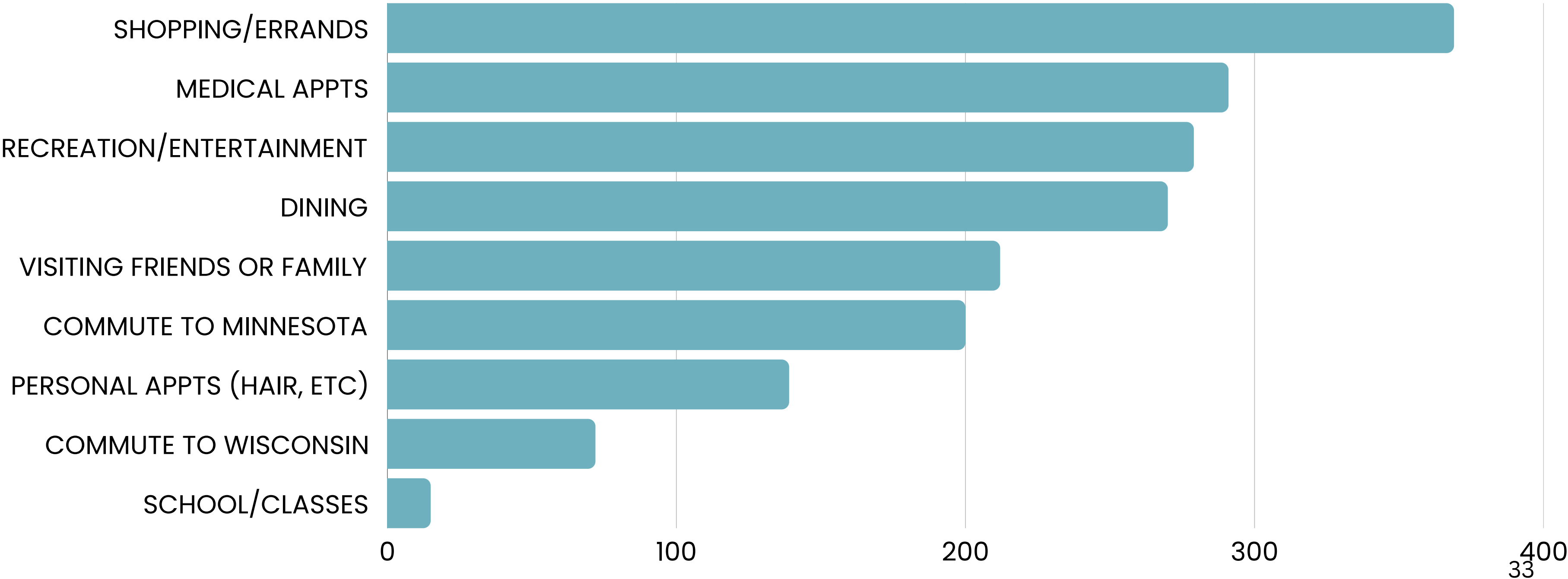
3. In a typical week, how many round trips do you make over one of the bridges between Wisconsin and Minnesota?

581 responses



AWARENESS & TRAVEL PATTERNS

PRIMARY REASONS FOR TRAVELING

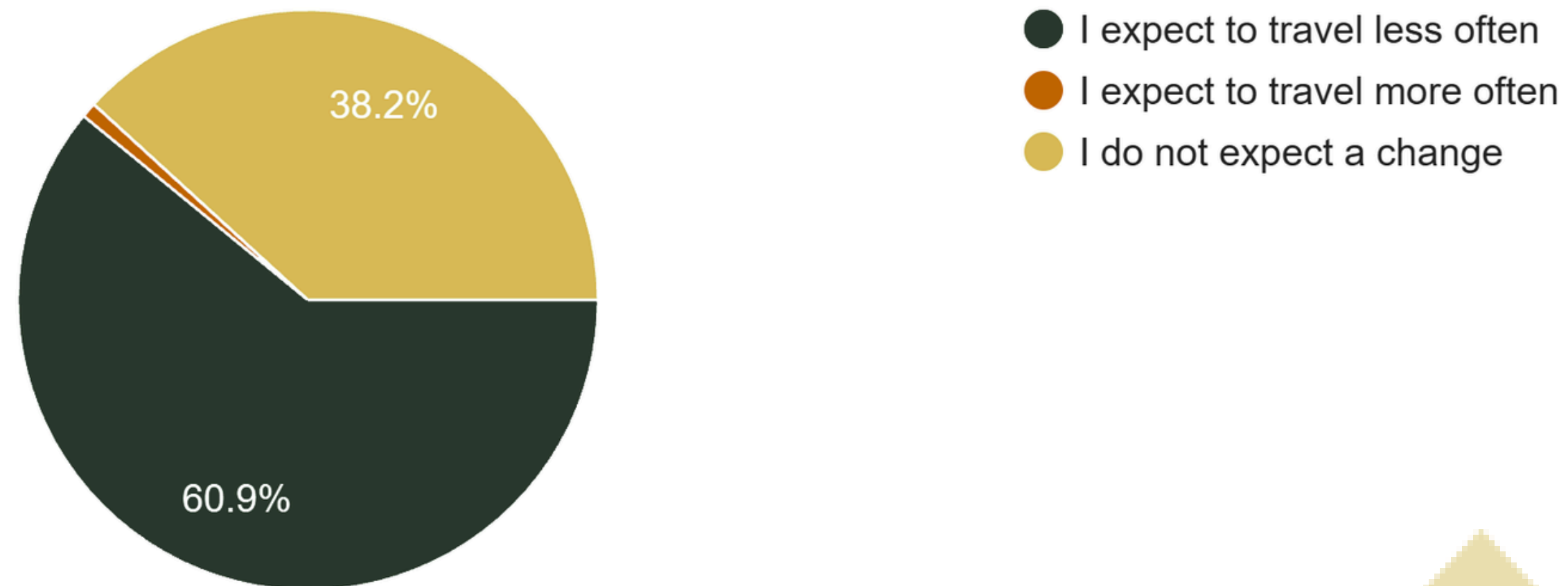


AWARENESS & TRAVEL PATTERNS

HOW BRIDGE CLOSURE WILL AFFECT TRAVEL

5. When the Blatnik Bridge closes, how do you expect this will affect how often you travel between Wisconsin and Minnesota?

581 responses

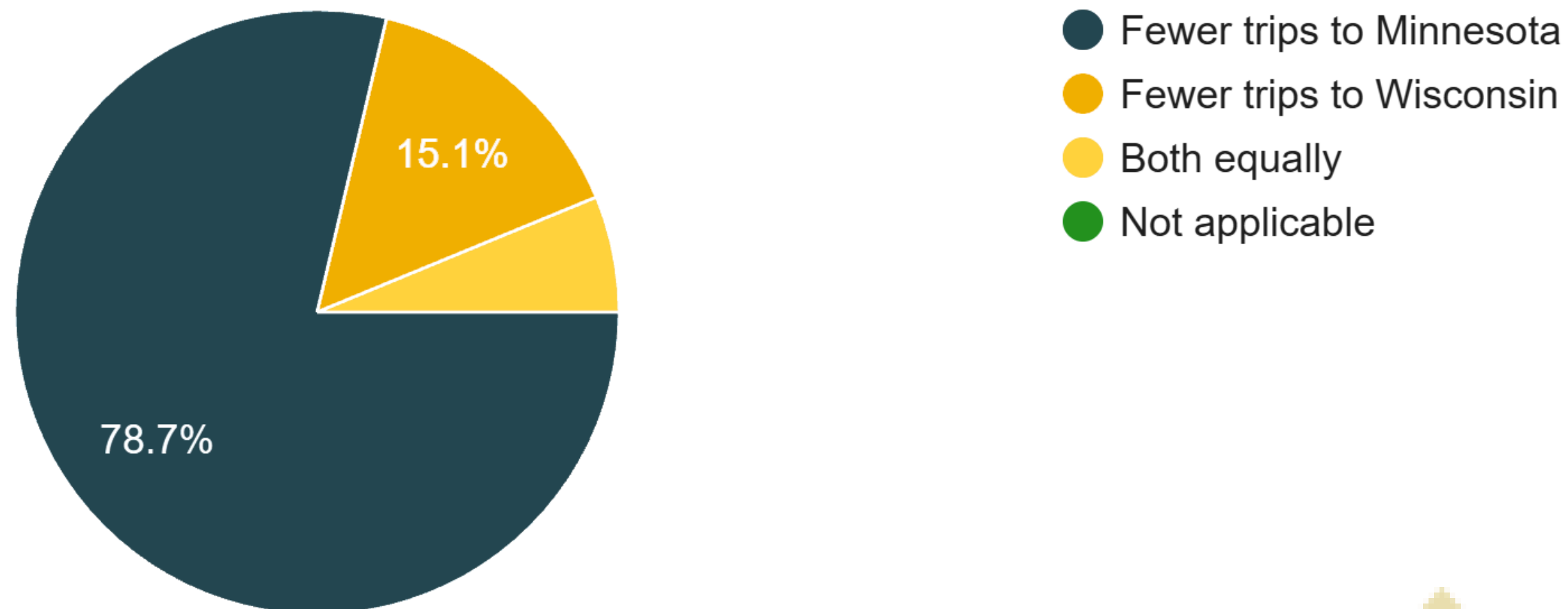


AWARENESS & TRAVEL PATTERNS

WHICH DIRECTION OF TRAVEL WOULD BE MOST EFFECTED

5.a. If you expect to travel less often, which direction would be most affected?

338 responses

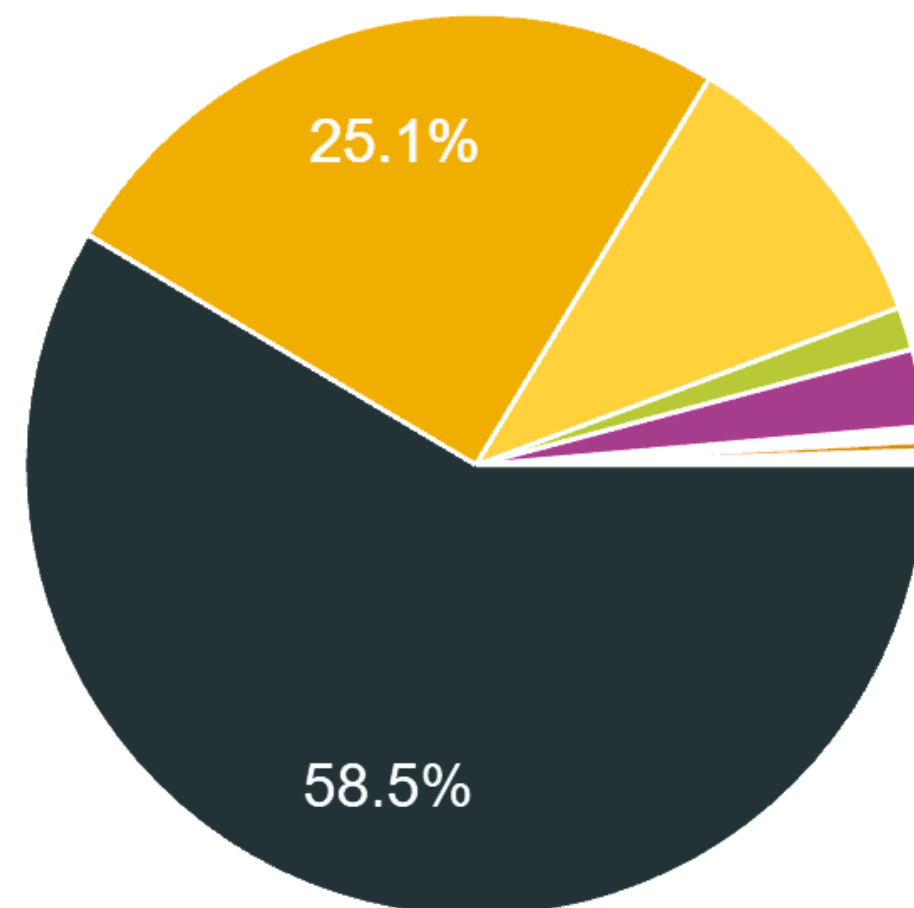


SHOPPING AND SPENDING PATTERNS

MAJORITY OF GROCERY SHOPPING

6. Where do you do most of your GROCERY shopping?

581 responses



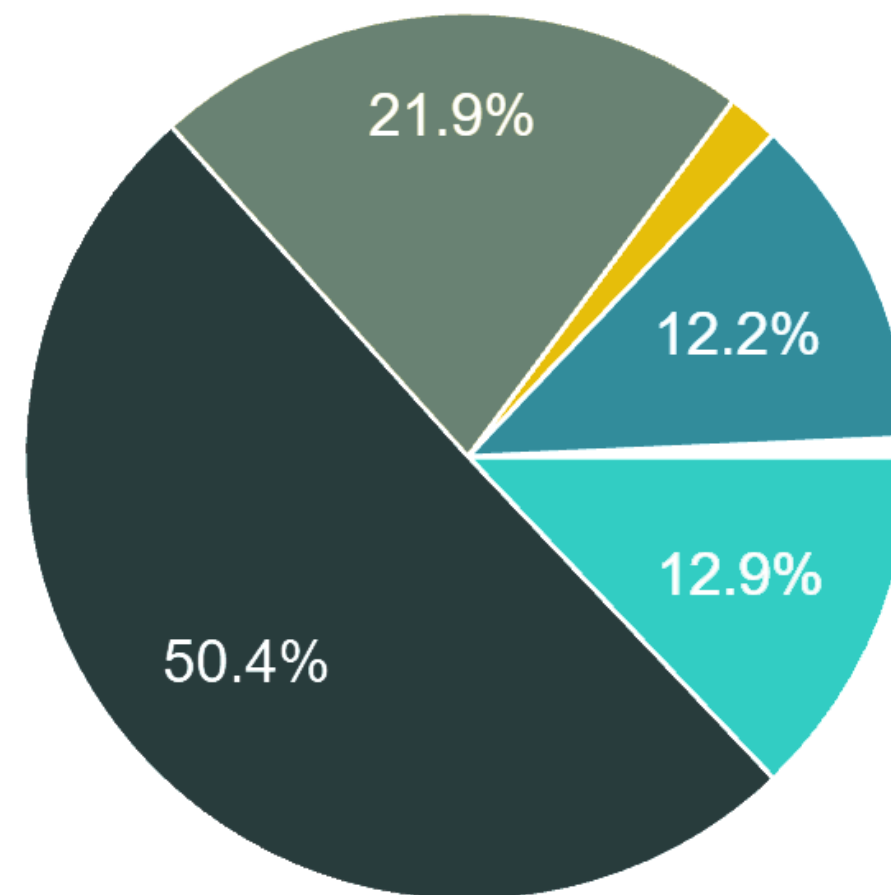
- In Superior or Douglas County
- In Duluth or St. Louis County
- Split fairly evenly between Wisconsin...
- Online grocery services
- Outside the Twin Ports region
- Most in Superior, but also the Whole F...
- No
- Carlton County

SHOPPING AND SPENDING PATTERNS

MAJORITY OF CLOTHING AND ACCESSORIES SHOPPING

7. Where do you do most of your shopping for CLOTHING AND ACCESSORIES?

581 responses



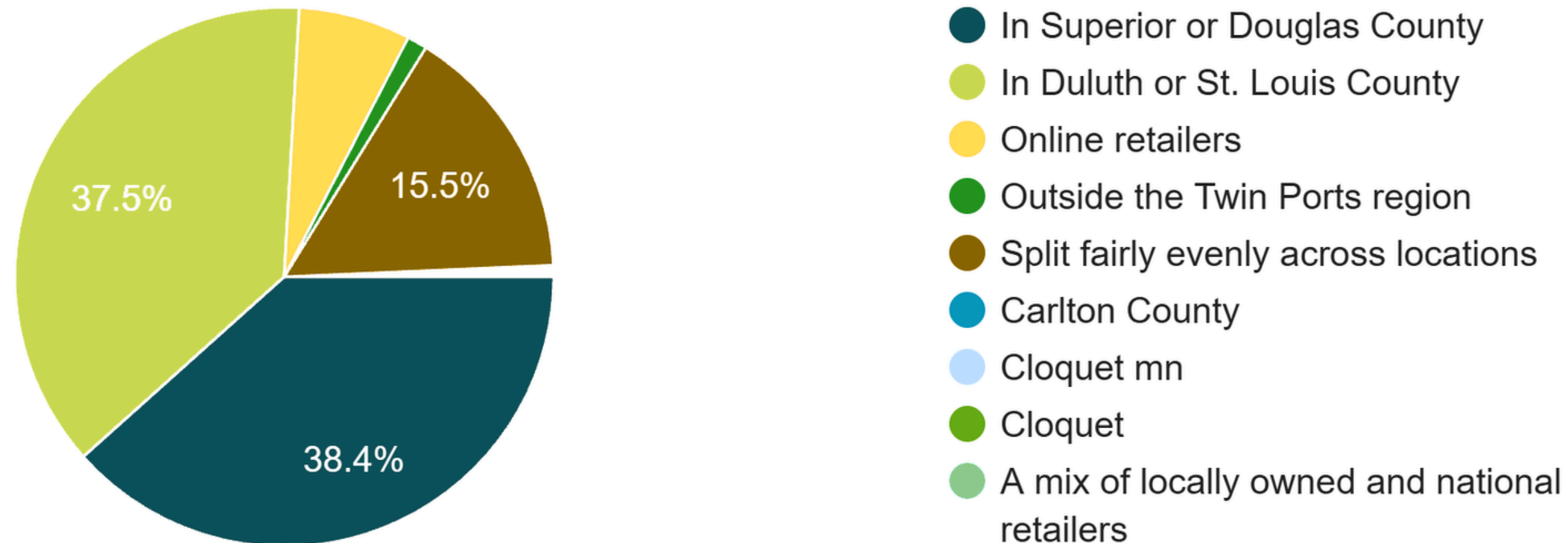
- In Superior or Douglas County
- In Duluth or St. Louis County
- Online retailers
- Outside the Twin Ports region (in-person)
- Split fairly evenly across multiple locations
- No
- Online and Minneapolis
- occasionally dropping by businesses...
- I have been too broke to buy new clothes...

SHOPPING AND SPENDING PATTERNS

MAJORITY OF HOUSEHOLD GOODS SHOPPING

8. Where do you do most of your shopping for HOUSEHOLD GOODS (home, hardware, general merchandise)?

581 responses

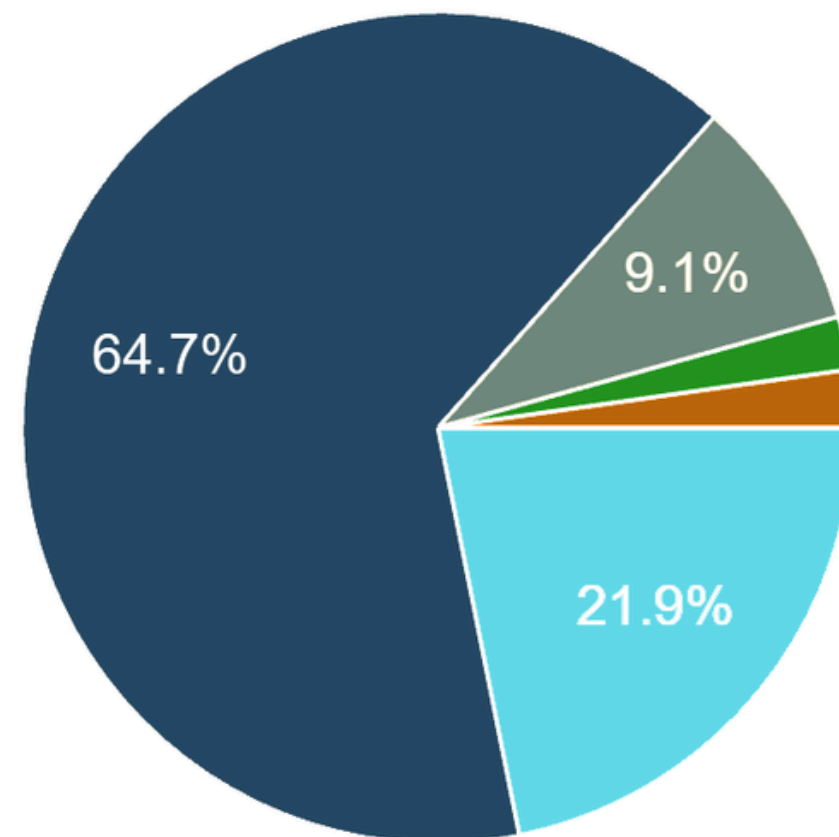


SHOPPING AND SPENDING PATTERNS

TYPES OF BUSINESS USUALLY SHOP AT IN AREA

9. When shopping in Superior or Douglas County, which best describes the types of businesses you usually shop at?

581 responses



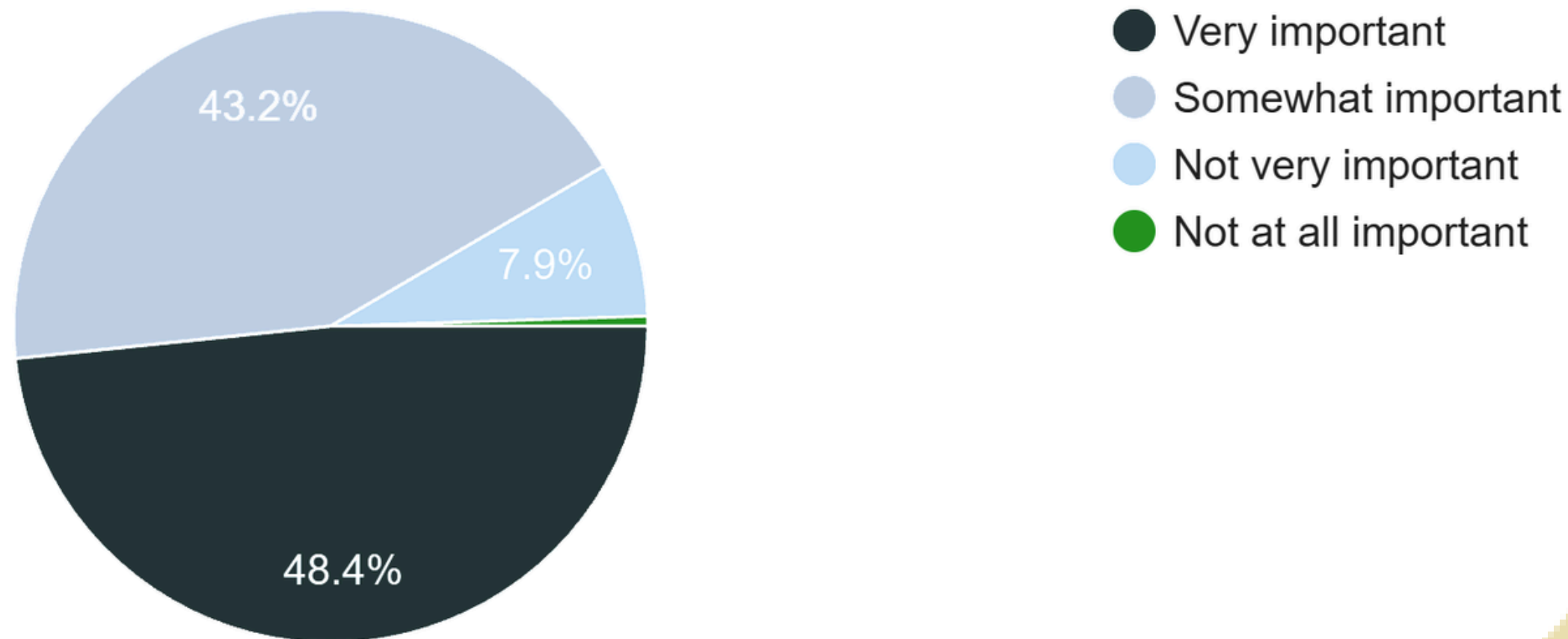
- Mostly locally owned businesses
- A mix of locally owned and national retailers
- Mostly national or chain retailers
- I don't usually shop in Superior or Douglas County
- I don't typically think about ownership

LOCAL SHOPPING CONSIDERATIONS

SHOPPING, DINING, AND SUPPORTING LOCAL

10. When deciding where to shop or dine, how important is supporting locally owned businesses in Superior or Douglas County to you personally?

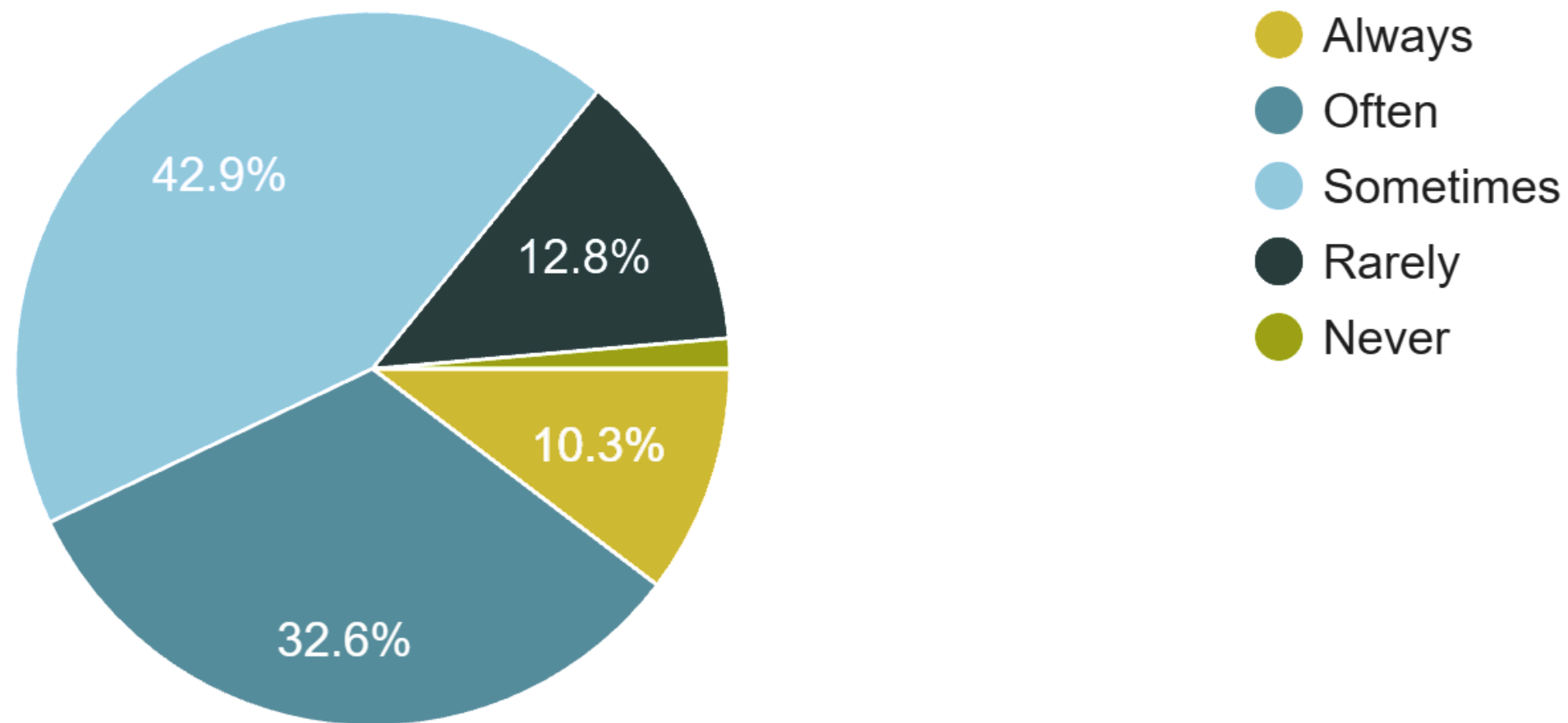
581 responses



LOCAL SHOPPING CONSIDERATIONS

11. When purchasing gifts (e.g., birthdays, holidays), how often do you consider shopping at locally owned businesses in Superior or Douglas County first?

580 responses

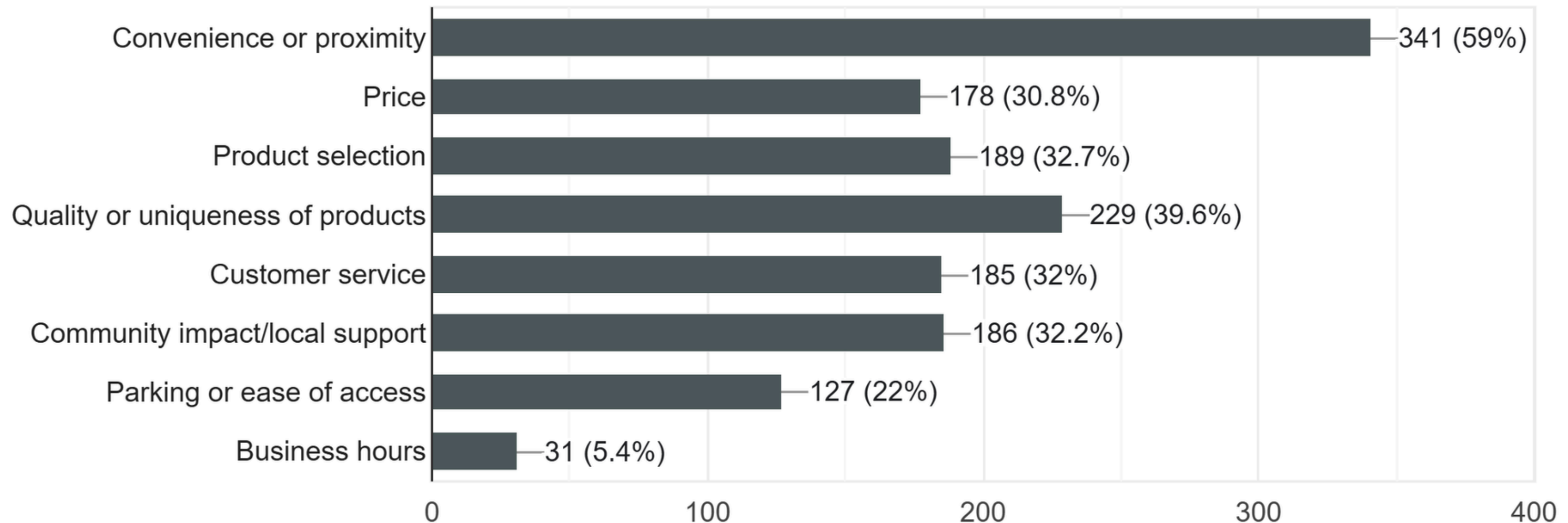


LOCAL SHOPPING CONSIDERATIONS

FACTORS MOST INFLUENTIAL TO SHOPPING LOCAL

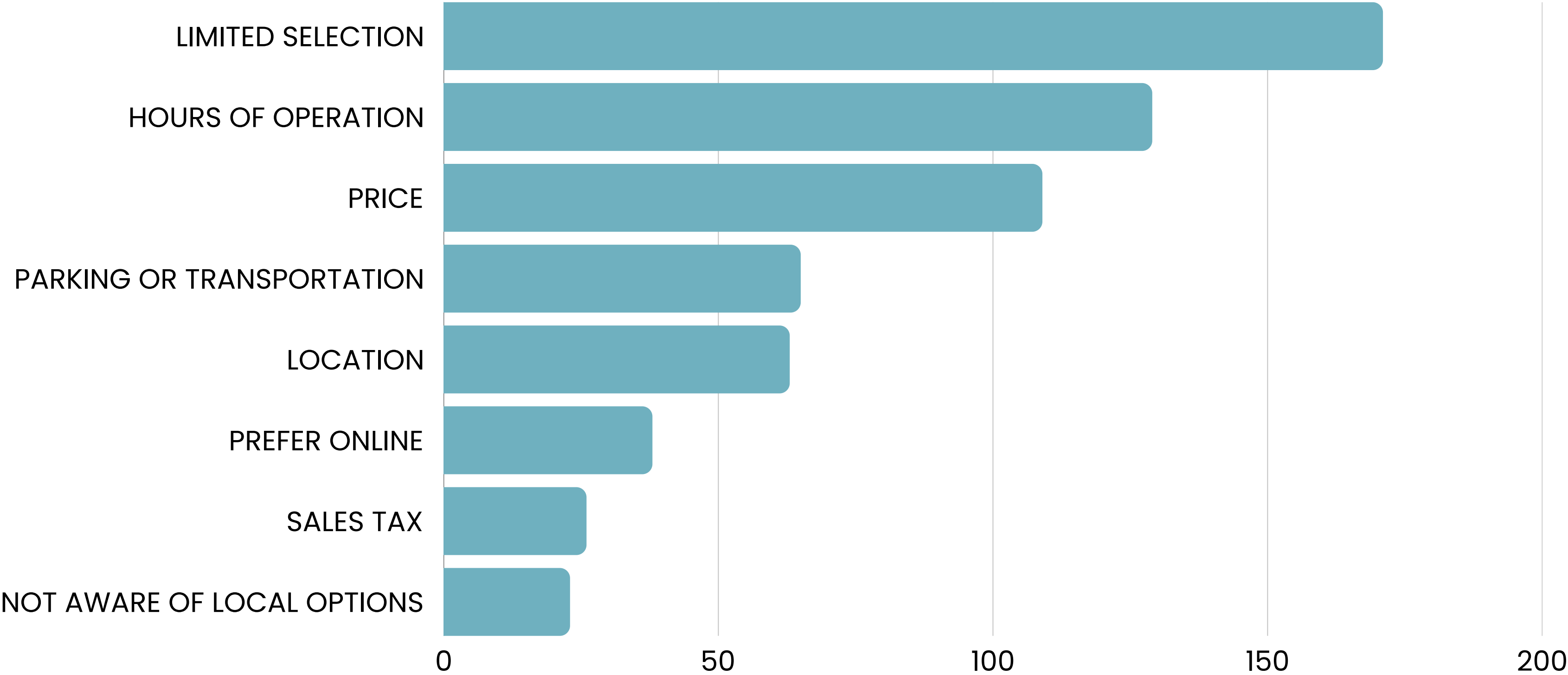
12. What factors most influence your decision to shop locally? (Select up to three)

578 responses



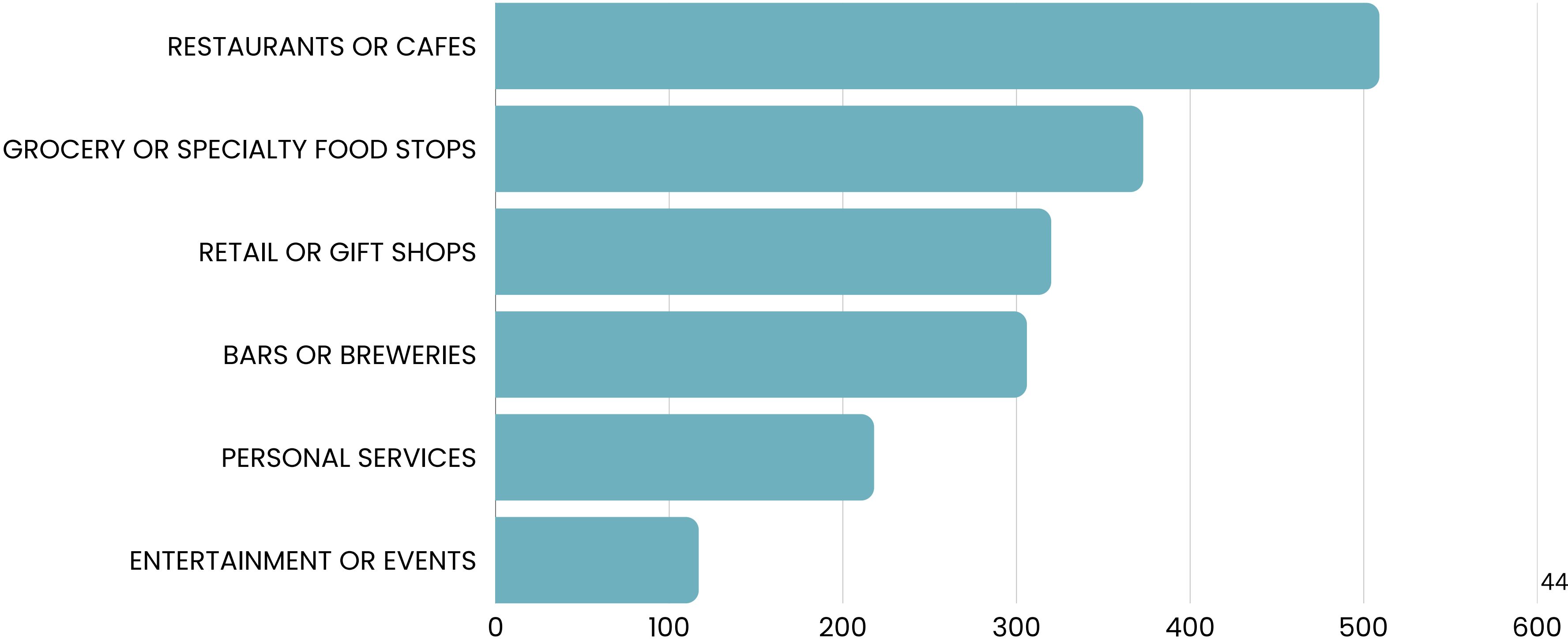
LOCAL SHOPPING CONSIDERATIONS

MAIN REASONS TO RARELY OR NEVER SHOP LOCALLY



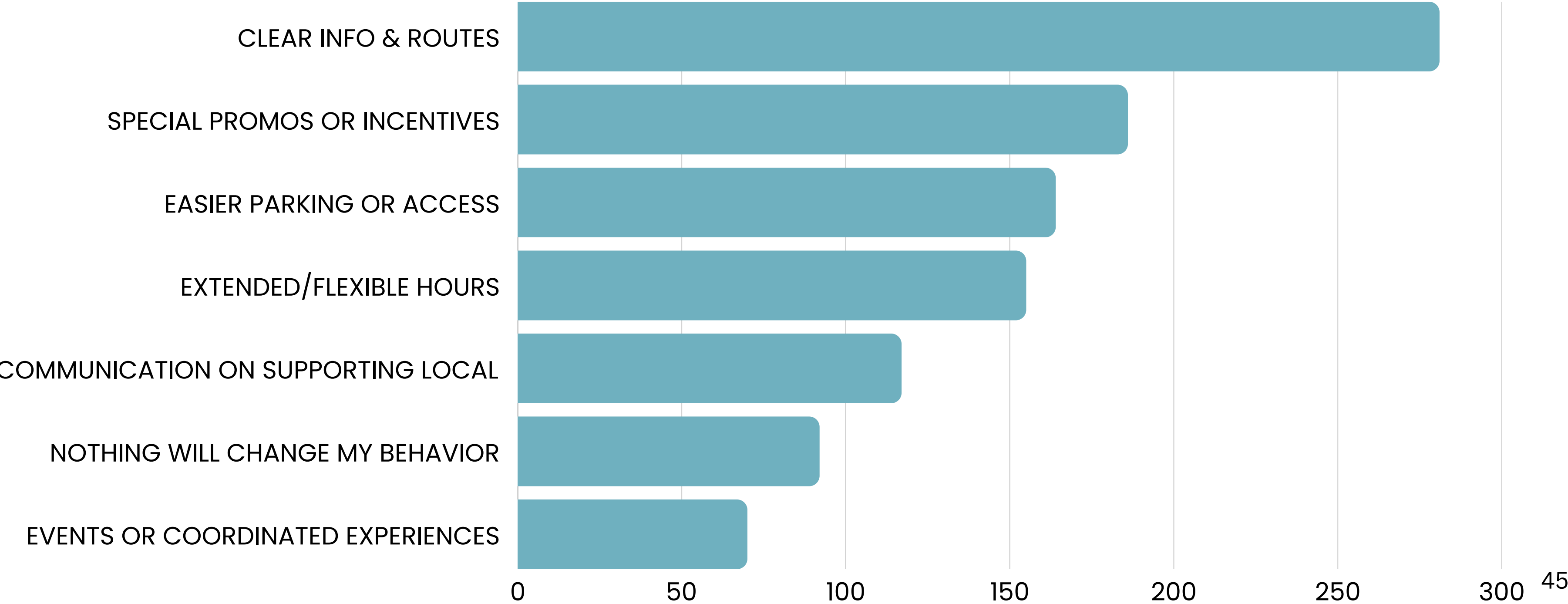
LOCAL SHOPPING CONSIDERATIONS

WHAT TYPES OF BUSINESSES DO YOU ALREADY SUPPORT



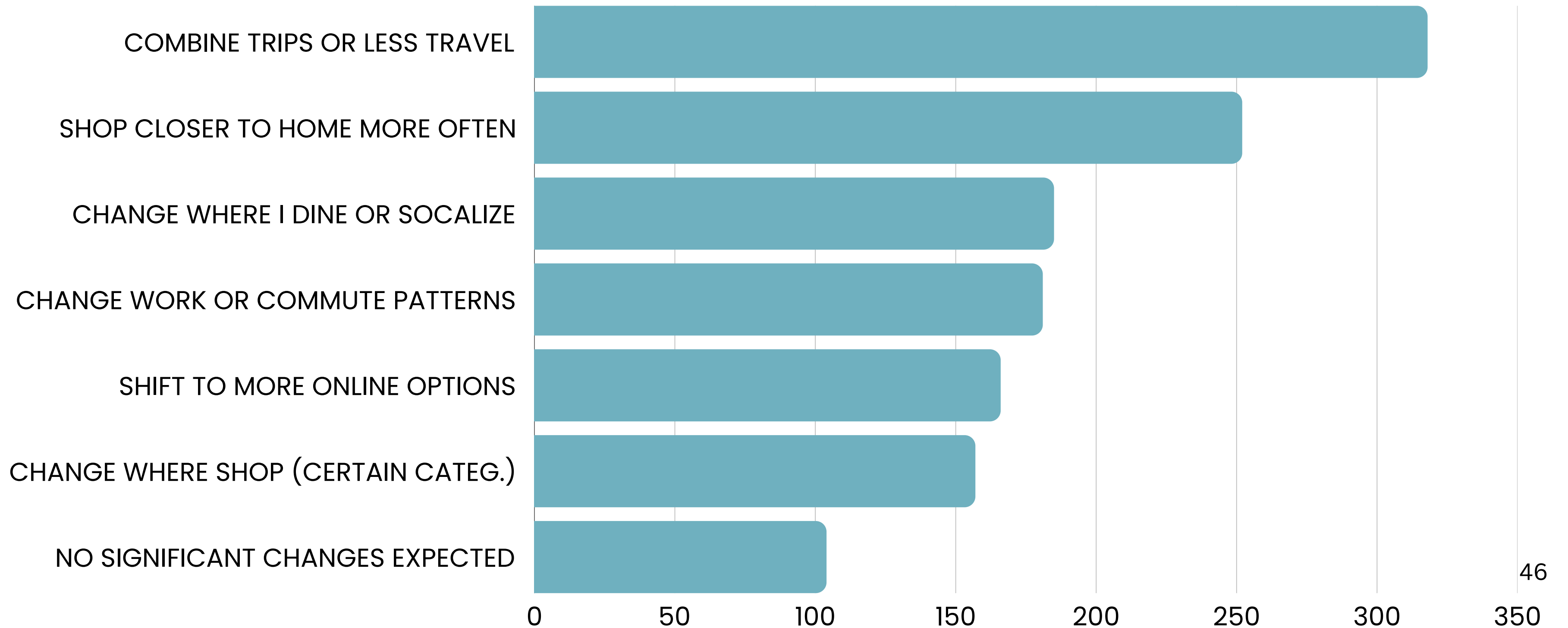
LOCAL SHOPPING CONSIDERATIONS

WHAT WOULD MAKE IT EASIER TO SHOP SUPERIOR/DC



ANTICIPATED CHANGES

WHAT CHANGES YOU'LL MAKE DURING THE BRIDGE CLOSURE

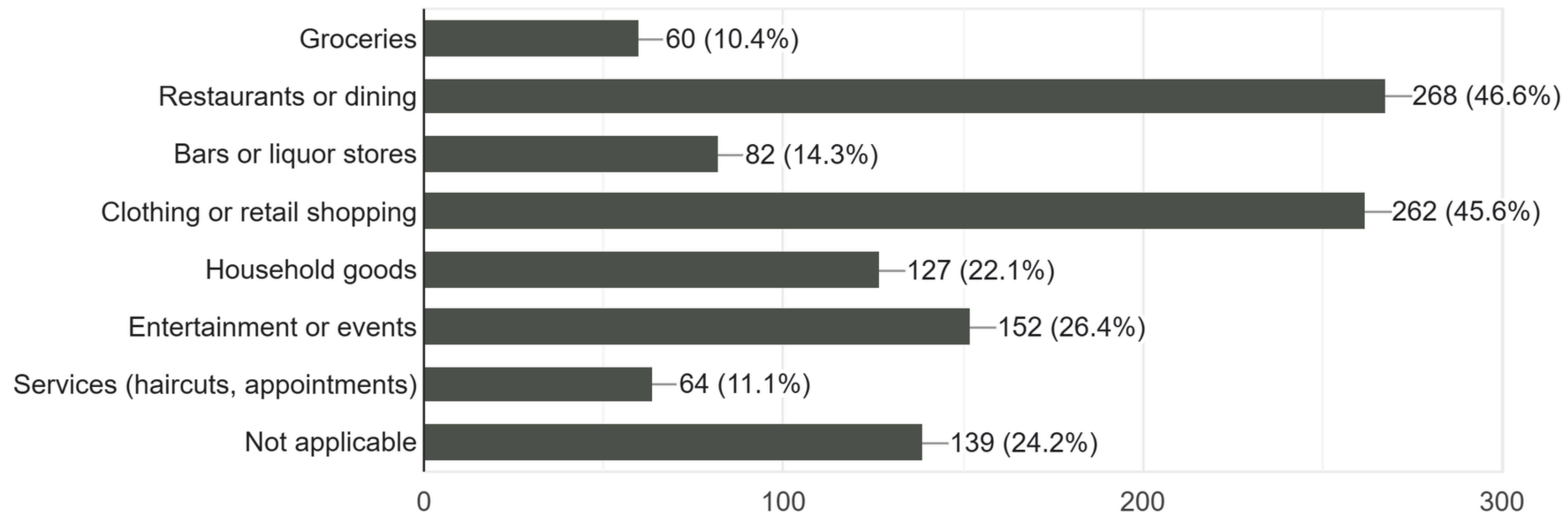


ANTICIPATED CHANGES

WHICH CATEGORIES MOST LIKELY TO CHANGE

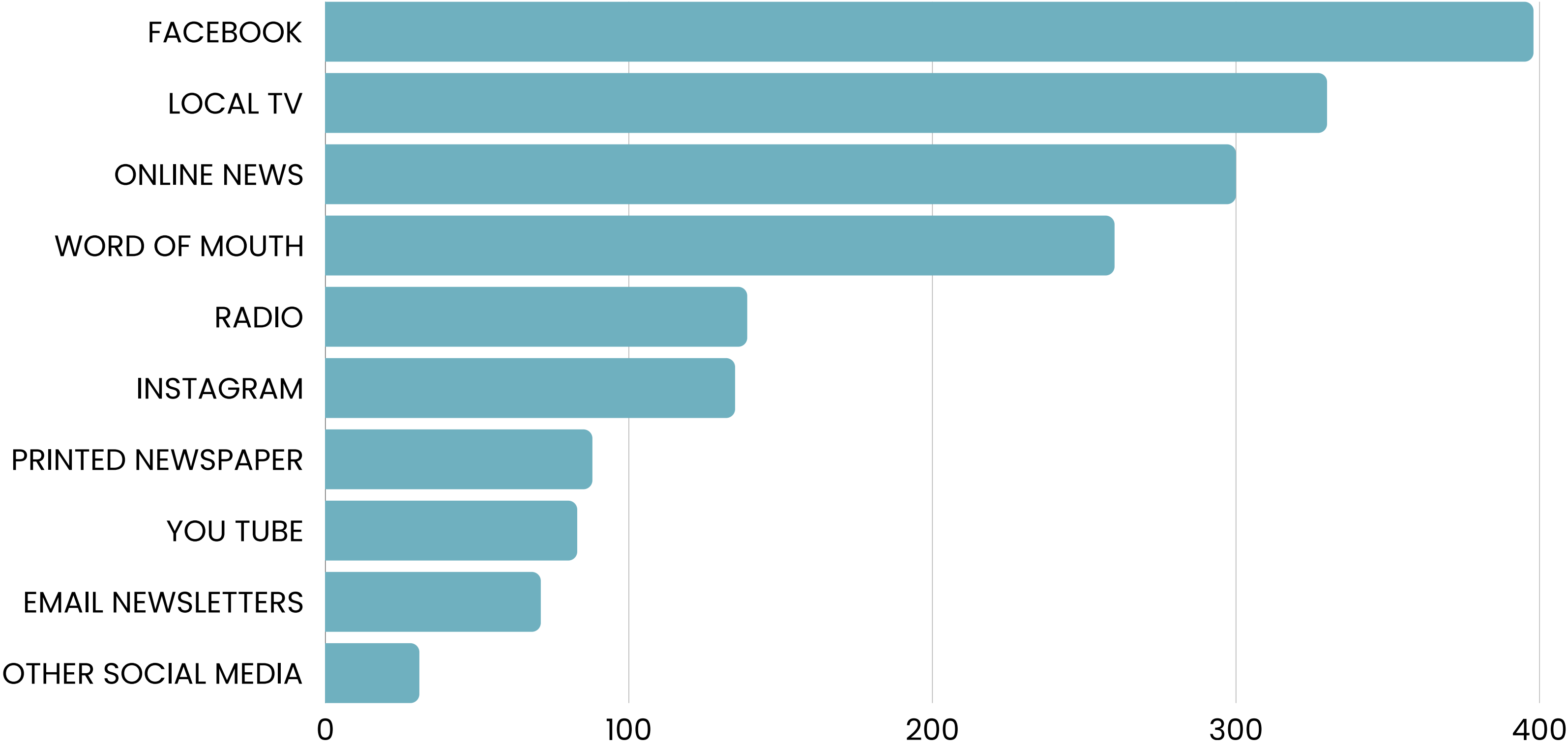
17. If you expect to make changes to spending, which categories are most likely to change? (Select all that apply)

575 responses



COMMUNITY INFORMATION

PREFERENCE FOR INFO ON LOCAL NEWS, EVENTS & UPDATES



WHAT WE ARE HEARING FROM CONSUMERS

WHAT MATTERS MOST DURING THE CLOSURE?

-  **Clear Communication & Navigation** - routes/detours/travel times
-  **Incentives & Promotions** - sales, discounts, loyalty programs - “shop local”
-  **Convenience & Accessibility** - extended business hours - easy parking
-  **Flexible Shopping Options** - Online ordering with local pickup - delivery
-  **Events & Community Engagement** - Coordinated shopping events
-  **Community Support Messaging** - Communication and awareness campaigns

Consumers are looking for convenience, clear communication, and promotions - not just during construction, but as part of an overall strategy to maintain shopping activity throughout and beyond the closure.

CONSUMER SURVEY

KEY TAKEAWAYS

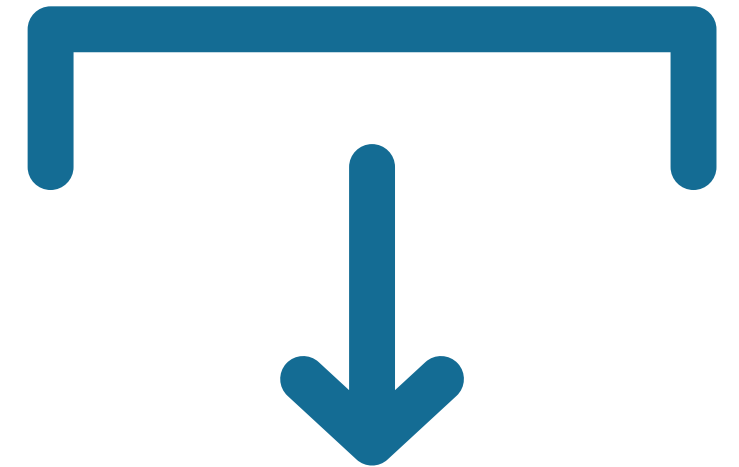
A disruption of this duration changes routines, not just routes

Consumers may:

- Consolidate trips
- Shift spending closer to home
- Increase online purchasing
- Develop new long-term habits

Economic impacts may continue even after bridge reopening. Behavior may permanently shift, including opportunities to keep consumers shopping local.

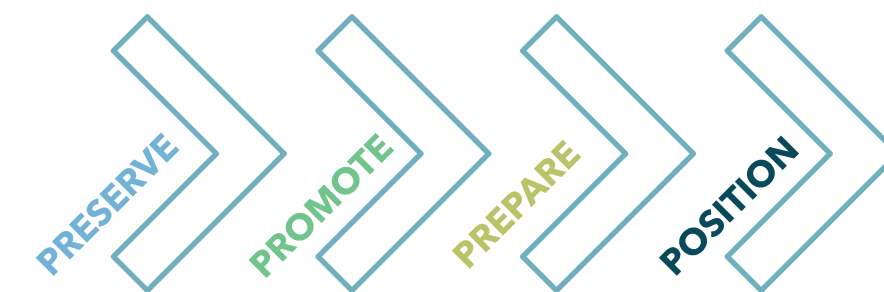
UP TO FIVE-YEAR
DISRUPTION



LONG-TERM
BEHAVIOR CHANGES

THE BRIDGE TO PROGRESS PROGRAM

PREPARING BUSINESSES & COMMUNITIES



PRESERVE Financial Stability for Businesses

Provide direct grants and forgivable loans directly to businesses impacted by the closure. The result: business continuity, workforce retention, and economic stability.



PROMOTE Citizen & Tourist Spending in the Northwest Region

Develop a cohesive regional branding and a targeted marketing campaign to change consumer behavior to shop, spend, and travel in Superior, Douglas County, and beyond.



PREPARE Business Owners with Training, Advising, and Technical Assistance

Provide workshops and technical assistance for businesses to pivot and prepare before, and during the bridge closure, leading to a more innovative and resilient Northern Wisconsin business community



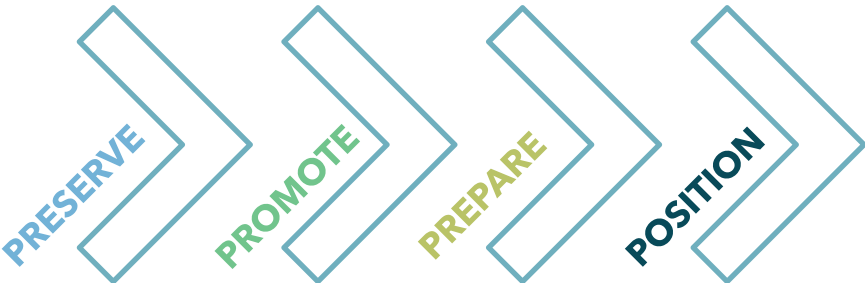
POSITION Access, Ease, and Visibility for Local Commerce

Invest in transportation enhancements and additional downtown bus and trolley routes to support commuters and sustain foot traffic for downtown businesses



THE BRIDGE TO PROGRESS PROGRAM

SMALL BUSINESS TRAINING SERIES



Kick-Off Training Event

Date: Monday, October 26, 2026

Time: 9 AM - 12 PM

Location: 1401 Tower Ave.
Ballroom

BRUNCH WILL BE PROVIDED

RSVP: LIZ@WEGROWBIZ.ORG

Trainings Themes Identified
Partnership Development & Connection
Cash Flow Planning
Financial Opportunities and Grants
E-Commerce
Marketing & Communication



OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

CONTINUING THE WORK & NEXT STEPS

- Continued stakeholder engagement
- Coordinated messaging and wayfinding
- Consumer awareness campaigns
- Local business promotion initiatives
- Event-based destination programming
- Transportation and mobility planning
- Business continuity support
- Data-driven policy advocacy



CONTACT US

Crystal Rohde

Northwest Regional Planning Commission
Business Development Specialist
crohde@nwrpc.com | 715-520-8160

Jenice Meyer

The Development Association
Assistant Executive Director
jenice@wegrowbiz.org | 715-319-495

