

# Biking to the Newport Folk Festival and Jazz Festival

A summary of 2024 Festival biking trends



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Photo by: Ken Abrams, What'sUpNewp



# Newport Folk and Jazz Festival: Biking Report

July-August 2024

## Background

In response to the anticipated 1600+ daily attendees biking to the Newport Folk Festival, Bike Newport, the Newport Police Department and the City of Newport worked together to plan and implement a bi-directional, protected bike lane on Harrison Avenue approaching the entrance to Fort Adams.

Analysis of quantitative and qualitative data collected during the festival identifies opportunities for further iteration and enhancement in subsequent years.

## Key Findings:

- The response to lane improvements was overwhelmingly positive among first-time festival-bikers and seasoned veterans alike.
- The response from the festival police detail was also overwhelmingly positive.
- Riding separately from the cars on Harrison was a relief to riders.
- Midday opening of the lane to cars led to confusion and dangerous conditions.
- Evening exit inside of the park felt unsafe to riders and needs attention.
- Without the lane improvements, Jazz Festival bikers felt unsafe and unaccommodated.
- Bicycle use exceeded ferry use by ~60%, becoming the second most popular transportation choice to the Folk Festival (behind cars).



Riders using the protected bike lane on Harrison Ave (Photo by: WJAR)

## Benefits to the City of festival biking:

- Reduces city-wide traffic congestion
- Reduces festival entrance backups
- Reduces carbon emissions and improves air quality
- Proven economic benefits to local businesses ([link to study](#))
- Less space required for vehicle parking
- Reduces inconvenience to residents

## Data Collection

- Rider feedback was collected through a voluntary survey accessible via QR codes posted on signs at the Bike Newport festival tent. 286 total responses were received across both festival weekends (full survey results can be found [here](#)).
- Parked bikes were manually counted each day at the festival
- A MetroCount traffic counter was installed in the Harrison bike lane to record traffic flow throughout the day for evaluation.

## Daily Bike Counts

The Folk Festival saw approximately 1500 bikes on Friday and 1600 per day on Saturday and Sunday, while the Jazz Festival consistently saw approximately 350 bikes per day.



Full bike racks on Friday afternoon

## **Praise for Harrison Ave Bike Lane**

The most insightful data collected was the direct testimony from riders about their experience biking to the festivals. Bikers gave overwhelmingly positive feedback around the Harrison Ave bike lane, with riders praising the safety and convenience of the new arrangement. When asked to rate how safe they felt on the Harrison bike lane, the mean response was a 4.9/5.

### *Selected Survey Responses:*

LOVED the new separated lane coming in. I have ridden into the fest for years and this was the best experience by far!!!

The new bike lane was fantastic! I only came here on bike because of it.

The bike lane was awesome thank you for keeping us safe!!!

The difference between last year and this year with the separated bike lane was night and day! SO key to get more people to bike

Loved the bike lane!! Please continue! More of our friends would bike if we continue it!

The protected bike lanes are amazing. Complete game changer. Excited to see more alternatives for cars driving in.

Thanks for the improvements this year! It made a noticeable difference

Loved the bike lane. Made us feel safe riding with kids in bike trailer

The new protected bike lane on Harrison Ave is INCREDIBLE. It makes such an amazing difference for people to have such a safe place to ride on the way to the festivals. For years biking has been an essential way to bring attendees to the festivals - it would be a nightmare for traffic and parking if the hundreds of people who bike were to switch to driving. Finally there's a safe and adequate route that supports people to make the choice to bike to the festivals - this is the kind of change and thinking we need to see in the world!

## **Issues with Inconsistency of Harrison Bike Lane**

The elimination of the Harrison bike lane at certain points in the day posed a significant safety issue for riders. Based on traffic counter data (see Figures 3,4), approximately 300 bikes per day did not get to use the protected bike lane entering the festival. When the lane was reopened to cars and bikes directed into the right lane with traffic, many reported feeling run off the road by passing cars, as the bollards made it impossible to pass at a safe distance. Several people also reported a lack of communication over the change, and were met with opposing traffic coming at them as they entered what they thought was a protected two-way bike lane.

*Selected survey responses:*

LOVED The dedicated bike lane this year. Have biked to the fest multiple years and it was by far the safest and smoothest I've ever felt. However the closed bike lane on Sunday was incredibly dangerous. It was not clear that cars were in the lane as there was no signage or individuals directing traffic. Having the bollards up made biking on the right side of the road more dicey as cars had no space to give room when passing. Thanks for all you do!

It felt unsafe on Sunday when the bike lane was closed. It was not clear that the bike lane had reverted to auto and I had to dodge cars head on.

### **Safer Exit Route For Bikes on the Way Out of the Fort**

Another major issue identified by respondents was the dangerous and chaotic experience for both bikers and pedestrians exiting the festival at the end of the night. Many people commented that they felt unsafe sharing a narrow, shoulderless lane with cars and buses coming in and out of the festival, with no clear channel designated for them to travel safely.

*Selected survey responses:*

I felt very unsafe leaving the festival when still on Fort Adams grounds. Bikes were narrowly sharing the road with exiting cars. I was very concerned about getting hit by a car.

Arrival path to the fest is vastly safer and more streamlined, the departure from bike parking to the road exit needs work.

I don't know what the solution is but getting out of the Fort in the evening riding alongside buses and cars feels dicey.

Leaving from the bike racks to the exit is tough at the end of the night, but not sure if there's much to be able to do about that. Maybe send off a wave of bikes in the opposite traffic lane after a bus goes through?

Love the improvements this year! Getting from bike lot to front gate after the fest remains complete chaos with 2 way bus traffic. What are you even supposed to do?!

Clearer bike path on the way out (after the festival)

Cleared exit plan, a lot of weaving between cars made me nervous for me and the families with kids near me. Felt very safe on the sep bike lane area and less so in mixed areas

I don't know if anything can be done, but when exiting the festival, the stretch between the bike racks and the hill leading out (passing Sail Newport, etc) feels dangerous with

the tight road and passing vehicles/busses. If there a way to dedicate a small partitioned bike lane there, that would be helpful.

Leaving the fort is a nightmare with the cars and busses, especially as it gets darker. Would love to see a dedicated or better directed bike path for exiting.

Bike lane from bikes to exit gate. Many cars were in shoulder and made the small stretch to the gate difficult

Specific lane for bikes when leaving the ground at the Fort. We shouldn't be on sidewalks, and up on the grass is tricky. Perhaps there's a better way to route riders from the bike racks to where the protected lane begins.

Continuing the dedicated bike lane through to bike parking.

Leaving the fort is a nightmare with the cars and busses, especially as it gets darker. Would love to see a dedicated or better directed bike path for exiting.

### **Safer Biking Arrangements for Jazz Festival:**

The stark juxtaposition of rider experiences at the Jazz Festival compared to the Folk Festival illustrates the contrast of biking in a protected lane versus navigating Harrison Avenue's treacherously narrow shoulder. This rider testimony supports the need to extend biking accommodations to the Jazz festival as well, a measure that promises to increase ridership and safety.

#### *Selected survey responses:*

There should be a dedicated bike lane like I heard there was for Folk

Please make a dedicated bike lane for jazz like during folk

Folk fest had a bike lane. Jazz fest does not and feels way less safe. Jazz fest needs a bike lane!

The lack of a protected bike route on the way really sketchy, especially compared to how good it was at folk fest

Why no protected bike lanes for the jazz fest????

would love to see the dedicated bike lanes like you had at folk fest! so grateful for bike newport. if i had to sit in a car in that traffic i wouldn't come to this festival again

There were almost no bike lanes on the route. The last couple of miles on Harrison and Fort Adams drive were especially hairy- narrow roads, no bike route, no shoulder. I am from Boston and used to biking in the city but this was truly scary

The support for riders is much less than Folk Fest. Also cars in traffic were very close to the side the of the road and there wasn't a bike lane. So we had to ride on the left of cars close to the fort and there was oncoming traffic. It was a bit unsafe. There needs to be a protected bike lane from downtown to the fort.

During the festival, a dedicated space for cyclists on the road would be so much safer. Cars while stuck waiting in traffic tend to hug the right most part of the lane, except when there is a line delineation for a shoulder/bike lane.

It was rough with no bike lane to the fort. The cars don't know how to manage space around bikes.

All the festivals need to create a dedicated bike lane.

Would have loved to see some protected lanes at Jazz festival as there were for Folk festival. Police officers were more helpful and less confrontational this year than they have been in many previous years. Drivers are still careless/dangerous/aggressive; just this weekend I was run off the road once, and nearly hit by someone passing me from behind on the left, crossing into the oncoming lane, while I was turning left properly, and with both electronic and hand signals, at an intersection. I don't know what the solution is to that, other than having the police enforce safe and sober driving, which I never see here or honestly anywhere else. Thanks to everyone who's trying to make it a little safer and more humane for us to ride!

The new Folk Fest bike lane was fantastic; it'd be fantastic to have it for Newport Jazz.



My friend got squeezed between a car and the curb and wiped out. She's OK but a bike lane would've made all the difference.

Very difficult and dangerous on roads without a bike lane. Silly not to have one when it is encouraged to bike to the Jazz Fest . I felt very unsafe being so close to cars on the road. I'm not sure I'll do it again for that reason.

But the people from Bike Newport could not have been nicer. Thank you to them.

The last of the three days was the most busy (cars) and therefore felt the most dangerous day to bike to the festival. But I was very happy with the parking facilities and warm welcome by you folks. If you make a bike route with as little changes in altitude or separate bike lanes (especially the last mile or two) that would be very helpful for the Newport Jazz cyclists.

The dedicated bike lane for Folk Festival was great. Much safer. Encouraged way more people to ride bikes. Not having the lane for Jazz fest was a mistake. The city needs to authorize this for all big events. Due to traffic we were forced to ride against oncoming traffic which was not safe. The dedicated bike lane encourages more people to ride to the event and alleviate traffic. They need to make this a regular occurrence. What you guys do at Bike Newport is amazing. Thank you!!

## Other Survey Takeaways:

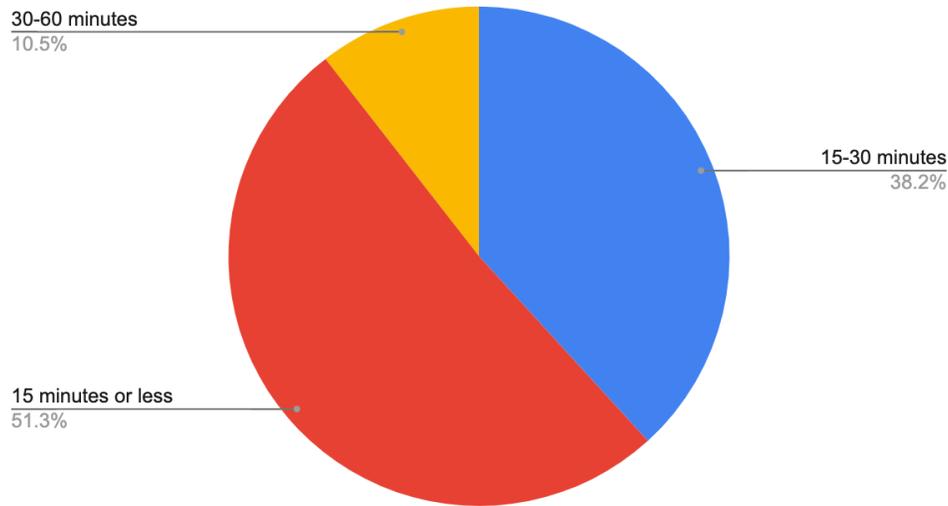


Figure 1: Trip duration to festival

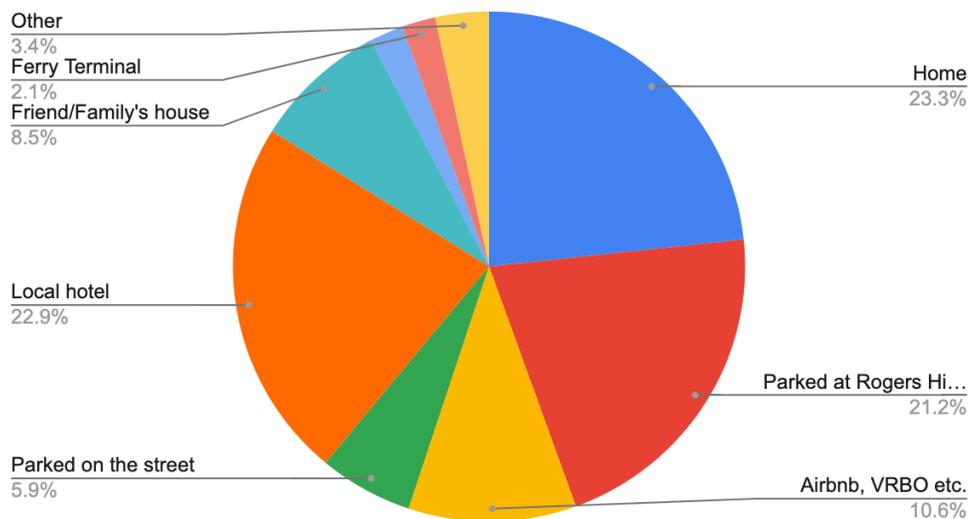


Figure 2: Origin of bike trips to festival

In addition to making sure cyclists feel safe, it is also important to make biking feel like a practical choice. The protected bike lane on Harrison makes sure that bikers have the quickest, most efficient route possible to the festival, avoiding conflict with the gridlocked car traffic in the other lane. More than half of Folk Fest bikers surveyed traveled just 15 minutes or less to the festival, with 90% traveling 30 minutes or less. Given the congestion on Harrison and throughout the city, most of these trips would have taken much longer by car.

Those who biked from home, their friends/family's house, or a hotel/AirBNB make up over 65% of riders, representing cars that were kept off the road altogether on one of the busiest traffic days of the year throughout the city. Extrapolating this ratio to the 1600 daily bikes over the weekend, this represents approximately 415 cars per day not contributing to event day city-wide traffic, an enormous success in itself.

Additionally, 20% of survey respondents parked at Rogers High School and rode in per Bike Newport's park and bike recommendation. Interestingly, however, not a single respondent reported using the secondary park and bike location at the Newport County YMCA. Given the 30+ minute hilly ride, this reinforces the idea that people are more likely to bike when it is a practical, economic choice. This also justifies the need for additional auxiliary parking close to the festival, which was in short supply due to the closure of the Rogers main lot, while the available Wickham-side Rogers lot filled up early every day. In future years, the newly-built Connell Highway Lot near the bridge will help provide additional parking, alongside the reopened Rogers main lot.

## **The Less-Recognized Benefits of Event Cycling**

### **Space Savings at the Festival**

At large events like the Folk and Jazz Festival, parked cars take up enormous amounts of space. Based on survey results, people biked to the festival in groups of 2.5 on average, meaning those 1600 bikers displaced 640 cars. Applying the standard metric of 325 sq ft/parking spot, 640 parked cars would require 208,000 sq ft, or nearly 4.8 acres, the equivalent of 3.5 football fields. Repeating the same calculations for the 350 daily Jazz festival bikes shows that the equivalent car volume would require 1 acre or just under 1 football field of space.

### **Economic Benefits to Local Business**

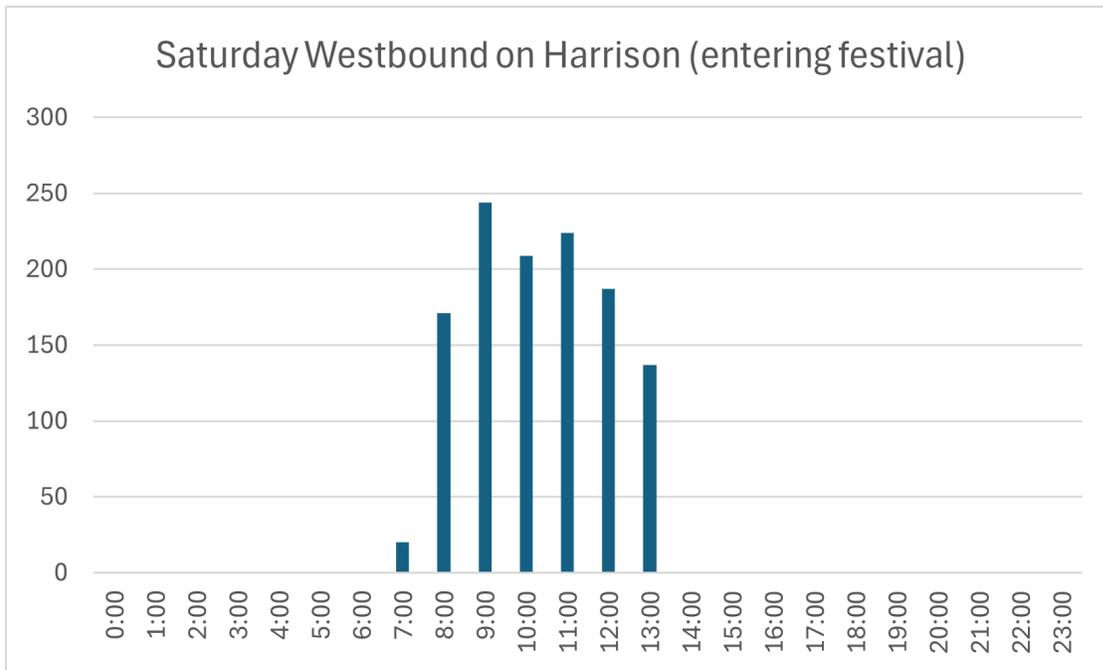
Event cycling also brings economic benefits to local businesses, with research showing that people on bikes are more likely to spend spontaneously than those in cars. Someone on a bike is much more likely to chain-up outside and follow their nose into a restaurant, than someone in a car who might have to circle the block several times just to find parking. This benefit can be huge for local businesses for which the Festival weekends are some of their most profitable of the year.

These benefits become even more impactful when car volumes exceed the typical on-street parking capacity of downtown. A study of six different American urban centers showed that on average, nearly a third of all traffic congestion was made up by people searching for a parking spot, a vicious, self-reinforcing loop that can exacerbate already severe event-day traffic. If businesses want to maximize customers on the city's busiest days, it is crucial to provide car-free options for people to access Newport's business-dense corridors.

## **Conclusion**

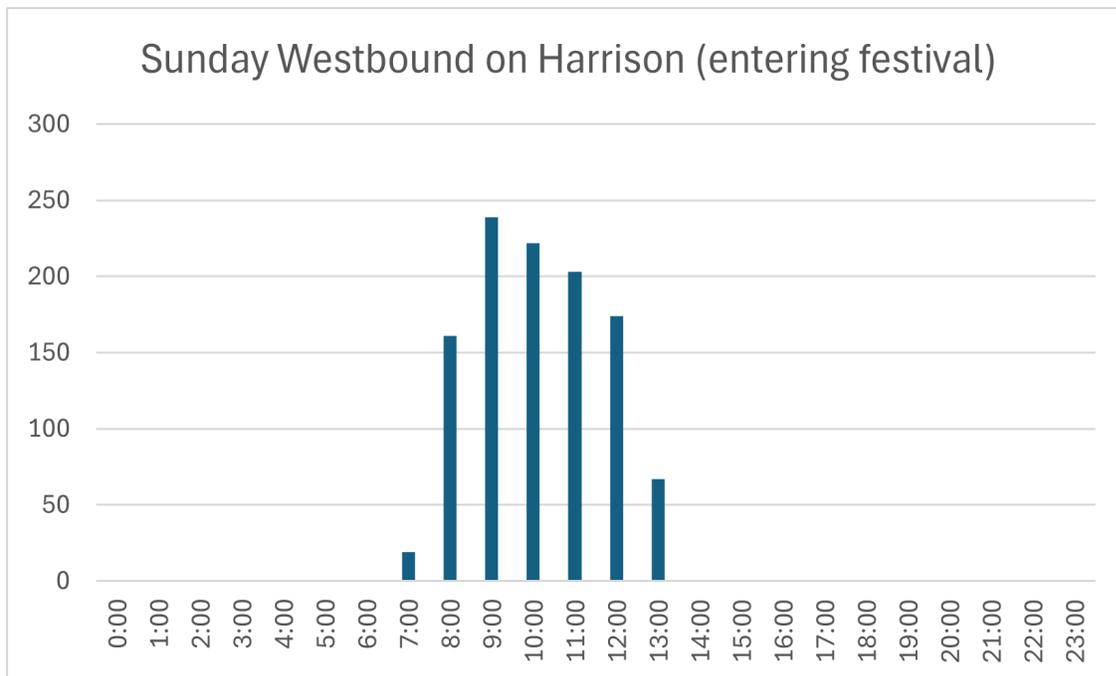
Biking to the festivals continues to improve each year, and this year's Folk Festival marked a significant leap in safety with the Harrison Ave protected lane. With daily biking rates more than 50% higher than ferry ridership at the Folk Festival, biking must be taken seriously as a key ingredient to a successful multimodal transportation plan for large events. Looking to the future, it is important for festival organizers, The Newport Police Department and Bike Newport to incorporate rider feedback and data insights as we work together to plan next year's festivals.

## Appendix: Traffic Counter Data



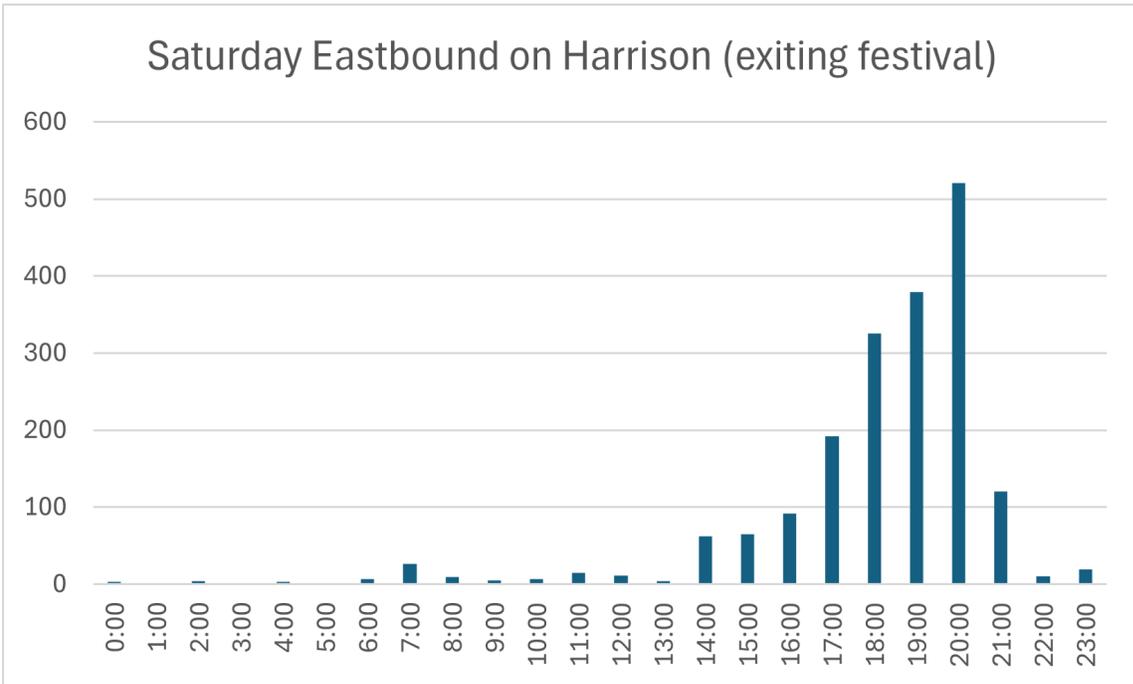
**Total count: 1211**

Figure 3: Saturday Westbound Traffic Counter Data



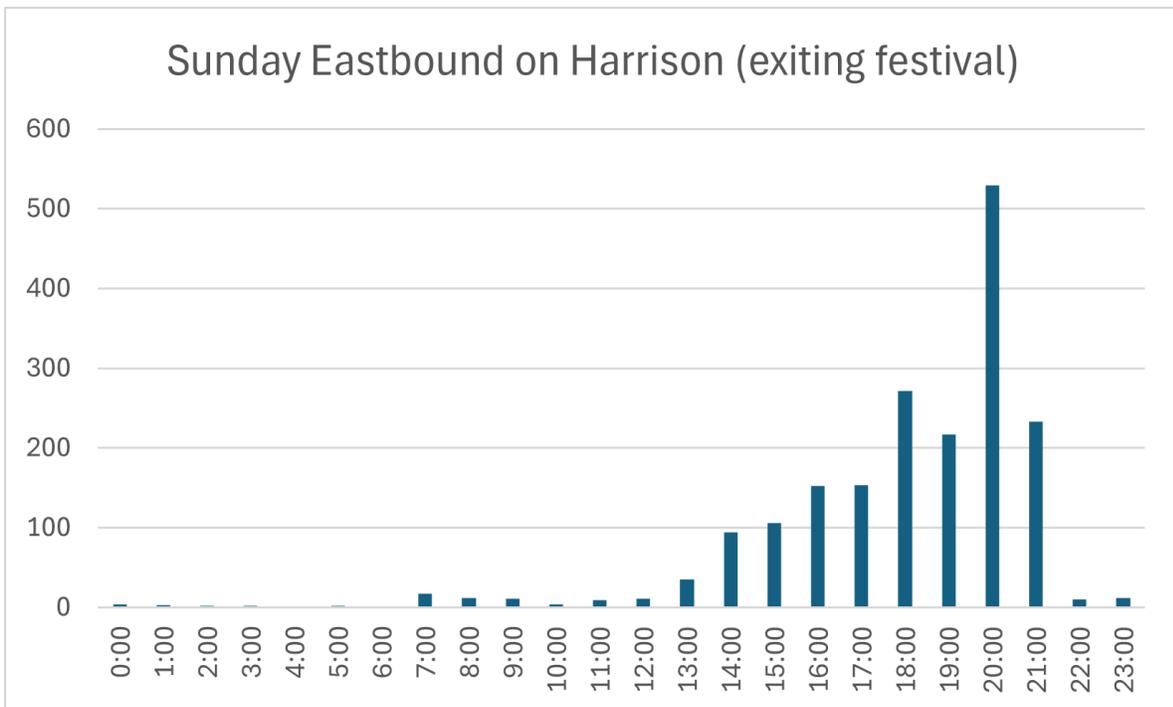
**Total Count: 1098**

Figure 4: Sunday Westbound Traffic Counter Data



**Total Count: 1572**

Figure 5: Saturday Eastbound Traffic Counter Data



**Total Count: 1433**

Figure 6: Sunday Eastbound Traffic Counter Data