US and canada domestic mobility survey 2025

retail: trends summary

Our US and Canada Domestic Mobility Survey Report 2025 is a comprehensive exploration into the dynamic intersection of macroeconomic challenges, employee experience, and the ever-evolving landscape of domestic mobility strategies. With the final report out now, we've taken a deep dive into the retail sector to see what the data tells us.

Why it matters: Whether you're managing large-scale relocations, attracting key talent, or future-proofing operations, these insights provide trends and opportunities for improvements to domestic talent mobility in this sector.

THE FOLLOWING ARE KEY FINDINGS FROM 11 RESPONDENTS FROM RETAIL COMPANIES:

mobility activity

In this year's report, 54% of participants from retail companies reported that their mobility activity had remained stable.

The other side: In cases where mobility activity was reported as decreasing (46%), cost containment strategies were listed as the top reason, followed by reducing volumes in different markets, and talent being unwilling to move.

mobility volume

When examining move volume in the retail sector over a 12-month period, 40% of respondents reported managing under 100 moves in the United States and Canada combined, 20% reported managing 100-500 moves, and 40% reported managing 501 to 1,000.

In the United States only, 67% of respondents reported managing less than 100 moves, while 33% reported managing 100-500. In Canada, 100% of respondents reported managing less than 100 moves.

move-types

The following move-types stand out as the most prevalent domestic offerings in the retail sector:

- **73%** renter
- **64%** standard homeowner with home sale program
- **46%** domestic temporary assignment
- **46%** executive tier assignments
- **46%** interns
- **46%** lump sum

The top three results from the parent survey differed slightly across all segment sizes: standard homeowner with home sale program led as the top move-type, followed by renter and lump sum.

in-house teams vs. program size

When asked how many in-house team members were responsible for the oversight of domestic mobility in their organizations, participants from retail companies had this to say:

number of mobility-focused employees	percentage of participants
1	27%
2-3	64%
4-5	9%

mobility priorities vs. challenges

domestic mobility PRIORITIES		
	parent report, across all industries	manufacturing
1	improving the employee experience (50%)	improving the employee experience (46%)
2	improving in-house mobility processes and optimization (43%)	improving in-house mobility processes and optimization (46%)
3	achieving a more flexible approach to mobility (e.g., core/flex, tiered policy) (42%)	review or redesign mobility policy (46%)

The retail industry is truly at a crossroads when it comes to mobility priorities, with several areas vying for attention. After the top three listed above, no fewer than seven important concerns made fourth and fifth place, from managing relocation costs and embracing more flexible mobility strategies to attracting top talent.

domestic mobility CHALLENGES		
	parent report, across all industries	manufacturing
1	rising mobility costs (51%)	rising mobility costs (55%)
2	meeting relocating employee expectations (33%)	achieving a more flexible approach to mobility (e.g., core/flex, tiered policy) (36%)
3	achieving a more flexible approach to mobility (e.g., core/flex, tiered policy) (32%)	lack of in-house resources (e.g., staff, time) (36%)

Zoom out: While cost control continues to be a concern, organizations also understand the importance of providing a positive employee experience. When asked what steps their companies were taking to achieve cost savings in their organizations, participants listed changing relocation eligibility criteria at the top of the list (27%), followed by adopting a more flexible approach to policy benefits, external provider changes/renegotiations, finding administrative process efficiencies, outsourcing, and reducing relocation volume (18% each).

read our two-part white paper series on cost savings through policy design:

part one part two

relocation resistance

A key challenge is the resistance that can occur among employees when they're asked to relocate. A significant 73% of companies from the retail sector cite family or personal circumstances as the top driver of employees declining an assignment—though that's still 13 percentage points than the parent report (86%). Housing market challenges (55%), compensation and benefits issues (46%), and spouse/partner employment issues (46%) were also listed.

What it means: Interestingly, all three reasons listed for turning down an assignment in the retail sector point to a quality-of-life issue—for employees and their accompanying family members. Whether the employee is part of a dual-income household, their partner is concerned about their own career trajectory, or their home quality would suffer due to a move, an employee may not want to relocate if it risks their current standard of living.

Where professionals in the retail sector stand: How are mobility teams trying to overcome employee resistance to relocation? Additional home finding days/assistance, additional temporary living, and a sign-on bonus were listed as the top three measures by respondents (36% each).

Room for improvement: While efforts being made do address some of the challenges mobile employees face, when we consider two of the top reasons employees reject a relocation (family or personal reasons and spouse/partner employment issues), it's clear that providing spouse/partner support would make a significant difference. Only 21% of companies typically offer this benefit across industries, as noted in the parent report. The retail sector comes in at 27%—better, but still falling short of meeting these top concerns.

Since spouse/partner support directly impacts the financial health of employees and the identity, career trajectory, and mental well-being of accompanying partners, more companies could improve their employee assignment acceptance rates by offering it as part of their assignment benefits package.

Companies aiming to boost assignment acceptance should focus on meaningful benefits, especially robust spouse or partner support, which can safeguard financial stability and foster greater career satisfaction. By caring for the whole family, organizations build trust and loyalty among employees.

lump sum and capped moves

In the retail sector, 46% have policies that include a total capped amount, with 80% of these same respondents determining the dollar amount by level- or job-type. Lump sum moves are offered by 64%, with 71% calculating payment amounts by employee level.

Rewind: The use of lump sums in domestic mobility has grown since the 2017 Cartus Domestic US Relocation Policy & Practices Survey, which showed only 29% using lump-sum policies across all industries. That's 35 percentage points below the 64% who offer lump sum or lump sum plus moves in the retail industry today. This change is likely to be driven in large part by the technological advancements in the industry along with a growth in employee choice approaches that have become more available over the last decade.

Reality check: While many organizations turn to lump sum mobility models to cut costs up front, the result is often surprising: mobile employees who don't know what they don't know often front-load spending, leaving insufficient funds for the end of the move. The administrative hours that in-house teams spend troubleshooting add up, costing businesses time and money in the long run. If your organization plans to use a lump sum model in its mobility program, consider providing managed lump sum support to avoid setbacks.

flexible mobility

The need for greater adaptability within mobility programs is evident, with 36% of respondents noting an increased requirement and 27% reporting that expectations have remained steady.

The drivers, however, reinforce our earlier point about a desire to provide a positive employee experience, while being mindful of costs. While 75% of participants from the retail sector listed budget constraints/macroeconomic environment pressures as the top influencer, administrative ease, budget consistency, changing employee expectations and needs, cost savings, and improving employee experience were each also listed by 50%.

core/flex mobility models

Flexible mobility models—including core/flex—are a popular choice among businesses that are trying to build greater flexibility and cost savings into their mobility programs. Interestingly, only 18% of companies in the retail sector said they were considering adopting a more flexible approach to policy benefits, and only 27% utilize a tiered core/flex mobility model.

The bottom line: Strategically designed core/flex delivery models enhance the employee experience, allow internal teams to better meet business goals and needs, and reduce exceptions. Companies in the retail sector would benefit greatly from incorporating core/flex mobility models into their mobility programs.

non-traditional benefits

When asked about non-traditional benefits that should be included as flexible offerings to attract relocating employees, respondents from the retail sector highlighted various options:

- Cleaning services (36%)
- Gift cards (27%)
- Cash-out (18%)

An additional 27% said they provide no non-traditional benefits.

Consider this approach: While non-traditional benefits such as cash-out options are available, clients may prefer to structure these as part of a graduated offering. This encourages greater use of managed benefits, which delivers higher levels of care and value.

Policy structure example:

- Each benefit point represents a fixed value in services (e.g. 1 point = $500 in services).
- If a participant opts to cash out a point instead, the value is reduced (e.g. 1 point = $300 in cash).
- To preserve the integrity of the program and promote service utilization, a maximum of 5 points may be cashed out.

talent acquisition & retention

To better meet the needs of both employees and the business, companies are investing in these top four options to attract and retain talent:

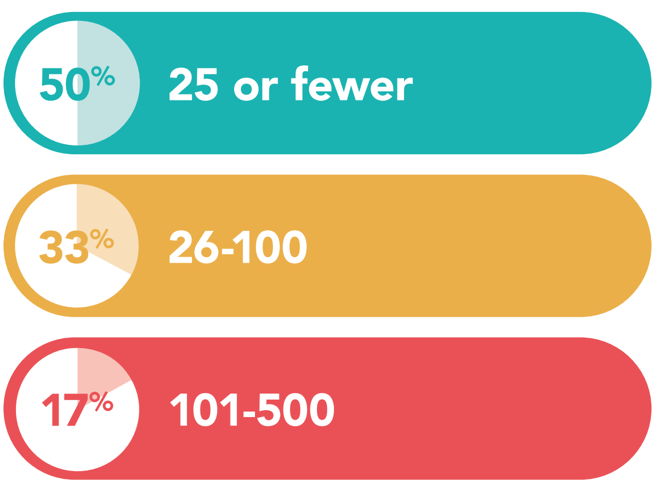
- Incorporating new inclusive policy elements to better reflect changing employee needs (36%)
- Developmental assignments (27%)
- Improved software for tracking/compliance purposes (27%)
- Partner support for career search as part of relocation (27%)

A key difference: These differed slightly from the top three options that were listed in the parent report, which included adding benefits to attract key talent for relocation (24%); incorporating new, inclusive policy elements to better reflect changing employee needs (21%); and developmental assignments (14%).

internship programs

The spotlight survey reveals that 55% of respondents from the retail sector support domestic internship programs—compared to the parent report's 62%. Within these internship programs, 100% support student summer interns, while 17% offer early career, part-time interns and student intern rotations.

Annual Intern Program Volume



hit play and get inspired:

Tune in to our Mobility Matters podcast episode, "Maximizing Internship Success: Strategies for Attracting, Retaining, and Relocating Top Talent" featuring insights from Doris Ng, Program Manager – Early Career, Medtronic.

Diverse and comprehensive benefits: Across industries, 88% of our parent report participants offer interns either a salary or lump sum payment. In the retail sector:

- 50% provided coordinated housing (directly billed)
- 50% offer a salary or hourly wages
- 33% offer a lump sum, solely for the move

En route travel, small shipments of belongings, and/or other stipends are offered by 17% of retail companies.

Resources provided to interns are intended to ensure a successful onboarding experience. The most popular resource that retail companies provide was listed as an onboarding company orientation (83%), followed by company arranged events/group connects, a company intranet site, LinkedIn groups, website resources, and/or a dedicated program (17% each).

Reality check: 17% of retail companies offer their interns no resources at all, which could be problematic among a population with limited to no prior work or independent living experiences. In addition, providing no support to interns has been found to negatively impact the ability to recruit talent from lower socio-economic backgrounds and therefore might limit access to qualified candidates.

tracking intern conversions

When it comes to tracking intern conversion rates, this sector is ahead of the game: 100% of respondents that are offering internships are tracking advancement into permanent roles, compared to 67% in the parent survey.

Why it matters: Given the connection between internship programs, cost-effective recruitment and talent pipelines, enhancing tracking mechanisms for intern conversions is crucial to organizational ROI and reaching long-term business objectives.

real estate market

When it comes to offering a home sale program, 73% of respondents from the retail sector do. The most effective measures being implemented to assist employees with their home sales include marketing assistance (88%), offering a home sale incentive (50%), providing loss on sale protection (38%), and offering a staging/fix-up allowance (25%).

When asked what benefits their organizations had added or were considering adding to support destination housing purchase, survey participants from the retail sector had this to share:

- Home purchase assistance (50%)
- Duplicate housing (38%)

Additionally, 38% said they are not considering adding benefits.

US buyer representations agreement

Of those managing moves within the United States, 18% indicated they understood the changes/potential impact of The National Association of Realtors (NAR) US Buyer Representations Agreement to their program very well and 36% somewhat understood the legislation.

On hold: 91% of participants in the retail sector have not made changes to their program in response to the settlement—and 70% are not sure whether they will in the next two years. However, of the 20% that do anticipate making changes in the future, 73% reported that they'll monitor program outcomes to determine long-term impacts.

technology

Like the parent survey, most retail participants (82%) stated they are not looking for a tech-only solution for specific move types. However, when they are considering their relocation program administration, the following tools and technologies were listed as the most critical to their company:

- Data analytics
- One source of truth for all mobility data
- Total cost reporting
- Accessibility (e.g., screen reader support)

artificial intelligence

Overall, while there is a growing interest in leveraging AI for relocation, many respondents in this sector indicated that their organizations are still in the early stages of exploring and implementing these technologies—mainly to improve data analysis and streamline processes.

DEI

While the acronym of "DEI" is becoming less prominent in some organizations today, inclusion, belonging, and the employee experience remain critical to most talent management strategies. When asked where they stand in terms of aligning relocation with their organization's DEI priorities—36% of participants from the retail sector shared that they are making progress.* Other participants shared that their relocation team is seen as a DEI ally, just getting started, or is considered a leader in the DEI space (18% each).

Reality check: To improve the employee experience, companies need to understand employee needs, which are often influenced by individual circumstances and cultural expectations. Workforce engagement and productivity are also heavily impacted by whether employees feel seen, heard, and valued by their employers. For companies where DEI isn't seen as a priority: to meet the top priorities and challenges listed in this report, decision makers would benefit from considering DEI as they align their mobility programs with business objectives.

To meet the top priorities and challenges listed in this report, decision makers would benefit from considering inclusion, belonging, and emerging needs as they align their mobility programs with their company's talent strategy and business objectives.

*"Making progress" in this context may include partner support, leveraging employee resource groups (ERGs), or providing cross-cultural and/or language training.

remote, hybrid, and extended business travel moves

What do we mean by Extended Business Travel (EBT), hybrid, or remote moves?

EBT: Business-initiated request for the employee to work from a different business location for a defined period (e.g., employee travels from Canada to the United States to work from their New York office for an extended time, typically 30 to 90 days)

Hybrid: Employees work partly at home and partly in the physical office (e.g., 1-2 days a week)

Remote work: Employee-initiated request to work from a location that is different from their permanent residence for a defined period (e.g., an employee based in California wants to work from Texas for two months during the summer)

Work from home: Everyone works at their place of residence

These types of moves are here to stay, but they remain a challenge for HR/mobility professionals.

When it comes to program responsibility, 60% of respondents said their Corporate HR Department manages their organization's domestic remote work policy, while 20% each said their business unit leaders, legal, modern workforce, or total rewards department handled the function.

Remote/hybrid workers

According to our research, 46% of participants from the retail sector in the United States and Canada have remote workers; 100% of them offer medical coverage and 50% offer remote work equipment. Compliance support, tax handling, and a travel allowance are also provided by 50% of respondents in the retail industry. When asked how many remote/hybrid workers they anticipated having in their US and/or Canadian programs over the next year, respondents shared the following:

remote/hybrid workers	respondents
0-100	60%
101-500	40%

Exactly 60% of respondents reported offering no remote-specific company-sponsored benefits to these employees. And another 60% shared that their organization has parameters/guidelines on the distance employees can live.

Extended Business Travelers (EBTs)

When asked how many extended business travelers (EBTs) they expected to have, 100% of retail respondents shared anticipating 0-100 employees.

Of those that are actively tracking their EBTs movements, respondents reported relying on business travel records and employee self-reporting (33% each). Of those that aren't tracking, only 40% said they're seeking a process for tracking today.

Reality check: The number of organizations that don't track their EBTs (60%) is a concern. Knowing employee locations for legal and tax compliance, security, and employee safety is crucial in today's ever-changing domestic mobility landscape in both the United States and Canada. The cost of non-compliance far outweighs the investment in available tracking solutions.

sustainability

64% of respondents from the retail sector said their organization had a corporate sustainability strategy covering the entirety of the business and its supply chain, while 36% weren't sure their organization had a plan. When assessing a partner's engagement and level of sustainability performance, 46% said it was desirable and 18% said it was essential for the allocation of business. 36% weren't sure it was a priority.

When it comes to approaches to sustainability within their mobility programs:

- 27% shared that sustainable mobility choices are not currently being developed
- 27% said that sustainable mobility choices are offered by the business - and individual employees are given a sense of autonomy over making sustainable choices based on their own personal values

listen to our *mobility matters* episode, [green relo dreams – sustainability in motion]

Reality check: Sustainability efforts accomplish a lot more than you think. Programs like "discard and donate" and organizations like [Move For Hunger] cut costs, lower emissions, and give back—all at the same time. With 27% of retail companies not pursuing a specific sustainability strategy yet, there's room for improvement in this segment. Connecting the dots for smarter, more meaningful strategies benefits mobile employees, businesses, local communities, and the wider world.

policy review

Nearly two thirds (64%) of respondents are considering reviewing their domestic policies this year, driven by reasons including employee experience, cost, business oversight, flexibility and program simplicity.

Reality check: If you're reviewing your mobility policy with an eye on improvements, consider the challenges and priorities outlined earlier in this report: the improvement of in-house mobility processes and optimization—and improving the employee experience.

Tackle increasing mobility costs, enable a flexible mobility approach, manage limited in-house resources, and fulfill relocating employee expectations by maintaining clear communication with your workforce, working collaboratively with your mobility partner, and seeking efficient, thoughtful strategies within your mobility program and processes.

ready for the road ahead

Domestic mobility across the United States and Canada is shifting rapidly—mirroring changes in the global talent market. Companies are feeling the push to elevate the employee experience, while managing the pressures of rising costs. By developing innovative and strategic solutions and putting employees at the heart of corporate relocation programs, companies like yours will be better able to tackle both the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead.

For more advice and recommendations on your domestic or global mobility programs, email cartussolutions@cartus.com or visit cartus.com.

read our full report!

Drawing on experiences from 106 talent mobility respondents, the data in the Cartus US and Canada Domestic Mobility Survey 2025 represents construction, consumer services, extraction (oil, gas, and mining), finance, manufacturing, media, retail, tech, and transportation industries.

This report explores the intra-country programs and move volumes in the United States and Canada. Download your copy now to discover how organizations are responding to shifts in mobility volume and activity, navigating the housing market, managing remote work dynamics, and adopting flexible mobility practices. Plus, we explore the growing focus on DEI and sustainability in mobility functions.

Pressed for time? Read our Executive Summary here.

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