Overview

Based on the survey analysis of 362 total responses collected between April and July 2025, the overwhelming majority (93.6%, or 339 responses) came from Kansas City residents, while only 6.4% (23 responses) came from visitors or recent transplants. Due to the statistically insignificant sample size of visitors, the analysis treated all responses as a single unified dataset, without distinguishing between resident and visitor perspectives.

This methodological decision allowed for more robust insights into overall wayfinding needs and preferences. The results reveal a strong demand for posted maps over printed materials, a concentration of activity in core walkable districts — such as River Market, Crossroads, and the Plaza — and a notable "skip rate" where people avoid destinations due to navigational uncertainty, particularly when not driving.

The consolidated dataset confirmed that walking and the streetcar are the primary alternatives to car travel. Additionally, while most respondents use smartphone apps, physical signage is seen as a critical complement, especially for solving "first and last block" wayfinding challenges at transit stops and key decision points.

Key insights

- Nearly 40% of respondents avoid visiting destinations because they’re not confident about how to get there or navigate around without driving, even though almost everyone uses smartphone apps.

- Posted maps receive 67.6% support, while printed handheld maps receive only 31.9%, indicating that people strongly prefer fixed-location signage over materials they need to carry.
- Walking receives 253 mentions compared to 188 for the streetcar, 74 for biking, and 64 for bus service, indicating that wayfinding improvements should focus on the pedestrian experience first.
- Though 59.9% of people report using navigation apps often, there is still a strong demand for physical signage that provides quick orientation and serves as backup when phones fail.
- Only 53.4% of respondents rate their favorite places as easy to navigate, indicating that even well-loved districts have persistent wayfinding issues that physical signs could help resolve.

Expected insights

- **Posted maps beat printed maps**

  Clearer appetite for on-site, fixed signage over handheld printouts.

- **Pedestrian-first locations**

  River Market, Crossroads, and the Plaza emerge as core districts where people concentrate on trips and walking.

- **Common non-car modes**

  Walking and the streetcar are the primary alternatives to driving, followed by bus and bike.

- **App ubiquity**

  Most people use navigation apps, so physical signage complements rather than replaces digital.

Unexpected insights

- **High “skip” rate due to uncertainty**

  Many respondents avoid destinations because they aren’t confident about getting there or around without driving. For a city center, that’s a strong signal of demand being constrained by wayfinding challenges.

- **The gap between posted vs. printed is large**

  Interest in printed handheld maps is notably weaker than support for posted maps. This suggests people want context-specific, immediate cues rather than carrying materials.

- **Concentration of favorites across walkable districts**

  The same few districts dominate preferences, implying that better wayfinding in and between these hubs could disproportionately boost confidence and exploration.

- **Modes signal micro-network needs**

  Walking and streetcar use are most common across all districts, suggesting that clear and consistent wayfinding be prioritized where these modes intersect: at first and last blocks, transfer nodes, and key decision points.

What this means for deploying physical (non-digital) wayfinding

Priority locations

- **Phase 1 districts**

  River Market, Crossroads, the Plaza, plus connectors to Westport, West Bottoms, Brookside, and 39th Street.

- **Nodes**

  Streetcar stops, bus transfer points, garages, trailheads, and high-footfall corners.

Core sign types to deploy

- **Orientation maps at arrival points**

  You-are-here maps with 5–10-minute walking rings, named landmarks, and clear neighborhood boundaries.

- **Directional fingerposts**

  Short, legible blades to the top 5–7 destinations in a 10–15-minute walk with time/distance.

- **Decision-point repeats**

  Smaller signs along the route can reduce second-guessing, which leads to “skip” behavior.

- **District identifiers**

  Gateways, totems, or banners to anchor mental maps and create consistency across districts.

Content and design standards

- **Walking-time primacy**

  Show minutes and distance; minutes are more intuitive for pedestrians than feet/miles.

- **Transit overlays**

  Include simple streetcar and key bus line schematics on area maps, along with clear transfer instructions to reduce uncertainty for mode-switchers.

- **Landmarks and landmarks-to-landmarks**

  Use named buildings, public art, trail segments, skywalks, and plazas as anchors.

- **Accessibility**

  Step-free routes, curb ramps, elevator locations, benches and rest points, and nighttime legibility cues.

- **Icon-forward**

  Prioritize symbols and iconography where visitor density is high.

Placement strategy

- **First/last block solving**

  Place signs at transit stops and repeat at mid-block where paths fork.

- **Continuity across districts**

  Use consistent graphics and naming so users can “carry” knowledge from one district to the next.

Density and maintenance

- **Density**

  Roughly 1 orientation map every 2–3 blocks in core districts, and fingerposts at most intersections, with 3+ route choices.

- **Maintenance**

  Central asset registry, quarterly audits, and 311 (myKCMO) app reporting for errors.

How to complement digital without relying on it

- **Web links on signs**

  Optional links to maps/transit information, but design signs to stand alone in case phones die.

- **Consistent names**

  Match sign labels with the same names used by popular apps and the names by which districts are commonly known so that directions align.

Success metrics to track post-deployment

- **Navigation confidence**

  Reduction in “skip” responses and increases in reported ease.

- **Behavioral lift**

  Foot counts and dwell time near new signs and increased cross-district trips.

- **Mode shift signals**

  Higher walk segments to/from streetcar and bus.

- **Usability**

  Conduct surveys to assess clarity, accuracy, and ease of navigation.

Bottom line

- Lean into posted, context-rich signage in the key walkable districts and at transit nodes.

- Design for the first/last block and decision points, as this is where uncertainty can lead to trip abandonment.

- Keep it consistent and modular. Physical wayfinding that pairs minutes-based cues with transit overlays is likely to increase exploration and reduce the high skip rate, especially for newcomers and infrequent visitors.