

# IV. Public Space & Public Life

**Public Life is the social activity that takes place in everyday public spaces - on streets, in parks and plazas, and in the spaces between buildings. It is what a collective group of people create when they live their lives outside of their homes, workplaces and cars.**

Visitors interact with the public spaces of Third Street Promenade in ways that are unique to its location, and much insight about its design can be gained by studying patterns of daily life on and near the street. Studying public life allows the social life of Third Street Promenade to be understood in the context of Downtown Santa Monica, while identifying important insights about its strengths and weaknesses by comparing this data with similar pedestrian streets around the world. This section includes information gathered through volume counts of people moving (an important task that has been supplemented here with data from digital sensors) and provides a snapshot of how people use the space, who visits, why and how often they visit, and how they arrived. The following insights about public life provide a glimpse of what's working and locate opportunities for improvement.



# Public Life Survey Methods

A group of volunteers were deployed over two days during the height of the 2018 holiday shopping season to record patterns of public life.

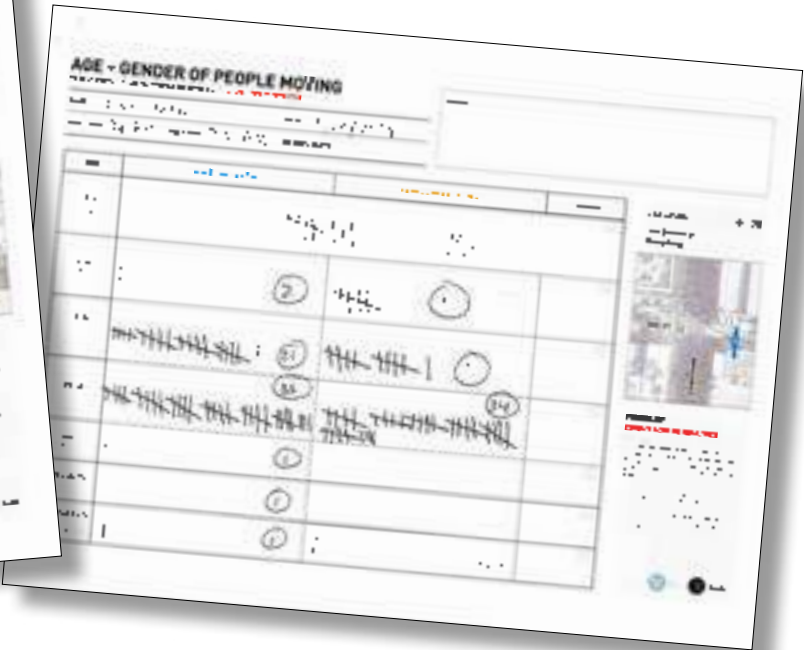
From 10am to 10pm on Thursday, December 13th and 8am to 10pm on Saturday, December 15th, observational surveyors recorded volumes of people moving, including which ‘mode’ (foot, bike, etc.) they were using; the age and gender of people moving; and the activities, posture, age and gender of people staying on each block. Intercept surveyors also tasked visitors with an anonymous survey that asked a variety of questions relating to users’ experience of and relationship to the space, and their demographic information. Below are some of the findings and insights from this survey.



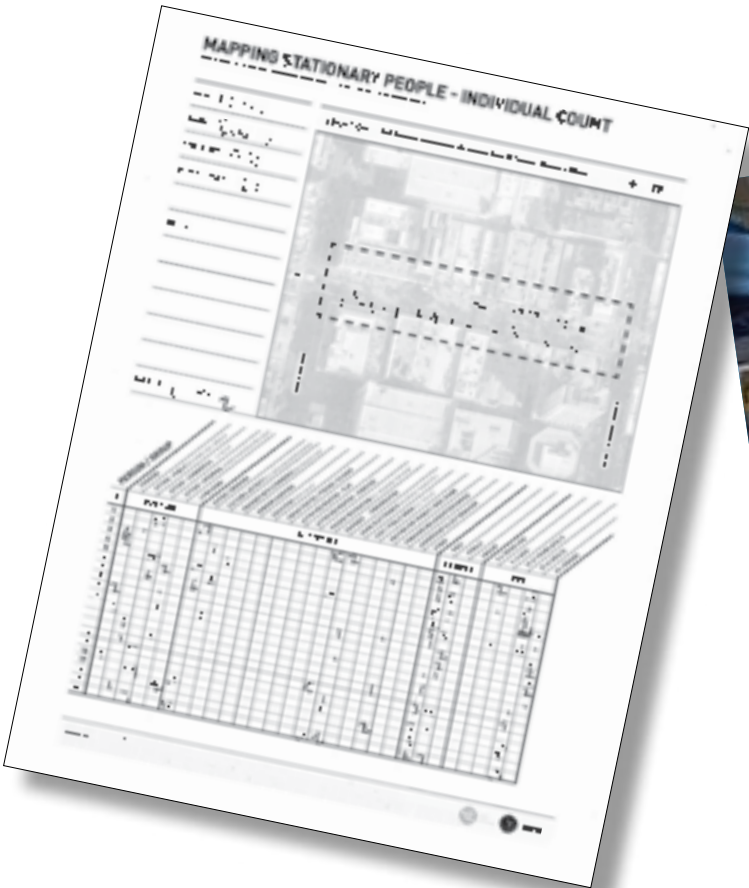
Mode of People Moving



Age + Gender of People Moving



Stationary Activities



Intercept Surveys



# Public Life insights for Third Street Promenade:

- 1

**People come from all over the world, but mostly from nearby**

Yet it lacks local retail offerings
- 2

**Santa Monica is a hub for active mobility**

This should be leaned into!
- 3

**Third Street Promenade attracts a young and diverse audience**

And they want more than just shopping
- 4

**Third Street Promenade knows retail**

But there are opportunities to invite for more well-rounded patterns of daily life
- 5

**The space is so successful that nobody stops to stay**

This could mean that people are overwhelmed by the crowds. It could also mean that there aren't enough invitations to stay
- 6

**The people that do stop, stop where they are invited**

And this varies from block to block
- 7

**Third Street could be a Third Place**

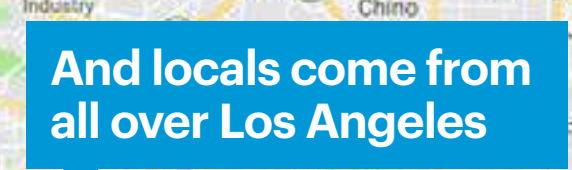
People who spend a long time on Third Street Promenade should be met with amenities that encourage them to stay in public space
- 8

**It is a strong spine that could be a part of a strong network**

There is room for activity to spill beyond Third Street Promenade, AND there are opportunities to borrow from the successes of surrounding streets



## Yet it lacks local retail offerings



37

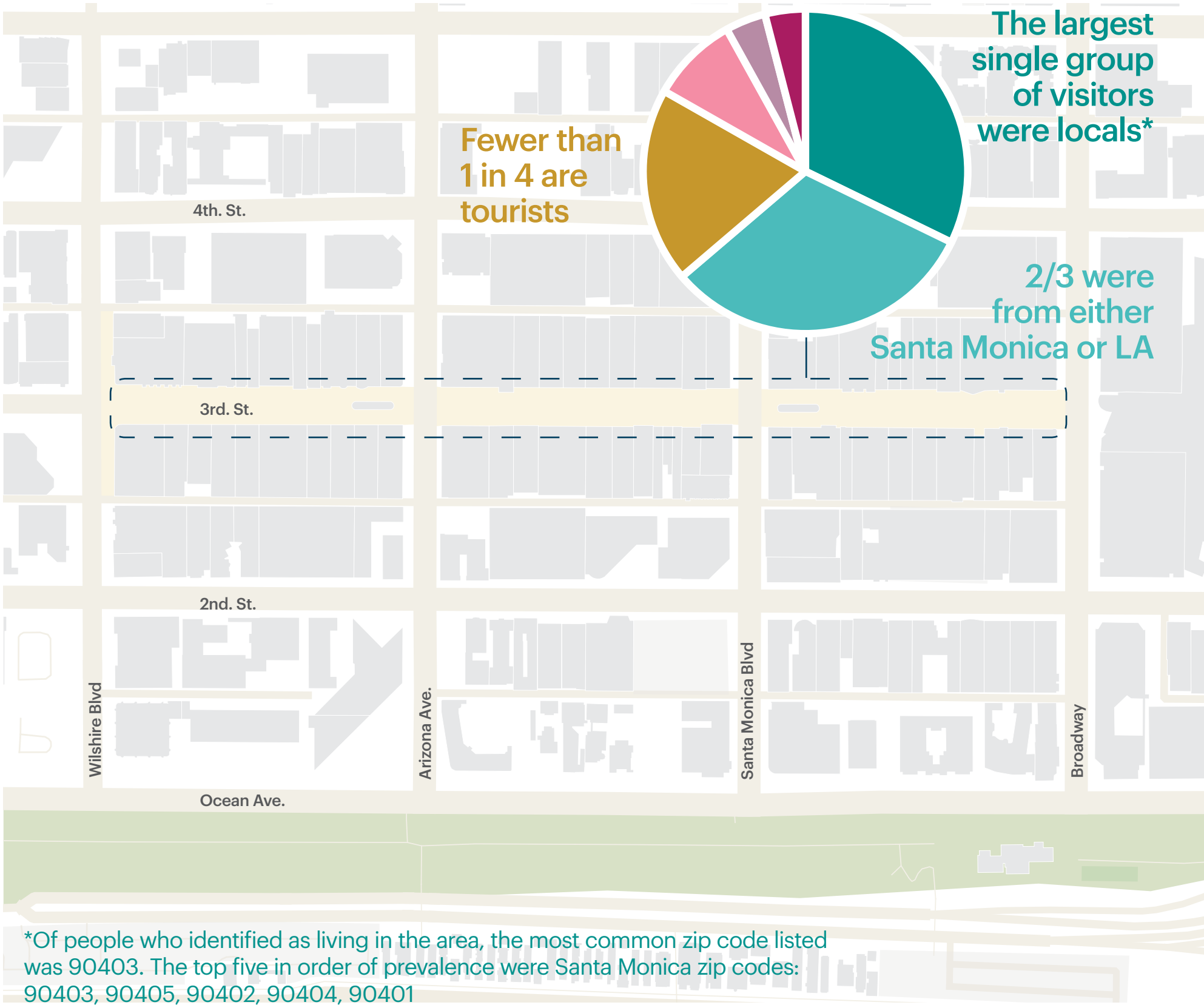


# The largest group of visitors during the survey were local to Santa Monica

Visitors were asked:  
“What is your relationship to this space?”

- Live in the area
- From elsewhere in Santa Monica or LA
- Tourist from outside LA
- Employee on the Promenade
- Commuter
- Musician/performer

1 People come from all over the world, but mostly from nearby



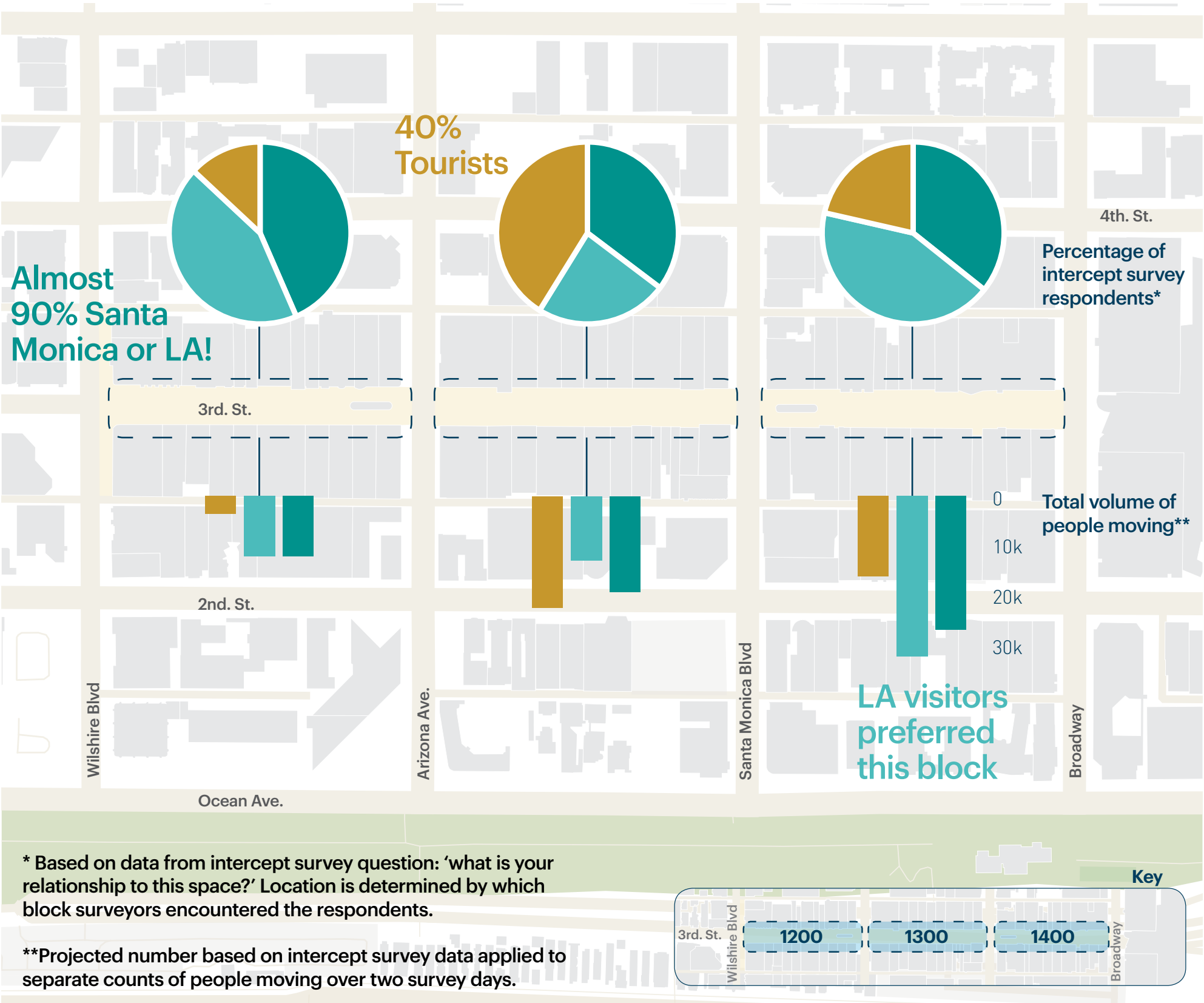


# ...and each block attracted a unique mix of locals and visitors

Frequent visitors and locals showed a preference for the 1400 block of Third Street Promenade, while tourists and first-time visitors seemed to prefer the 1300 block. This may be due to both proximities, and to the unique mix of amenities on each block, with the 1400 block offering more retail, and fewer food and beverage options than the 1300 block.

- Live in the area
- From elsewhere in Santa Monica or LA
- Tourist from outside LA

1 People come from all over the world, but mostly from nearby





## 2. Santa Monica is a hub for active mobility

.....

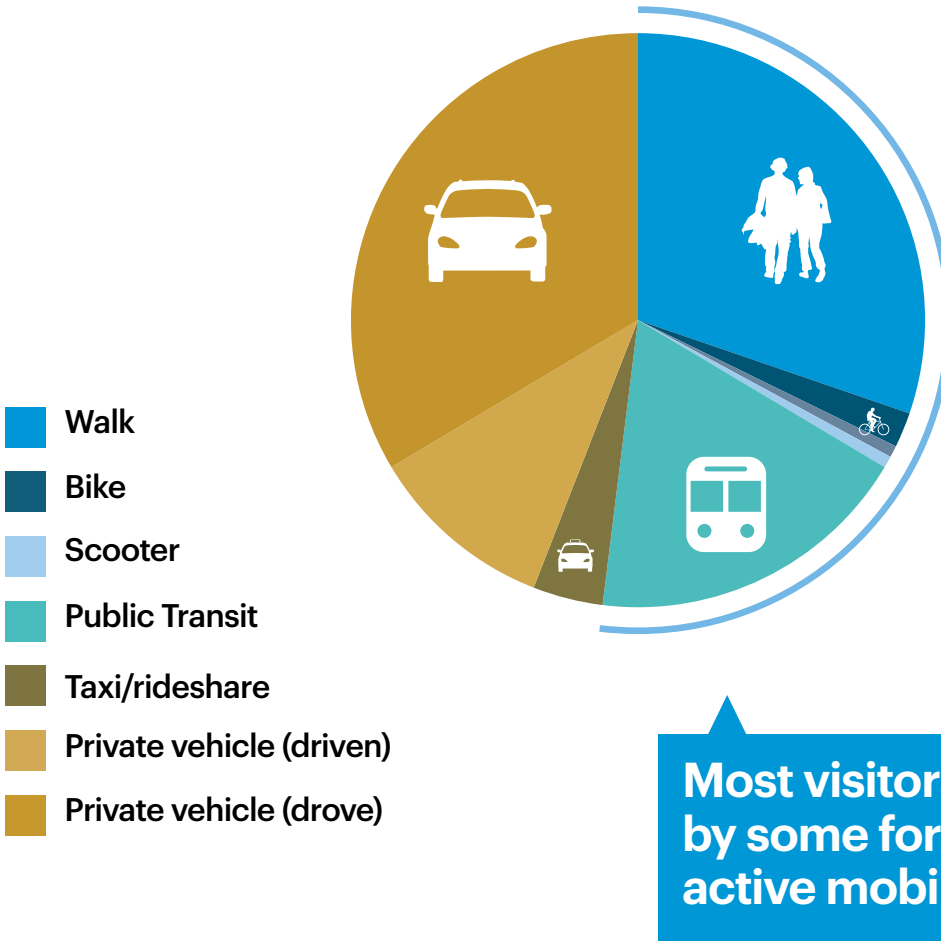
This should be leaned into!



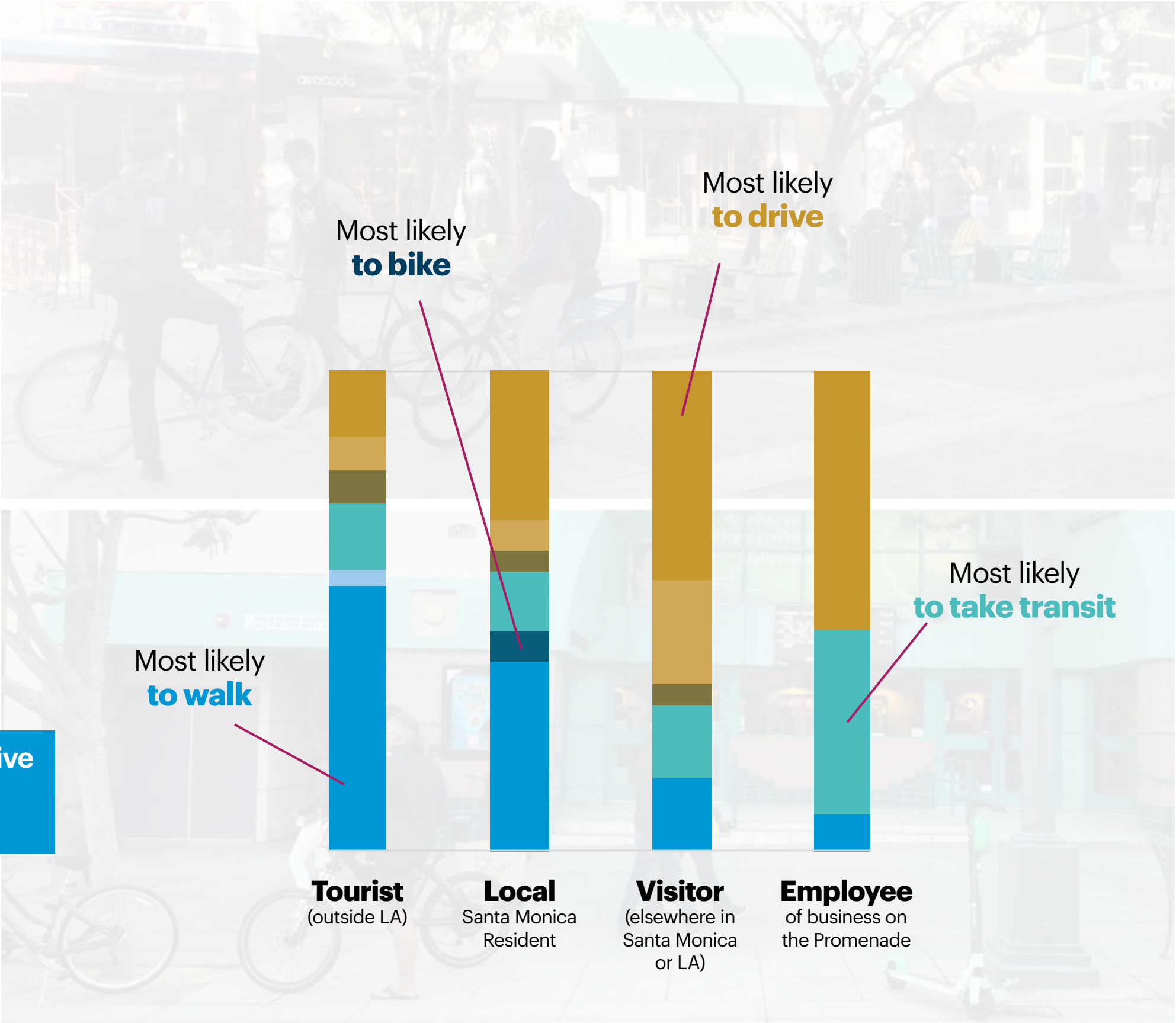


# The majority of visitors arrive by foot, bike or public transit

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## 2 Santa Monica is a hub for active mobility





...but representation of bikes, scooters and skateboards suggests that there is a need to address arrival by 'wheels'

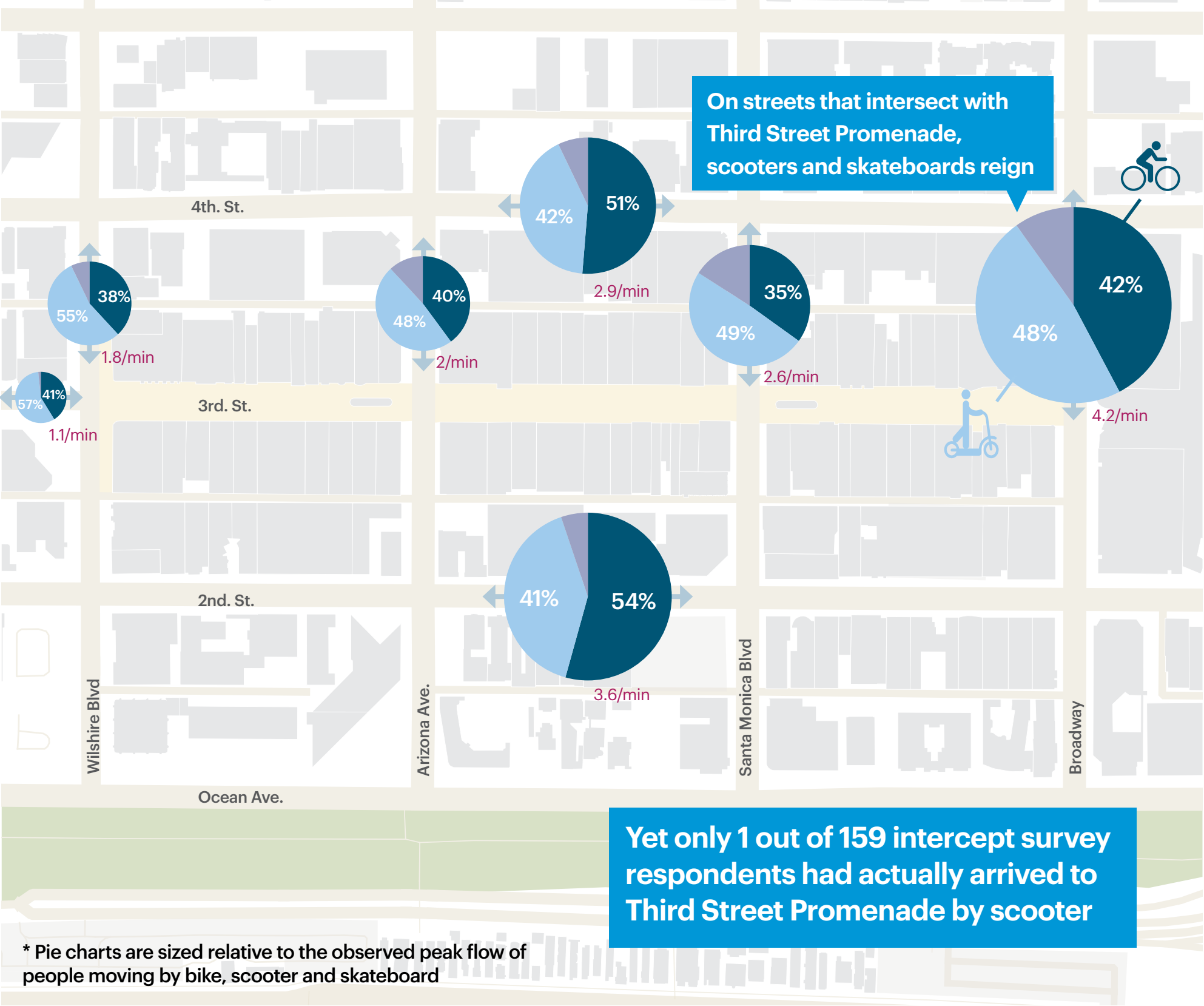
On streets that intersect Third Street Promenade, many people were observed traveling by bike, scooter and skateboard. (A peak of one person every 14 seconds was observed on Broadway)

- Bike
- Scooter
- Skateboard

Graph width = peak of 1 per minute

\* Peak volume per minute

2 Santa Monica is a hub for active mobility





### 3. Third Street Promenade attracts a young and diverse audience

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And they want more than just  
shopping

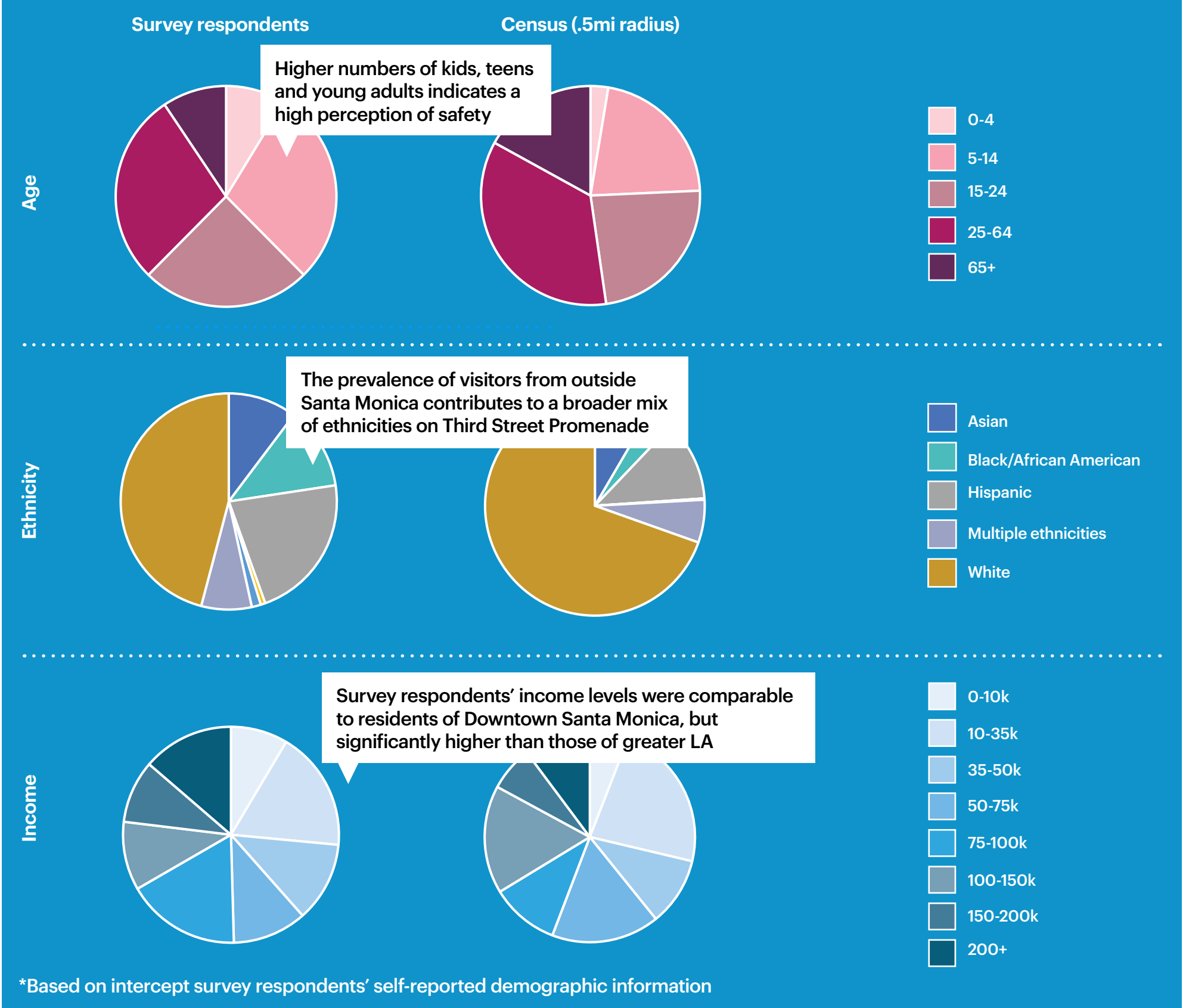




# Survey respondents were younger and more ethnically diverse than the surrounding census

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## 3 Third Street Promenade attracts a young and diverse audience



# Visitors value the core experience of Third Street Promenade

Visitors were asked:  
“What do you like / love about Third Street Promenade?”



**3** Third Street Promenade attracts a young and diverse audience



...but when asked about what they wished for, responses show that people want more.

Visitors were asked:  
“What do you wish you could do here that you cannot do today?” and  
“What, if anything, would you change about this space”

**3** Third Street Promenade attracts a young and diverse audience





## 4. Third Street Promenade knows retail

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But there are opportunities to  
invite for more well-rounded  
patterns of daily life

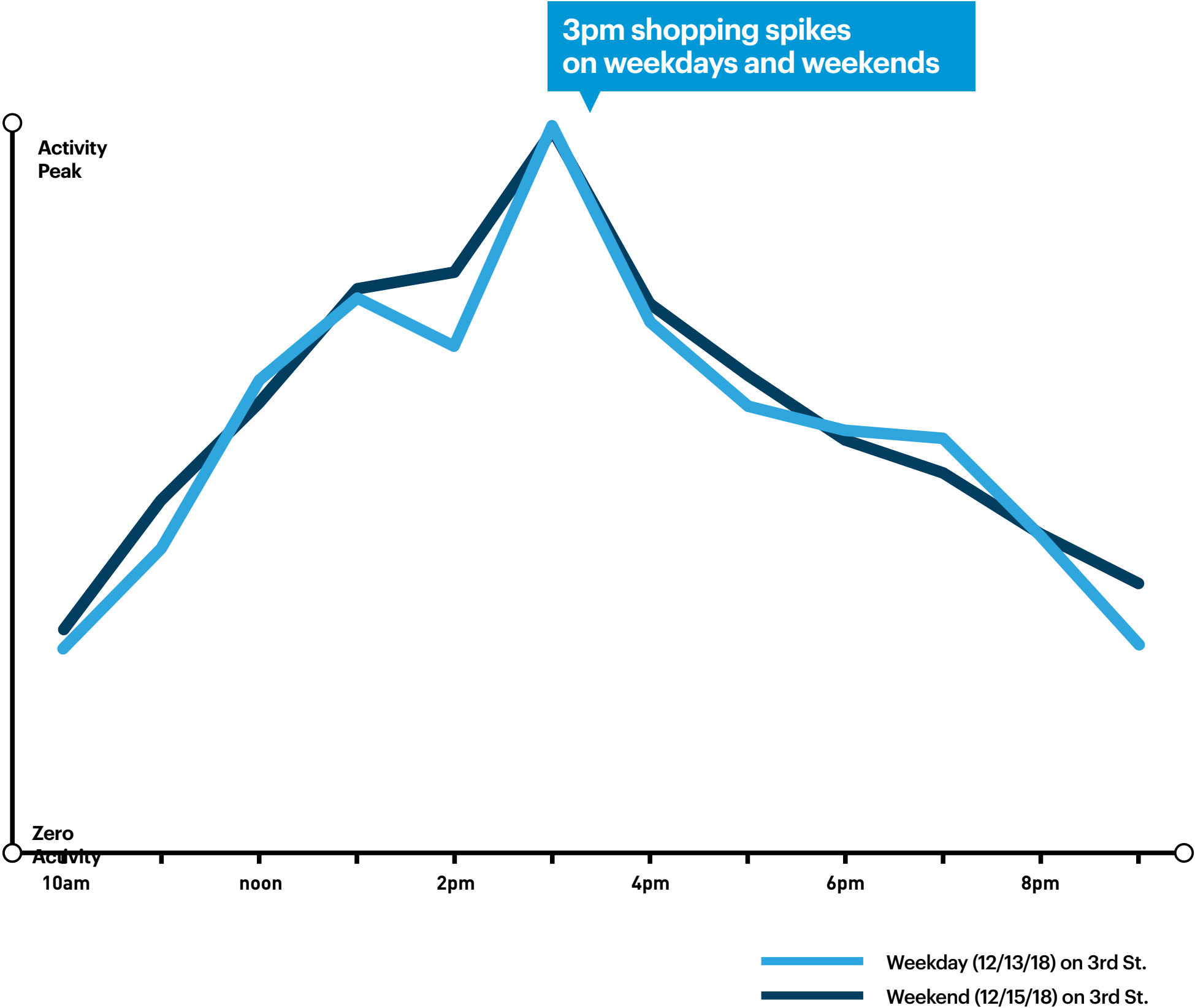




# Current patterns of daily use show that there is an opportunity to expand offerings on Third Street Promenade beyond current retail hours

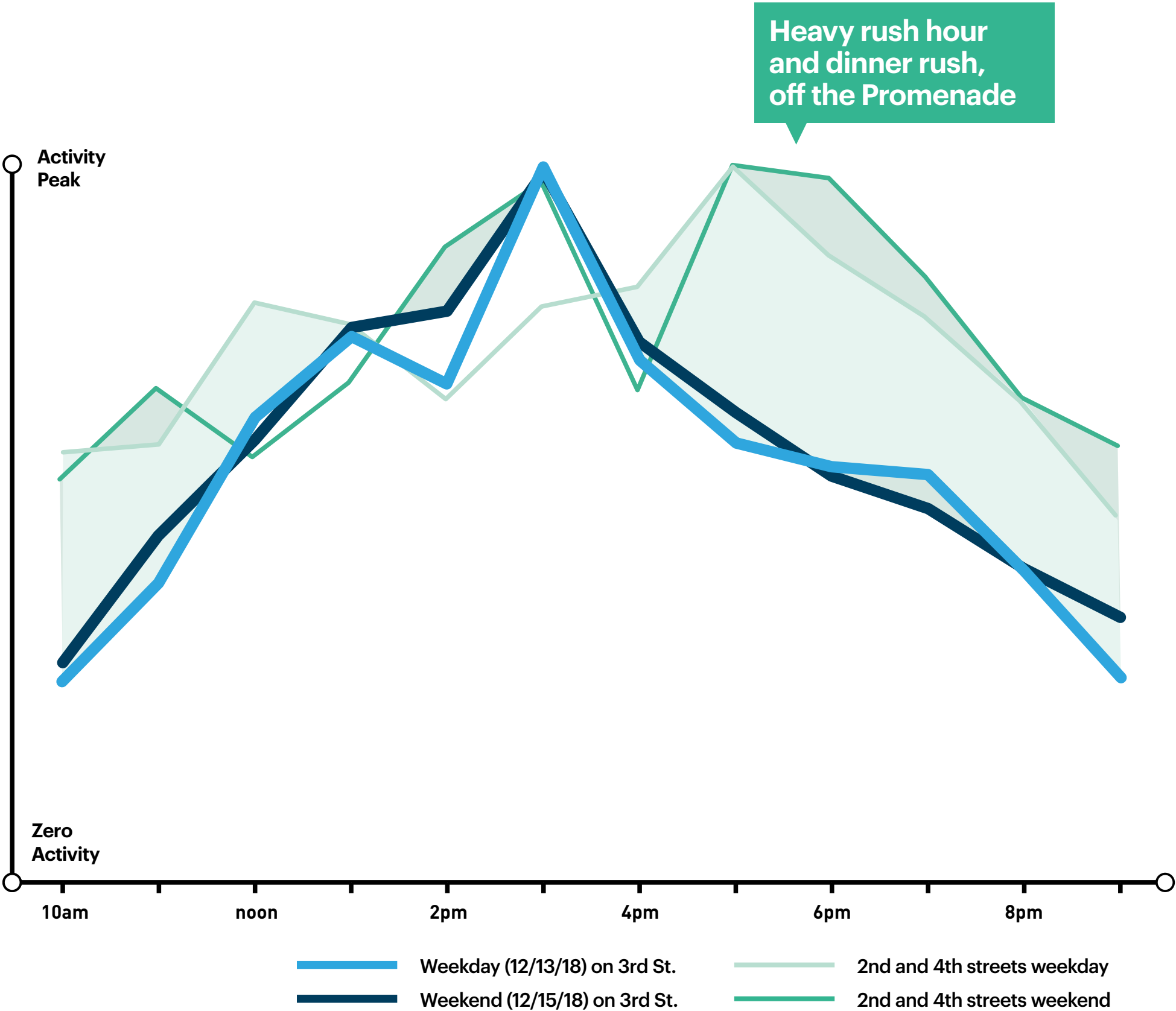
The profile of movement volumes throughout the day shows little morning and evening activity compared to afternoon spikes, suggesting that there are opportunities to expand the dimensions of public life on the street by appealing to wider uses.

## 4 Third Street Promenade knows retail



# Current patterns of daily use show that there is an opportunity to expand offerings on Third Street Promenade beyond current retail hours

Concurrent counts showed that there were prominent morning and evening rushes on 2nd and 4th Streets that were missing on Third Street Promenade



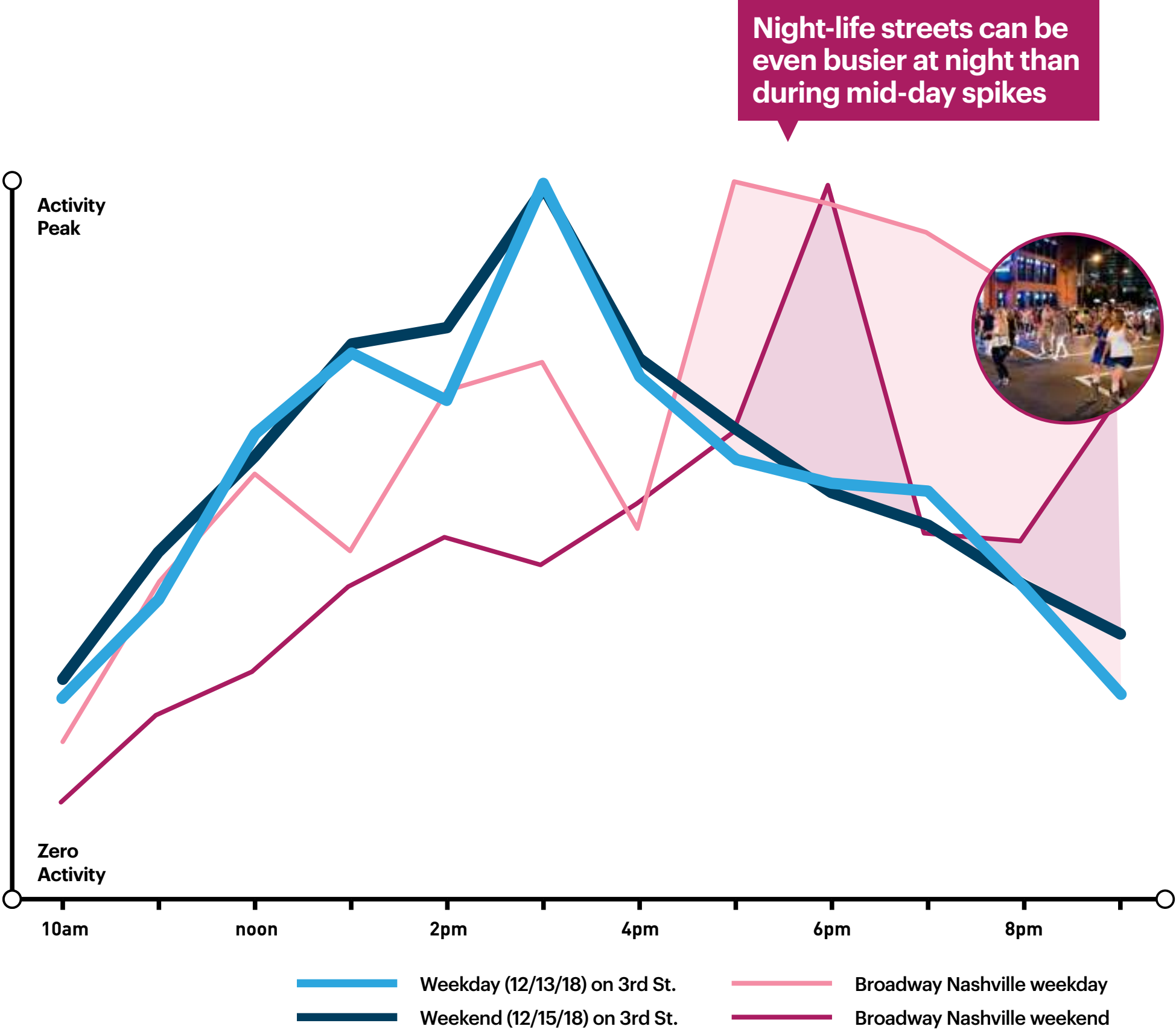
## 4 Third Street Promenade knows retail



# Current patterns of daily use show that there is an opportunity to expand offerings on Third Street Promenade beyond current retail hours

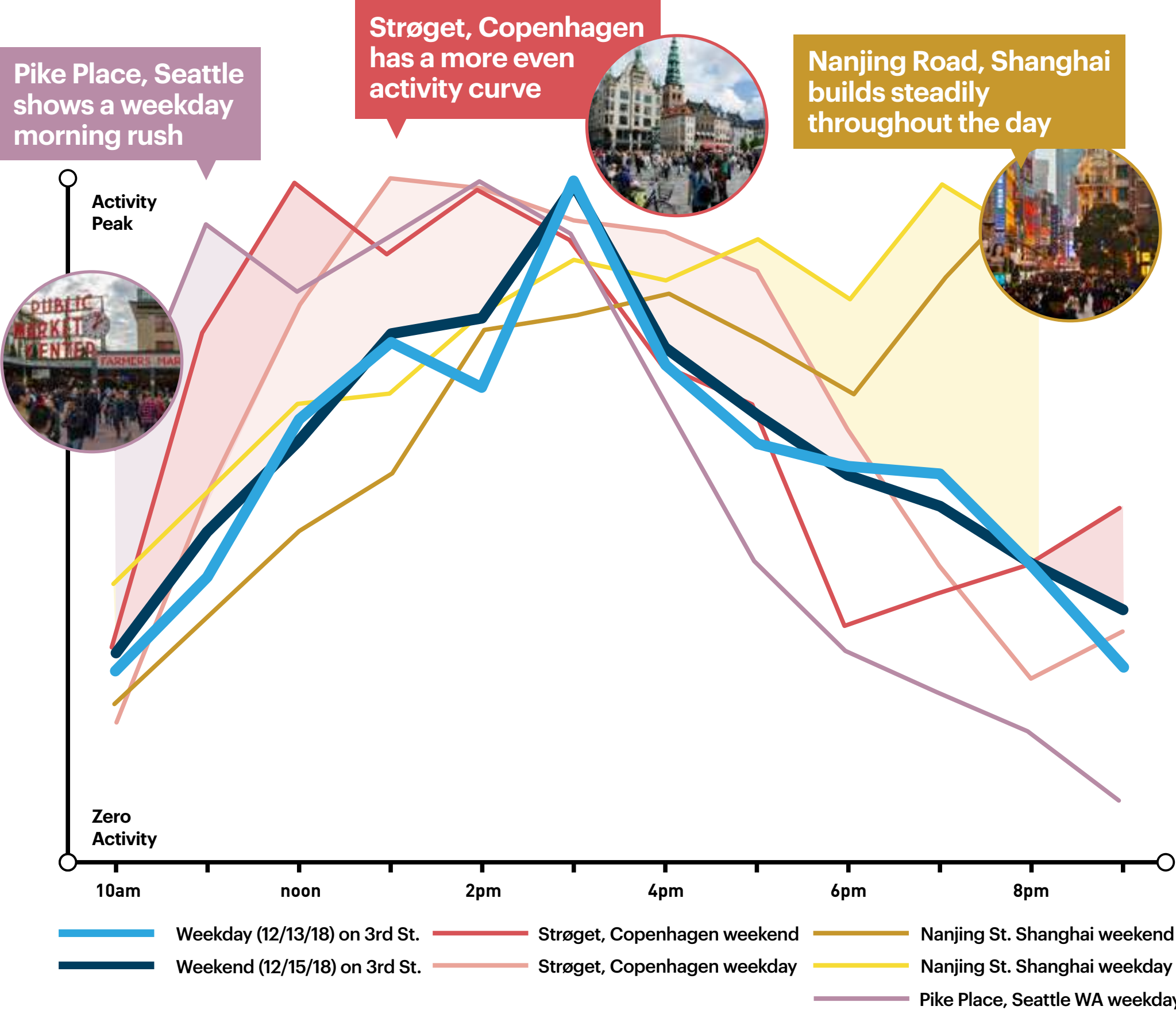
Compared to other world-class 'people streets,' night-life is missing

## 4 Third Street Promenade knows retail



# Current patterns of daily use show that there is an opportunity to expand offerings on Third Street Promenade beyond current retail hours

Use patterns on other high-use pedestrian streets around the world are often more evenly spread throughout the day.



## 4 Third Street Promenade knows retail



## 5. The space is so successful that nobody stops to stay

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This could mean that people are overwhelmed by the crowds. It could also mean that there aren't enough invitations to stay.

**"Nobody goes there anymore.  
It's too crowded."  
- Yogi Berra**

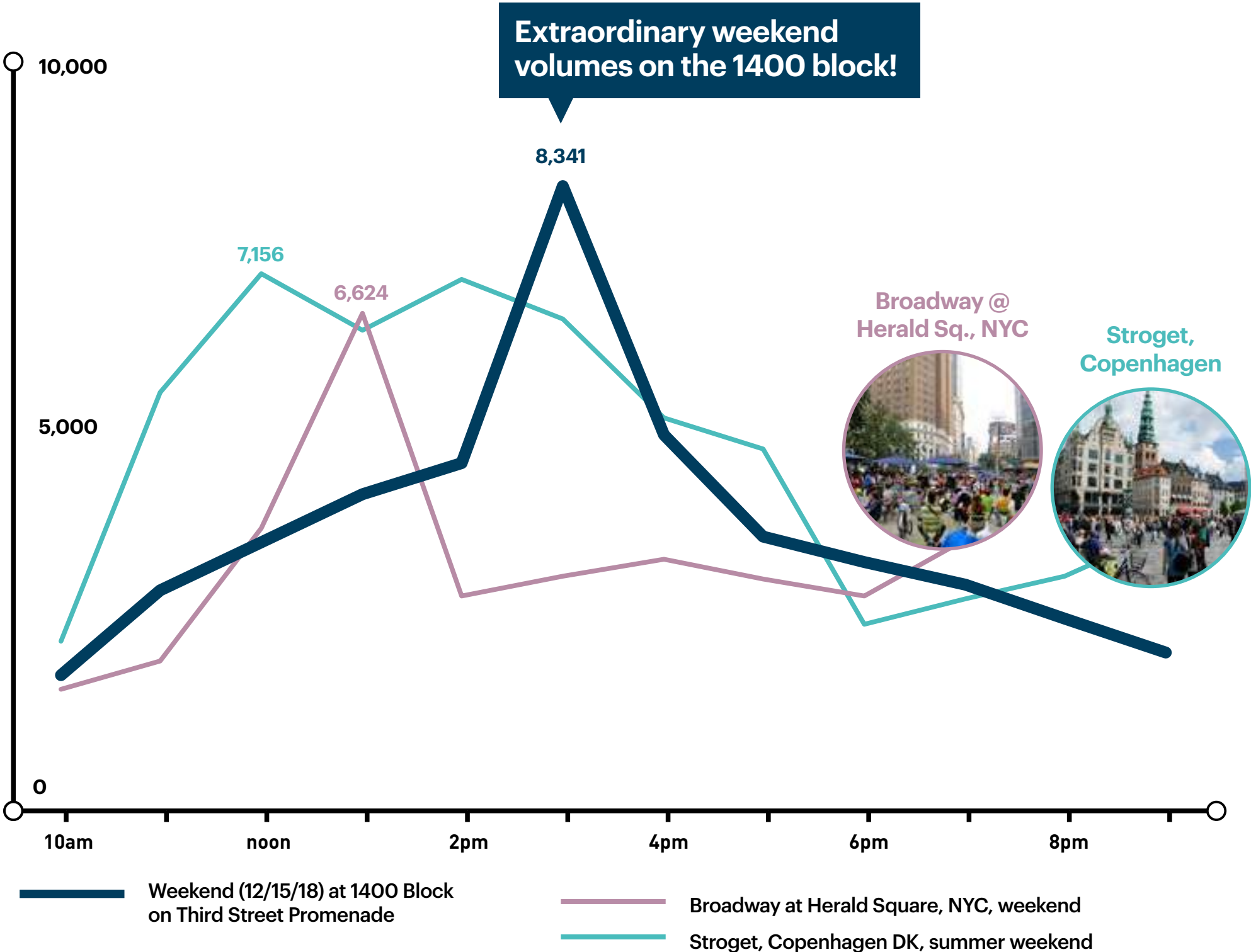




# Third Street Promenade can be extremely busy

During peaks hours, the volume of people moving rivals those of the world's busiest pedestrian streets

**5** The space is so successful that nobody stops to stay





...but there is little 'spillover' of activity between spaces, and movement volumes vary greatly from end to end

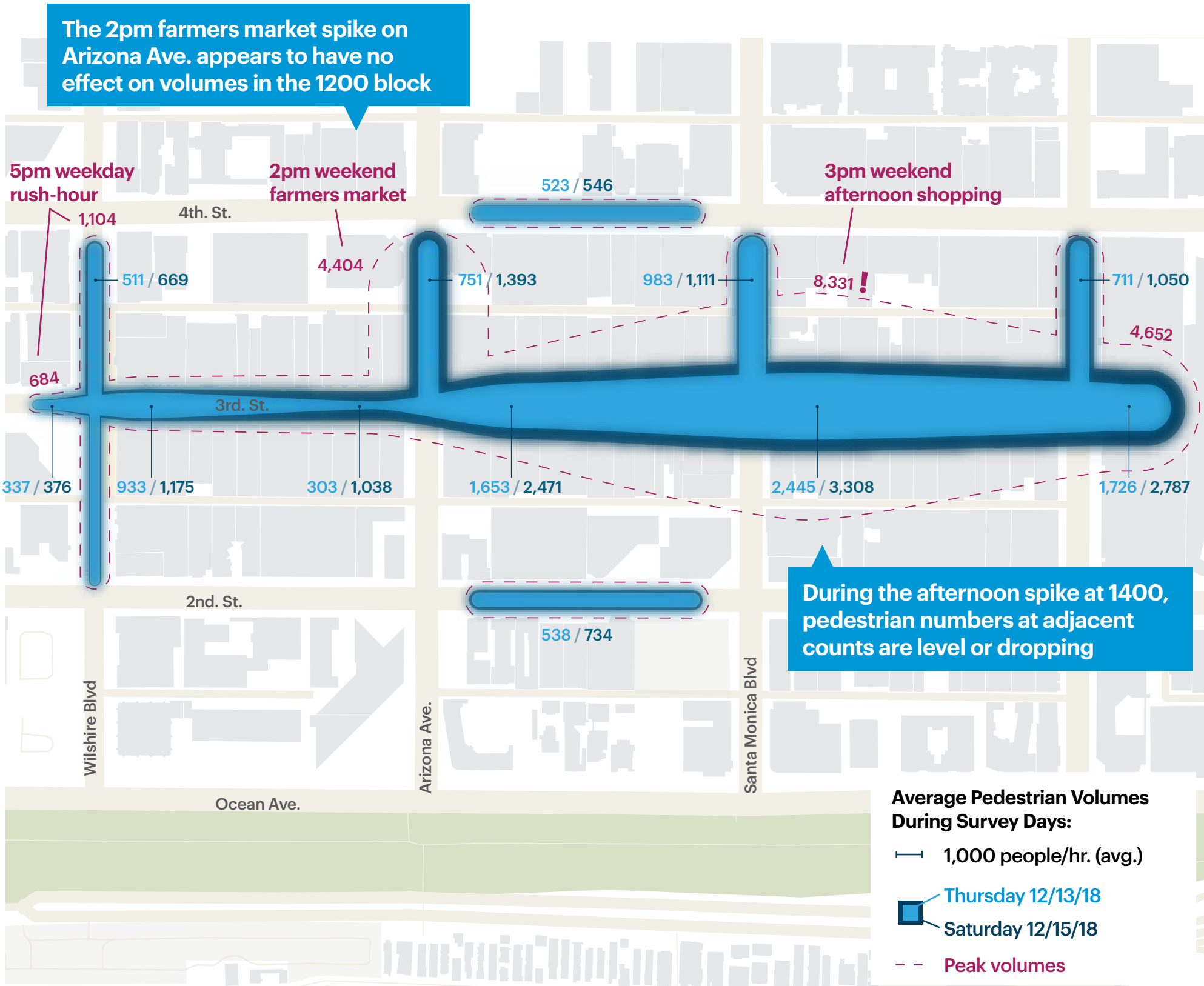
Peaks in pedestrian flow occur at different times at each location, suggesting that visitors may come for one reason and are reluctant to venture beyond it.

The south end of Third Street Promenade experiences wide fluctuations between peaks and lows, while the north end shows a slower but more consistent pattern of daily activity. This pattern is more similar what was seen on other retail streets in Santa Monica, shown below.

Retail Street Comparison Counts:

- 214 / 426 Main Street @ Ashland
- 236 / 315 Montana Ave. @ 10th St.

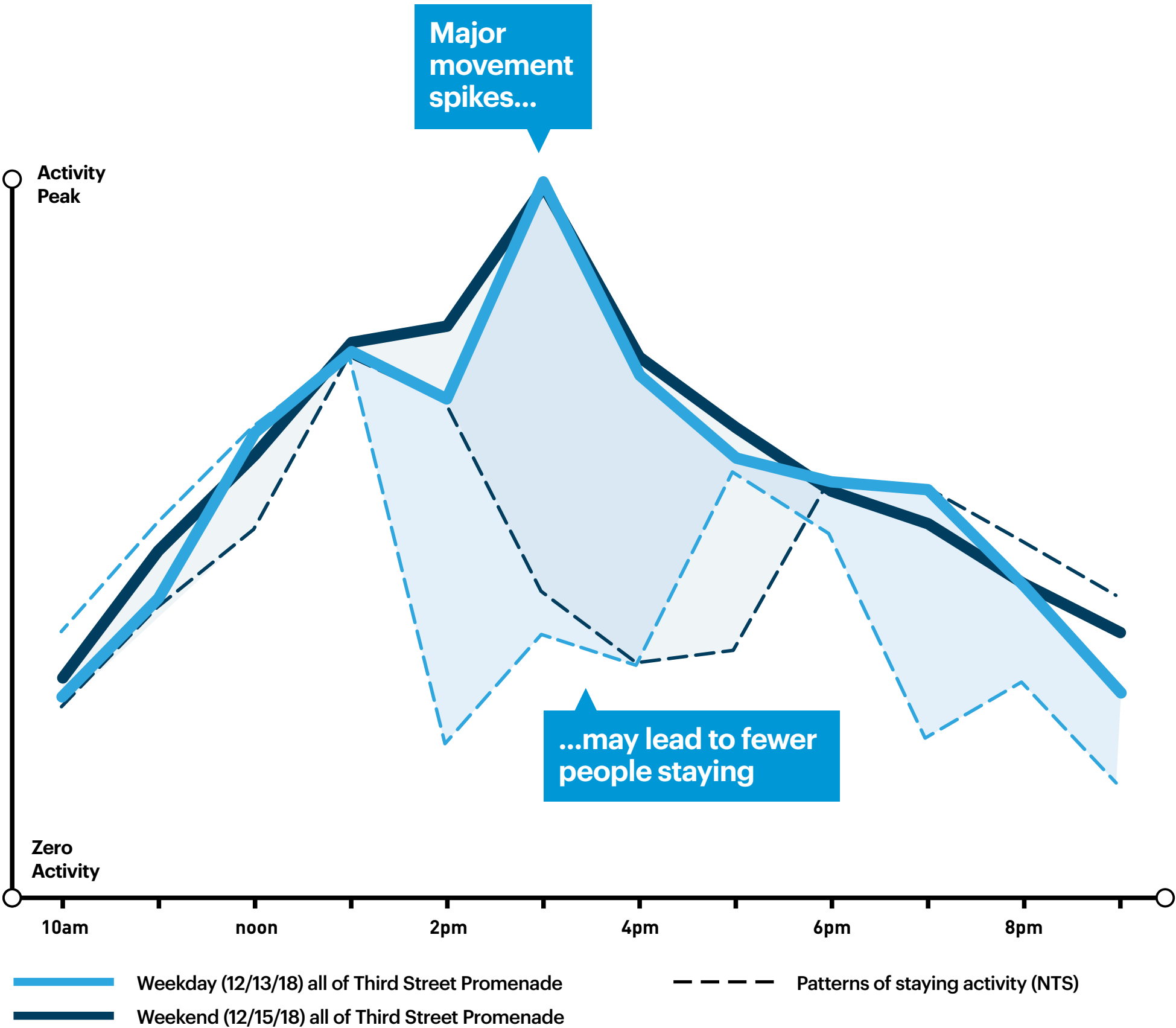
5 The space is so successful that nobody stops to stay



...and during times with the highest volumes of people moving, we see fewer people actually staying in the space

The 'success' of Third Street Promenade as a movement space may be overwhelming the comfort of those staying. During periods of intense activity, people need special invitations to stay in spaces that allow them to escape from the flow.

5 The space is so successful that nobody stops to stay





## 6. The people that do stop, stop where they are invited

.....  
And this varies from block to  
block





# Third Street Promenade creates a high sense of safety for visitors

.....

**6** The people that  
do stop, stop  
where they are  
invited





# ...yet males make up a disproportionate percentage of people staying

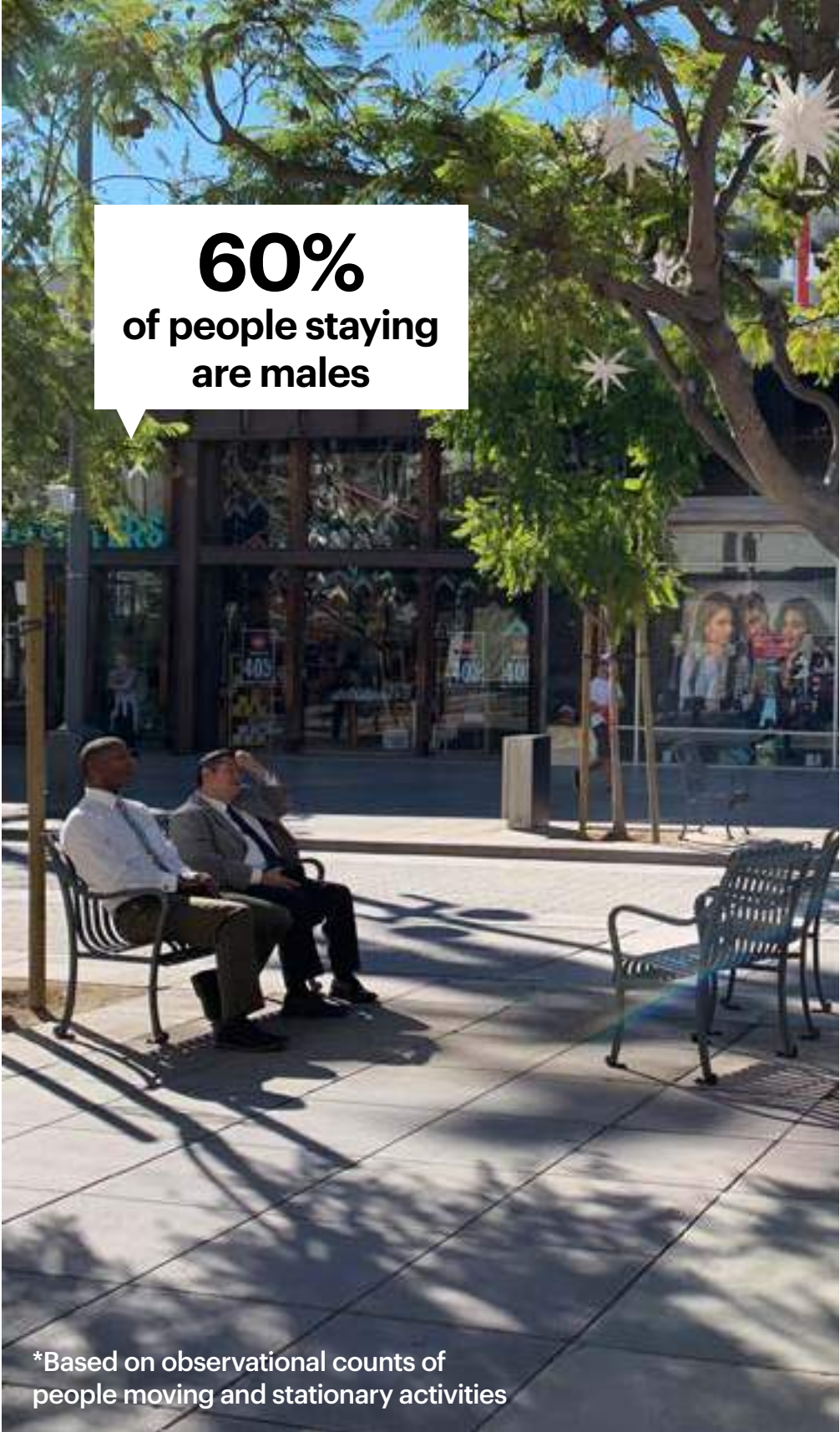
.....

On Third Street Promenade, visitors’ sense of safety doesn’t seem to be the cause of this disparity. A variety of factors are at play, and further analysis would benefit our understanding of how to address this through design.

It is possible that men who visit occupy a demographic that is simply more likely to spend time. Yet the prevalence of women on similar walking streets, like Stroget in Copenhagen, suggests there are opportunities for Third Street Promenade to provide more invitations for women to stop and stay.

The males who visited during the survey tended to be older and to stay longer than female visitors, and were more likely to come for food and drinks. If they came for shopping, they were less likely to have a specific product in mind. Males were also more likely to come alone, and to identify as tourists than females.

**6** The people that do stop, stop where they are invited

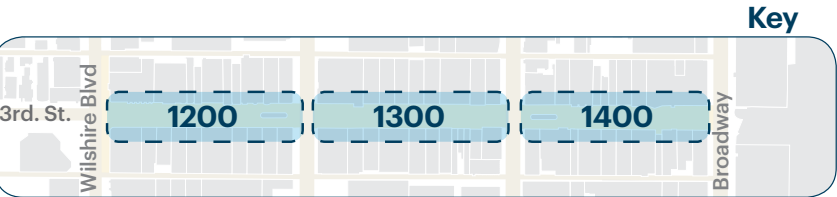




# The profile of Public Life varies from block to block

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Each block on Third Street Promenade has its own unique personality; they invite different activities, attract slightly different demographic populations, and encourage varying amounts of people to stop and stay



**6** The people that do stop, stop where they are invited



## 1200 Block:

- Has the highest percentage of locals, and lowest activity overall
- People spend less time here (avg. 2:10)
- Much more ‘play’ activity here than on other blocks
- It has the most vacancies



## 1300 Block:

- Has the highest percentage of tourists
- Attracts an older population (2x more seniors than other blocks)
- More ‘eating and drinking’ activity than other blocks



## 1400 Block:

- Has the most cultural activity
- More kids and young adults than other blocks
- People spend more time here (avg. 2:45)
- Respondents encountered here visit more often (60% visit daily or weekly)



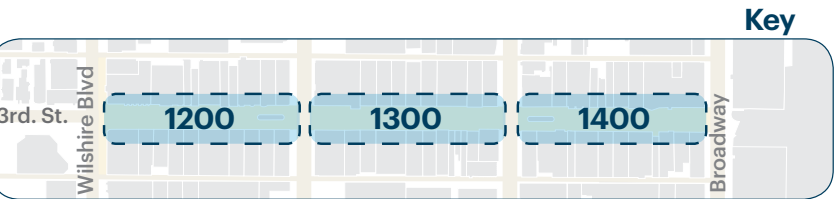
# ...'Stickiness' also varies by block

'Stickiness' is a measure of how many people stop and stay vs. those moving through a space.

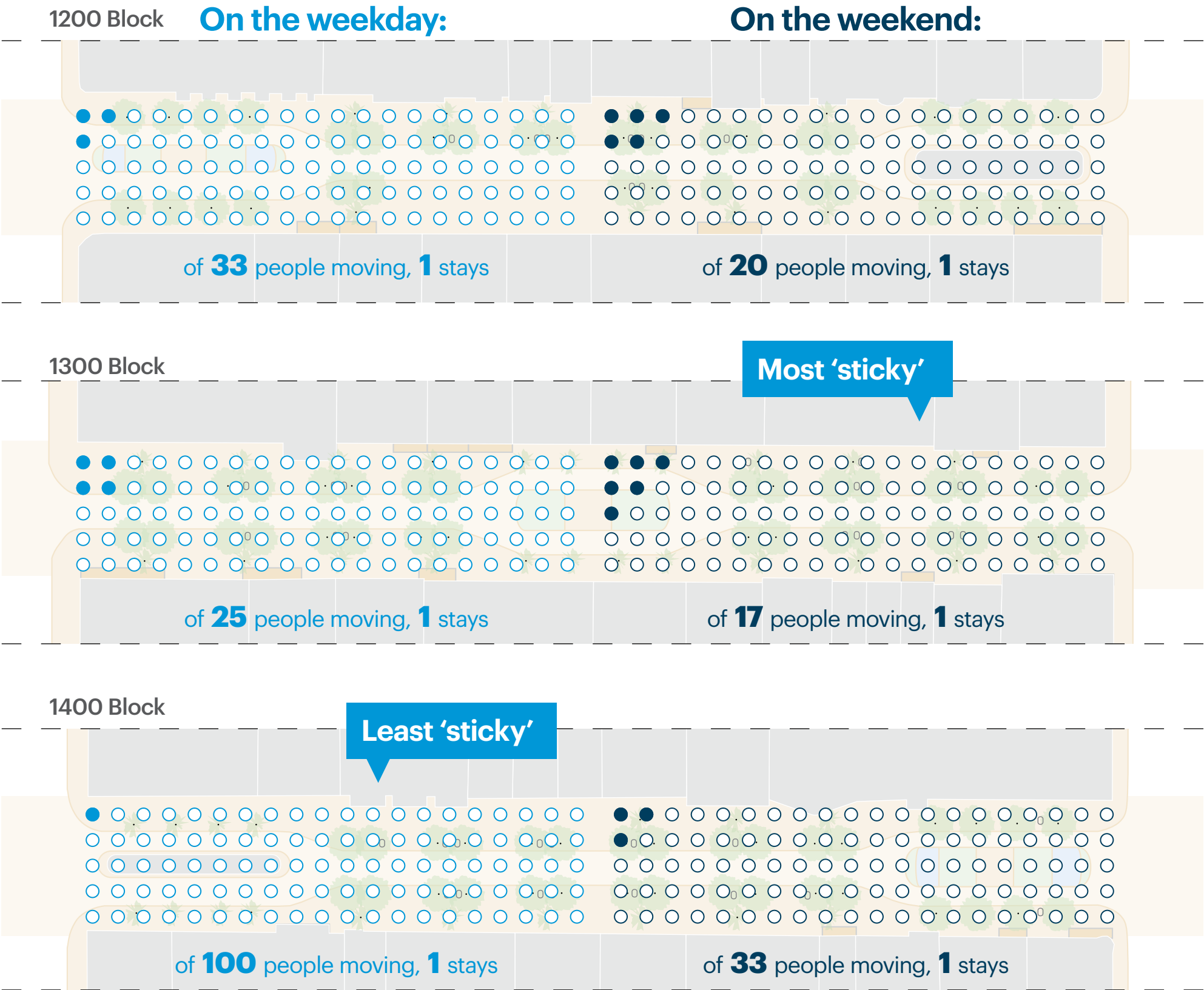
Times Square for example is extremely 'sticky,' with one out of every five people stopping to stay - more than three times higher than the stickiest block on Third Street Promenade on the weekend observed.

Times Square, NY:  
of every 5 passers by, 1 stays

Swanson Street, Melbourne:  
of every 4 passers by, 1 stays



6 The people that do stop, stop where they are invited

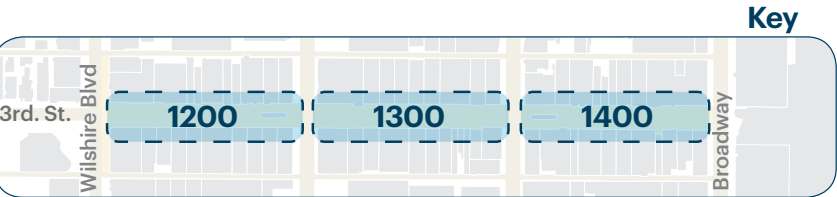


# ...and streetlife improves when ground floor uses encourage people to linger

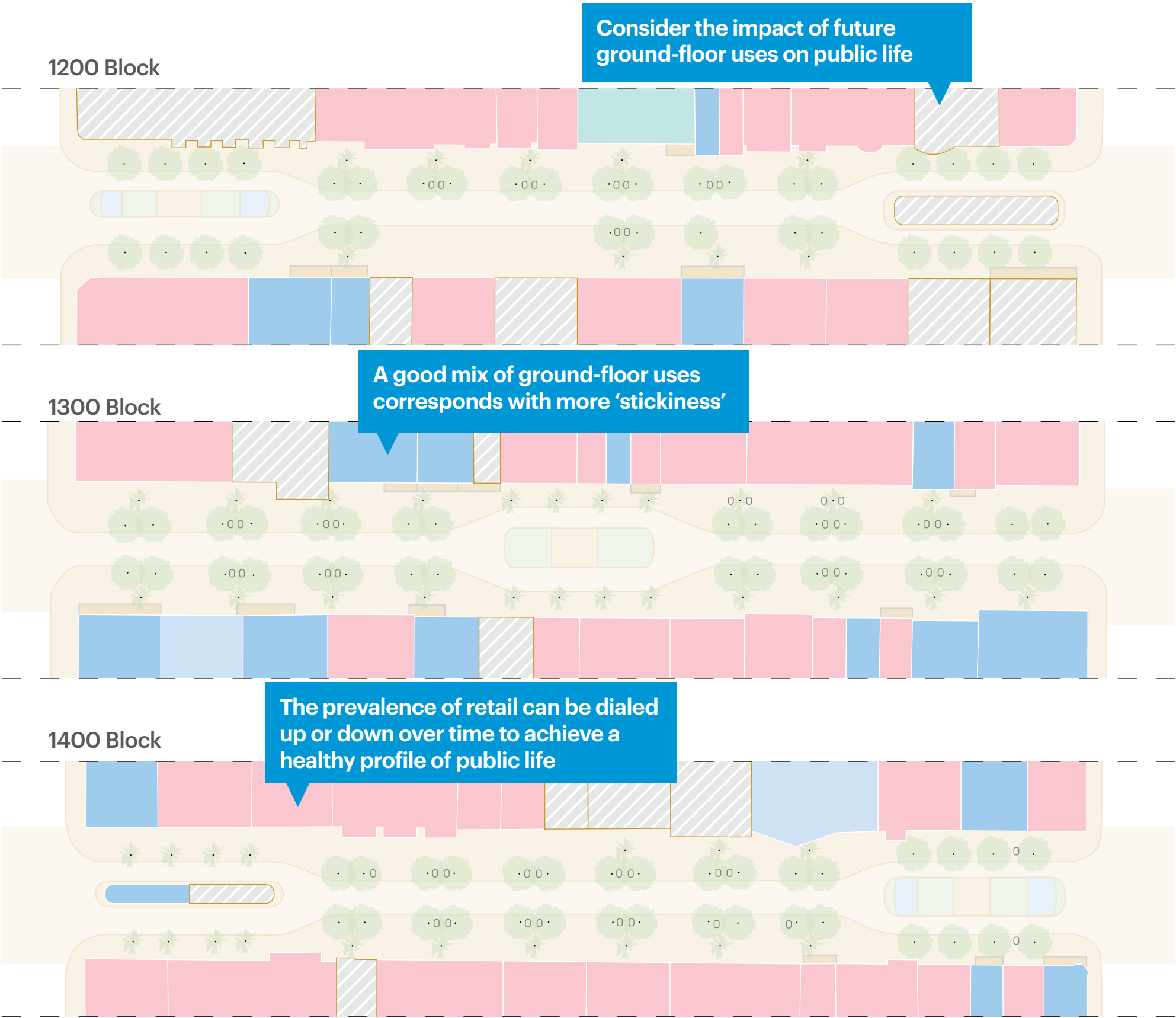
Ground-floor uses that offer a diversity of experiences, in addition to retail shopping, can contribute to greater visitor diversity and prolonged hours of street-life on Third Street Promenade. Bars and restaurants, entertainment venues, and fitness clubs can create a sphere of social influence that spills out into the street in ways that many retail outlets do not.

## Ground Floor Uses:

- Food and Beverage
- Entertainment, theater
- Health and wellness
- Retail
- Vacant

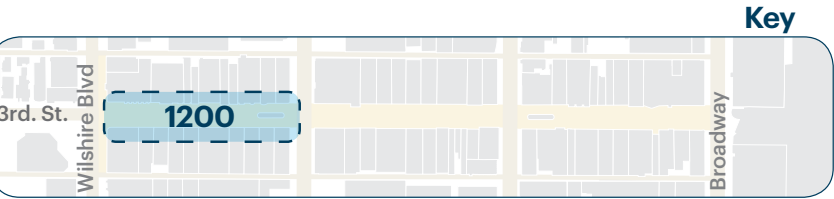


**6** The people that do stop, stop where they are invited





# Public Life Profile: 1200 block



**6** The people that do stop, stop where they are invited

## Who stays here?

Females make up **40%** of people staying

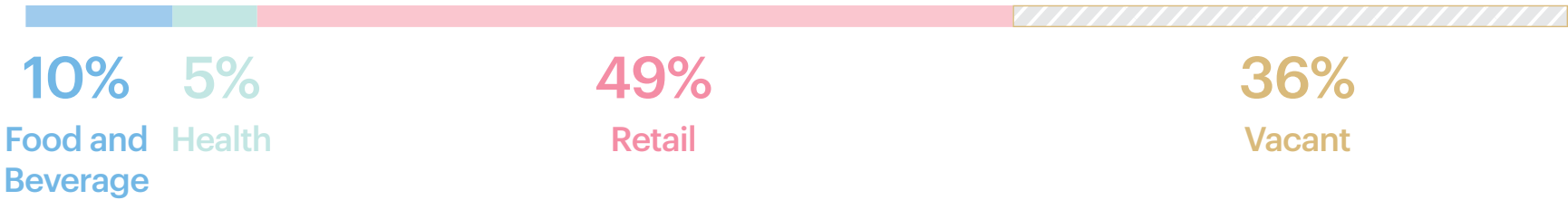
Most **25-64** year-olds of any block

## Open space amenities:

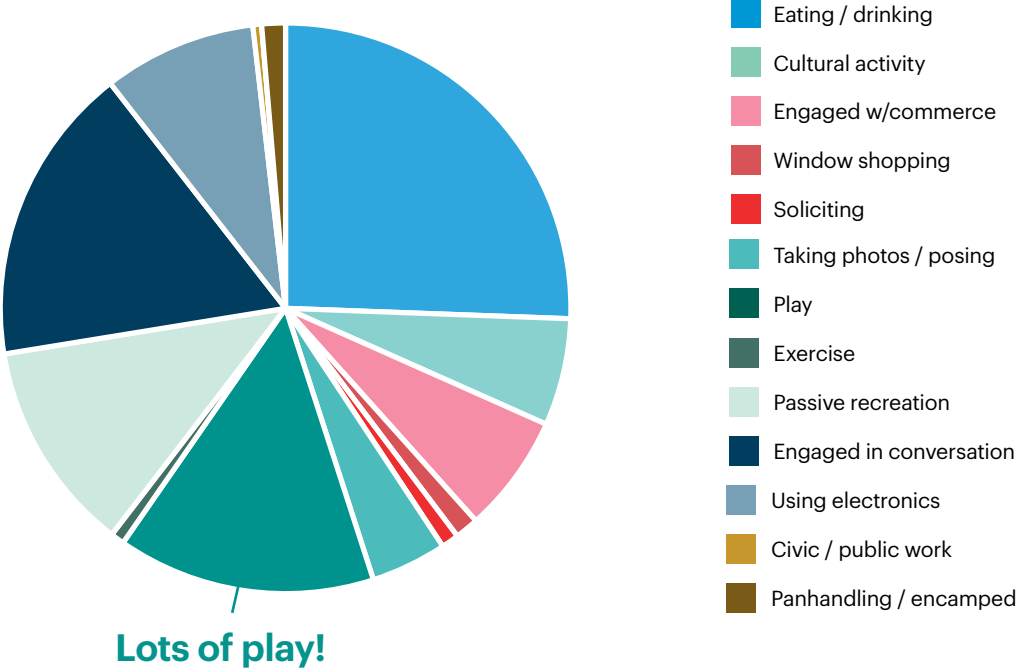
**23**  
Public Seats

**4**  
Pay-to-sit Areas

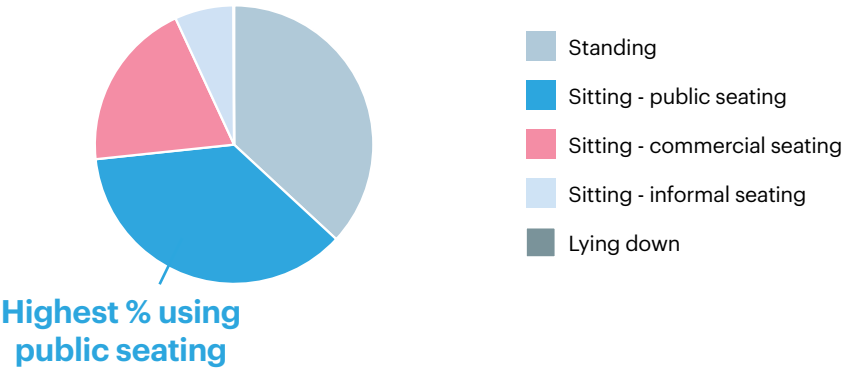
## Ground-floor uses:



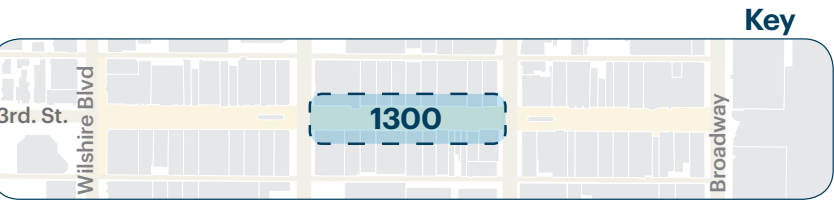
## What do they do?



## How people stay in the space:



# Public Life Profile: 1300 block



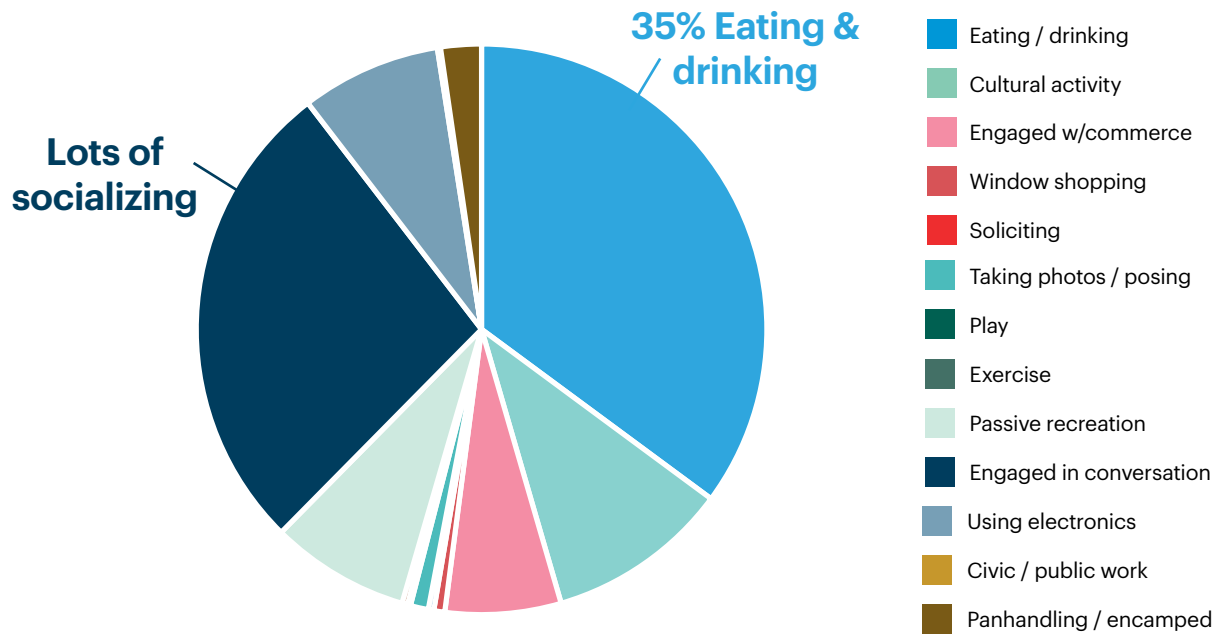
**6** The people that do stop, stop where they are invited

## Who stays here?

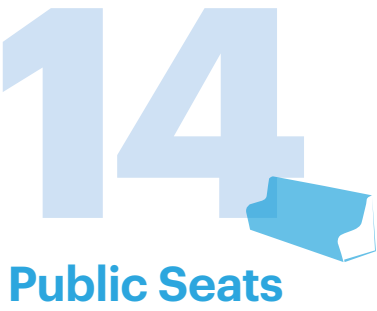
Females make up **45%** of people staying

2X as many **seniors** on this block

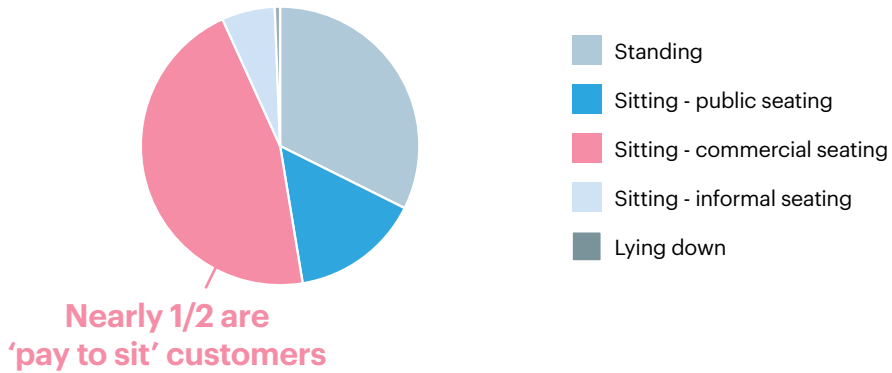
## What do they do?



## Open space amenities:



## How people stay in the space:

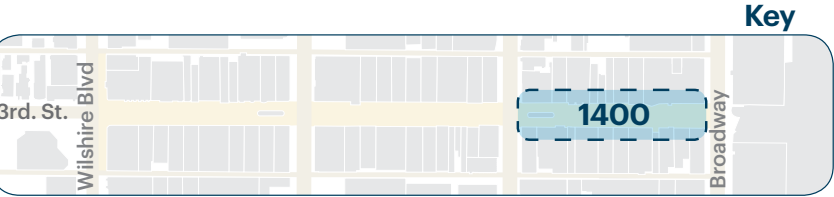


## Ground-floor uses:





# Public Life Profile: 1400 block



**6** The people that do stop, stop where they are invited

## Who stays here?

Females make up **44%** of people staying

2X as many **young adults** on this block

## Open space amenities:

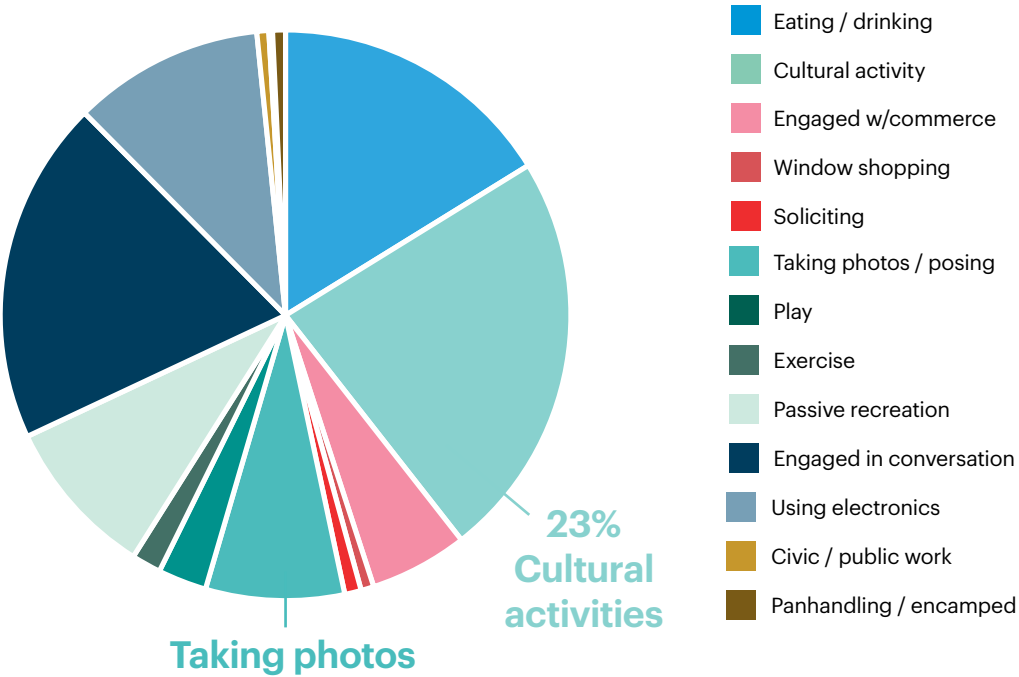
**13**  
Public Seats

**5**  
Pay-to-sit Areas

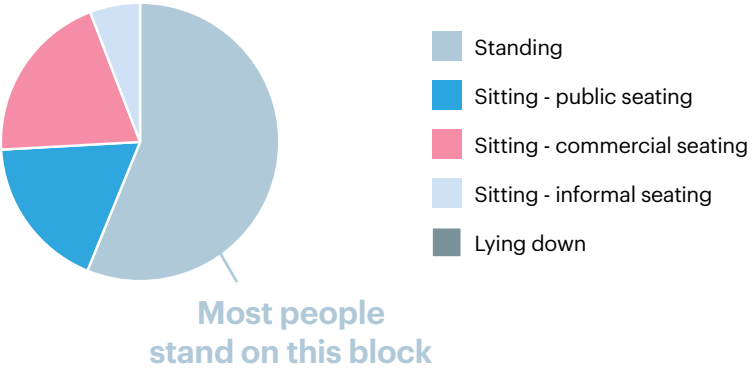
## Ground-floor uses:



## What do they do?



## How people stay in the space:





## 7. Third Street could be a Third Place

.....

People who spend a long time  
on Third Street Promenade  
should be met with amenities  
that encourage them to stay in  
public space





# People who stay longest are more likely to come for the culture

.....

Visitors who come for more than two hours tend to be younger, more ethnically diverse, and are more often from greater LA than those who come for shorter visits



**7** Third Street  
could be a  
Third Place



# Open, transparent façades contribute to the pedestrian experience - but they can go overboard

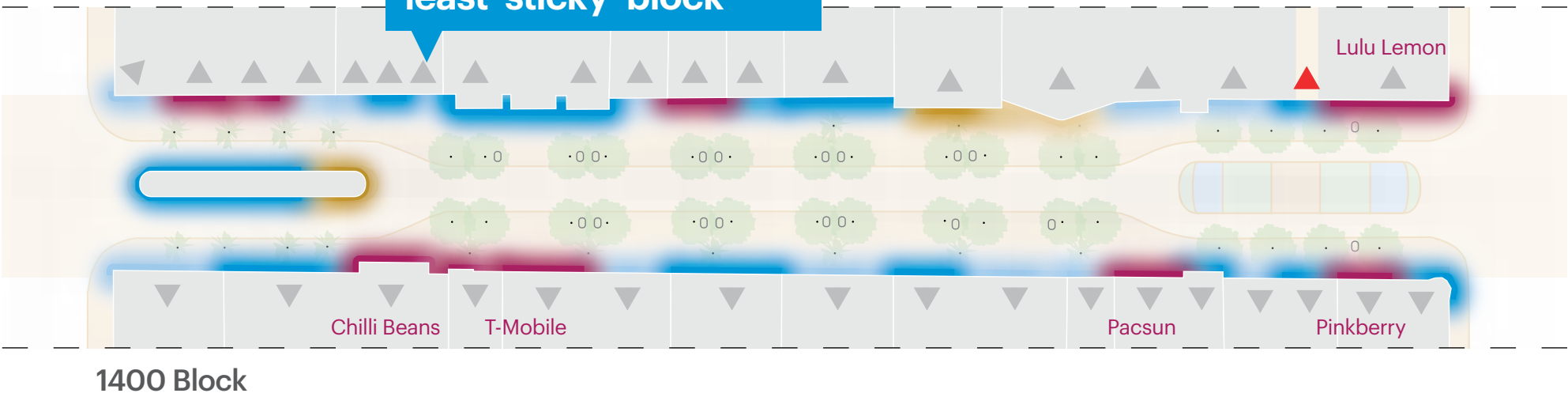
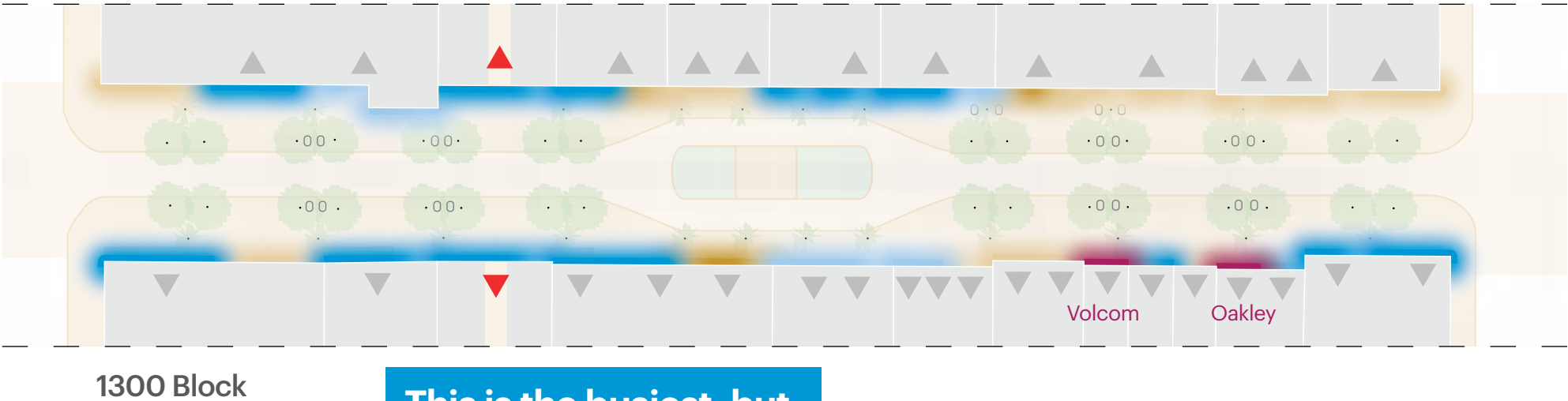
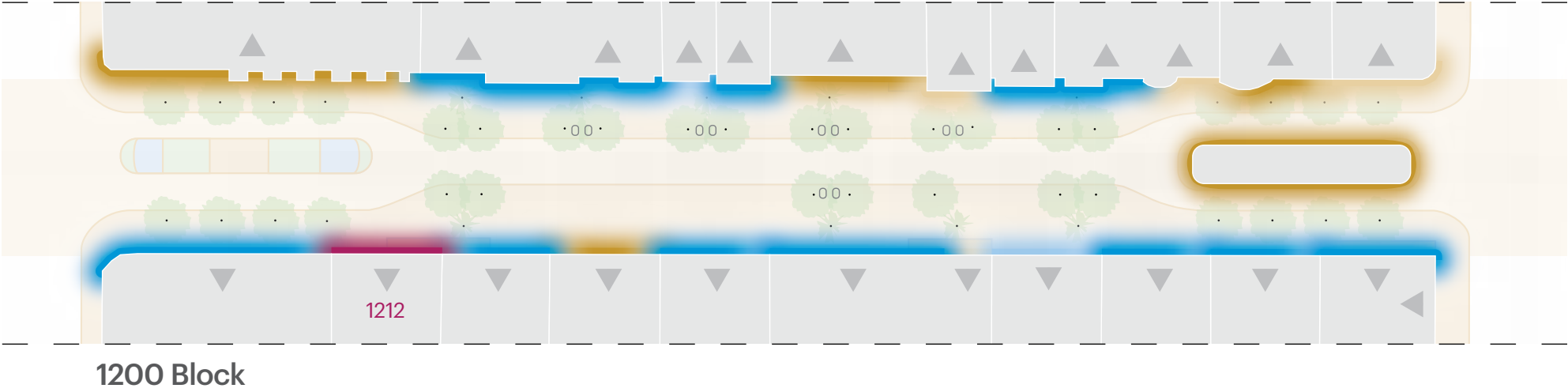
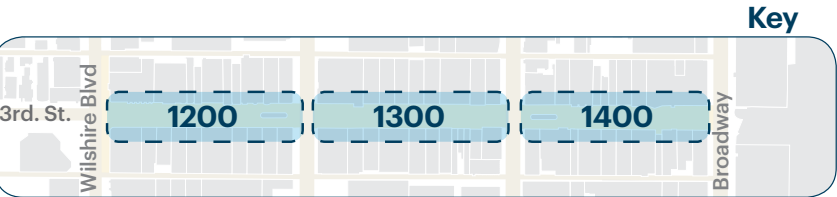
Some facades on Third Street Promenade do very little to signify a threshold between public and private space. These facades can have a large radius of influence on the pedestrian experience.

- Transparent, Weak Threshold

Mostly Opaque
- Transparent

Closed Facade
- Somewhat Transparent

Passageway Entry



## 7 Third Street could be a Third Place



# The visual noise of some storefronts may detract from the comfortable 'Main Street' feel of Third Street Promenade

Overwhelming sensory stimuli encourages people to keep moving. In some spaces, visitors may find it difficult to seek respite from the shopping experience, detracting from the spaces' ability to serve more informal, 'third place' types of social interaction. The presence of several 'loud facades' on one block may contribute negatively to staying activities.



**7** Third Street  
could be a  
Third Place



## 8. It is a strong spine that could be part of a strong network

.....

There is room for activity  
to spill beyond Third Street  
Promenade, AND there are  
opportunities to borrow from  
the successes of surrounding  
streets





# We mapped active façades in Downtown Santa Monica

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**Vibrant facades** contribute greatly to the pedestrian experience, providing people on foot with new stimulus including entries, windows and facade articulation every four to five seconds.

In contrast, **inactive facades** encourage people to move more quickly and discourage staying activity. These facades are opaque and uninteresting, contributing very little to streetlife.

8 It is a strong spine  
that could be part of  
a strong network



## Vibrant

- Small units with many doors
- High transparency
- No vacant or passive units
- Lots of character
- Good articulation, materials and details

## Active

- Relatively small units
- Some transparency
- Few passive units
- Some articulation and details

## Dull

- Large units with few doors
- Low transparency
- Some passive units
- Few or no details

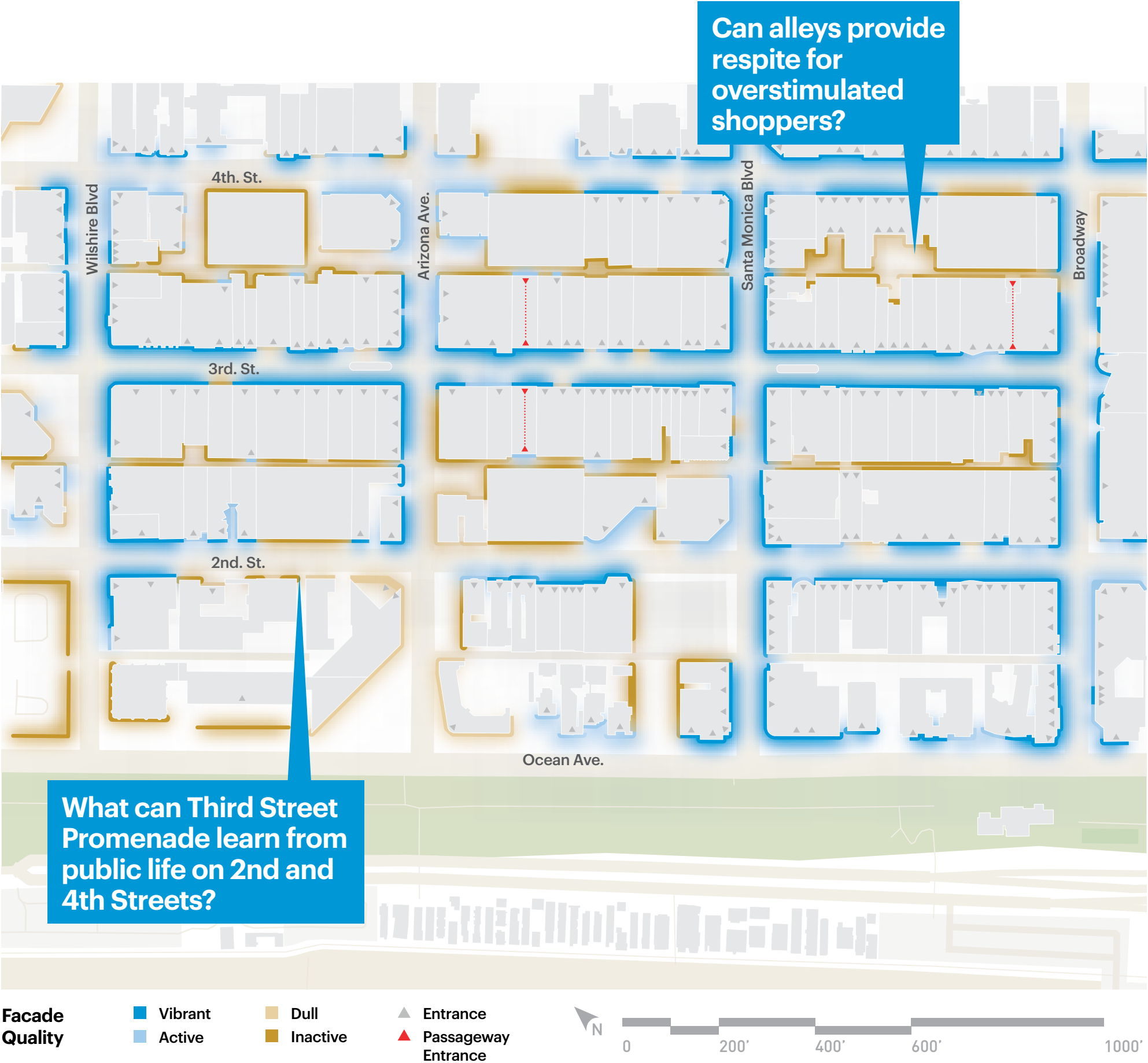
## Inactive

- Large units with/few doors
- Very little/no transparency
- Uniform façades with/no details
- Parking or vacant lot

# Third Street Promenade provides the heart of the pedestrian experience in Downtown Santa Monica

Despite our caution regarding ‘loud facades’ (above) which can overwhelm the senses, Third Street Promenade contributes greatly to the walkability of the neighborhood as a whole, with three blocks of consistent vibrant facades. Data from the public life survey suggests that there is an opportunity for greater interaction between the Promenade and surrounding streets, which could provide a more varied and holistic pedestrian experience in Downtown Santa Monica.

**8** It is a strong spine that could be part of a strong network





# The alleys hold untapped potential, and could offer a complimentary experience to Third Street Promenade

Strengthening connectivity between Third Street Promenade and adjacent streets and alleys will better enable the street to act within a larger network of open spaces and amenities. This will enhance the experience of downtown Santa Monica by building on the diversity of options for visitors to Third Street Promenade.

**8** It is a strong spine that could be part of a strong network



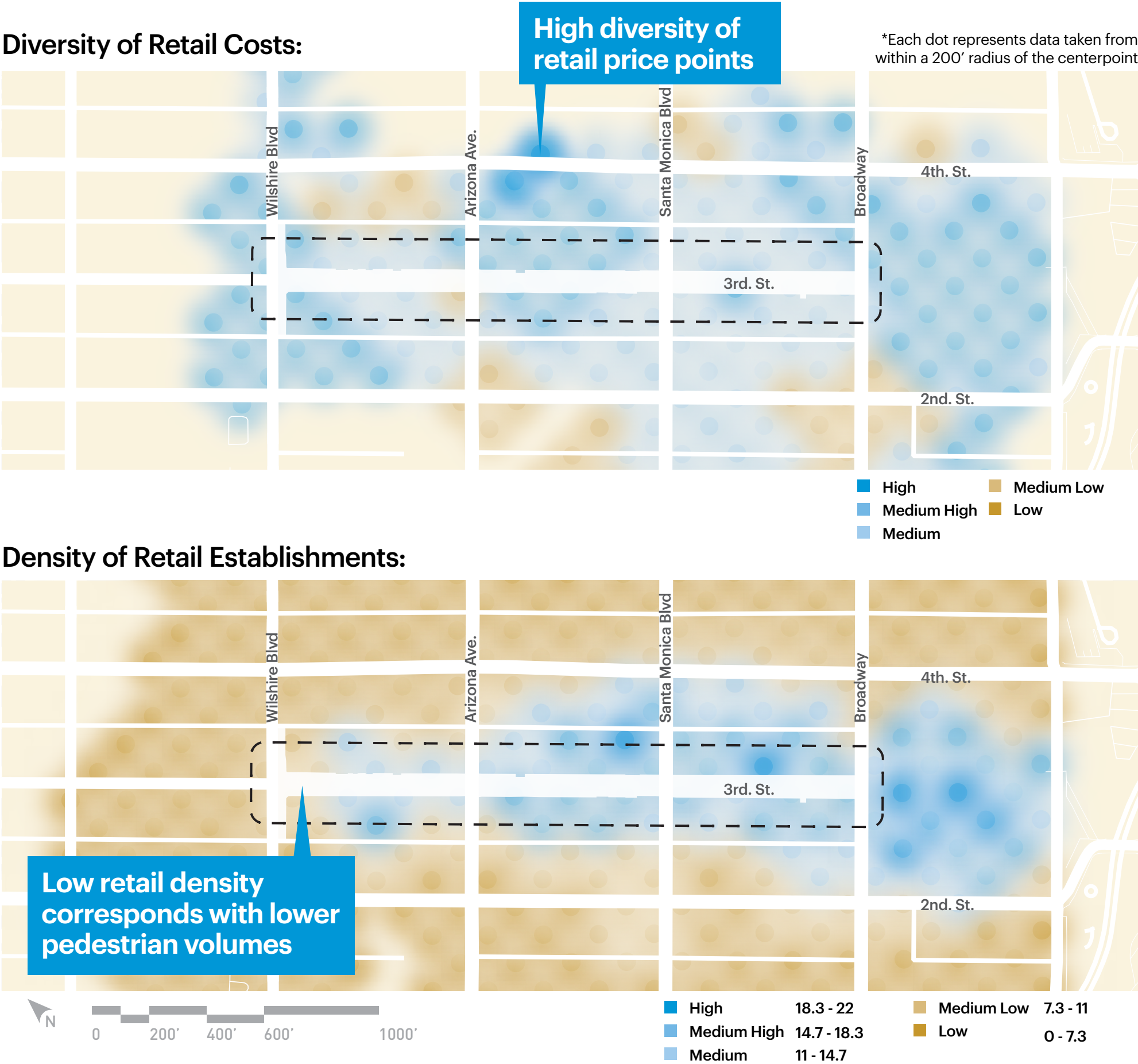


# Survey respondents expressed a desire for more affordable food and retail options

Cultivating a higher diversity of retail costs, as found at some locations on 4th street, could welcome more locals to Third Street Promenade and invite a wider audience.

At the same time, retail density on Third Street Promenade corresponds with high levels of pedestrian activity. This is a positive trend, though at peak volumes pedestrian flow appears to have a negative effect on staying activity. Downtown Santa Monica as a whole could benefit by ‘spreading the wealth’ of food and retail amenities throughout Third Street Promenade and beyond.

**8** It is a strong spine that could be part of a strong network





# Need for further study

## More Often

The public life study was conducted during the height of the pre-holiday shopping season in mid-December. Because of this there are inherent limitations on what can be stated generally about life on Third Street Promenade. We know from sensor data, for instance, that peaks in activity occur at different times of day and at different volumes depending on the season. We don't know what affect this has on staying activities, nor do we have a picture of the types of people who choose to come and the reasons they visit during fall, spring and summer.

## In Higher Resolution

The December study was limited by volunteer hours and a broad scope of inquiry. In future public life studies, this scope can be more focused toward staying activities. In order to properly understand the spatial aspects of spaces that attract more staying activity on Third Street Promenade, more energy should be devoted toward mapping - in high resolution - where people choose to stay.

