TOWN OF GANDER

Town of Gander Transit Needs Assessment

November 2025

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Executive Summary

The Town of Gander engaged Colliers Project Leaders to conduct a Transit Needs Assessment, evaluating the growing transportation demands within the town and exploring possible options for a local transit system. This study was initiated in response to increasing mobility challenges within the community and the Town's goal of enhancing accessibility, connectivity, and quality of life for residents while reinforcing Gander's role as a regional service hub for Central Newfoundland.

The assessment combined a background review of Gander's demographic and socio-economic conditions, case studies of comparable municipalities, and public and stakeholder engagement. With a local population of roughly 13,000 residents and a surrounding population of over 45,000 within a 60-minute drive, Gander provides access to healthcare, education, and employment for many residents of Central Newfoundland (NL). However, many residents lack the means to consistently access these essential services due to the region's limited and expensive transit options.

Background Research and Case Study Analysis

The background review confirmed that Gander's balanced age distribution and continued population growth differentiate it from other communities in NL, many of which are experiencing population decline. Gander provides many essential services to residents beyond town limits, and access to those services is particularly challenging for residents without consistent access to a private vehicle. Discussions with the town council highlighted transit as a missing essential service in the area and a potential economic opportunity for the town. Council also emphasized that a successful transit system must be equitable, reliable, and designed for long-term sustainability, ensuring residents of all income levels and abilities can fully participate in education, healthcare, employment, and community life. The long-term vision of the system would include regional transit that connects Gander to surrounding communities.

A comparative analysis of transit models from similar-sized communities, including Bridgewater, NS; Pictou County, NS; Corner Brook, NL; Summerside, PE; and St. Anthony Basin, NL, highlighted many potential transit options and key lessons learned that the Town of Gander should consider. A hybrid approach was adopted by all communities, offering both fixed-route and some form of on-demand transit, which ensures that individuals with mobility challenges can access transit. Key lessons from these communities emphasize the importance of simple route design, reliable scheduling, accessibility features, maintaining community awareness, and establishing partnerships to ensure operational sustainability. Ensuring that residents can rely on transit and have safe and comfortable access to public transit is essential. This can be achieved through transit scheduling/ route design, sufficient stop infrastructure, and considering how riders get to and from stop locations, such as improving active transit infrastructure.

Through research and case study analysis, transit has been highlighted to have several benefits for communities, beyond its direct economic impacts. Perhaps most importantly, is the social impact of ensuring that all residents can access essential services. Stakeholders representing healthcare and community organizations emphasized that transit would enable equitable access to medical appointments and services, while also promoting inclusion and reducing social isolation. Public transit would be life-changing for the many residents who would rely on it. Additionally, transit can have far-reaching economic benefits for local businesses and the tourism, housing, and commercial infrastructure sectors, all while reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving air quality.

Public Engagement Findings

Engagement from the public was achieved through two means: a publicly available survey advertised by the Town of Gander, and interviews with key stakeholders that provided local insights into the perspectives

and lived experiences of all Gander residents. Engagement results revealed that 42% of the 301 survey respondents identified limited options as a difficulty when finding transportation in Gander. An additional 31% identified affordability as an issue. When asked how often respondents have difficulty finding transportation, 34% had difficulties at least a few times per month. Many residents must rely solely on taxis or private vehicles, which limits their independence and affordability. Aside from personal vehicles, residents highlighted that they need to rely on walking, taxis, and rides from friends and family for their transportation needs. Each of these options has its own difficulties and is generally not considered reliable or accessible.

Respondents consistently identified schools, medical facilities, retail areas, and workplaces as their top desired destinations for transit. Participants also emphasized the importance of an affordable fare structure, consistent service hours, and clear public communication regarding schedules and routes. Ensuring routes and schedules are convenient and reliable was identified as necessary to promote the use of transit. Accessibility was highlighted as a concern in using transit, but one that can be easily mitigated through proper planning and design.

Key Considerations

Overall, the needs assessment revealed a need for public transportation in Gander. Gander's most immediate need is for a local transit service that connects residents within the town, particularly youth, seniors, and those without access to a personal vehicle, to key destinations such as schools, healthcare facilities, shopping areas, and employment. The recommended approach is to start with a local system that prioritizes reliability, affordability, and accessibility. This pilot system would establish a foundation for long-term growth and potential expansion to nearby communities such as Appleton, Glenwood, and Benton.

The most commonly used transit model identified through the case study analysis was a hybrid system, with a flag stop fixed-route service as the primary service offering. The fixed route should be short in duration, ideally running on a 30-minute loop, to have an easy-to-understand schedule where riders aren't spending an excessive amount of time on the bus. To cover more, less common stops, the route could be adjusted during peak times, or offer two alternating routes that both stop at key destinations and cover separate, lower-demand areas to maximize coverage. A flag-stop system allows residents to get on or off the bus at any designated area along the route, minimizing unnecessary walking.

In addition to a fixed-route service, implementing an on-demand service is important for ensuring that riders with unique mobility challenges who can't safely or reliably access a stop location can access transit. The on-demand service can be expanded to cover a larger area than the fixed route, thereby significantly increasing the system's service coverage. Considering the last-mile problem, active transportation and other transit methods, including taxis and ride-sharing, are also essential for a successful transit model.

Several other factors can contribute to the system's success. Buses should be fully accessible, with shelters, benches, and safe pedestrian crossings at high-demand stops. Fares should remain affordable, noted at around $2.00 to $3.00 per ride, and inclusive, offering discounts for students, seniors, and low-income residents to encourage equitable access. Strong communication and public awareness efforts will be crucial in promoting ridership and fostering community confidence in the system. Features such as real-time tracking and easy fare systems will be crucial in ensuring easy access for both new and experienced riders. Reliable buses that are properly maintained are essential to maintaining service reliability and building public trust.

Next Steps

The next step for the Town of Gander is to undertake a Transit Feasibility Study to define the service model, route design, fleet requirements, capital and operating costs, and governance structure. This study will also explore potential funding sources through federal and provincial programs, including the Rural Transit Solutions Fund, to support implementation.

Through continued collaboration and phased development, Gander has the opportunity to establish a reliable, inclusive, and scalable transit system that reflects community priorities, supports economic growth, and strengthens its regional role. Implementing transit will enhance access to healthcare, education, and employment, improve social equity, and position Gander as a leader in sustainable regional mobility across Central Newfoundland.

1.0 Introduction

In 2024, the Town of Gander (Gander) recognized the increasing demand for improved transit services and proactively secured funding through the Rural Transit Solutions Fund to conduct a transit needs assessment. The purpose of this needs assessment is to assist Gander in engaging the community and to assess best practices from similar communities, informing the development of a regional public transportation system. This system is intended to provide reliable access to employment, education, healthcare, and other essential programs and services, while supporting the region's population growth projections and serving residents of all ages and income levels.

This report will guide future planning initiatives and funding applications, ensuring that recommendations are both evidence-based and tailored to Gander's regional context.

1.1 Objectives

The primary objectives of this Transit Needs Assessment are to:

- Understand current mobility needs by evaluating how residents currently travel within and outside the community and identify key trip generators such as workplaces, healthcare facilities, schools, and commercial centers.
- Assess existing transportation gaps by reviewing current transportation options to identify service gaps, accessibility issues, and unmet needs.
- Explore comparable systems by analyzing case studies from similar Atlantic Canadian communities to extract lessons learned and identify applicable service models.
- Engage stakeholders through meaningful engagement with residents, community organizations, and businesses to ensure the recommendations are grounded in community needs and priorities.
- Develop actionable recommendations to provide Gander with evidence-based recommendations and a roadmap to guide decision-making and next steps for transit development.

1.2 Project Status

At the time of this report, the project is in its needs assessment phase. The needs assessment is a crucial step in any project, as it confirms the project's needs by engaging with the community and other transit authorities to understand key lessons learned. The needs assessment will guide Gander in its next steps, including the feasibility analysis, design, and implementation of a public transit system.

1.3 Methodology

The methodology for this Transit Needs Assessment is structured in three phases designed to provide a clear, collaborative, and evidence-based approach. Each phase is informed by proven advisory practices and tailored to address Gander's unique regional context, demographics, and transportation needs.

1.3.1 Phase 1 - Project Management and Kick-Off

Phase 1 established the foundation for the project. Colliers led a project kick-off meeting with the Town of Gander's Project Team that allowed Colliers to:

- Gain a full understanding of the project background, scope, and desired outcomes.
- Define the Project Team and Steering Committee structure for decision-making.
- Confirm the scope of services, deliverables, timelines, and communication protocols to ensure a clear understanding of the project.
- Identify and collect key documents, such as planning reports, demographic data, and transportation statistics.
- Conduct background research to gain a deeper understanding of the demographics and specific needs of the Town of Gander.

1.3.2 Phase 2 - Community Engagement

Phase 2 focused on capturing the lived experiences, perspectives, and needs of Gander residents and identified stakeholders. Community engagement was a crucial element of this study, ensuring that the recommended transit solutions reflected local needs and priorities. Engagement activities were designed to be inclusive, ensuring that the voices of all demographic groups, including seniors, youth, students, and those with mobility challenges, were heard and incorporated. Engagement activities included:

- An online public survey to gather feedback on current transportation habits, needs, and barriers, with optional demographic questions to support analysis of key user groups.
- Stakeholder interviews with targeted outreach to key organizations such as local employers, healthcare providers, and community groups to explore unique transportation needs and challenges.

Insights gathered during this phase provided critical data to support the technical assessment, ensuring that recommendations were aligned with community priorities.

1.3.3 Phase 3 - Recommendation and Reporting

The final phase consolidated findings from the technical review, case study analysis, and community engagement to develop a comprehensive Needs Assessment Report. The assessment provided a clear

summary of the work completed and delivered actionable recommendations to guide the Town's next steps. Key tasks included:

- Summarizing the findings into a draft report for review by Gander staff and the project Steering Committee.
- Preparing a summary presentation to communicate findings clearly to Council and stakeholders.
- Finalizing the report based on feedback, including implementation pathways and potential funding considerations.

2.0 Project Background

The Town of Gander, located in the heart of Newfoundland and Labrador, has a local population of approximately 13,000 residents and a surrounding population of over 45,000 within a 60-minute drive. Gander provides surrounding communities access to essential services, including healthcare, education, retail, and government programs.

As the town continues to grow and evolve, there is a growing demand for improved public transportation to enhance mobility, reduce reliance on private vehicles, and improve access for residents to employment, healthcare, and recreation. This transit needs assessment was initiated to explore the feasibility of a sustainable, inclusive, and scalable transit system that responds to local and regional needs.

During this needs assessment, three types of transit were considered:

1. Inter-regional transit- travel between different regions within NL.
2. Regional transit- travel within the Gander Region, but outside the Town of Gander.
3. Local transit- travel within the Town of Gander.

The following subsections outline the demographic context and the vision for a future transit system that will inform the development of actionable recommendations for the Town of Gander.

2.1.1 Understanding the Demographics of Central Health

The Town of Gander is situated in the centre of the Central Health Authority, as shown in Zone 9 of Figure 1 below. The Central Health Authority has a regional population of approximately 92,000 residents across ten population clusters (Zones). As one of only two communities with a regional hospital, Gander (Zone 9) and Grand Falls-Windsor (Zone 5), Gander plays a critical role in healthcare service delivery across the Central Health Authority.

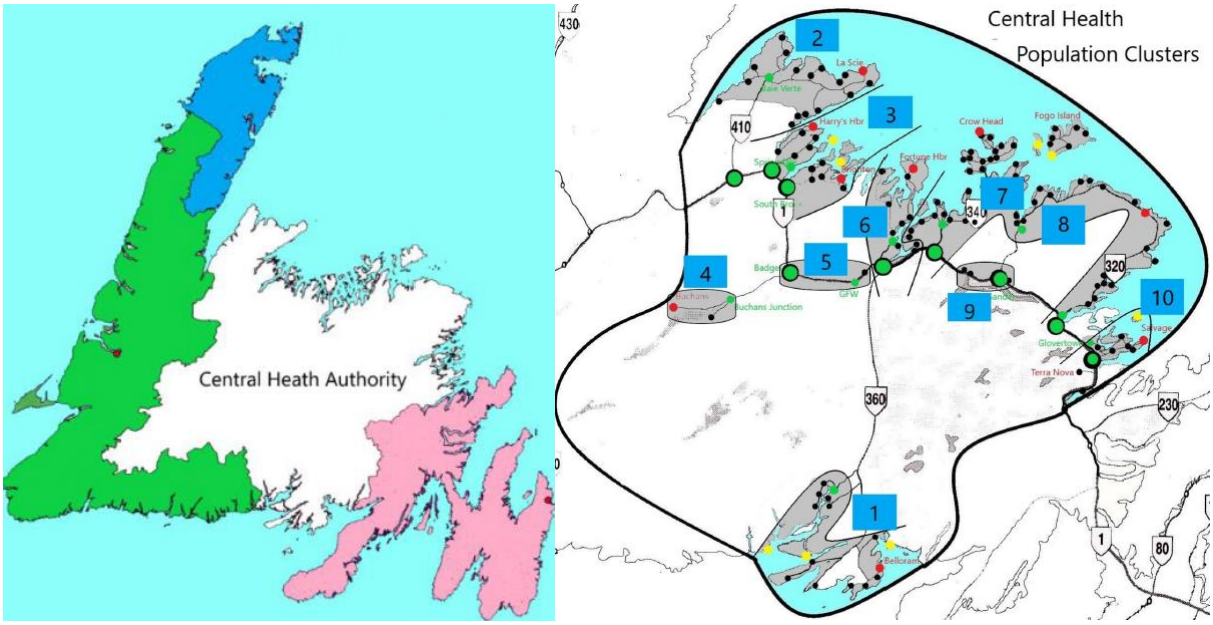


Figure 1: Map of Central Health Authority

In 2001, *"Understanding the Demographics of Central Health: A Guide for Planners"* was published with the intention of better informing decision-makers and contributing to the process of creating a "re-imagined"

healthcare system through the NL Health Accord initiative. The study aimed to gain a better understanding of the demographics of NL, particularly those related to the Central Health Authority. The study classified the Central Health Authority into the ten population clusters identified in Table 1 below. The Table highlights the following metrics, which play a crucial role in shaping transit in the Central Health Authority.

- Population size and age distribution across the zones.
- The number of communities with populations over/ under 500 residents.
- Ratios of seniors to children indicate projected population growth or decline.
- Travel times to Gander and Grand Falls-Windsor hospitals.

What's challenging about the Central Health Authority with regards to healthcare is that the populations are unevenly dispersed, with the majority of communities having a population of less than 500 and therefore are unable to support a local hospital. Access to healthcare is often defined by travel time, which is the most significant consideration when it comes to access to healthcare.

The study identifies that, under certain medical situations, a travel time of 60 minutes, possibly up to 90 minutes, may be considered reasonable. Travel times greater than 90 minutes are often considered too long for most situations. Based on this, a different approach to addressing access to healthcare will need to be taken for communities outside the 60- to 90-minute window. Improving access to Gander for all residents within the 60 to 90-minute travel time window should be the primary focus for inter-regional public transportation.

Table 1: Demographics of the Central Health Authority based on 2016 Census data

	Zone 1	Zone 2	Zone 3	Zone 4	Zone 5	Zone 6	Zone 7	Zone 8	Zone 9	Zone 10
Category	The Connaigre Peninsula	The Baie Verte Peninsula	Green Bay	Buchans Area	GFW Area	Bay of Exploits Area	Road to the Isles-Gander Loop	Bonavista North-Gander Loop	Gander Area	Terra Nova Area
Population	7,011	5,057	7,895	851	18,712	7,133	18,603	9,932	13,234	3,974
Number of Communities	14	17	18	3	3	11	37	18	4	11
Number of Communities with 500+ Population	5	2	4	1	3	4	8	8	3	2
Youth Population	895	610	895	70	2,595	805	2,145	1,215	2,175	445
Seniors Population	1,455	1,140	2,115	280	4,105	1,895	5,085	2,440	2,410	1,135
Ratio of Seniors to Children	5:3	2:1	7:3	4:1	8:5	7:3	7:3	2:1	1:1	5:2
Travel Time to Grand Falls - Windsor	02:01	02:00	01:11	01:19	00:00	00:13	02:02	02:38	00:56	01:38
Travel Time to Gander	02:36	03:04	02:25	02:05	00:56	00:48	01:44	01:39	00:00	00:42

Evaluating the data found in Table 1, the travel time to the nearest hospital for all residents in the Central Health Authority can be determined. As shown in Table 2 and illustrated in Figure 2, approximately 46,332 residents are within a 0- to 60-minute drive to Gander, with another 13,536 residents within a 61- to 90-minute drive. Notably, 77% of the Central Health population lives within 100 kilometres of Gander, reinforcing its position as a regional centre for healthcare, education, employment, and commercial activity.

Table 2: Population Travel Time from Central Health Authority Hospitals

Destination	Travel Time (minutes)			
	0-60	61-90	91-120	120+
Gander	46,332	13,536	7,330	10,352
Grad Falls- Windsor	43,294	8,622	16,022	9,612

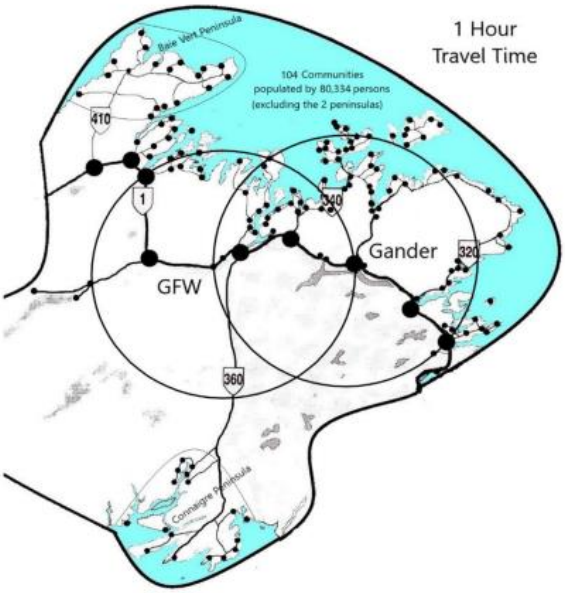


Figure 2: Map showing a 1-hour Travel time from Gander and GFW

Further, Table 3 demonstrates that 45,743 residents identify Gander as their closest hospital. This finding suggests that there is a high demand for inter-regional transportation among approximately 45,000 residents who could benefit from it, although residents with Gander listed as the nearest hospital may live up to 104 minutes away. This broad regional reliance on Gander emphasizes the need for regional transportation links within the Central Health Authority.

Table 3: Populations Supported by Gander Hospital

Metric	Total Population	Youth Population	Seniors Population	Adult Population
Gander is the closest Hospital	45,743	5,980	11,070	28,693
Gander is the second closest Hospital	46,659	5,870	10,990	29,799
Total	92,402	11,850	22,060	58,492

Considering both the 1-hour travel time and Gander being the nearest hospital, extended regional transit could be considered in the following communities.

Table 4: Regions that identify Gander as the closest hospital or are within a 60-minute drive

Community	Travel time to Gander	Nearest Hospital	Population
Gander	0 minutes	Gander	13,234
Terra Nova Area	42 minutes	Gander	3,974
Bay of Exploits Area	48 minutes	Grand Falls Windsor	7,133
Grand Falls Windsor	56 minutes	Grand Falls Windsor	18,712
Bonavista North Gander Loop	99 minutes	Gander	9,932
Road to the Isles-Gander Loop	104 minutes	Gander	18,603
Total			**71,588**

These findings highlight the opportunity to strengthen connectivity between Gander and its surrounding communities, ensuring reliable access to critical services for everyone regardless of age or mobility constraints.

2.1.2 Gander Area Demographics

As defined by the Central Health Authority, the Gander Area comprises four communities: Gander, Appleton, Glenwood, and Benton/ unorganized, as shown in Table 5. Together, these communities have a combined population of approximately 13,234 residents, with Gander itself accounting for 11,688, as per Statistics Canada's 2016 Census. Note that all demographic data in this report is from the 2016 census to be consistent with the report *"Understanding the Demographics of Central Health: A Guide for Planners,"*. The total population of Gander, as reported in the 2021 census, was 11,880, representing a 1.6% increase.

Table 5: Gander Area Demographics based on 2016 Census data

Community	Population	Distance from the Town of Gander
Town of Gander	11,688	0 km
Appleton	574	22 km west
Glenwood	778	22 km west
Benton/ unorganized	194	21 km east
Total	13,234	

According to the 2016 Census, 18.8% of Gander's population were seniors (65+), while 16.7% were youth (0-14), showing a balanced demographic with a slight aging trend. The median age for Gander is 45.8 years, slightly higher than the provincial median, reflecting broader aging patterns in rural Newfoundland. While much of the Central Health Region has experienced population decline between 2011 and 2016, Gander recorded a 4.3% population increase, making it one of the few areas within the region to experience net growth as residents of rural NL are moving to larger population centres.

As shown in Table 1, Gander maintains a balanced senior-to-youth ratio of 1:1, in contrast to many surrounding zones where seniors significantly outnumber youth. This ratio highlights the importance of designing transit services that cater to the needs of both younger and older populations. Growth in school enrollment adds to this trend. Between 2019 and 2024, overall student numbers in the region increased by 4.6%, with Gander Collegiate seeing a 25.9% rise in secondary school enrollment since 2018.

The Town of Gander prides itself on acting as a modern service hub for over 78,000 people within a 100 km radius, making it a preferred centre for healthcare, education, retail, and recreation in central

Newfoundland. Gander's economy is supported by transportation, communications, education, and public administration, and is home to Gander International Airport and 9 Wing CFB Gander, which includes 103 Search and Rescue Squadron. More than 350 storefront businesses have made their home in Gander, with an additional 80+ enterprises registered in the home-based business sector. Retail sales in the Town of Gander are estimated to be 2.5 times the national average for communities of comparable size and are fast approaching half a billion dollars annually, according to reports from the Town of Gander.

Gander offers extensive recreational and community amenities, including a multipurpose hockey arena, curling club, golf course, and year-round programs, all supported by numerous parks and trails. Natural resources, such as the Gander River and Gander Lake, are common tourist attractions for visitors in the area.

Taken together, these dynamics illustrate that Gander is uniquely positioned to sustain a regional transit system. Its demographic stability, balanced age profile, and status as the closest or second-closest hospital for more than 78,000 residents across Central Health make it the logical centre for investment in public transit infrastructure.

2.1.3 Gander Transit Ideology

Members of the Town of Gander Council view public transit as both a missing essential service and a potential economic opportunity for the town. Their vision is for a regional, inclusive transit system that meets both local and regional mobility needs, with a focus on youth, seniors, and surrounding communities within a 20-30 minute travel radius.

Council emphasized that a successful transit system must be equitable, reliable, and designed for long-term sustainability, ensuring residents of all income levels and abilities can fully participate in education, healthcare, employment, and community life. Their vision for Gander's future transit system is built on three primary goals:

1. To establish scheduled transit or student-oriented routes to improve connectivity for youth, seniors, and other residents within 20 to 30 minutes of Gander.
2. Reduce reliance on private transportation, particularly for those without access to a personal vehicle.
3. Support the regional integration of services, including education and healthcare, to foster community cohesion and efficiency.

Through discussions with Council, they emphasized the importance of Gander's role as a regional service hub, supporting people from surrounding communities for employment, healthcare, and retail purposes as well as serving as a travel destination for tourists. Council also recognized that accessibility and affordability must be at the forefront of planning. Residents currently face mobility barriers due to the town's dispersed layout, limited taxi reliability, and lack of affordable alternatives. Council recognized that a subsidized, municipally supported system would likely be necessary to ensure access for all users while generating broader economic and social returns, such as connecting residents to jobs, schools, and healthcare, and supporting local businesses.

Beyond accessibility, Council identified safety, comfort, and adaptability as core design principles. Key features such as bus shelters, security cameras, and digital route tracking were identified as methods that could help ensure user confidence and convenience. They also supported the inclusion of bike racks, supporting the growth of active transit infrastructure, and potential ride-sharing options/ partnerships in the town to ensure door-to-door transit is considered.

In terms of social and environmental benefits, Council acknowledged that an effective transit system could help alleviate traffic congestion, reduce carbon emissions, and support a more active and connected lifestyle. It was noted that improved mobility would particularly enhance the independence and mental health of seniors, youth, and newcomers to the community, while also improving employer access to a broader labour pool. Ensuring students have safe access to public transit was also seen as a potential primary benefit to families in the region. To help support families adopt the idea of students using public transit, conducting a youth mobility audit tied to school and after-school activities, piloting limited routes during peak school hours, and exploring the option of discounted or free youth passes to encourage ridership should be considered.

Lastly, the town recognizes the importance of long-term planning and phased implementation of its transit system. Council supports a model that begins with a limited pilot phase. The system must remain equitable, accessible, and adaptable, serving residents of all ages and income levels. It should also address after-school, weekend, and employment-related mobility needs through reliable, predictable service. As Gander continues to grow as a regional service hub, the transit model must be designed for scalability capable of accommodating both stable and increasing populations while improving connectivity, reducing traffic congestion, and supporting the town’s broader environmental and economic development goals.

3.0 Transit Case Study Analysis

The purpose of the case study analysis was to identify and document possible transit solutions and lessons learned from communities with active public transit that are comparable to and could be implemented in the Town of Gander. The analysis looked to identify practical insights, highlight challenges and successes from similar-sized municipalities, and identify lessons that can be adapted to Gander's unique local and regional circumstances.

3.1 Evaluation Process

The case study was conducted in two steps: evaluation and analysis, as shown in Figure 3 below.

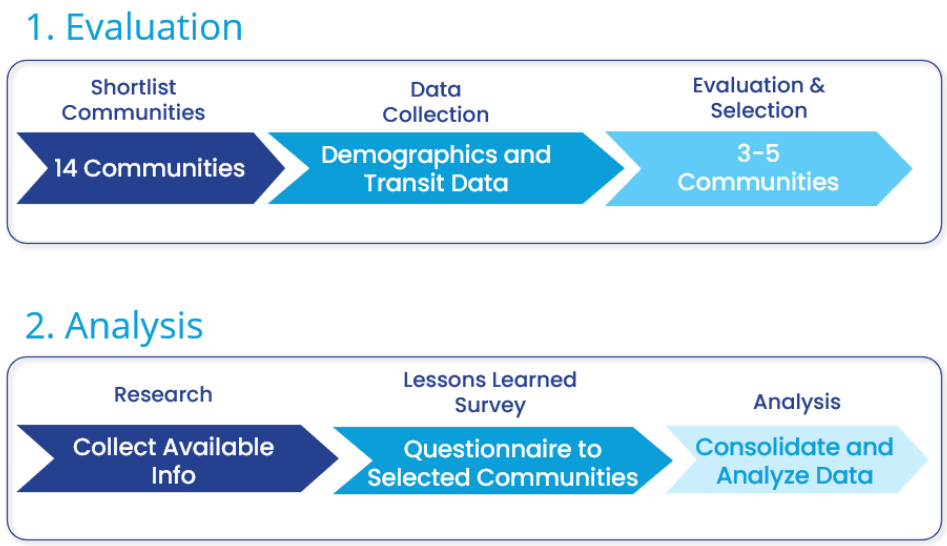


Figure 3: Case Study Analysis Process

3.1.1 Case Study Evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation was to identify the communities to be used for the case study analysis, and it was conducted in three steps:

1. **Shortlist Communities** - Selected 14 potential communities based on population, geography, and transit service type.
2. **Data Collection** - For each shortlisted community, collect geographic/population data, and review the transit models for Inter-Town/ Regional Coordination, and the transit solutions' ability to offer public transit to residents.
3. **Evaluation & Selection**- Evaluated the communities based on the collected data against the evaluation matrix to identify the top communities for the Case Study Analysis.

The 14 potential communities operate various forms of rural or small-urban transit systems and were chosen based on their population size, geographic characteristics, and existing transit service models. Each community was evaluated against a set of criteria developed in collaboration with the Town of Gander, which included the metrics below. The full evaluation matrix and scoring can be found in Appendix 1.

- Population.
- Geographic structure.
- Location.
- Transit model regional coordination.
- Service model type (fixed-route, on-demand, hybrid).
- Availability of operational and survey data.

The case study evaluation scoring results are presented in Table 6. The case study analysis was conducted for the top five communities.

Table 6: Case Study Evaluation Scoring Results

Rank	Community	Scoring (Max 80 Points)
1	**Bridgewater, NS**	**67.25**
2	**Pictou County, NS**	**62.25**
3	**Corner Brook, NL**	**60.75**
4	**St. Anthony Basin, NL**	**59.5**
5	**Summerside, PE**	**59.5**
6	Edmonston, NB	59
7	Digby County, NS	58
8	Kenora, ON	57
9	Yarmouth, NS	56
10	Victoria County, NS	56
11	Terrace, BC	55.5
12	Amherst, NS	53
13	Miramichi, NB	47.5

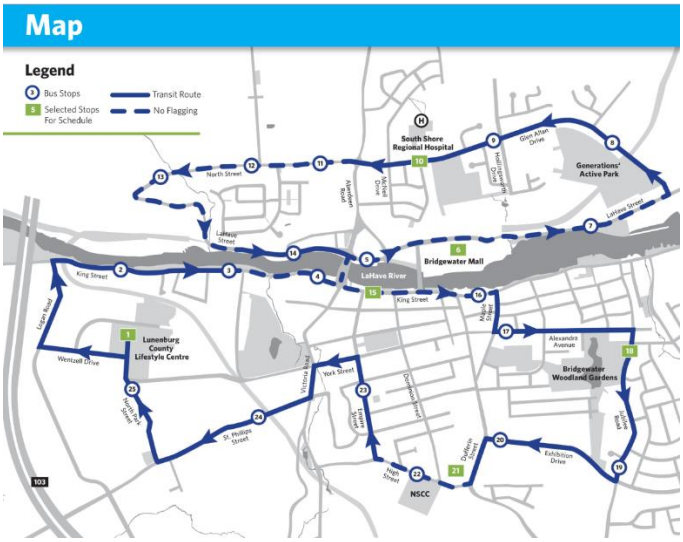
3.1.2 Case Study Analysis

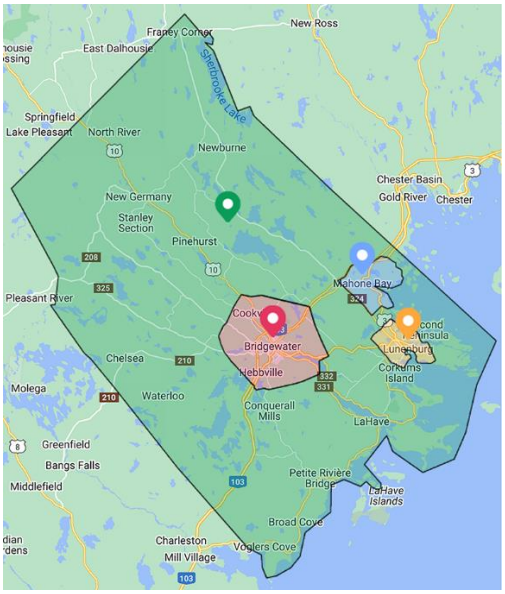
The case study analysis aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the transit model, its implementation, and lessons learned, in order to assist the Town of Gander throughout its implementation process. The analysis was conducted in three steps:

1. **Research** - Collected and reviewed all available information on the transit authorities.
2. **Transit Needs Assessment Survey**- Developed a list of questions to summarize lessons learned and customer satisfaction in each community.
3. **Document Lessons Learned** - Summarized the results into the Transit Needs Assessment Report.

To ensure that the case study included a diverse selection of transit models, the analysis was conducted on five communities. During the background research, different communities had varying levels of publicly available information and interest in participating in the analysis. The questions from the lessons learned survey are listed in Appendix 2. The results of the research and the survey results for each community can be found in the following sections.

3.2 Town of Bridgewater, Nova Scotia





3.2.1 Bridgewater Transit Details

Town Population: 9,000	**Transit Authority:** Bridgewater Transit, Lunenburg County Wheels
Regional Population: 60,000	**Town Transit Type:** Flag Stop Fixed Route
Transit Contact: Jim Coleman, Jim.Coleman@bridgewater.ca	**Regional Transit Type**: On-Demand
Fares: **Single:** $2.00, $1.50 Student/ Youth **10 Rides:** $18.00, $13.50 Student/ Youth **Monthly:** $45.00, $30.00 Student/ Youth **Family:** $4.00/ ride up to 5 people **On Demand:** Based on distance	**Fixed Route Schedule:** Hour-long route, once per hour **Provided Info:** Bridgewater Transit Pilot Evaluation Report, Fixed Route Transit Service Expansion Pilot Study, Lessons Learned Survey

3.2.2 Transit Offerings

The Town of Bridgewater offers two complementary transit services that address the mobility needs of residents within the town and across Lunenburg County. Within Bridgewater itself, the town operates a flag-stop fixed route service that runs on a one-hour loop, seven days a week. Riders can board and depart at designated stops or by flagging the bus along much of the route. Service hours span weekdays from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., Saturdays from 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., and Sundays from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The system is accessible, featuring low-floor buses, wheelchair spaces, and bicycle racks, and offers a flat fare of $2.00 with discounts available for bulk passes, monthly passes, and student/family rates.

Bridgewater Transit provided their ridership data from September 2017 to July 2025, shown in Figure 4 below. Their service has experienced a steady increase in ridership since its inception in 2017. They averaged 63 riders per day in 2017. Ridership has increased to an average of 131 riders per day in 2025, as of July, representing a 108% increase. Note that the drop in ridership from 2020 to 2023 was attributed to COVID-19 lockdowns.

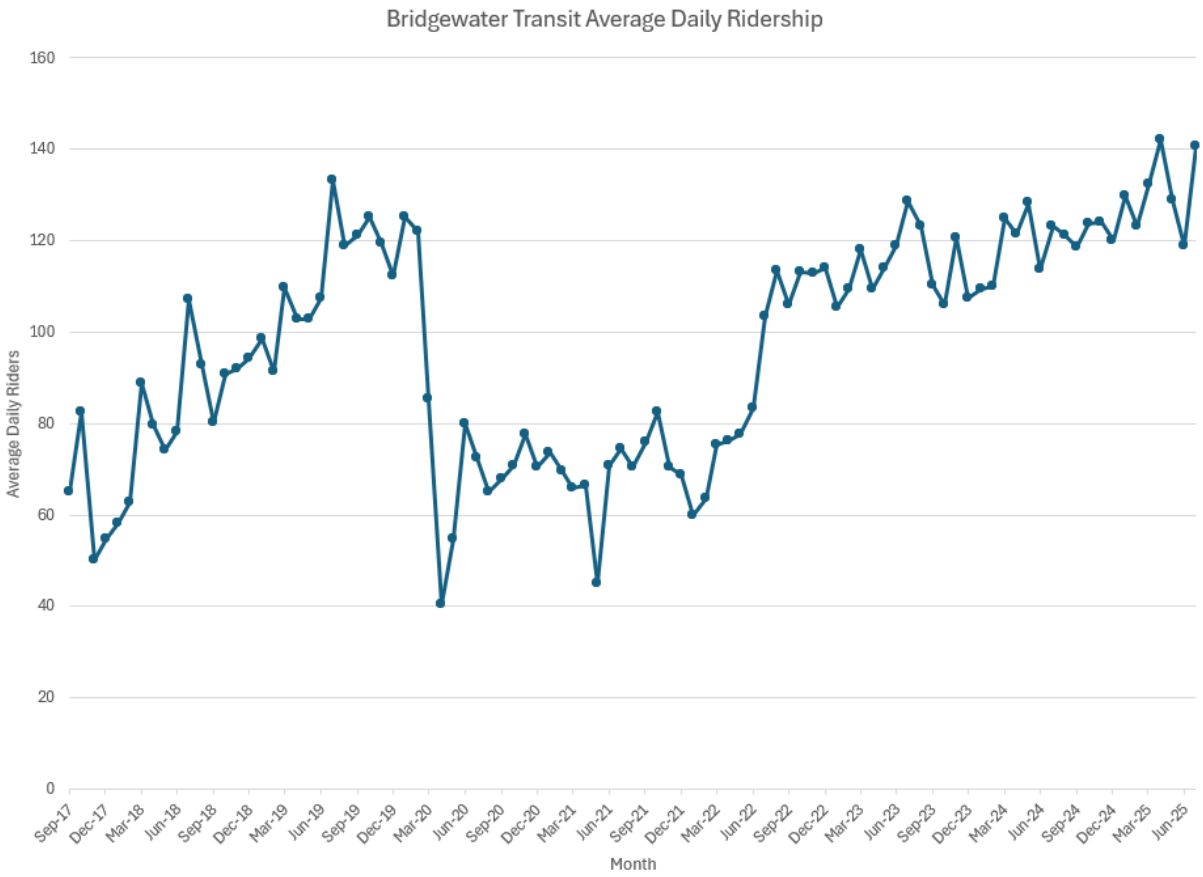


Figure 4 Bridgewater Transit Average Daily Ridership

Usage patterns were strongest during weekday peaks, with trips most often associated with access to employment, medical appointments, and shopping. While overall numbers reflect the modest size of the community, the data demonstrates consistent demand and highlights how even small-scale systems can deliver meaningful mobility benefits. For Gander, this evidence suggests that a well-structured transit option, even at a limited scale, can attract regular ridership and serve essential daily needs.

Beyond the town boundary, Lunenburg County Wheels offers a door-to-door on-demand service that provides accessible transportation across the county. This service caters to individuals residing in rural or low-density areas that are not directly served by Bridgewater's fixed route, playing a crucial role in connecting them to medical appointments, shopping, education, and community programs. Pricing is fixed between and within the towns in the County, and there is a pay-per-km fee structure for rural residents. Together, these two systems create a hybrid model that provides transit services to the entire region.

3.2.3 Lessons Learned

Feedback from riders in Bridgewater indicates strong support for having a local public transit option, with many emphasizing that it provides independence for youth, seniors, and residents without access to a vehicle. Riders noted the affordability of the flat fare system and appreciated the convenience of the flag stop model, which allows them to complete errands, access recreation, attend medical appointments, and reach employment opportunities that might otherwise have been out of reach.

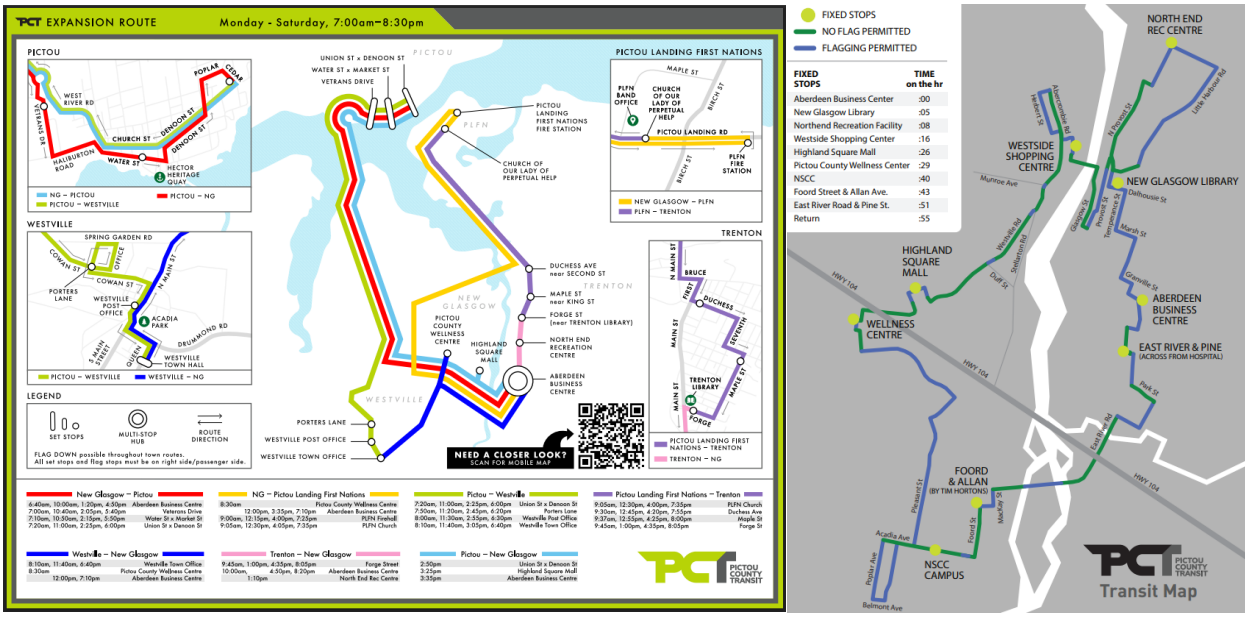
Conversely, Bridgewater indicated they have several challenges and opportunities for improvement in their current system. The hour-long, one-way loop was frequently described as too long, with buses not coming

frequently enough. Riders also emphasized the need for enhanced stop infrastructure, including shelters, benches, and winter maintenance, to improve the system's accessibility and comfort. Adding accessible stop infrastructure and adjusting routes to shorten travel times while expanding access to high-demand commercial areas were identified as the primary opportunities for improvement. These struggles underscore the delicate balance between coverage, frequency, and cost that a transit authority must strike.

Other suggested improvements specific to Bridgewater included enhancing coverage in areas such as seniors' complexes and other major commercial areas, which are currently underserved. Limited communication and the lack of posted schedules were noted as barriers for casual riders, while some non-users questioned the appropriateness of the bus size and cost for a community of Bridgewater's scale.

From these experiences, several lessons emerge that may be relevant to Gander. A flag-stop fixed-route service can succeed in small urban centers when it balances coverage and efficiency, but early and ongoing engagement is essential to refine routes, schedules, and fare structures. Investments in stop amenities and clear rider information significantly improve the user experience and encourage growth in ridership. Finally, integration with regional on-demand services, such as Lunenburg County Wheels, strengthens overall accessibility and provides a model of coordination between urban and rural service delivery.

3.3 Pictou County, NS



3.3.1 Pictou County Transit Details

Town Population: 3,200	**Transit Authority:** Pictou County Transit, CHAD Transit
Regional Population: 43,000	**Town Transit Type:** Fixed Flag Stop Route
Transit Contact: Marg MacIntosh, Marg@CHADTransit.ca (PCT and CHAD)	**Regional Transit Type:** Expansion Fixed-Route, On Demand
Fares: **Town Single Ride:** $3.00	**Fixed Route Schedule:** Hour-long route, once per hour

Town Day Pass: $7.50 **Expansion Day:** $5.00 **Monthly Pass:** $70.00, $60.00 Senior/ Student, $40.00 Youth **On Demand:** Based on distance	**Provided Info:** Fixed Route Transit Service Expansion Pilot Study, Lessons Learned Survey

3.3.2 Transit Offerings

Pictou County Transit operates a flag-stop fixed-route system that serves the towns of Stellarton and New Glasgow, running on an hour-long loop with a flat fare of $3.00 for a single trip or $5.00 for a day pass. This route provides predictable coverage across key destinations and has been a foundation for mobility within the county. With an hour-long route, the bus is scheduled to arrive at any stop location on the hour, every hour, making it easy to navigate for new users.

In 2024, Pictou County introduced an expansion route to connect additional communities beyond the core service area. While this initiative demonstrated an apparent demand for regional connectivity, it has struggled to achieve projected ridership, with engagement showing that many residents were unaware of the service or how to access it. Nevertheless, the expansion route reflects ongoing efforts to broaden mobility options across the region and importantly, ridership has been increasing.

All Pictou County Transit vehicles are fully accessible, equipped with low floors and wheelchair ramps, ensuring mobility for residents with disabilities and seniors. Service hours are structured to support both commuting and daily trips, with operations focused on weekdays to connect residents to work, shopping, and appointments.

Complementing these fixed-route services, CHAD Transit provides a door-to-door on-demand service across Pictou County. This service is particularly valuable for residents in rural or lower-density areas, as well as those requiring accessibility services. Together, Pictou County Transit and CHAD Transit form a hybrid model of mobility that balances the consistency of scheduled fixed routes with the flexibility of on-demand transportation, offering lessons in how urban and rural service delivery can be coordinated.

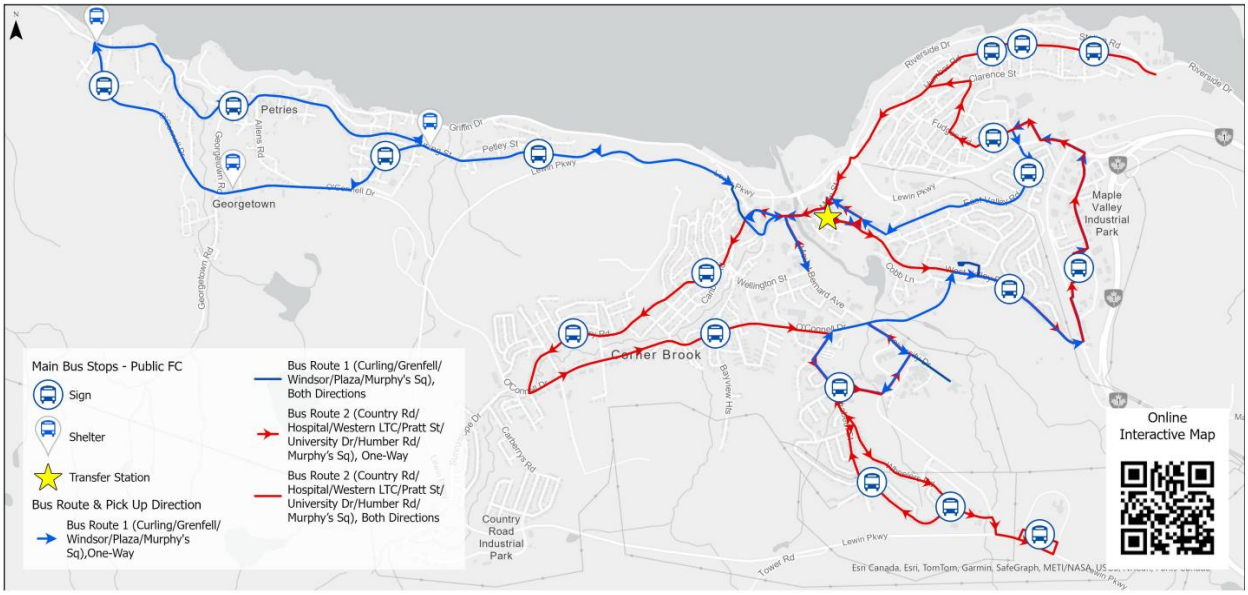
3.3.3 Lessons Learned

The *Pictou County Fixed Route Transit Service Expansion Pilot Study* indicated that feedback from riders in Pictou County indicates strong support for having a reliable and affordable local public transit option. The $3.00 single fare and $5.00 day pass were generally highlighted as affordable options, particularly for individuals making multiple trips in a day. Similar to other rural systems, the fixed flag-stop route enabled access to essential services, employment, education, and shopping, while also offering flexibility for spontaneous travel.

However, riders identified several barriers to regular use. Respondents frequently mentioned that buses did not come often enough, that trips could be lengthy or indirect, and that stops were sometimes too far from destinations. Limited-service hours and gaps in geographic coverage were also cited as significant challenges. These findings suggest that while the service provides an important foundation, frequency and convenience remain limiting factors for attracting and retaining riders.

In terms of improvements, residents expressed a desire for more frequent service, better route design to reduce travel times, and increased accessibility at stops. Extended service hours, particularly for evenings and weekends, were also identified as priorities. Investments in comfort and safety, including shelters and benches, along with clearer rider information and communication, were highlighted as necessary to make the system more attractive to both existing and potential users. Introducing technology such as real-time bus tracking or the ability to plan trips with Google Maps would help use the service.

3.4 Corner Brook, NL



3.4.1 Corner Brook Transit Details

Town Population: 19,000	**Transit Authority: Corner Brook Transit**
Regional Population: 30,000	**Town Transit Type:** Fixed-Route
Transit Contact: Aaron O'Brien, aobrien@cornerbrook.com	**Regional Transit Type:** N/A
Fares: **Single Fare**: $3.25, $2.00 Youth **5 Ride Pass**: $13.50, $12.50 Student/ Senior **Monthly Pass**: $80.00, $60.00 Senior, $55.00 Student **Student Semester Pass (4 Months):** $220.00 **On Demand:** Based on distance.	**Route Schedule:** Hour-long, once per hour **Provided Info:** Lessons Learned Survey

3.4.2 Transit Offerings

Corner Brook offers transit through two fixed-route bus routes that cover the entire city, circulating through residential neighbourhoods, the downtown area, and key destinations such as the hospital, shopping centres, and post-secondary institutions. The routes intersect at the main transfer terminal in the downtown area. Service runs on weekdays from 7 am to 6 pm with no service available on weekends or holidays. Both routes operate on an hour-long loop with stops at the same time every hour. Corner Brook's Transit only uses accessible, low-floor buses and applies a flat fare structure designed to keep costs affordable for riders.

Launching only in July 2025, Corner Brook also operates a separate on-demand accessible transit service for residents with mobility challenges. This door-to-door system ensures that seniors and persons with disabilities can access medical appointments, shopping, and community activities. The fixed-route service offers comprehensive coverage and visibility throughout the city. Together, the two systems illustrate a dual approach to mobility: fixed routes provide consistency and coverage for the general population, while on-demand services ensure inclusion for residents with accessibility needs.

3.4.3 Lessons Learned

Based on the lessons learned survey, Corner Brook highlights that residents value having a fixed-route transit system in Corner Brook as it provides affordable and reliable mobility across the city. The system was primarily used by students, seniors, and newcomers to Canada. They emphasized the importance of considering accessibility needs and exploring partnerships and advertising services with the community to improve ridership.

The most common concerns were related to service frequency and scheduling, with long wait times between buses making the system inconvenient for time-sensitive trips. The hour-long fixed route loops were described as being inefficient, and the town is in the process of reviewing alternative routes. Limited evening and weekend service also restricted ridership. Riders also noted that some stops were not conveniently located or required lengthy walks to access.

Key recommendations include increasing service frequency, particularly during peak hours, and extending operating hours into evenings and weekends, as well as redesigning routes to be more efficient. Corner Brook is also in the process of offering on-demand services and software on their fixed routes to live tracking, estimated time of arrival at stops, and an electronic payment system for easier access. Overall, the service is highly valued by the community, but the route design must strike a balance between affordability and convenience. Reliable frequency and well-placed stops are key to growing ridership. Complementing the fixed-route system with targeted service improvements and clear communication can enhance accessibility and satisfaction for existing and new riders.

3.5 Summerside, PEI

3.5.1 T3 Summerside Transit Details

Town Population: 16,000	**Transit Authority:** T3 Transit
Regional Population: 80,000 (Combined population of Charlottetown, Stratford, Cornwall, and Summerside)	**Town Transit Type:** Fixed Flag Stop Route
Transit Contact: Mike Cassidy, (902) 393-0139	**Regional Transit Type:** Direct between population centres

Fares: **Single Ride:** $2.00, Free for youth under 12 **10 Ride Booklet**: $18.00 **Monthly Pass**: $20.00, $10.00 Student/ Senior **Rural Transit**: Based on distances.	**Route Schedule:** Shorter variable routes, 30 minutes max **Provided Info:** Phone Interview

3.5.2 Transit Offerings

T3 Transit operates a hybrid fixed-route network across several key municipalities on Prince Edward Island, including Summerside, Charlottetown, Stratford, and Cornwall. T3 serves an estimated combined population of around 80,000 across the four communities. In Summerside, service runs from Monday to Friday, 6:15 am to 6:45 pm. The fixed-route service connects residential neighbourhoods to key destinations such as downtown, hospitals, shopping centres, and community facilities. The schedule operates on a timetable with scheduled stops for each location and some flag stops offered depending on the time of day. The route changes every hour based on expected demand throughout the day. The route takes between 15 to 40 minutes to travel from one end of the city to the other. Popular stops are made in both directions to decrease the time spent on the bus.

In addition to city transit, T3 offers Rural Transit, which aims to connect most of the major population centres in PEI through a direct route between neighbouring centres. The Rural Transit routes must be booked in advance, and the cost depends on the route distance. Rural Transit, in combination with fixed routes in Charlottetown, Stratford, and Cornwall, extends the network across the provincial capital region. These routes establish broader regional connectivity and reinforce transit as a vital mobility option for both urban and semi-urban communities. The combined system highlights how small municipalities can collaborate to deliver a more coordinated service offering, with shared management, branding, and operating efficiencies.

T3 Transit has demonstrated notable performance growth over the past few years. In 2022, the system saw record ridership levels, with one month (July) reaching 77,000 passenger fares, marking the highest tally for that month on record. Additionally, T3's annual ridership in the combined service area (Charlottetown / Cornwall / Stratford) has exceeded pre-pandemic levels, with growth driven in part by provincial subsidies on fares and increased service investment.

3.5.3 Lessons Learned

From T3's experience, several lessons stand out as potentially relevant to Gander. First, fare subsidies and institutional support (e.g., free youth transit) can significantly boost ridership by lowering financial barriers. Second, incremental service expansion, such as zone buses or drop-off modes, can extend usability beyond strict fixed-route hours without requiring the full deployment of new routes. Third, consistent investment in accessibility, fleet features, and rider information fosters user confidence and enhances the system's reputation. Finally, T3's growth highlights the importance of regional coordination and shared governance across municipalities in delivering more scalable transit offerings without overburdening individual towns.

Key lessons learned and recommendations from T3 included:

1. The importance of keeping routes short in duration. T3 suggested that people don't want to be on the bus longer than 22 minutes.
2. Routes should be built around universities, hospitals, malls and popular roads.
3. Taxis can be a good resource, as they are often busy; similarly, a bus would also be busy in that area.
4. Stopping infrastructure is essential, especially during the winter months.

5. When implementing rural routes, they should be designed with consideration for the users, such as students, workers, and seniors.

The lessons learned from Summerside align with the findings of longer, fixed-loop routes offered in other case studies.

3.6 St. Anthony Basin, NL

3.6.1 St. Anthony Basin Transit Details

Town Population: 2,500	**Transit Authority:** SABRI Transit
Regional Population: 8,000	**Town Transit Type:** Hybrid approach. Fixed route with a variable schedule. On-Demand during low-demand periods.
Transit Contact: Felicia Hillier, feliciahillier@sabrinl.com	**Regional Transit Type**: Fixed-Route
Fares: **Single Ride**: $3.00 **12 Ride Booklet**: $30.00 **Day Pass:** $10.00 **Monthly Pass**: $80.00, $60.00 Student/ Seniors	**Route Schedule:** Varies **Provided Info:** Public info only

3.6.2 Transit Offerings

St. Anthony Basin Resources Inc. (SABRI) provides public transit services to the town of St. Anthony and the surrounding region in northern Newfoundland. The town has a population base of approximately 2,500, with a total of 8,000 across the region. The service model is a hybrid approach, combining a fixed-route structure with variable scheduling and on-demand service during periods of low demand. This flexible design enables SABRI to strike a balance between affordability and accessibility, while accommodating the unique travel needs of a smaller, more rural population base.

SABRI's fare structure is set at $2.50 per ride or $10.00 per day. The system's schedule varies depending on demand, ensuring that service is not oversupplied during quiet periods while still providing reliable

mobility to essential destinations such as employment, healthcare, and shopping. Regional trips are also supported through fixed-route connections, enabling access between St. Anthony and neighbouring communities.

Although SABRI did not provide direct survey responses, public information indicates that its hybrid service model plays a crucial role in connecting residents of remote and rural communities, where private vehicle ownership is often the only alternative. By combining fixed and flexible elements, the system offers a scalable solution for smaller municipalities seeking to optimize coverage and efficiency within constrained budgets.

3.7 Transit Impact Considerations

The case study analysis provided valuable insights not only into the operational aspects of small-urban transit systems but also into the broader impacts these systems have on the communities they serve. These impacts extend well beyond transit and can have far-reaching effects on social, economic, employment, housing, infrastructure, and the environment within the community.

These considerations are intended to help the Town of Gander understand the potential benefits and challenges that may arise from implementing a transit system. While not exhaustive, they summarize key themes observed in the case study communities and outline how similar outcomes could apply in Gander's context. The subsections that follow provide a high-level description of these impacts, highlighting potential benefits for residents, businesses, and the region. Ultimately, these impacts should be viewed alongside operational and financial feasibility to ensure that transit planning in Gander balances community benefits with long-term sustainability and resource considerations.

3.7.1 Social Impacts

Transit systems play a significant role in supporting social equity, cohesion, and inclusion. By providing affordable and reliable mobility options, transit ensures that all residents, regardless of age, income, or ability, can participate in community life. For countless people, transit has expanded access to healthcare, recreation, and education, thereby strengthening residents' overall quality of life and sense of belonging.

For Gander, the introduction of public transit could substantially enhance social outcomes, as supported through community engagement. Youth would benefit from improved access to after-school programs, part-time employment, and recreational opportunities, reducing dependence on parents or caregivers for transportation. Seniors, who represent a significant proportion of the population, would gain independence and the ability to age in place with dignity by reliably accessing healthcare, shopping, and social activities.

Public transit also has the potential to foster stronger regional ties. By linking Gander with surrounding communities, such as Appleton, Glenwood, and Benton, residents can participate more fully in regional services and events, thereby building cohesion across the Gander Region. In this way, transit serves not only as a means of moving people but also as an investment in inclusive growth and stronger social infrastructure.

3.7.2 Economic Impacts

Public transit systems in small and mid-sized communities can play a critical role in supporting local and regional economic activity. Beyond the direct employment required to operate and administer services, transit enables broader participation in the workforce by reducing mobility barriers for those without access to a private vehicle. Transit benefits employers just as much as it expands their available labour pool for

local employees. Furthermore, by reducing dependence on private vehicles, transit can help reduce or even eliminate the capital and operating costs associated with owning a personal vehicle.

In addition to the benefits that transit can have on the workforce, it can also increase customer access to local businesses. Transit systems serving downtowns and major commercial areas enable residents to access shopping districts and service centers more easily, thereby promoting local demand and economic activity. Expanding transit to rural or dispersed areas extends these benefits to smaller communities, ensuring that local businesses outside of core service areas remain connected to larger regional markets. From a municipal perspective, investment in transit can yield indirect fiscal benefits. Increased economic participation supports personal and business incomes, which in turn generate tax revenues at both the local and provincial levels.

While the true economic impact of introducing a transit system in Gander can't be predicted, the Canadian Urban Transit Association (CUTA) has published financial statistics up to 2023 for Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) and across Canada. Total passenger fare revenue across all public transit in NL peaked in 2019 at approximately $6.2 million before the COVID-19 pandemic. Although data is unavailable for 2024–2025, revenue recovered to $4.94 million in 2023 after declining significantly during the pandemic, which is largely attributed to COVID-19 restrictions. In 2023, total national transit revenue reached $5.8 billion, supported by an estimated service area population of 26 million people and $10.84 billion in capital funding sources, largely from provincial, federal, and municipal contributions.

CUTA's 2019 issue paper, "*The Economic Impact of Transit Investment in Canada"*, further highlights the magnitude of public transit's contribution to Canada's economy. The study estimated that the national transit industry generates at least $19 billion in annual economic benefits, directly employs approximately 59,600 Canadians, and supports over 65,000 jobs through capital investments. According to the same study, transit reduces personal vehicle operating costs by approximately $12.6 billion annually and generates around $609 million in annual tax revenues from capital investment alone.

While these figures represent provincial and national estimates, they illustrate the scale of benefits that even modest local systems can achieve through reduced vehicle dependence, increased employment access, and access to local spending. For Gander, the economic implications of a future transit system could be significant. Improved access to employment, education, healthcare, and commercial areas can enhance workforce participation, strengthen downtown commercial vitality, and support the town's regional service hub ambitions. Even a small-scale, reliable transit system could generate measurable economic multipliers by reducing mobility barriers and fostering more inclusive access to opportunity.

3.7.3 Tourism Impacts

Public transit can generate significant benefits for the tourism sector, particularly in small urban and regional centers that serve as gateways to surrounding attractions. Accessible and affordable transit provides visitors with a convenient way to reach hotels, cultural sites, shopping districts, and recreational facilities without relying on private vehicles. For communities such as Corner Brook and St Anthony Basin, local transit has supported the tourism economy by making it easier for visitors to navigate the town, attend events, or support local businesses.

For Gander, transit could strengthen its role as a regional hub and entry point for visitors to Central Newfoundland. A reliable transit service would enable tourists arriving by air at Gander International Airport or by intercity bus to connect seamlessly to accommodations, attractions, and events within the community. Improved transit connections could also enhance access to regional destinations.

In addition to visitor spending, transit can also support the tourism economy by improving workforce access. Students or seasonal employees, who are often younger workers without reliable access to vehicles, would benefit from affordable transportation to jobs. Over time, enhanced mobility for both visitors and employees can contribute to a more active tourism economy in Gander.

3.7.4 Employment and Population Impacts

Transit systems can have notable effects on community demographics. By enhancing mobility, communities become more attractive to young families, seniors, and individuals without access to a private vehicle. The availability of transit can support a community's ability to retain youth populations by ensuring access to schools and part-time employment, while also providing seniors with the independence required to age in place.

Looking more broadly at the impacts on employment that a transit system can have at the most basic level, operating a public transit system creates jobs for drivers, dispatchers, schedulers, and administrative staff. Transit systems can also support indirect employment by contributing to local economic development.

More importantly, as described above, transit enables broader workforce participation by connecting residents to employment opportunities. Case studies consistently showed that transit is most often used to access jobs in retail, healthcare, education, and service sectors. In Corner Brook, for example, fixed-route transit has been critical for employees commuting to the hospital, schools, and shopping centres. Similarly, on-demand services in rural areas help ensure that residents in smaller communities can reach employment hubs in nearby towns.

In Gander's context, reliable transit could bolster its role as a regional hub within Central Newfoundland, supporting growth and stability in both the core community and surrounding feeder towns. Improved connectivity can counterbalance rural depopulation trends by enabling residents in smaller communities to remain in place while still accessing essential services, education, and employment opportunities in Gander. In Gander, many residents work in regional service roles at the hospital, airport, schools, and government offices. Transit could reduce barriers for those without access to a vehicle, particularly youth and lower-income residents. Affordable and reliable transit would also strengthen the seasonal workforce, supporting tourism, retail, and hospitality jobs by making positions accessible to individuals who might otherwise be excluded due to transportation challenges. Over time, enhanced workforce mobility can contribute to greater economic resilience and competitiveness for the town and the surrounding region.

3.7.5 Regional Infrastructure and Housing

Transit is closely linked to patterns of infrastructure development and housing. Many people, particularly students, seniors, low-income individuals, and those with accessibility challenges, choose housing based on the availability of public transit. Communities with accessible public transit are more inclusive and can attract more people to the area. It also provides those with no other means of transportation with increased access to more affordable housing, which is often located outside of urban centres.

According to CUTA's 2019 issue paper, "*The Economic Impact of Transit Investment in Canada"*, transit systems can also influence the efficiency of local road networks and the demand for parking infrastructure. In small urban centres, transit has helped reduce traffic congestion, which is especially useful during peak hours, particularly around schools, hospitals, and commercial areas. Even modest reductions in personal vehicles can have significant effects in towns where road networks are limited and parking supply is under pressure. For municipalities, reducing reliance on personal vehicles can also delay or eliminate the need for costly investments in road widening, new intersections, or expanded parking facilities.

For Gander, a future transit system could support housing affordability and long-term planning objectives by reducing the reliance on private vehicles, thereby lowering household transportation costs, increasing access to affordable housing, and reducing parking in downtown cores. Over time, transit investment could help attract new housing developments in Gander's residential areas while also ensuring regional residents can access essential amenities. By providing reliable alternatives, transit could also improve safety by reducing traffic volumes during peak times. These reductions can contribute to more efficient land use in Gander, freeing up space that would be needed for parking to support other community priorities such as housing, green space, or commercial development.

3.7.6 Environmental Impacts

Public transit offers significant opportunities to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, improve air quality, and support climate adaptation goals. In smaller urban and rural communities, a large share of trips are made by personal vehicles. Introducing a reliable and convenient transit system can shift a portion of these trips to shared modes, thereby directly reducing emissions in proportion to the number of riders. Even modest transit investments can generate significant reductions in car dependency, which in turn can help alleviate local traffic congestion, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and other air pollutants.

In CUTA's "*The GHG Reduction Impact of Public Transit",* it was highlighted that Canada's transportation sector represents 24% of carbon emissions in Canada. Canada aims to achieve a zero-emission by 2050, and has available funding to help municipalities reach this goal through public transit. According to the CUTA GHG report, it was estimated that someone can reduce their GHG emissions per km by approximately 77% if they decide to use a standard diesel bus. This reduction would be even greater with the implementation of zero-emission options such as electric buses.

For Gander, where many residents must travel to access employment, healthcare, and education, a local and regional transit system could play a central role in advancing environmental sustainability. Reduced reliance on private vehicles would not only cut emissions but also decrease fuel costs for households, improve air quality, and contribute to broader climate resilience objectives in Newfoundland and Labrador. Transit also aligns with provincial and federal policy directions emphasizing climate action and sustainable community development.

4.0 Community Engagement

Community engagement is critical to understanding the town's strategic vision for a regional public transit network and providing equitable access for residents of the Town of Gander region. Our approach includes gathering feedback from municipal staff, community partners, organizations, business leaders, and underrepresented community groups to ensure we have heard a broad range of perspectives and community experiences. Feedback was gathered from key members of the Town of Gander using two main strategies:

- **Online survey** - The team designed and distributed a public survey to capture residents' transit habits, needs, and challenges, including optional demographic questions to identify specific requirements of different community groups. The online survey was effective in engaging with large groups of people to collect specific responses to multiple-choice questions.
- **Stakeholder interviews** - The team conducted interviews with key groups identified by the Town of Gander, including municipal staff, community organizations, business leaders, and underrepresented groups, which allowed for diverse responses to the interview questions and enabled a better understanding of transit demand in Gander.

The results of the survey and interviews are discussed in the following sections.

4.1 Public Engagement Demographics

An online survey with 14 questions was publicly advertised by the Town of Gander, which closed on October 14th, 2025. A total of 301 responses were received. Of the 301 survey respondents, 288 resided in the Town of Gander, with an additional 4 respondents living in the Gander region, which includes Benton, Appleton, and Glenwood. The remaining 9 respondents lived within 150 km of Gander. Figure 5 shows the age demographics of the survey respondents. The 35-44 age group was the most popular, with respondents under 18 representing only 1% of responses, and those over 65 representing approximately 10% of respondents. Approximately 68% of the participants were women, 29% were men, with the remaining 3% identifying as non-binary or preferring not to disclose their gender. Figure 6 displays the identity groups of the respondents, highlighting that 69 respondents belong to one or more of these identity groups.

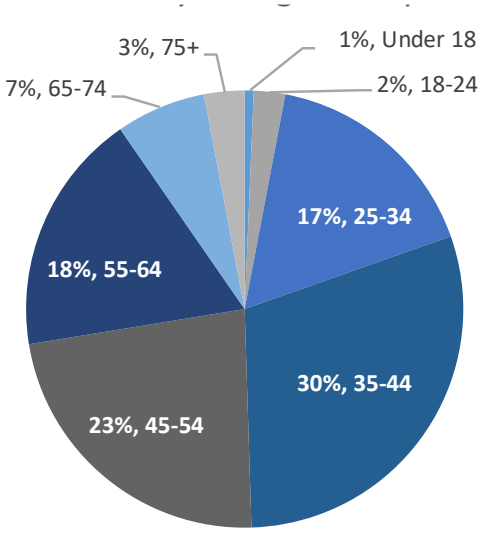


Figure 5 Survey Respondents: Age Demographics

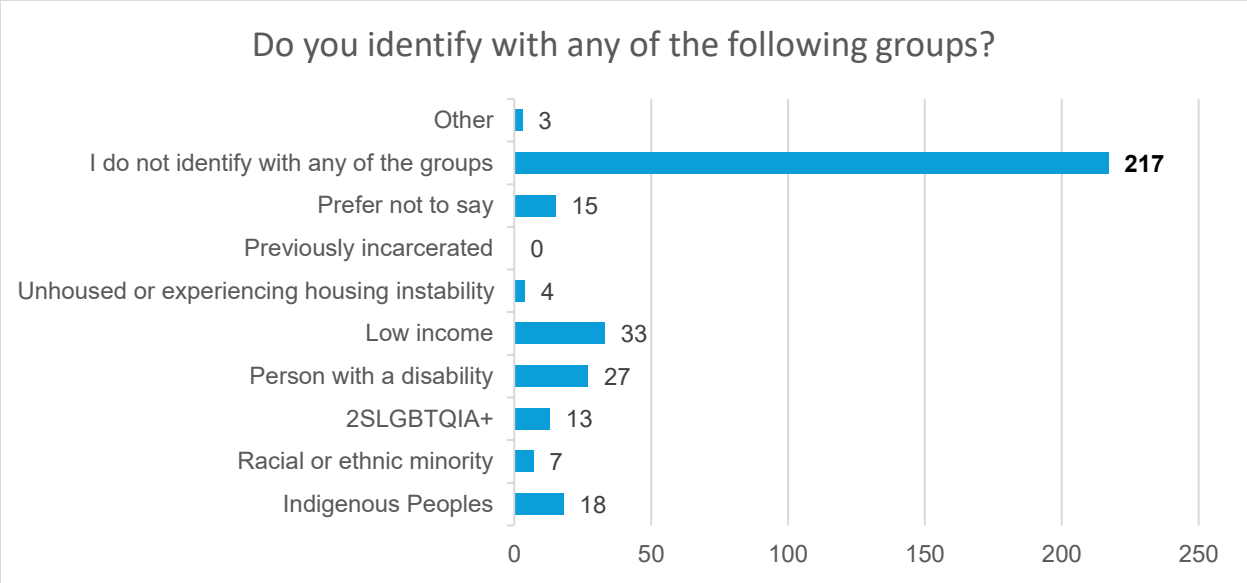


Figure 6 Survey Respondents: Identity Groups

Figure 7 illustrates the employment status of the respondents, with the majority working full-time, followed by 15% who are retired. Only 3% of survey respondents were students.

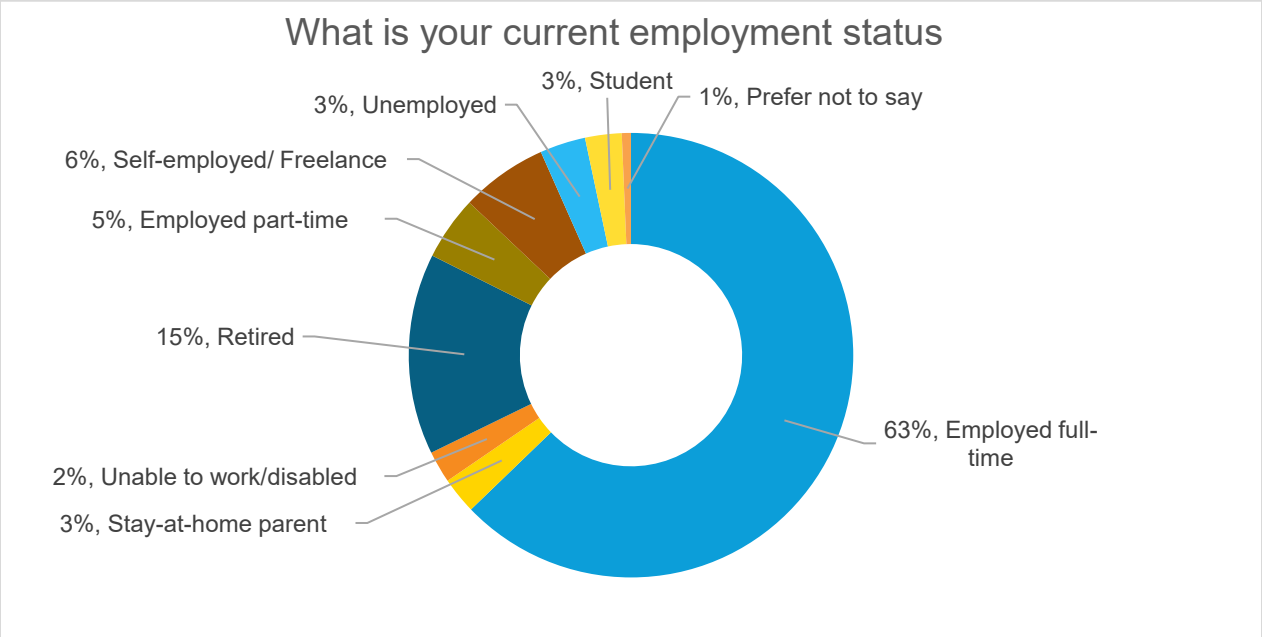


Figure 7 Survey Respondents: Current Employment Status

In addition to the online survey, stakeholder interviews were also conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the transportation challenges, priorities, and expectations of key community partners across Gander and the surrounding region. In consultation with the Town of Gander, the following key stakeholder groups were identified:

1. Town of Gander Council
2. Healthcare
3. Education and Training
4. Business and Employment
5. Vulnerable Populations and Social Supports
6. Immigrants and newcomers

The discussions centred on identifying shared and group-specific transportation challenges, current modes of travel, and opportunities to enhance accessibility and mobility throughout the region. The input gathered provides valuable context for interpreting the community's broader transportation needs and helps to ensure that the eventual recommendations are grounded in local experience.

4.2 Transportation Needs

Interviews with key stakeholders confirmed that transportation plays a crucial role in enabling daily life in Gander. Despite being a small and compact community, the physical distribution of amenities, services, and employment areas creates a consistent and varied need for travel among residents and workers. Across all groups, travel in Gander occurs frequently and for a wide variety of purposes.

When respondents were asked how often they required transportation, 45% reported needing transportation at least every weekday. 12% needed transportation a few times per week, 17% a few times per month, with the remaining 27% reporting that they rarely or never required transportation. Figure 8 illustrates the time of day when respondents need to travel. At least 40% of respondents indicated that they needed to travel during each of the AM rush, PM rush, midday, or evening periods, with the peak travel times occurring during the AM and PM rushes. 22% indicated they needed to travel before 7:00 a.m., and 26% indicated they needed to travel after 9:00 p.m.

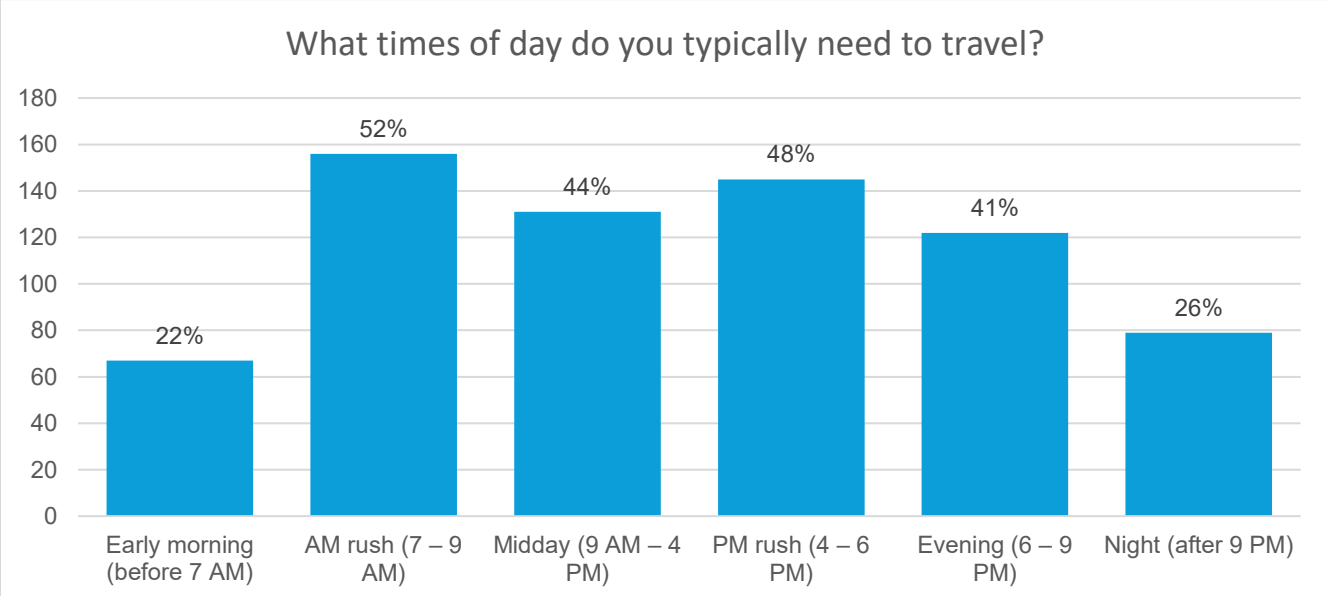


Figure 8 Survey Respondents: What time of day do you typically need to travel?

Stakeholders identified employment, education, medical appointments, grocery shopping, and recreational activities as the most common reasons for travel. This aligns with the survey responses, as shown in Figure

9 below, where grocery shopping, workplaces, and medical appointments are the top three most common reasons for travel.

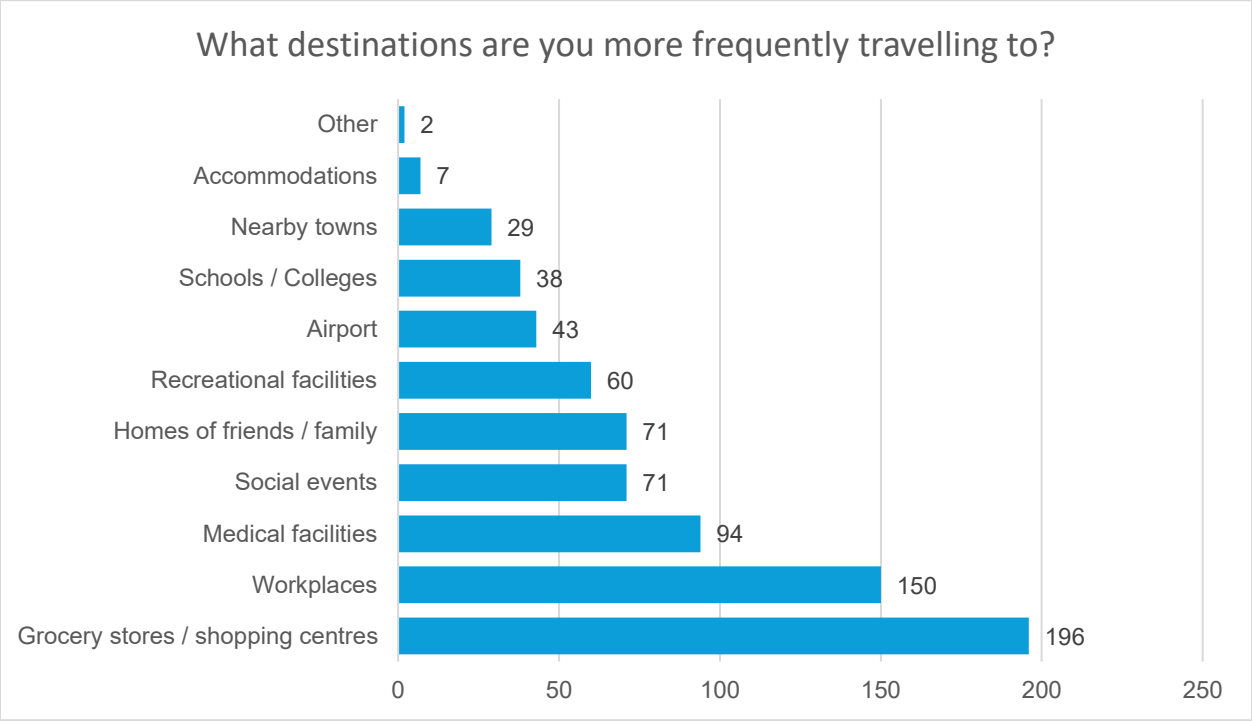


Figure 9 Survey Respondents: What destinations are you more frequently travelling to?

Each stakeholder group generally identified similar transportation needs; however, each group was also faced with unique challenges. Healthcare providers noted that residents often need to travel to the hospital, clinics, or pharmacies multiple times per week. Residents in smaller, outlying communities often commute to Gander for specialized or routine services. Walking to the hospital is neither safe nor practical due to its location on the outskirts of town, and needing to cross a busy highway, often during peak travel times. Employers and business representatives emphasized that most staff travel daily within or to Gander for work, with some commuting from as far as Gander Bay, Glenwood, or Appleton.

Education stakeholders reported that students travel every weekday between housing, the College of the North Atlantic campus, clinical placement sites, and workplaces. Many students also need transportation for groceries and other errands. Students or other newcomers to the town often do not have a personal vehicle, whether due to the high cost or a lack of credit from having recently entered the Country. Without any other form of transportation, they can often feel socially isolated and dependent on friends and colleagues with whom they may not yet have a good relationship.

Community organizations and advocates for vulnerable populations identified frequent trips for essential errands, such as grocery shopping, banking, and accessing social programs. These groups also reported that many individuals must make multiple trips per day to meet their basic needs.

In summary, stakeholders identified that travel in Gander is essential and frequent, with many residents making multiple trips daily for work, school, and essential services. Destinations are dispersed, often requiring travel across long distances even within town limits. There is a regional reliance on Gander for healthcare, shopping, and employment, which extends travel needs beyond locals. Winter conditions exacerbate existing barriers, particularly for individuals who walk or rely on informal transportation.

4.3 Current Forms of Transportation

Of the 301 respondents, 245 or approximately 81% reported having consistent access to a personal vehicle. Approximately 10% do not have access to a personal vehicle, while the remaining 9% have inconsistent access to one. Figure 10 shows that the most commonly used form of transportation, aside from personal vehicles, is walking, with 56% of respondents, followed by taxis, and then rides from friends and family.

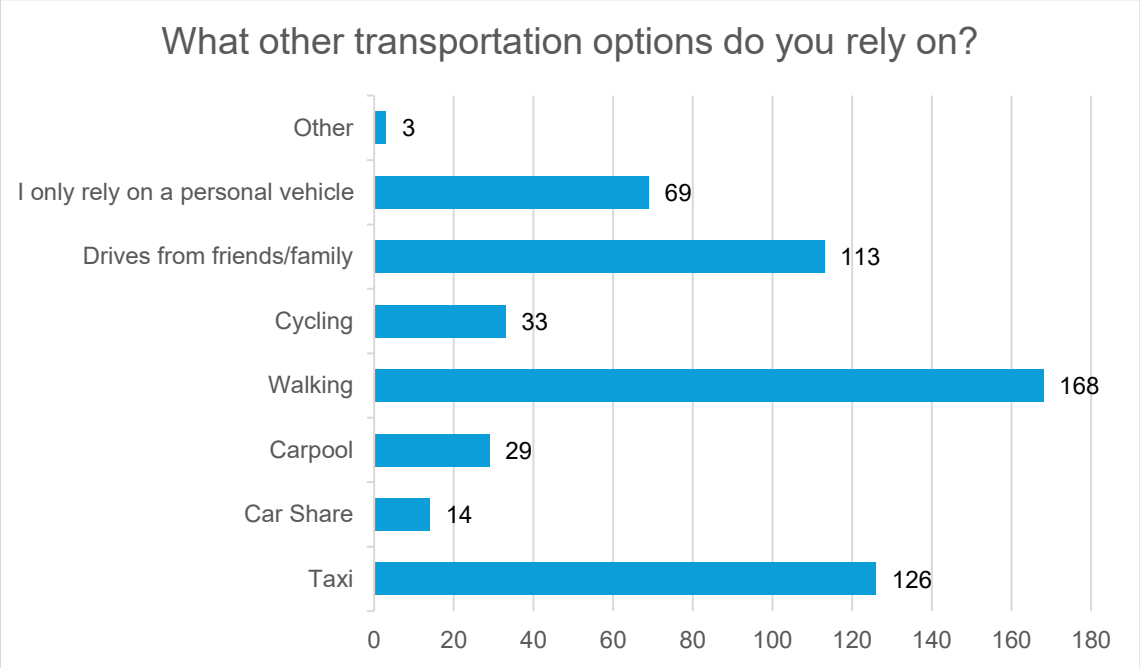


Figure 10 Survey Respondents: Other Forms of Relied Upon Transportation

Almost all stakeholder groups identified that most residents rely on personal vehicles for daily travel. This reliance extends across employment, education, and healthcare sectors, with most trips made by car due to the town's dispersed land use and limited walkability. Employers and business leaders observed that staff typically drive to work, often from nearby communities such as Glenwood, Appleton, or Gander Bay. Stakeholders noted that vehicle dependency is so deeply embedded in local culture that the absence of a vehicle often equates to reduced independence and participation in community life.

Walking remains the most common alternative to driving, particularly among students and lower-income residents. Educational institutions reported that many students walk significant distances, up to 4 or 5 kilometres, to reach campus or workplaces, even along major roads with limited sidewalks and lighting. While walking is feasible in some central areas, winter weather conditions and safety concerns severely limit its practicality for much of the year. Cycling was mentioned rarely and is not viewed as a realistic or safe option, especially during colder months.

Taxi services are currently the only formal alternative to private vehicles. However, stakeholders across multiple groups described the service as expensive, unreliable, and insufficiently available to meet local demand. The single taxi operator in town reportedly prioritizes airport service, leaving local trips with long wait times or no service at all. Accessible taxis are particularly limited, with some stakeholders indicating that only one accessible vehicle may be available in the region. As a result, individuals with mobility challenges, seniors, and low-income residents frequently depend on family, friends, or neighbours for

transportation to medical appointments, work, or essential errands. These informal arrangements are often inconsistent and place social pressure on both riders and drivers.

To summarize, personal vehicles dominate transportation patterns, with few affordable or reliable alternatives available. Taxi service capacity is limited, both in terms of cost and availability, especially for accessible transport. Walking serves as a last resort, with safety and seasonal limitations restricting use. Reliance on family and community support fills gaps in the absence of a formal transit system, but it also creates inequity and dependency.

4.4 Difficulties of Transportation

Respondents were asked to identify the difficulties they experienced in finding transportation. As shown in Figure 11- 42% of respondents identified limited options, and 31% identified affordability as a difficulty. A total of 117 respondents reported no difficulties.

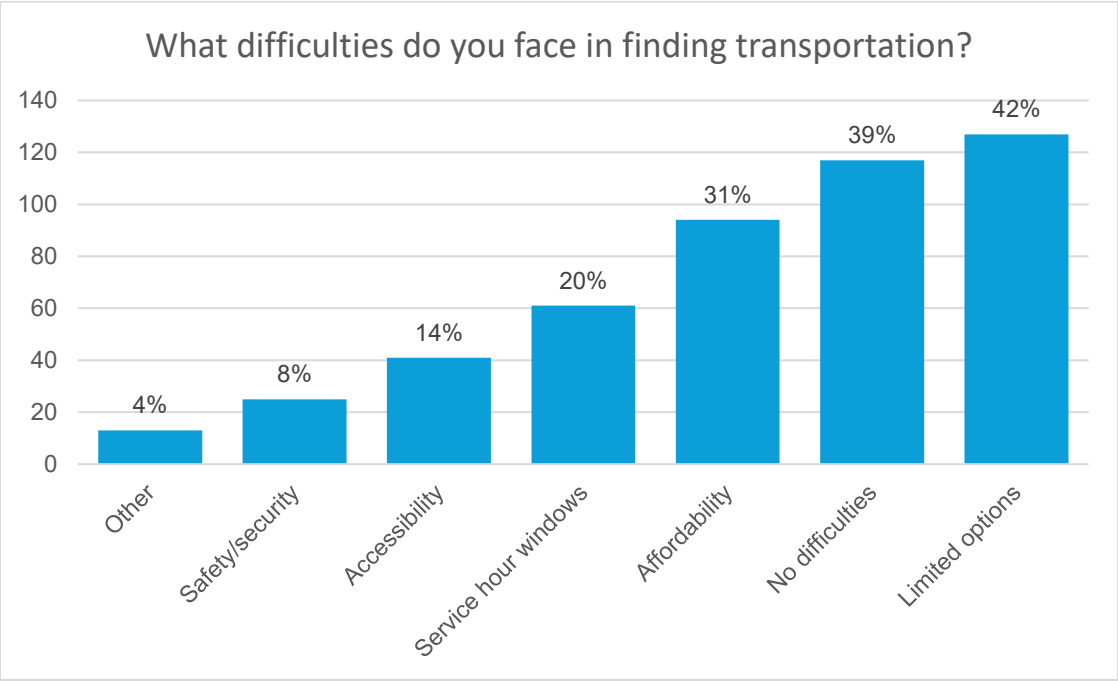


Figure 11 Survey Respondents: Difficulties in finding transportation

When asked how often they had difficulty finding transportation, 66% of respondents identified never or rarely having any difficulty. The remining 34% had difficulties at least a few times per month, as shown in Figure 12.

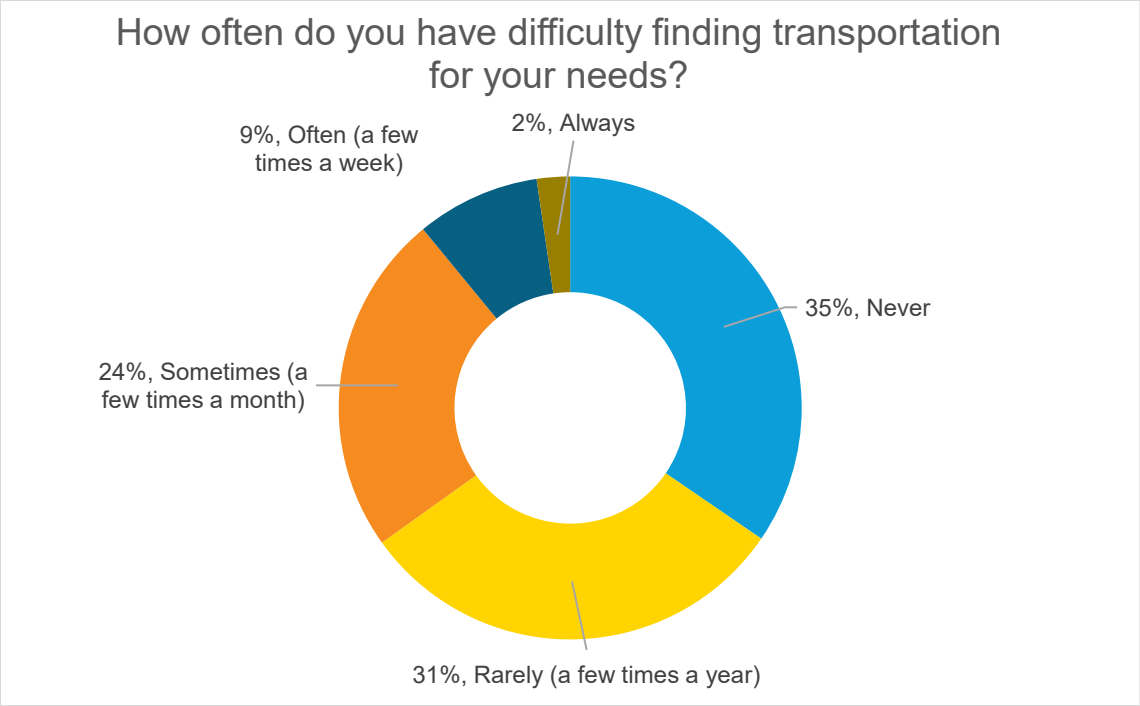


Figure 12 Survey Respondents: How often do you have difficulty finding transportation

Across all stakeholder groups, several consistent themes emerged regarding the barriers that residents face when travelling within and around Gander. These difficulties affect a wide range of community members, including seniors, youth, students, low-income individuals, newcomers, and persons with disabilities, and stem primarily from limited transportation options, affordability concerns, and infrastructure gaps.

One of the most frequently cited challenges is the cost of transportation. For residents without a personal vehicle, taxi fares were described as prohibitively expensive, particularly for those making frequent trips for medical appointments or shift work. Accessibility was also identified as a major concern, with limited or no access to vehicles that can accommodate mobility aids. Organizations serving seniors and people with disabilities noted that many clients depend entirely on others for transportation, leaving them isolated or missing critical appointments when assistance is unavailable.

Stakeholders consistently described unreliable and insufficient transportation options, particularly outside regular business hours. The single taxi provider often cannot meet local demand, especially during peak periods or when drivers prioritize longer airport runs. For individuals who work night shifts, participate in evening programs, or require early morning travel, transportation is often unavailable. Community organizations expressed frustration at the lack of predictable options to support clients' participation in programs and services.

In summary, affordability and accessibility remain the primary barriers for residents without personal vehicles. Taxi services lack reliability and capacity, particularly for after-hours travel and accessible service. Gander's dispersed layout and winter conditions exacerbate travel difficulties for pedestrians and cyclists. Transportation limitations restrict access to essential services, employment, and social participation, disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups.

4.5 Expectations of a Public Transit System

When asked about concerns respondents had regarding using public transit, limited-service hours and reliability/ on-time performance were the most common concerns, with more than 40% of respondents highlighting both as concerns. The cost of fares and the lack of routes near their homes or workplaces were other common concerns, with more than 30% of respondents highlighting each as a concern.

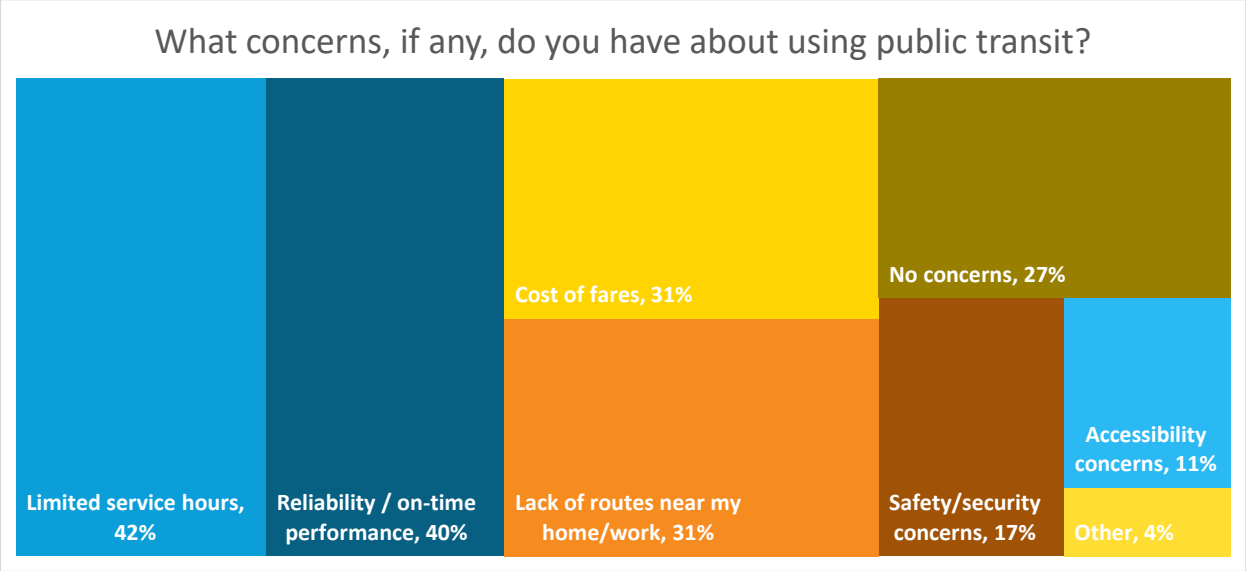


Figure 13 Survey Respondents: What concerns do you have about using public transit?

Similarly, respondents were asked what would encourage them to use public transit. 47% of respondents stated that affordable fares, 45% said that convenient schedules, and 31% said that convenient routes would encourage them to use public transit.

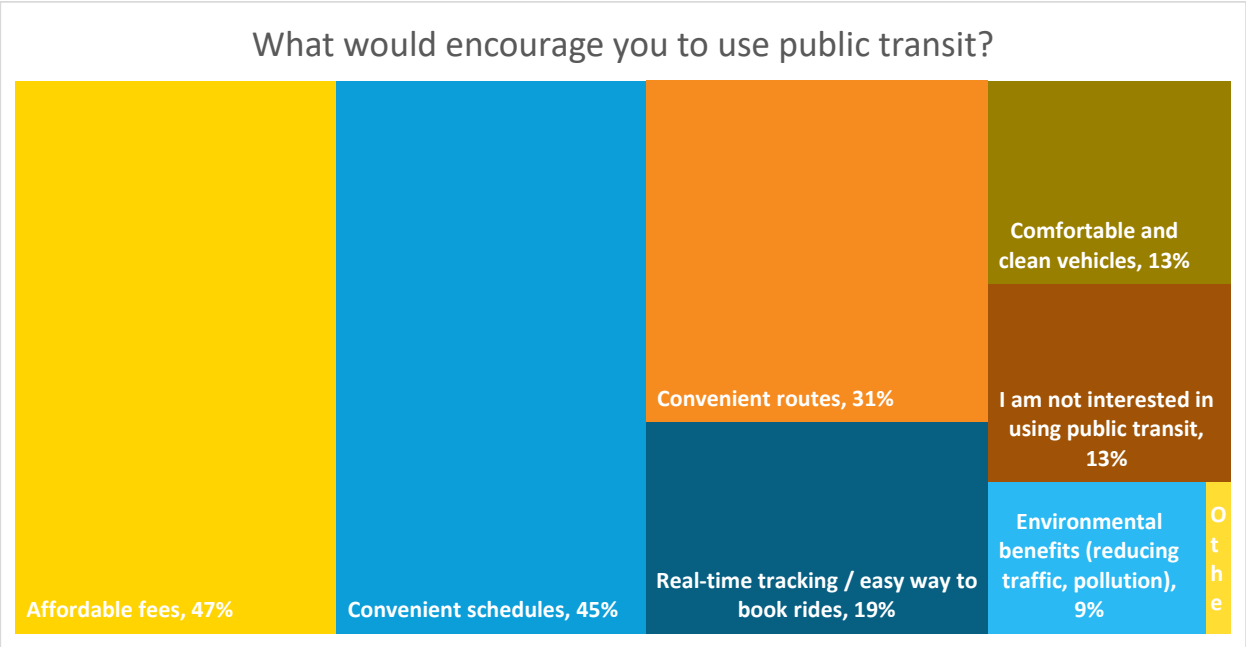


Figure 14 Survey Respondents: What would encourage you to use public transit?

During stakeholder interviews, reliability was identified as the single most important expectation. Stakeholders emphasized that any new transit system must operate on a consistent and dependable schedule, with predictable arrival times and minimal cancellations. For individuals who rely on transportation to reach work, school, or medical appointments, an unreliable service would not be a viable alternative to personal vehicles or taxis. Municipal representatives and business stakeholders also noted that reliable transit could enhance workforce participation by providing employees with dependable travel options for early-morning and evening shifts.

There was broad consensus that the system must provide coverage across key destinations throughout Gander, including the hospital, airport, College of the North Atlantic, commercial districts, and residential neighbourhoods. Stakeholders from education, healthcare, and employment sectors highlighted that many of these destinations are separated by several kilometres and are not easily accessible on foot. Several participants suggested that routes extend to surrounding communities such as Glenwood, Appleton, and Benton to support students, commuters, and newcomers seeking affordable housing outside the core area. Flexibility through options such as flag stops or on-demand service was viewed as a practical way to improve reach while managing costs.

Accessibility was another common priority. Service providers and social organizations emphasized that low-floor, wheelchair-accessible vehicles are crucial for accommodating seniors and individuals with mobility challenges. Stakeholders noted that current options for accessible transportation are extremely limited and often unavailable, resulting in isolation and missed appointments. Beyond physical accessibility, there was also a strong desire for inclusive service design, one that ensures equal access regardless of age, income, or physical ability and that fosters community independence and dignity.

The cost of fares was discussed in nearly every interview. Stakeholders emphasized that fares must remain affordable for residents on fixed or low incomes, particularly seniors, students, and newcomers. Many groups supported a flat, low-cost fare (for example $2-$3 per trip) or the use of discounted monthly passes for frequent users. It was noted that even modest fees can deter use among vulnerable groups, so a subsidized fare structure, potentially in partnership with social service agencies, was viewed as important to ensure equitable access.

Several stakeholders stressed the importance of simple, easy-to-understand route information, clear signage, and ideally, real-time updates through mobile applications or online tools. For many potential users, especially younger populations and newcomers unfamiliar with the town, a clear and accessible communication system would enhance trust and ease of use. Amenities such as shelters, benches, and winter maintenance at key stops were also cited as important features to support comfort and safety.

In summary, reliability, coverage, and affordability are the highest priorities among all stakeholder groups. Accessibility and inclusivity are essential to ensuring equitable service for all residents. Stakeholders prefer a simple, user-friendly design supported by clear route information and reliable communication tools. A future system should strike a balance between efficiency and reach, offering options for both fixed and on-demand services to serve both core and outlying areas. Transit is viewed as a means to enhance community well-being, economic participation, and sustainability in Gander.

5.0 Summary and Recommendations

Through community engagement, case study analysis, and interviews with the town Council, the Gander Transit Needs Assessment has confirmed a clear and growing need for transit within the Town of Gander and its surrounding region. While a public transit system may not operate as a profit-generating service, it represents an essential social and community service that improves accessibility, supports economic participation, and enhances the quality of life for residents without full access to a personal vehicle for employment, education, healthcare, and daily needs.

Throughout the study, three levels of transit were considered:

1. **Inter-regional transit** - connecting the Gander Region to other regions across Newfoundland and Labrador.
2. **Regional transit** - linking surrounding communities such as Appleton, Glenwood, and Benton to Gander.
3. **Local transit** - serving travel within the Town of Gander itself.

The findings indicate that the greatest immediate need lies at the local level. Gander's residents require a reliable, affordable, and accessible service that connects them to key destinations such as schools, healthcare facilities, shopping areas, and workplaces within the town. The recommended next step is to conduct a feasibility study with the intention of initiating a local pilot program service that focuses on reliability and consistent operation, with stops located at the town's primary trip generators.

Once a local system has been successfully implemented and is operating effectively, opportunities to expand regionally can be explored. Regional/ inter-regional transit could include connecting nearby communities through strategic partnerships or Gander-led initiatives that build upon the local system's foundation. The model for each local, regional and inter-regional transit should be evaluated independently based on the needs and travel patterns within each community. What works for the Town of Gander may not necessarily be the best method for connecting the surrounding communities to Gander. A well-thought-out, coordinated transit model will enhance Gander's role as a regional service hub.

A complete and sustainable transit strategy must also address the last-mile problem, ensuring residents can easily travel between transit stops and their final destinations. A comprehensive solution can be achieved through a hybrid approach that combines different public transit service offerings with other modes, such as active transportation**,** taxis**,** and ride-sharing services**.** While the latter of these options are typically operated privately, they play an essential supporting role in enhancing community mobility and accessibility. Investing in sidewalks, crossings, and trail connections will further extend the reach of the transit system and ensure it meets the needs of all users. A well-integrated approach will help Gander deliver a seamless and inclusive transportation network that aligns with the recommendations and findings outlined throughout this study.

5.1 Route Design and Service Model

The design of Gander's future transit network should reflect the community's size, travel patterns, and primary trip generators identified through this needs assessment, as well as further engagement and census data that examine the specific travel patterns within Gander. The needs assessment revealed that Gander's travel demand is concentrated around key destinations, including grocery stores, shopping centres, health facilities, schools, and the downtown corridor. An ideal transit system would connect residents, primarily those without secure access to a private vehicle, with these central attractions.

Stakeholder interviews highlighted that commuting occurs from neighbouring communities, including Glenwood, Appleton, and Benton; however, there were limited survey responses from these areas. Before integrating these communities into a transit system, more directed engagement with these areas should be considered.

Given the population density, demographics, travel frequency, and distribution of major trip attractors, a hybrid service model combining elements of fixed-route and on-demand transit proved to be the most common and successful approach for communities similar to Gander, as supported by the case studies. For Gander, a flag-stop, fixed-route system targeting the most popular areas in town could serve as the backbone of the system, offering predictable travel between major destinations within Gander on a set schedule. This model has been proven effective in comparable municipalities, such as Bridgewater and Corner Brook, where fixed routes provide structure, reliability, and ease of use for new riders. Stops should be strategically placed at high-demand locations, while maintaining flexibility for flag-stop operation in lower-density areas to maximize coverage without overextending resources.

However, some residents with accessibility challenges who are unable to travel, even a short distance, would likely miss out on a fixed route service regardless of the selected route. To complement the fixed-route service, an accessibility-focused on-demand transit could be implemented and offered in areas outside of the primary service area. This approach, successfully adopted in municipalities like Bridgewater and Pictou County, can provide access for residents with unique travel requirements or mobility challenges while maintaining operational efficiency. As noted in the interview with the town Council, there are several accessible buses within Gander, which are generally privately owned by local long-term care facilities or retirement homes. A strategic partnership with these facilities could be an option to help expand the on-demand service to others in Gander.

We were unable to determine what an eventual inter-regional transit should look like with the amount of data collected in the needs assessment. Of the case studies completed, T3 was the only transit authority to successfully implement a transit model of this scale. With fixed routes between population centers that require booking in advance and a local transit system at the majority of end locations, they have implemented their transit system across Prince Edward Island. This scale of system is only realistic through partnerships with other Towns, and again should only be pursued after a more direct public engagement confirms demand.

Lastly, connecting the fixed-route transit system with popular destinations for visitors to Gander, such as the airport, hotels, and tourist attractions, could help support the tourism sector in Gander; however, local engagement is unlikely to accurately reflect the true demand for these trip generators. The airport was invited to participate in the stakeholder interviews, but unfortunately did not respond. A strategic partnership with the airport could be beneficial for residents and tourists alike.

5.2 Service Coverage vs Frequency

Designing a transit route requires balancing the trade-off between coverage, the extent of the area served, and frequency, which refers to the frequency at which the service is provided to riders. Finding the right balance between coverage, frequency, and cost is the key to a successful transit system that meets the needs of most residents. Findings from both the survey and stakeholder interviews emphasize the need for a network that effectively connects key community destinations, while remaining frequent enough to be dependable for regular use.

Travel demand in Gander is concentrated around a small number of high-traffic destinations, as identified through the public engagement. Stakeholders also identified Gander's regional service role within Central

Health, attracting visitors and workers from surrounding towns such as Glenwood and Appleton and beyond. While regional connectivity should remain a long-term goal, initial efforts should prioritize essential local stops, ensuring reliable service between core residential and commercial areas before expanding beyond the town boundary.

Feedback highlighted a strong preference for a service model that aligns with daily routines, particularly for those commuting to work, attending medical appointments, or shopping for essentials. Limited or inconsistent service frequency in other municipalities, such as Bridgewater, Corner Brook, and Pictou County, has been noted to reduce ridership, compromise service reliability, and lead to poor public perception. To build public confidence and encourage adoption, Gander's system should emphasize consistent weekday service during core hours, with flexibility to adjust as ridership patterns emerge. Evening and weekend operations should be introduced gradually based on demonstrated community demand.

Many of the case study communities identified that an hour-long route is too long for residents to rely on, and many will choose other options if available. Limiting the frequency to around 30 minutes was successful on T3's Summerside routes, and is the direction that Bridgewater, Pictou County, and Corner Brook are heading. If the 'start small and expand service' approach is the desired strategy for the Town of Gander, it would be recommended to design a 30-minute route around the core areas in Gander, focusing on maintaining reliable service. Similar to T3, the route does not need to be the exact same every 30 minutes. Key stops can be every 30 minutes, with less common stops occurring only every hour, which still allows for short trips that residents can plan around. A schedule with similar stops every 30 or 60 minutes is easy for new riders to understand and can connect more residents to the transit system while maintaining short trip times.

If additional demand is evident as the service is implemented, future options for expansion should then be considered. During implementation, it's crucial to conduct periodic evaluations to adjust coverage and frequency as demand evolves. By focusing on dependable core service within Gander's urban area, the town can establish a sustainable foundation for future growth while maintaining flexibility to expand coverage as the community's mobility needs evolve.

5.3 Transit Fleet, Accessibility, and Infrastructure

Reliable and accessible infrastructure will be essential to the long-term success and sustainability of a transit system in Gander. Feedback from comparable municipalities, such as Bridgewater and Corner Brook, highlights the importance of investing not only in reliable vehicles but also in supporting infrastructure, including shelters, benches, and signage, to ensure a safe and comfortable rider experience.

To meet accessibility standards and accommodate passengers with mobility challenges, vehicles should include low-floor access and be wheelchair-accessible. As shown in Figure 11,14% of survey respondents identified accessibility as a current difficulty when finding transportation in Gander.

Key stakeholders also identified the importance of purchasing newer, more modern vehicles that people would feel comfortable riding on. 13% of survey respondents in Figure 14 identified a comfortable and clean vehicle as something to encourage them to use transit. While the purchase of used buses may appear cost-effective, this approach often leads to higher maintenance costs and unreliable service if the buses are older and nearing the end of their usable lifespan. A dependable fleet is crucial to building rider trust and minimizing service disruptions. Figure 13 highlights that 40% of respondents indicated that reliability/ on-time performance is a concern while using public transit.

Bus shelters are particularly important during colder months and should provide adequate weather protection for passengers throughout the year. Shelters and benches should be strategically located at high-traffic destinations, such as shopping centres, healthcare facilities, and community hubs, with clear signage and lighting for enhanced safety. Figure 9 highlights the most popular destinations from the public engagement. Attention to winter maintenance, including snow clearing and accessible pathways, will be particularly important in Gander's climate to ensure year-round usability. Signage is also helpful for new riders, as well as to promote the service as it grows.

5.4 Technology and Rider Information

Modern rider information systems play a crucial role in the success of transit systems by enhancing reliability, accessibility, and rider confidence. Feedback from both community engagement and case studies highlighted the importance of real-time tracking, clear communication, and predictable schedules to ensure ease of use for first-time and occasional riders. In Figure 14, 19% of survey respondents identified that real-time tracking/ an easy way to book rides would encourage ridership. Poor reliability and rider experience were highlighted to have the opposite effect.

Survey respondents and stakeholders expressed a strong interest in tools that enhance trip planning and predictability, such as real-time bus tracking, route mapping through Google Maps, and easy access to digital schedules. Similar tools have been successfully implemented in municipalities such as Bridgewater and Kings Transit through the integration of General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS) data. These technologies allow riders to access stop locations, expected arrival times, and service alerts directly from their mobile devices, thereby reducing uncertainty and improving user satisfaction. Enabling riders to pay for fares digitally or with their credit card through modern fare validation systems will also encourage new riders or visitors to use transit.

Lessons from Pictou County's transit operations emphasize that while technology can enhance service delivery, it must be supported by clear communication and public education to ensure uptake. Low rider awareness can diminish the effectiveness of rider tools. In contrast, consistent and transparent communication through municipal websites, social media, and posted materials has proven effective in maintaining engagement and trust.

5.5 Affordability and Fare Policy

Establishing a fair and accessible fare structure will be key in ensuring that Gander's transit system meets the needs of all residents, particularly those with low incomes or limited access to a personal vehicle. Cost was one of the most frequently cited barriers to transportation access during stakeholder interviews. It's essential to strike a balance between maintaining fares that are both affordable and sustainable for the municipality to operate.

Lessons learned from comparable municipalities such as T3 Transit in Summerside and SABRI Transit show that flat fares and pass-based options are simple, transparent, and effective in small systems. A low, consistent fare encourages regular use, simplifies fare collection, and minimizes confusion for new riders. Many comparable services maintain fares between $2.00 and $3.00 per trip, with discount programs available for students, seniors, and low-income residents.

To ensure equitable access, fare structures should consider income-based relief measures or pass programs that support frequent riders and vulnerable populations. Stakeholder feedback indicated that seniors, youth, and individuals without access to a personal vehicle are most significantly affected by transportation affordability issues. Providing multi-ride passes, monthly passes, or subsidized fares through

social service partnerships can improve mobility while supporting social inclusion and economic participation.

5.6 Last Mile Problem

A common problem in transit planning is the last-mile problem, which is the gap between a rider's final destination and the nearest available transportation service. Stakeholders have identified a lack of sidewalks and limited active transportation infrastructure in Gander. When paired with harsh weather conditions, these short trips become difficult when relying on public transit. Addressing this shortage will be critical to ensuring the success of any future transit system.

A complementary active transportation network, comprising sidewalks, crosswalks, cycling lanes, and multi-use trails, can greatly enhance the reach and accessibility of public transit. These facilities not only improve mobility for residents who walk or cycle to transit stops but also contribute to health, safety, and environmental sustainability. Given the community's growing emphasis on connectivity and recreation, it is recommended that the town undertake a dedicated Active Transportation Needs Assessment to identify infrastructure gaps, prioritize key corridors, and integrate pedestrian and cycling improvements, considering the future public transit system.

Private transportation services also play a vital role in addressing the last-mile problem. Taxi operators currently provide essential door-to-door service for residents without vehicles; however, reliance on taxis has been noted as costly and often inconsistent. A public transit system will help relieve the excess demand on the existing taxi network. Additionally, ride-sharing platforms could help supplement public transit by offering flexible, on-demand options that connect users to main routes or destinations during off-peak periods. These services, although generally privately operated, can form part of a coordinated mobility ecosystem that balances public and private options to meet the community's diverse travel needs.

By addressing the last-mile problem through active transportation and partnerships with existing transportation methods, the town can ensure that transit investments are accessible, inclusive, and sustainable, ultimately reducing overreliance on single-occupancy vehicles and enhancing the overall effectiveness of Gander's transportation network.

5.7 Community Need and Engagement

Cited as perhaps one of the most important considerations from the lessons learned survey, sustained community engagement is critical to the success and longevity of Gander's transit system. Bridgewater Transit's experience emphasized the importance of maintaining continuous community feedback loops throughout implementation and operation. Regular engagement through rider surveys, community check-ins, and strategic partnerships with the town ensures that the transit system evolves to meet the changing needs of the community. This approach has proven effective in maintaining public trust and ensuring service alignment with real-world travel behaviours.

Both the public survey and stakeholder interviews revealed strong community support for improved transportation options, particularly among youth, seniors, and residents without access to a personal vehicle. For those who regularly use public transit in Gander, a safe and reliable transit system would be life-changing. The needs of the public can change frequently, and a new system is unlikely to meet the needs of everyone from early implementation. It's important to be flexible, willing to re-engage the public, and adapt the system based on feedback.

Lastly, as identified as an important lesson learned from the case study analysis, it's crucial to ensure that the public is aware of the transit system through its implementation stages. Riders need to build confidence in the transit system for it to become successful. Being aware of transit offerings and ensuring easy access are two primary considerations that can be easily overlooked.

6.0 Implementation and Next Steps

The Gander Transit Needs Assessment has confirmed strong community demand, identified potential service markets, and outlined a clear set of priorities to guide future planning. The next step toward establishing a successful local transit system will be to undertake a transit feasibility study to confirm the optimal service model, operational structure, and implementation pathway. A feasibility study is expected to take approximately 6 to 9 months from project award.

Building on this Needs Assessment, a feasibility study will provide the technical, financial, and organizational foundation required to move from concept to implementation. The study should:

- Continue community engagement and market research on mobility/ census data to better quantify travel demand, trip patterns, and key destinations.
- Assess capital and operating costs, funding sources, and long-term financial sustainability.
- Identify infrastructure requirements, including stop design, accessibility standards, and winter maintenance considerations.
- Examine governance and operating models, including public, contracted, or partnership-based approaches.
- Develop a phased implementation roadmap that outlines pilot options, timelines, and performance indicators.

Based on the information gathered during this needs assessment, it is recommended that the town prioritize transit within the Town of Gander and expand regionally based on later demand and focused public engagement in surrounding communities. A feasibility study could consider all options and develop a phased approach; however, the needs and travel patterns may change and should be re-evaluated closer to implementation. The recommendations in Section 5 are based on the case studies and public engagement conducted during the needs assessment, the desired direction can be confirmed and further refined during the feasibility study.

The completion of this needs assessment marks an important first step toward establishing a sustainable transit solution for the Town of Gander. The study has demonstrated a strong foundation of community need, stakeholder support, and alignment with broader regional objectives. Moving forward, a transit feasibility study will transform these findings into actionable plans, identifying the most effective service models, confirming operational and financial feasibility, and defining clear steps toward implementation. Through continued collaboration between the town, regional partners, and the community, Gander can develop a reliable, accessible, and future-ready transit system that enhances mobility and quality of life for all residents.

Appendix 1 CASE STUDY EVALUATION

Town of Gander Transit Needs Assessment Evaluation Criteria							
SCORING KEY							
Evaluation Criteria	Weighting	Description	0-20	20-40	40-60	60-80	80 - 100
Demographics	Total: 35 Points						
Population	15	Gander has a population of 13,000 and supports the surrounding towns. Solutions should be approximately similar in size.	More than ±30,000 from Gander	±15,001-30,000 difference	±10,001-15,000 difference	±5,001-10,000 difference	Within ±5,000 of Gander
Geographic Structure	15	Population Hub also serves a larger rural area/ smaller Regional Towns.	Dense urban core with no rural ties	Urban town with minor fringe service	Urban hub with some rural linkages	Town with defined regional service responsibilities	Population hub clearly serving surrounding rural/remote communities
Transit Location	5	The town is located in Atlantic Canada.	Outside Atlantic Canada	N/A	N/A	N/A	Located within Atlantic Canada
Transit Solution	Total: 45 Points						
Regional Coordination	20	The Transit Solution Involves the Regional area and not just the town.	Transit only within the town, no mention of regional coordination	Acknowledges regional need, but no implementation	On-Demand Service for the neighbouring town/rural area.	Has good coverage across neighbouring towns/ rural areas.	Fully integrated or shared service delivery across regional partners/ Rural areas.
Transit Service Solution	25	How unique is the solution? We're looking for innovative ideas beyond fixed transit types.	Traditional fixed route with no flexibility or innovation	Fixed route with basic innovation (e.g., real-time app, flag stop)	Flexible model that varies routes to perceived customer needs.	Hybrid model or limited demand-responsive	The model has full-service offerings to the town and region with innovative solutions to address customer accessibility.

Evaluation Type	Evaluation Criterion	Total Available Points	St. Anthony Basin, NL	Bridgewater, NS	Miramichi, NB	Pictou County, NS	Victoria County, NS	Summerside, PEI	Edmonston, NB
Comparable Transit Location	Population	15	15	15	12	12	13.5	9.5	9
	Geographic Structure	15	15	15	15	13.5	13.5	9.5	9
	Transit Location	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Transit Solution	Regional Coordination	20	12	16	8	18	14	18	16
	Transit Service Solution	25	12.5	16.25	7.5	13.75	10	17.5	20
	Score		59.5	67.25	47.5	62.25	56	59.5	59

Evaluation Type	Evaluation Criterion	Total Available Points	Town of Yarmouth, NS	Amherst, NS	Corner Brook, NL	Kenora, ON	Digby County, NS	Grand Falls-Windsor, NL	Terrace, BC
Comparable Transit Location	Population	15	15	15	15	15	12	15	12
	Geographic Structure	15	15	13.5	15	15	12	12	12
	Transit Location	5	5	5	5	0	5	5	0
Transit Solution	Regional Coordination	20	6	12	12	12	14	10	14
	Transit Service Solution	25	15	7.5	13.75	15	15	5	17.5
	Score		56	53	60.75	57	58	47	55.5

Appendix 2 CASE STUDY ANALYSIS: LESSONS LEARNED QUESTIONS

Lessons Learned & Advice for Gander

1. What lessons have you learned during the implementation and operation of your transit system?
2. What would you do differently if starting over?
3. What advice would you give a town like Gander that is exploring transit options for the first time?

Performance & Planning

4. How do you measure the success of your system?
5. Have you made any recent changes based on performance or community feedback?
6. Are there any planned improvements or service expansions in the near future?
7. What are the biggest challenges you're currently facing?

Ridership & Usage Information

8. How many people currently use your transit service? Can you provide ridership data (daily, monthly, annual)?
9. What is the demographic profile of your riders (age, occupation, accessibility)?
10. What is the utilization rate of your service (actual vs. expected ridership)?

Community Feedback & Satisfaction (Perceived or Collect Data if Available)

11. Do you collect feedback from your riders? If so, what methods do you use (surveys, public meetings)?
12. What are your satisfaction levels like among riders?
13. Would your users recommend the service to others?
14. Have users provided feedback on affordability, convenience, and reliability?
15. What are the most common barriers or unmet needs riders express?
16. What would make non-users consider using your service?

Transit Operations & Service Offerings

17. What are your most popular or common routes? (Rural vs Urban?)
18. What amenities or technologies do you offer (e.g., dispatch, app booking, vehicle type)?
19. Have you implemented or considered new booking systems or digital platforms? If so, what?

Accessibility & Target Users

20. How does your service support accessibility needs (e.g., wheelchair access, scheduling assistance)?
21. Do you coordinate with taxis, active transportation, or inter-regional transit? If so, How?
22. Do you promote inclusion, equity, and access for marginalized groups? If so, How?