

THE MEETUP PROBLEM

Peer-to-peer commerce has become ordinary. The handoff has not. Almost every local sale still ends with two strangers agreeing to occupy the same square of pavement at the same minute, and the public remedy for that, a marked parking space outside a police station, is open fewer hours than most people work and unavailable to many of the people who need it most. In July 2026 the Postal Service began selling an alternative, which makes the design question concrete rather than hypothetical.

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FINDINGS

- 01 **Local, in-person resale is now mainstream behavior, not a niche.** 93 percent of Americans bought a secondhand item in the past year and 54 percent sold one, per OfferUp's 2025 survey with GlobalData.¹ Fifty-nine percent said they enjoy buying and selling with people in their own community.²
- 02 **There is no national count of harm at meetups.** No federal crime series records whether a robbery, assault or homicide began as an online listing. Policy in this area responds to individual deaths reported by local outlets, not to a measured trend.
- 03 **The main public remedy is small, supervised by nobody, and mostly a weekday service.** Across ten US jurisdictions we reviewed, six recommend or effectively limit use to weekday business hours, most offer one or two marked parking spaces, and every program that addresses the question states that officers will not observe the exchange and that the city accepts no liability.^{8, 11}
- 04 **A police parking lot is not a neutral place for everyone.** Survey and clinical research going back more than a decade finds substantial shares of Latino residents, including US-born ones, who avoid contact with police out of immigration-related fear.^{20, 18} A remedy that requires standing at a station is unavailable to them in practice, whatever its formal availability.
- 05 **Even when nothing goes wrong, the meetup itself is the friction.** Two schedules have to converge on one place and one moment. The failure mode is not crime, it is the sale that never happens, and the cost of the handoff is roughly the same whether the item is worth thirty dollars or three hundred.
- 06 **Most of the volume is small items; most of the value is a few large ones.** Phones, clothing, jewelry and household goods move constantly and fit in a compartment. Furniture and vehicles carry far larger tickets, with private-party sales making up 42.2 percent of US used-vehicle transactions in 2025 at an average vehicle price near \$26,000 to \$27,500, and they do not.^{37, 38} The reported robberies cluster in the first group.

07 A national asynchronous option now exists, and its constraint is density. USPS Local XChange, launched 15 July 2026, lets a local buyer and seller complete a sale through a post office compartment for \$5.51 per item, without meeting.^{29, 30} As of October 2025 roughly 700 post offices had the compartments the service depends on.²⁹

WHAT WE COULD NOT MEASURE

Four things this report wanted and could not obtain. First, a national incidence rate for violence at peer-to-peer meetups: no agency codes crime that way, and marketplace operators do not publish it. Second, an aggregate no-show rate from a platform or an academic source; the only quantified figure we found comes from a vendor selling a fix for no-shows, and we treat it accordingly. Third, a complete national inventory of municipal Safe Exchange Zones: none exists, so our sample is hand-assembled and non-random. Fourth, completion rates by price band: no platform publishes how often a match at \$25 ends in a trade versus a match at \$250, which is the measurement that would settle the argument in section VIII.

Where a figure below is our own tabulation rather than a published statistic, it is labeled as such. See the methodology note.

I.

A market built on showing up

Secondhand buying stopped being a subculture some time in the last five years. In OfferUp's seventh annual Recommerce Report, produced with the retail analytics firm GlobalData and a June 2025 Pollfish survey of 1,500 US adults, 93 percent of respondents said they had bought a secondhand item in the past year and 54 percent said they had sold one.¹ Seventy percent said the stigma around buying used had lessened in the previous twelve months.²

The category is also much wider than clothes. OfferUp's figures put apparel at roughly a quarter of the US resale market, with electronics, furniture, home goods, sporting equipment, car parts and children's items making up the rest.³ That composition

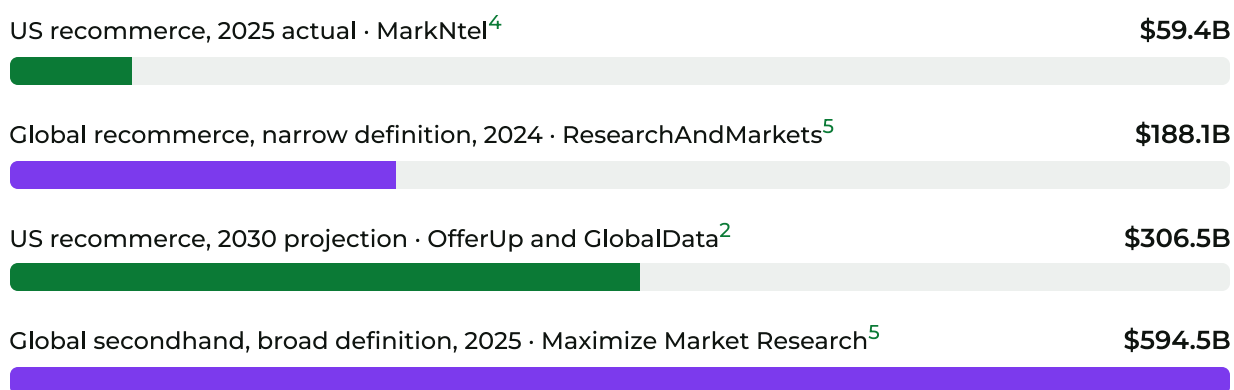
matters for this report, because those are the categories a person carries in one trip and hands to a stranger for cash.

The in-person part is not incidental. OfferUp's own framing is that local exchange is a feature of the experience, and its survey found 59 percent of shoppers say they enjoy local exchanges and 75 percent say they enjoy meeting in person to complete a transaction.² That is a marketplace operator describing its own product, so read it as an operator's claim rather than an independent finding. What is not in dispute is the mechanism: the money and the item change hands face to face, at a time both parties negotiated.

FIGURE 1

The market is large, and nobody agrees how large

Published estimates for resale and recommerce differ by an order of magnitude because they measure different things. Shown as reported, with scope and date.



Two of these are US, two are global; two are actuals, two are projections. They are not comparable and should not be averaged. The point of the figure is the spread, not a number.

One number is worth holding onto despite the disagreement. OfferUp and GlobalData project US recommerce reaching \$306.5 billion by 2030, or roughly 8 percent of total US retail spending.² Whatever the true figure, a large and growing share of American retail activity is settled by two people meeting in a parking lot.

II.

What actually changes hands

The composition of the market decides what any handoff design can and cannot fix. Two transaction classes sit inside the same listing feed, and they behave nothing alike.

The first is high frequency and low ticket: a phone, a coat, a stroller, a set of wrenches, a box of kitchen goods. Apparel alone is roughly a quarter of the US resale market, with electronics, home goods, sporting equipment and children's items making up much of the rest.³⁷ These are the sales that happen constantly, for tens to a few hundred dollars, and every one of them is small enough to fit in a compartment.

The second is low frequency and high ticket: furniture, large appliances, and above all vehicles. Private-party and unorganized sales accounted for 42.2 percent of US used-car transactions in 2025, a channel that runs largely through general local marketplaces.³⁷ The average used vehicle changed hands somewhere between about \$26,000 and \$27,500 in 2024.³⁸ A single car sale is worth more than a thousand phone-case sales, and it happens once every several years per household.

FIGURE 2 · RELAI FRAMING

Two markets, one handoff

Ticket ranges are illustrative and drawn from ordinary listing prices, not from platform data; only the vehicle figure is a published average.³⁸ Volume is ordinal, not measured. The last column is the one that matters for infrastructure.

CLASS OF ITEM	TYPICAL TICKET	TRANSACTION VOLUME	COMPARTMENT-SIZED
Clothing, shoes, toys, kitchen goods	\$5 to \$80	Highest	Yes
Phones, tablets, consoles	\$50 to \$600	High	Yes
Jewelry, sneakers, collectibles	\$100 to \$2,000	Moderate	Yes
Tools, small appliances	\$40 to \$400	Moderate	Mostly
Furniture, large appliances	\$50 to \$800	Low	No
Vehicles	\$26,000 to \$27,500 average	Lowest	No

A compartment covers the top four rows, which is most of the transaction count and most of the reported robberies. It does not cover a sofa or a car, and no amount of design will make it.

That split runs through the rest of this report. The harms documented in local reporting concentrate in the small, portable, high-value-density items: phones, jewelry, sneakers, firearms. The dollars concentrate in the items that will never fit in a

compartment and that a buyer reasonably insists on inspecting. Any honest claim about asynchronous handoff has to say which market it is talking about.

III.

What goes wrong, and what nobody counts

The meetup concentrates several risks into a single moment. Both parties know in advance where the other will be and roughly what they will be carrying. One of them is usually carrying cash. Neither has been identity-verified by the platform. The location is chosen by negotiation, which means it can be chosen by the party with worse intentions.

CASE · BROOKLYN, NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 2023

Off-duty NYPD officer Adeed Fayaz was shot in the head and later died during an attempted robbery at a car sale arranged through Facebook Marketplace, in a case ABC7 New York reported as part of a wider robbery pattern that began on the platform.²¹ The same report described a Yonkers buyer who exchanged cash for keys at a grocery store meetup on the strength of a fake title and later found the car had been reported stolen.

THE PATTERN IN LOCAL REPORTING, 2026

Murfreesboro, Tennessee, 9 March. A seller meeting several men on a residential street to sell a gold chain was robbed at gunpoint after one asked to inspect it. Police urged residents to use the department's Safe Exchange Zone.³⁴

New Haven, Connecticut, April. Two robberies in one weekend, both sellers meeting buyers to sell cellphones, both suspects implying a gun before taking the phone on foot.³⁶

Portland, Oregon, 3 June. An 18-year-old was shot and robbed at a 9 PM meetup on a residential block. A sergeant described the wound as significant and potentially fatal. Days later a separate Tualatin case saw a buyer pay with counterfeit cash, then fire at the sellers.³³

Gainesville, Florida, 22 July. Two people drove to meet buyers and were robbed at gunpoint by masked men; the person who arranged the meeting was found to be part of it. A sheriff's spokesman said the transaction had been arranged for the purpose of the robbery.³⁵

La Vergne, Tennessee, 3 June. Three buyers took an item without paying and drove off. The seller chased them and fired into the car, wounding one. The three were charged with aggravated robbery; the seller was charged with attempted first-degree murder.³²

Read together, these cases say something more specific than "meetups can be dangerous." The items are small and portable, and easy to carry away on foot. The locations are ordinary residential streets and parking lots chosen in a message thread, not the marked spaces cities have built. In several cases the meeting was arranged in order to produce the robbery, which means the listing functioned as bait. And La Vergne shows the other tail of the distribution: a person who is robbed in the moment may respond in a way that puts the whole encounter, and their own liberty, beyond recovery. Every one of these departments closed its statement with the same advice, which is to meet somewhere public, well lit and monitored.

Violence is the extreme case. The more common one is a transaction that is not physically dangerous but is socially unpleasant enough to push people out of the market. The BBC documented women selling clothing on mainstream platforms receiving sexualized messages and requests for worn garments, with blocked accounts reappearing under new identities.²⁶ One seller quoted in that reporting had stopped posting photographs of herself in the items she was selling.

The relevant point for this report is structural rather than statistical. Harassment that begins in a message thread becomes a different kind of problem when the same thread ends with an agreement to meet alone. A seller who has been messaged that way has to decide whether the sale is worth the meeting, and the safest available answer is often to not sell at all. That decision does not appear in any dataset. It appears as a listing that quietly comes down.

Which raises the question of scale, and here the record runs out. The single most important fact about the safety of peer-to-peer meetups is that nobody counts it. Federal crime statistics classify offenses by type, weapon, location category and relationship, not by the digital origin of the encounter. A robbery that began as a Marketplace listing is recorded as a robbery. There is no field for the listing.

The consequence is that the public record consists of local news reports of individual incidents, and municipal responses to those incidents. That is a poor evidence base for policy in both directions. It cannot establish that meetup crime is rising, and it cannot establish that it is rare. It can only establish that it happens, that police departments treat it as serious enough to build programs around, and that those programs were built without a baseline to measure against.

We considered compiling our own count of US meetup homicides from news reporting and decided against publishing one. A tally assembled from search results measures press coverage, not incidence, and it would systematically over-represent cases involving photogenic victims, large cities and firearms. Naming a number we could not defend would do more harm to this argument than leaving the gap visible. The gap is the finding.

IV.

The public remedy and its limits

The standard municipal answer is the Safe Exchange Zone: one or two marked parking spaces outside a police station, sometimes a corner of the lobby, under video recording. Hundreds of US departments now operate one. Boston runs them at every district station and at headquarters, available 24 hours and monitored by security video.⁷

Boston is the exception rather than the pattern. We reviewed the published pages of ten US programs across urban, suburban and rural jurisdictions. What the departments themselves say about their own capacity is more revealing than any outside critique.

FIGURE 3 · RELAI TABULATION

Ten Safe Exchange Zone programs, as described by the agencies that run them

Compiled from the operating agencies' own published pages, accessed August 2026. Non-random sample. Sources 7 to 16.

JURISDICTION	CAPACITY	PRACTICAL AVAILABILITY
Boston, MA	13 sites	24 hours, video monitored
Amherst, NY	2 spaces and lobby	24 hours, 365 days
Farmington, UT	2 stalls	Lit and recorded 24 hours
San Mateo, CA	Lobby entrance	Recorded 24h, daytime recommended
Fremont, CA	2 spaces	Mon to Fri 7:30a to 5:30p recommended
Hackensack, NJ	2 spaces, no reservations	Mon to Fri 8a to 5p optimal
Harrison Twp., MI	Marked area	Business hours advised, station not always staffed
Ann Arbor, MI (U-M)	Lobby and lot SC16	Building Mon to Fri 8a to 4:30p, closed holidays
Charleston, SC	2 sites	One site not staffed 24h, one gated with a code desk
Prince William Co., VA	3 stations, 15-min limit	Daytime recommended, cameras not always monitored

DAYTIME OR WEEKDAY LIMITED	EXCHANGE SITES PER JURISDICTION	PROGRAMS ACCEPTING LIABILITY
7 of 10	1 to 3	0

Nine of the ten jurisdictions operate three or fewer sites regardless of population. No program in the sample supervises the exchange or accepts liability for it.

The disclaimers are consistent and unusually blunt. Fremont states that officers will not be present, that video is not always monitored in real time, and that city employees cannot act as an official witness or settle a civil dispute.⁸ Amherst states that the department "assumes no liability whatsoever" for those using the space.¹⁰ Prince William County notes that an officer will not stand by during the transaction and that the cameras are not actively monitored at all times.¹²

Read plainly, the programs offer a well-lit place with a camera and a nearby building where police work. That is a real improvement over a stranger's driveway. It is also not supervision, and the departments are careful to say so. Meanwhile, capacity is what it is: two parking spaces, first come and first served, no reservations.⁹ Prince William County operates three sites for a county whose population exceeds four hundred thousand.¹²

V.

A national alternative, at a price

Between the drafting of this report and its publication, the largest possible operator entered the problem. On 15 July 2026 the Postal Service launched USPS Local XChange, a service that, in the agency's own description, lets buyers and sellers who are local to each other hand off items bought through an online marketplace without meeting in person.^{30, 29} The seller books through Click-N-Ship, drops the item into a compartment at a participating post office, and the buyer retrieves it with a QR code. The price is \$5.51 per item.²⁹

This matters more than its launch coverage suggested. A federal agency has now priced the asynchronous handoff for peer-to-peer sales and put it on sale nationally. The concept is no longer speculative, and the remaining questions are operational.

Those questions are real. As of October 2025 about 700 post offices had the compartments the service depends on, against a national footprint of tens of thousands of retail locations, so most of the country is not within reach of one.²⁹ The seller must have a compartment location within 50 miles of their return address, which is a radius, not a neighborhood. The item has to fit the compartment, which excludes the furniture and vehicles in section II. The buyer has five calendar days to retrieve it, after which the item moves to the retail counter for ten more days and then goes back to the seller, so the pick-up ultimately falls back onto a staffed lobby and its hours. And \$5.51 is a real fraction of a \$30 sale.

The flat national price deserves its own note, because a single price for a service whose cost to use varies enormously is a distributional choice. \$5.51 buys a two-block walk in a dense neighborhood with a participating post office. It buys a forty-minute drive in a county where the nearest equipped office is the only one for several towns, and the 50-mile radius the service permits describes exactly that kind of trip. The fee is the same in both cases; the effort is not. Rural users pay the same money for a materially worse product, and as section IX sets out, they are the users with the fewest alternatives when the trip is hard to make.^{22, 24}

The same flatness cuts across income rather than geography. \$5.51 is under two percent of a \$300 sale and more than a quarter of a \$20 one, so the households selling small items to cover a bill pay the highest effective rate. Both effects point the same way: uniform pricing on a sparse network transfers cost to the people already furthest from it. Density is what makes a flat price fair, which is another way of saying the pricing problem and the coverage problem are the same problem.

Consumer appetite is also unproven at this scale. DHL eCommerce reported in 2025 that 6 percent of US shoppers prefer their orders routed to compartments, against 12 percent globally.³¹ That is a preference measured against home drop-off for retail orders rather than against a stranger meetup, so it understates the case here, but it is the honest starting point: the behavior is new to most Americans. What Local XChange establishes is that the mechanism works and someone will sell it. What it does not establish is coverage, and coverage is the whole question. A service available at 700 sites nationally is closer in kind to the two parking spaces of section IV than to infrastructure.

VI.

Who the police station excludes

Hours and parking spaces are the easy objections. The harder one is that a police station is not a neutral location, and for a substantial share of the country it is an actively avoided one. A safety measure that requires the user to stand in a police parking lot for fifteen minutes is only a safety measure for people who experience that as safe.

A 2012 randomized survey of 2,004 Latino residents across Cook, Harris, Los Angeles and Maricopa counties found 44 percent said they would be less likely to contact police as a crime victim because of immigration enforcement concerns, and 28 percent of US-born Latinos said the same.

THEODORE, UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO, REPORTED BY NBC LOS ANGELES²⁰
AND NEWSWEEK²⁷

Those figures are more than a decade old, and we flag that clearly. More recent work points the same direction. A 2021 emergency-department study of undocumented Latinx immigrants, Latinx citizens and non-Latinx citizens found more than 40 percent of crime victims across all three groups were afraid to report to police, with fear of discovery and deportation the most common reason among undocumented respondents.¹⁸ The Cato Institute, reviewing the evidence in September 2025, cited a 2025 survey in which 76 percent of attorneys and advocates for immigrant survivors of domestic abuse said their clients were concerned about calling police, and noted that roughly 41 percent of immigrants feared that they or a family member would be detained or deported as of April 2025, before that year's largest enforcement increase.¹⁷

The American Immigration Council reported the operational consequence in local terms: the Los Angeles Police Department recorded a near 10 percent drop in spousal abuse reports and a 25 percent decrease in reported rape among Latino residents, and

Camden County, New Jersey saw a 6 percent drop in service calls from predominantly undocumented communities.¹⁹ These are reporting rates rather than victimization rates, which is exactly the point: the contact with police is what people are avoiding.

Immigration status is also not the only relationship that gets inherited. Gallup's 2024 measures, published in May 2025, found 64 percent of Black adults confident in their local police against 77 percent of White adults, and 67 percent believing local police treat people like them fairly against 90 percent of White adults.⁴⁰ On Gallup's stricter measure of a great deal or quite a lot of confidence, the Council on Criminal Justice reports roughly a quarter of Black respondents in 2025 against about half of White respondents.⁴¹ These are national averages, and they have been improving. They still describe a substantial minority for whom a police parking lot is not a neutral errand.

The same holds for LGBTQ+ residents, with sharper differences inside the group. A national survey conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago and analyzed by the ACLU with the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and UC Irvine found 71.0 percent of LGBTQ+ respondents would call police for help in future, against 86.9 percent of non-LGBTQ+ respondents. Lesbian and gay respondents were close to the general figure at 80.4 percent, while bisexual respondents were at 68.5 percent, transgender respondents at 61.3 percent and queer+ respondents at 60.2 percent.^{42, 43} A 2025 Williams Institute review of twenty-five years of research reached the same conclusion, citing a study in which 46 percent of transgender respondents said they would avoid contacting police if they were the victim of a crime.⁴⁴

The effect compounds where identities intersect, and the compounding is not subtle. In the same survey, 53 percent of Black transgender respondents said they had been hit, beaten, pushed or otherwise physically assaulted by police, against 25 percent of White transgender respondents and 8 percent of White cisgender men.⁴³ Latine LGBTQ+ respondents were markedly less likely to say they would call police than White LGBTQ+ respondents, at 57.8 percent against 74.1 percent.⁴² A person who is Black and transgender, or undocumented and queer, does not experience these as separate discounts on a shared sense of safety. They experience the police station as a place to be avoided, and a marked parking space in front of it is not a service they can use.

None of this is an argument about how any department behaves. It is an argument about siting. Every group above is more likely than the average American to be a crime victim and less likely to seek police contact, which means the residents with the most to gain from a safe handoff are among the least able to use the one the country has built. A remedy placed anywhere else, a library, a transit stop, a grocery lot, does not carry that cost.

Immigration status is the largest documented case but not the only one. Several departments in our sample market the same space for court-ordered custody handoffs, which places separated parents and, in some cases, survivors of domestic violence in the same two parking spaces as an electronics sale.^{12, 15} Charleston is explicit that the space cannot be used to leave a child for a later pick-up: both parties must be present at once.¹³ For a survivor whose safety depends on never being in a predictable place at a predictable time with a known person, a shared synchronous location is the specific thing to avoid.

We did not find published research measuring avoidance of Safe Exchange Zones specifically, by any group. What the literature establishes is avoidance of police contact generally. Applying that to these programs is our inference, not a documented finding, and it is a straightforward one: a remedy sited at a police station inherits whatever relationship the user already has with the police.

VII.

The coordination cost

Set safety aside entirely and the synchronous meetup still fails often, because it requires two independent schedules to intersect. Every local sale carries a small negotiation about time and place, and every one of those negotiations can fail at any point up to the moment of the handoff.

We could not find an authoritative measurement of how often it fails. The platforms do not publish no-show rates. The one quantified figure we located comes from ShowdUp, a scheduling vendor whose product exists to reduce no-shows, which reports that 70 percent of buyers ghost confirmed pick-ups based on an analysis of more than 50,000 appointments booked through its own tool.²⁵ That figure should be

treated with real caution on two counts: the vendor has a commercial interest in the number being high, and sellers who adopt anti-no-show software are likely to be sellers already experiencing above-average no-show rates. We cite it because it is the only quantified estimate available, not because we consider it reliable.

People have already invented a workaround, and it is worth taking seriously because it shows what they actually want. Porch pickup is now an ordinary listing convention: the seller leaves the item on the porch or in a side yard, the buyer sends payment electronically and collects it whenever they pass by, and the two never speak in person. No platform built this and no city sanctioned it. It emerged because the schedule, not the price, was the thing people could not solve, and it solves the schedule completely.

What it does not solve is everything else. The item sits unsecured, so it can be taken by anyone, and the seller carries that loss with no recourse. The buyer pays before inspecting, and the seller has no way to confirm the right person collected it. Most consequentially, the arrangement requires the seller to publish their home address to a stranger they have not met, which trades the risk of a meeting for a permanent disclosure. For a woman receiving the messages documented in section III, or for anyone whose safety depends on their address staying private, that is a worse trade rather than a better one. Porch pickup is the market demonstrating demand for asynchronous handoff and, at the same time, demonstrating why it needs to be secured and sited away from the home.

The qualitative picture is not in dispute. The mechanism is simple enough that it does not need a statistic: a seller who has to be home between two and three o'clock has committed an hour, and a buyer whose plans change has no cost for abandoning. The result is a market where the item is available, the buyer wants it, the price is agreed, and the sale does not happen because the calendars did not line up.

VIII.

The market the friction never made

Sections II and VII together imply something this report cannot measure but should state plainly: the observed peer-to-peer market is smaller than the latent one, and the gap is largest at the bottom of the price range.

The mechanism is a fixed cost on a variable value. The handoff costs roughly the same whatever the item is worth: a negotiation over time and place, a trip, a wait, a stranger, and the small ongoing risk this report has documented. That cost does not scale down for a \$25 lamp. So there is a price floor below which selling is irrational even when a willing buyer exists at the asking price, and the floor rises for anyone whose trip is harder to make, whose schedule is less elastic, or who has reason to avoid the available safe locations. Below the floor, the item is stored, donated or thrown away. It never becomes a transaction, so it never appears in any market estimate.

Several observed facts are consistent with a deflated market. ThredUp's estimate that the average American household holds roughly \$5,300 of unused goods describes inventory that exists and is not being sold.³⁹ Sixty-nine percent of shoppers say they are more likely to buy or sell secondhand when the economy feels uncertain, which describes demand that scales up faster than the handoff capacity serving it.³ The safety advice every department in section IV issues, meet in daylight, meet in a specific lot, bring someone, is advice that reduces the number of feasible transactions in exchange for reducing risk per transaction. And the harassment documented in section III causes sellers to withdraw listings entirely.²⁶

None of that is proof. Each fact has an alternative explanation, and the largest single alternative is simple indifference: people keep unused things because sorting them is tedious, not because the handoff frightens them. We are describing a mechanism we consider likely, not a measured effect, and readers should treat this section as the most speculative in the report.

What would test it is specific and sits inside the platforms. If friction deflates the market, then completion rates should fall as listing price falls, sellers should abandon low-price listings at a higher rate than high-price ones, and both effects should weaken where an asynchronous option is available. Any marketplace can run that analysis on data it already holds. We would like to see it, whichever way it comes out.

IX.

Access without a car

A meetup is a trip, and the trip is not free. Nationally, 8 percent of US households have no vehicle available, according to 2023 American Community Survey estimates summarized by Pew, and about one in ten Americans say they seldom or never drive.²³ Those households are concentrated where transit exists, which softens the problem in dense cities and sharpens it everywhere else.

Rural areas invert the picture. The 2025 Rural Transit Fact Book puts rural households without a vehicle at 4 percent, half the urban rate, but only 0.4 percent of rural residents commute by public transportation compared with 4.3 percent of urban residents.²² A rural household without a car has fewer alternatives, not more. The Bureau of Transportation Statistics found that 15 percent of the nation's 88.8 million rural residents lacked reasonable access to scheduled intercity transportation in 2021, rising to 25 percent when residents on the fringe of urban areas are excluded, and to 62 percent in South Dakota.²⁴

Layer the Safe Exchange Zone onto that geography and the arithmetic gets worse. In a county where three sites serve four hundred thousand people, the safe option is a drive.¹² The households least able to make that drive are also, per the same ACS data, disproportionately lower-income renters, which is to say disproportionately the households for whom selling a used item to cover a bill is not a hobby.²⁸ Fifty-seven percent of resellers in OfferUp's survey said they use resale earnings for bills and everyday expenses.²

X.

What asynchronous access changes

Every problem in this report shares one root: the drop-off and the pick-up are the same event. Break them apart and each problem changes shape. The two parties never have to be in the same place, so the encounter that carries the risk does not occur. Neither party has to hold an hour open, so the coordination failure has nothing to fail at. The

hours of the exchange point stop depending on who is staffing a building. And the site can be chosen for where people already are rather than for where a police station happens to sit.

Asynchronous handoff does not solve fraud, and this report does not claim it does. A buyer can still be sold a broken item, and separating the parties removes the inspection that some buyers rely on. Marketplaces would need to pair asynchronous handoff with payment holds and return windows for it to work on higher-value items, and nothing in it moves a sofa or a car. What it does solve is the class of harm that requires physical proximity, plus the class of failure that requires two calendars to agree.

ABOUT THE PUBLISHER

Relai builds hyperlocal infrastructure for asynchronous access. Its Exchange Zones are secure, modular, climate-resilient access points deployed in everyday places, each divided into compartments that one person can leave an item in and another can retrieve later, without the two of them meeting and without staff on site.

This report was produced by Relai because the problem it describes is the one the company was built to address. Readers should weigh it accordingly. The evidence, sources and gaps are laid out above so the argument can be checked rather than taken on trust.

Marketplace operators: if you are weighing an asynchronous handoff option for local listings, we would like to compare notes on what your data shows about failed meetups. Write to hello@relai.us.

Municipalities: if your department runs a Safe Exchange Zone and has usage data, or wants to discuss coverage beyond station parking lots, we would like to hear from you at the same address.

METHODOLOGY

Figure 3, the Safe Exchange Zone sample. Ten programs were identified through open web search in August 2026 and coded from the operating agency's own published page. Selection was purposive, aiming for a mix of large city, mid-size city, suburb, county and campus jurisdictions; it is not a random or representative sample of the several hundred US programs, and no complete national inventory exists to sample from. "Practical availability" reflects the agency's stated hours or its own recommendation where hours are unrestricted but daytime use is advised. The count of seven in ten treats a daytime recommendation as a limit, on the grounds that a department advising against evening use is describing the protection it can actually offer.

Figures not published. We did not publish a count of meetup homicides, or a distance-to-nearest-site calculation. In the first case a news-derived tally measures coverage rather than incidence. In the second, site addresses are published but no jurisdiction publishes a coverage analysis, and a distance figure computed from a ten-jurisdiction convenience sample would imply a precision the sample cannot support.

Local incident reporting. The cases in section III were selected from local news coverage published between March and July 2026 and are illustrative of the pattern departments describe, not a sample of anything. As the same section explains, no denominator exists, so these cases cannot support any statement about frequency or trend. Each is reported as the outlet reported it, and charges described are allegations unless a disposition is noted.

Figure 2 and section VIII. The ticket ranges in Figure 2 are illustrative bands from ordinary listing prices, and the volume column is ordinal; only the used-vehicle average is published. Section VIII argues a mechanism from adjacent evidence and is labeled as speculative at the point of use, with the test that would confirm or refute it stated in the text.

Porch pickup. The description in section VII is an observation of listing practice, not a measured behavior. No platform publishes how many local sales complete this way, and we found no research quantifying it. It is included because it is a user-invented workaround with clear design implications, and it is labeled as observation at the point of use.

Source handling. Market-size figures are reported with their scope, date and publisher because they are not comparable. Survey figures produced by companies with a commercial interest in the result are labeled as such at the point of use. Where a claim is our inference from adjacent evidence rather than a documented finding, the text says so.

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