

## Developing Issue

# LOCAL DRIVE THRU BANS

**A**round 75% of all restaurant traffic is off-premises, meaning people order and take their food with them to consume it. Drive thrus account for 51% of all off-premises traffic, making this one of the most popular ways for people to dine out. However, local governments nationwide are moving to ban new restaurants with drive thrus, effectively limiting consumer access to local small businesses.

According to new research from the National Restaurant Association, nearly 1 in 3 adults use drive thrus multiple times per week. Notably, that usage is fairly consistent across urban, suburban and rural consumers. Fifty percent of both parents and commuters, who need convenience and efficiency in their busy lifestyles, find themselves at drive thrus multiple times a week.

Banning drive thru fundamentally changes a community's access to the meals they rely on and negatively impacts the economy of a local area by driving down restaurant usage and sales.



## THE ISSUE

**DRIVE THRUS ALLOW RESTAURANT OPERATORS TO REMAIN FLEXIBLE AMID WORKFORCE SHORTAGES WHILE MEETING CUSTOMER DESIRE FOR FLEXIBILITY AND PROVIDING A SAFE AND STREAMLINED ENVIRONMENT FOR THEIR EMPLOYEES.**

Proponents of planning and zoning restrictions on restaurants with drive thrus suggest these bans will help reduce emissions and litter, reduce traffic congestion, and enhance walkability. In some areas, lawmakers are even trying to curate the types of businesses welcome in their communities.

For restaurant operators, the bans cut deeply into their operations and sales potential.

## THE PUBLIC SUPPORTS DRIVE THRUS AS AN OPTION

**55%**

**OF ALL ADULTS SAY PURCHASING TAKEOUT FOOD IS ESSENTIAL TO THE WAY THEY LIVE**

**63%**

**OF ADULTS OPPOSE BANNING DRIVE THRUS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES - OF THOSE, 45% STRONGLY OPPOSE THE BANS**

**50%**

**OF ADULTS STOP AT A DRIVE THRU AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK, OF THOSE, 30% USE DRIVE THRUS MULTIPLE TIMES A WEEK**

**74%**

**OF COMMUTERS AND 72% OF PARENTS USE DRIVE THRUS ONCE PER WEEK, WITH MOST VISITING DRIVE THRUS MULTIPLE TIMES PER WEEK**

Source: National Restaurant Association survey conducted by Morning Consult, April 10-12, 2023

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**CONSUMER HABITS CHANGED DURING THE PANDEMIC, AND NOW THEY ARE EVEN MORE FOCUSED ON OFF-PREMISES DINING OPTIONS. THESE HABITS HAVE STUCK; 66% OF ADULTS SAY THEY'RE MORE LIKELY TO PURCHASE TAKEOUT AND FREQUENT DRIVE THRUS THAN BEFORE THE PANDEMIC.**

**67%**  
OF COMMUTERS SAY A DRIVE THRU BAN IN THEIR COMMUNITY WOULD IMPACT THEIR DAILY ROUTINE

AND

**65%**  
OF PARENTS REPORT A DRIVE THRU BAN IN THEIR COMMUNITY WOULD IMPACT THEIR DAILY ROUTINE



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## TODAY'S DRIVE THRUS ARE ESSENTIAL BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

In addition to meeting changing habits, drive thrus provide access for people with mobility challenges, caregivers with small children to wrangle, and commuters.

Drive thrus allow restaurant operators to efficiently serve customers during peak times, while ensuring a safe working environment for their employees.

According to National Restaurant Association research, nearly 2 in 3 restaurant operators are understaffed to meet their current customer demand. Having the option to go "drive thru only" allows restaurants to stay open on days when they're critically short staffed.

Emerging brands and small businesses often embrace the drive thru model to court an audience that desires new options with the convenience of a drive thru. In fact, this is one of the fastest growing opportunities for restaurant sales growth.

Many large restaurant brands are including drive thrus in nearly all future store locations.

Municipalities that ban drive thru would largely remove themselves from contention to attract these operators.

Suppose a restaurant is barred from including a drive thru in a new location. In that case, some operators expect they'd opt for pick-up windows, creating the need for additional parking spaces and unintentionally making traffic concerns worse.

With the rise of third-party delivery and digital ordering, some operators are experimenting with new drive thru configurations, such as having a lane dedicated to advance orders (like third-party delivery or pick up) and a more traditional drive thru lane dedicated to on-site ordering. These new designs will help to relieve congestion and speed up customer orders.



## BOTTOM LINE

Restaurant operators want to work with local governments to ensure new drive thrus work for each unique community.

**HOWEVER, AN OUTRIGHT BAN ON NEW RESTAURANTS WITH DRIVE THRUS WOULD FRUSTRATE CONSUMERS AND STIFLE THE GROWTH AND INNOVATION THAT MAKE THE RESTAURANT INDUSTRY AN ESSENTIAL PART OF DAILY LIFE.**