

More Than Miles: Understanding the Relationship Between Challenging Transportation and UCSD Commuters' Stress Levels

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Introduction

College students often face overwhelming pressures and demands.¹ There is an increasing prevalence of mental health issues among college students due to their difficulties in trying to succeed in the college setting.² Studies show that at least 40% of college students experience depression and anxiety, both of which result in stress.³ 85% of college students are commuters.⁴ Transportation challenges create harsh implications on mental health due to unreliability, cost, distance from home, etc.⁵

Objectives

This study examines the relationship between UCSD student commuters' stress levels and their commuting experiences.

Methods

- Conducted an analytic cross-sectional quantitative study
- Participants recruited through social media, UCSD public health mass email, presented to classmates, & people on public transportation
- Excluded minors and anyone that was not a UCSD commuter student
- Collected data using a questionnaire created on Qualtrics between April & May 2025
- Utilized R Studio to run statistical tests (linear regression, one-way ANOVA, and Pearson correlation)

Results

- 329 total participants in final survey, on average ages between 18-22

Figure 1. Comparing Students Perceived Stress Levels by their Commuting Distance

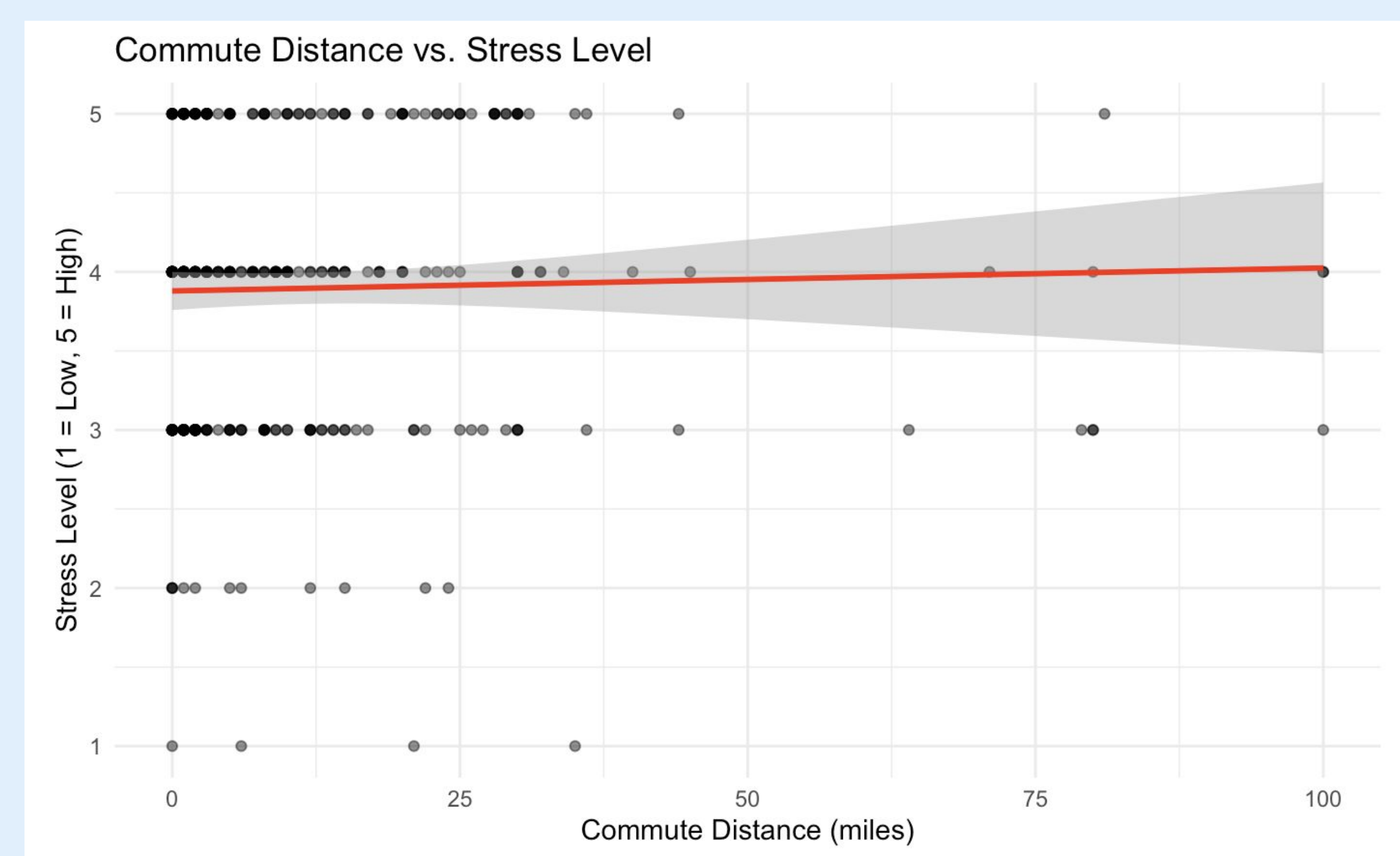


Figure 1: No significant association between students commute distance and stress levels. P value = 0.58
Average commute distance = **11.44 miles**
Average commute time = **11.50 minutes**

Figure 2. Different Transportation Challenges and Students Perceived Stress Levels

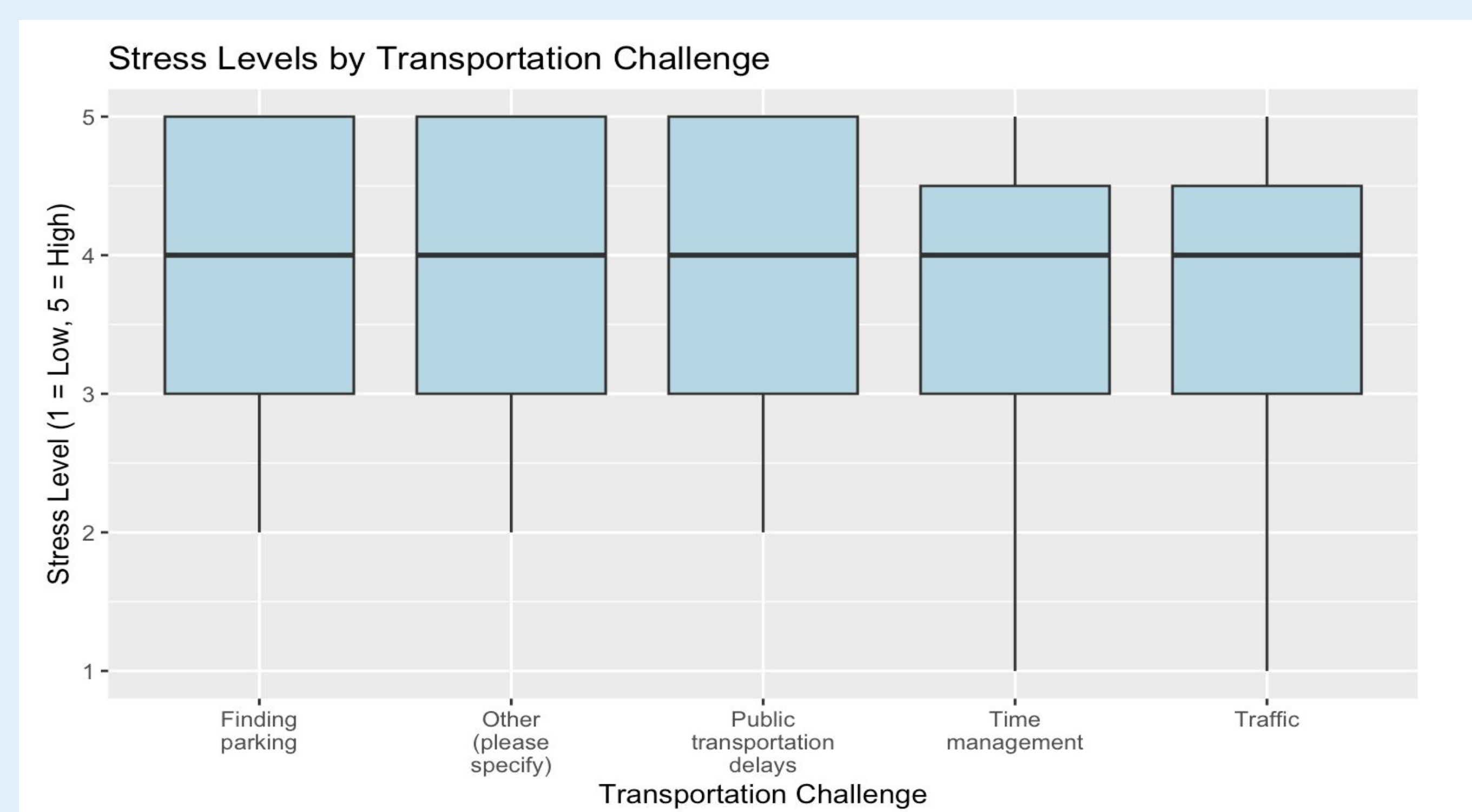


Figure 2: No significant association between transportation & perceived stress levels. P value = 0.0965
Average stress level for all participants is 3.89 on a scale of 1-5, 5 being the highest

Conclusion

This study did not find a significant relationship between transportation challenges and stress levels among UCSD commuters. Limitations to this study were focusing on only UCSD students and testing multiple transportation types. Future studies should focus on comparing different locations and specific transportation types. Despite our finding of high levels of stress in commuter students, we were unable to conclude where the origin of this stress is from.

Policy Implications

Since transportation may not be a primary driver of stress in UCSD commuter students, policymakers at UCSD should consider a more holistic approach to commuter students' well-being. Investments in mental health support, work-life balance policies, and socioeconomic support may be more effective in reducing stress than transportation improvements alone. The lack of a significant relationship may suggest that people have adapted to transportation challenges. Policies should support this adaptability by promoting flexible commuting options. A prime example would be allowing a hybrid schedule to incorporate flexibility in schedules.

References & Acknowledgments

Thank you to all the UCSD students who participated in this research study and allowed us to research further the topic of transportation and stress levels in commuter students. A special thank you to our moderators Dr. Anne White and Shanzeh Iqbal.

Scan code for references and survey questions

