

On-Board Survey Results

Overview

As part of the Lower Connecticut River Valley Transit Study, a passenger survey was conducted on board both 9 Town Transit and Middletown Area Transit (MAT) bus routes. Passengers shared information about their trip and their general use of transit services, their priorities for improving service, and their satisfaction with each system’s service and features. The survey was administered in May 2019 during weekday service on general public services, with paper surveys available in both English and Spanish. A total of 95 surveys were collected on 9 Town Transit routes (approximately 60% of riders) and 197 surveys were collected on MAT routes (approximately 30% of riders). Of these, two surveys were completed in Spanish on 9 Town Transit services, and six surveys were completed in Spanish on MAT services. The results for each system are summarized below.

9 Town Transit

Rider Characteristics

Gender

9 Town Transit survey respondents are more likely to be male (58%) than female (42%).

Age

The largest share of 9 Town Transit respondents (42%) are between the ages of 36 and 64. Nearly one quarter are 65 and over, and close to a fifth are between the ages of 18 and 25. 9 Town Transit serves many seniors that may not be able to drive due to health reasons.

Figure 1: Gender

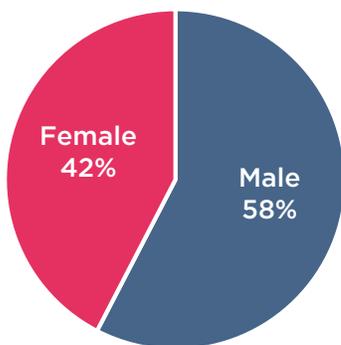
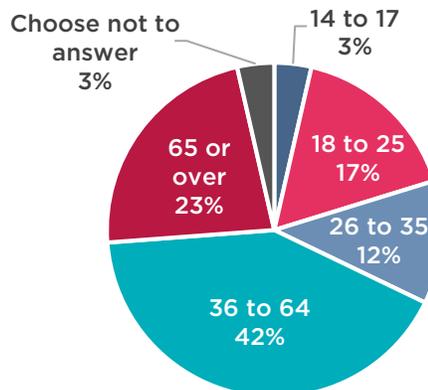


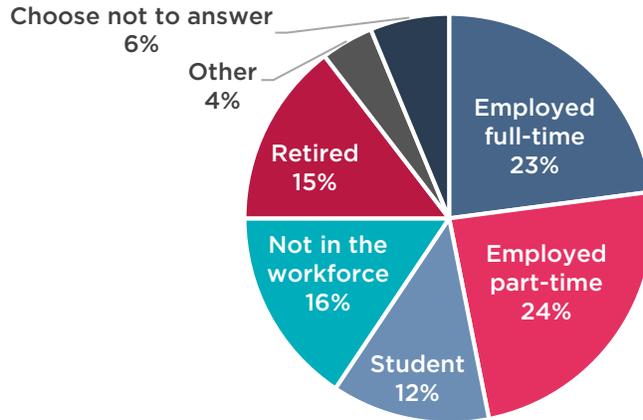
Figure 2: Age



Employment Status

About a quarter of 9 Town transit riders are employed full-time, while another quarter are employed part-time. About 30% of riders are not in the workforce or are retired. Those that are employed probably depend on transit to reach their place of employment.

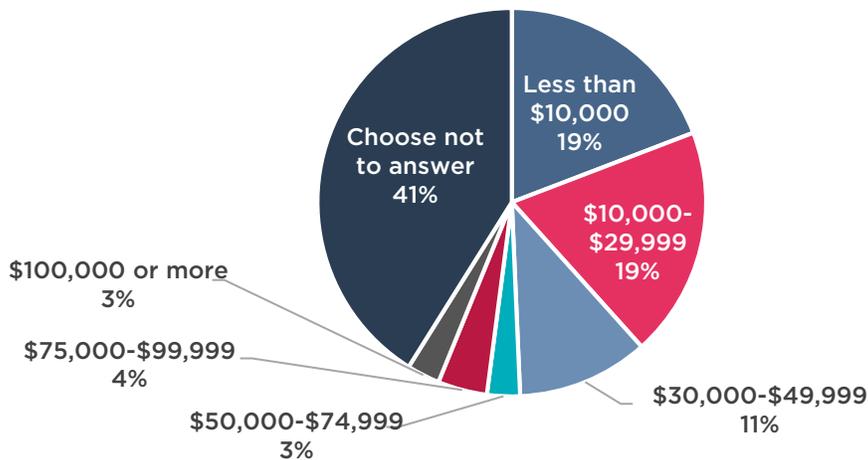
Figure 3: Employment Status



Income

Just over half of 9 Town Transit riders reported living in households with incomes that are a third or less of the state median household income of \$93,870.¹ Of these, 38% have household incomes of less than \$30,000, and an additional 11% have \$30,000 to \$49,999. This finding suggests that a majority of transit riders in the 9 Town Transit region live at or significantly below the poverty line.

Figure 4: Income

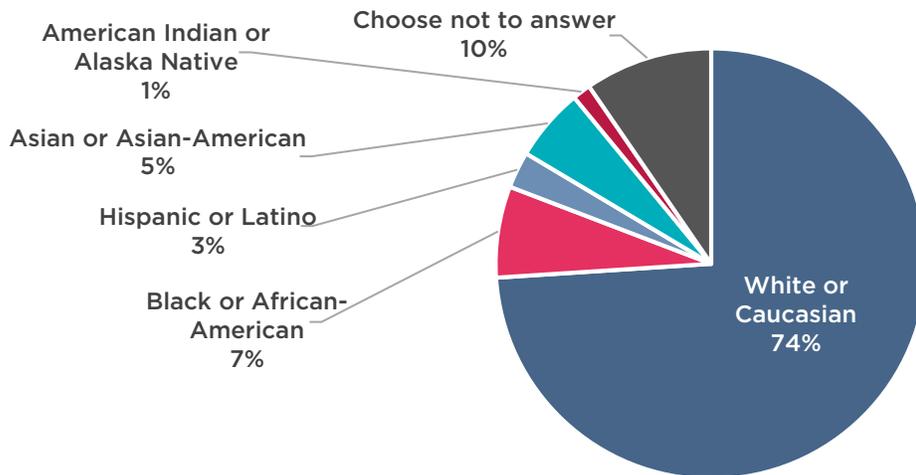


¹ US Census American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate (2013-2017)

Race/Ethnicity

White or Caucasian riders constituted the largest portion of 9 Town Transit respondents (74%). Black or African American respondents made up 7% of respondents, while Asian or Asian-American respondents constituted 5%. As described in the following section, this contrasts with MAT survey respondents, of whom more than 50% identified as non-White.

Figure 5: Race and Ethnicity

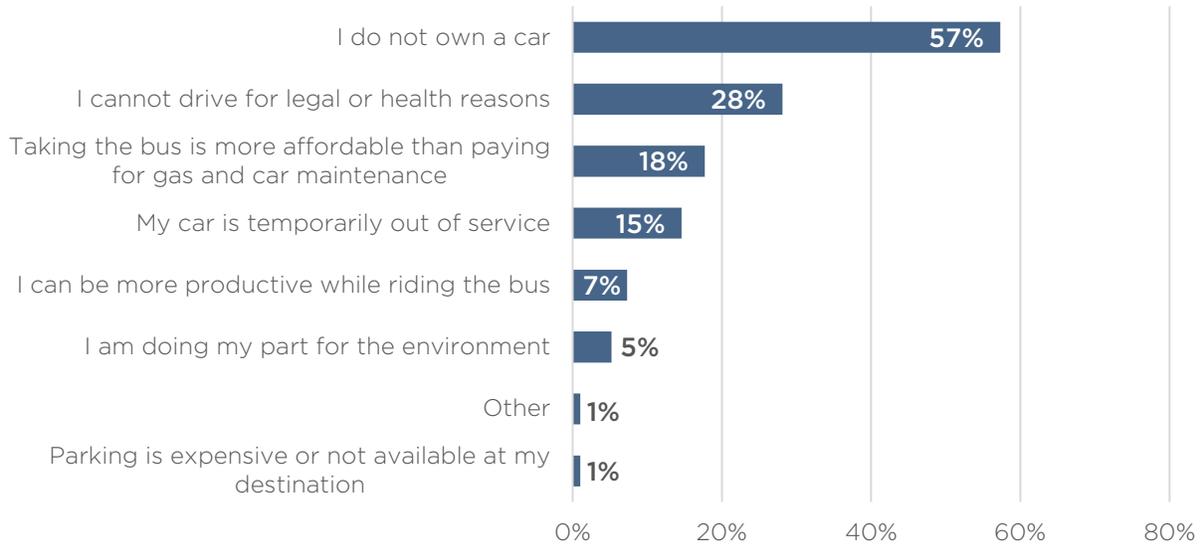


Transit Use

Reasons for Using Transit

More than half of respondents (57%) reported using 9 Town Transit because they do not own a vehicle. 28% use transit because they cannot drive due to medical or legal difficulties, and 17% of respondents find taking the bus more affordable than driving. Since many riders tend to have lower incomes, the cost of taking transit is one of the primary factors why people use it. Others may also not be able to drive due to their health or legal history. These findings further emphasize that many passengers are reliant on transit and ride largely because they do not have other options.

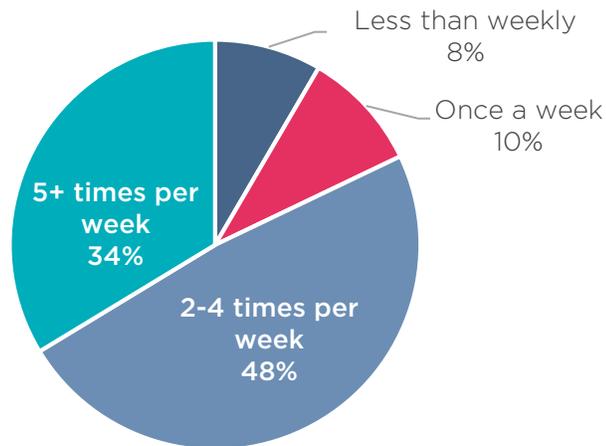
Figure 6: Reasons for Using Transit



Frequency of Transit Use

About 80% of 9 Town Transit riders surveyed reported that they regularly use local bus services. Of these, nearly half of survey respondents (48%) reported that they ride 9 Town Transit almost every day, while another 34% ride multiple times per week. Only 10% of riders reported using local bus services just once a week.

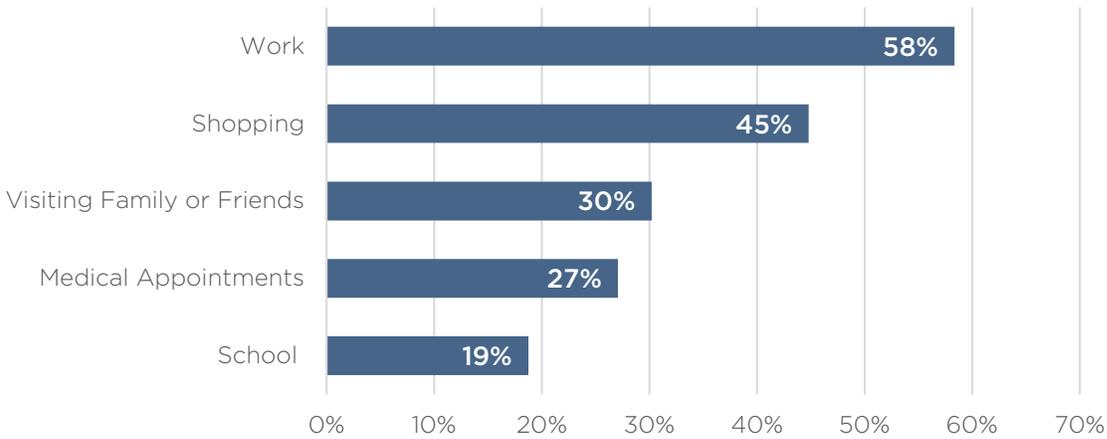
Figure 7: Frequency of Transit Use



Trip Purposes

Respondents reported using transit for a variety of purposes. More than half of 9 Town Transit respondents (58%) reported that they regularly use local bus services to reach their place of employment. 45% of survey respondents reported that they ride 9 Town Transit for shopping. In addition, close to a third 30% use 9 Town Transit for leisure or to visit family/friends, while 27% use it to access health services.

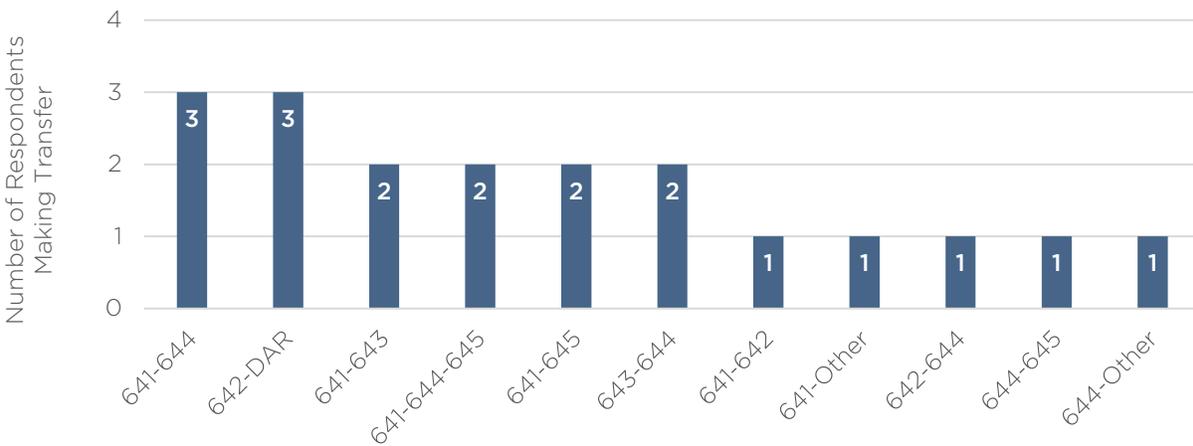
Figure 8: Purposes of Transit Trips



Transfers

Among the 95 survey respondents using 9 Town Transit, 22 (23%) were making a trip that involved at least one transfer. The most common transfers made by riders were between Route 641 Old Saybrook/Madison and Route 644 Old Saybrook/Middletown, and between Route 642 Old Saybrook/Chester and the General Public Dial-a-Ride. Two respondents reported making a trip that necessitated using three routes: Route 641, Route 644, and Route 645 Madison/Middletown.

Figure 9: 9 Town Transit Route Transfer Pairs

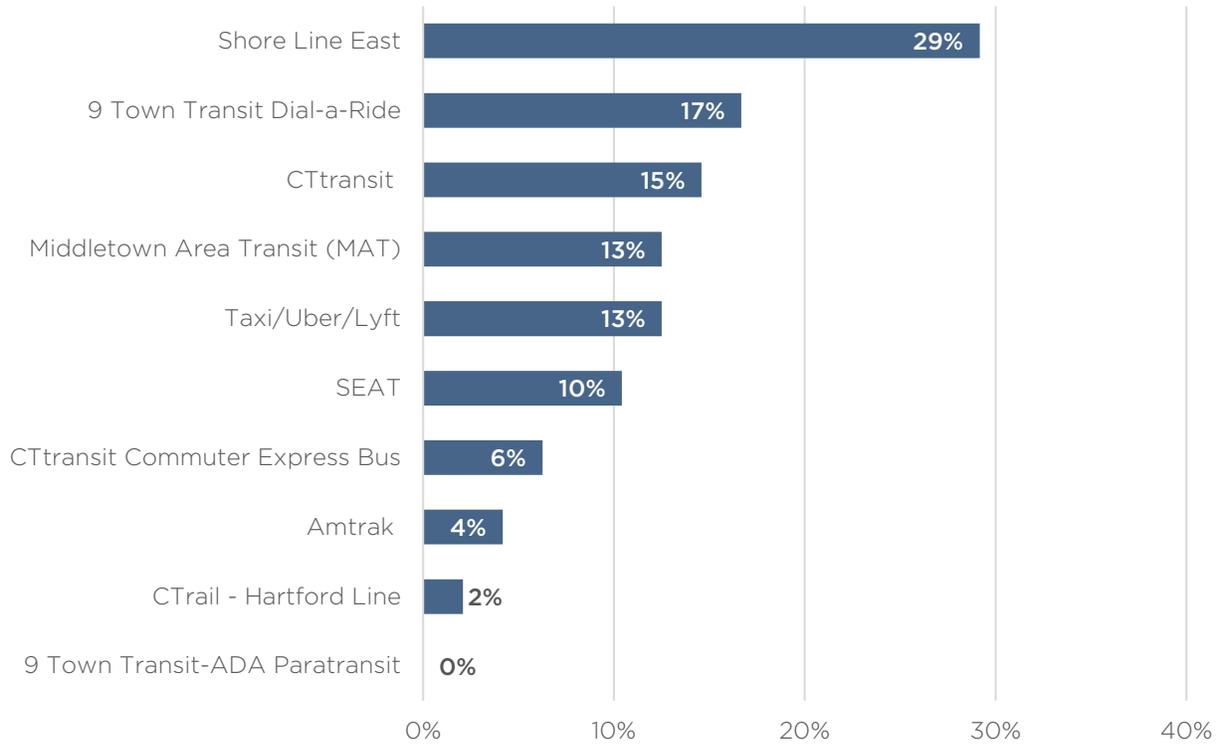


Use of Other Services

Riders were also asked about their use of other transit services in the region beyond the 9 Town Transit service area. Nearly 30% of respondents reported that they use Shore Line East rail service 17% reported that they use 9 Town Transit’s general public Dial-a-Ride to reach areas that may not be accessible by fixed routes. 15% reported using CTtransit local bus services, which includes service to New Haven and New Britain and connecting service to

Hartford. 13% connect to the neighboring Middletown Area Transit (MAT) system, and another 10% use Southeast Area Transit District (SEAT) service in the New London/Norwich region.

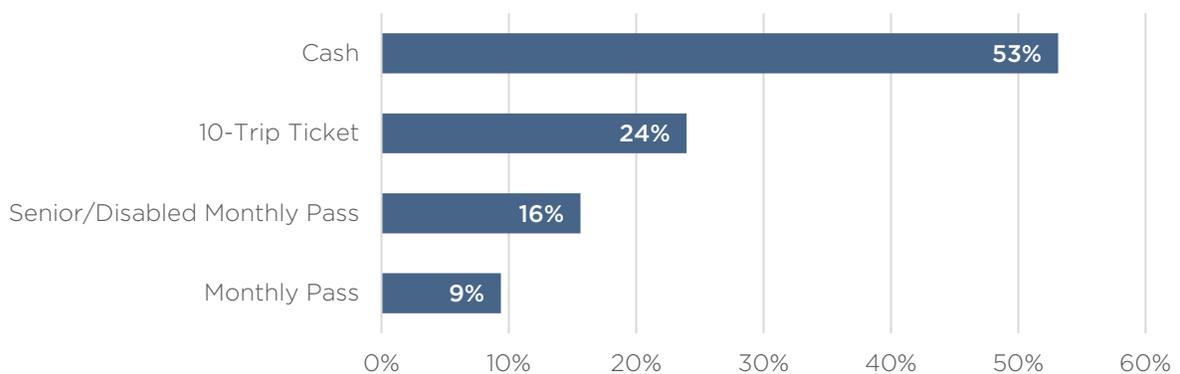
Figure 10: Use of Other Transit Services



Fare Payment

A majority of 9 Town Transit riders (53%) use cash as their primary payment method. Nearly one quarter purchase a 10-trip ticket, while 16% use a senior/disabled monthly pass.

Figure 11: Fare Payment Methods

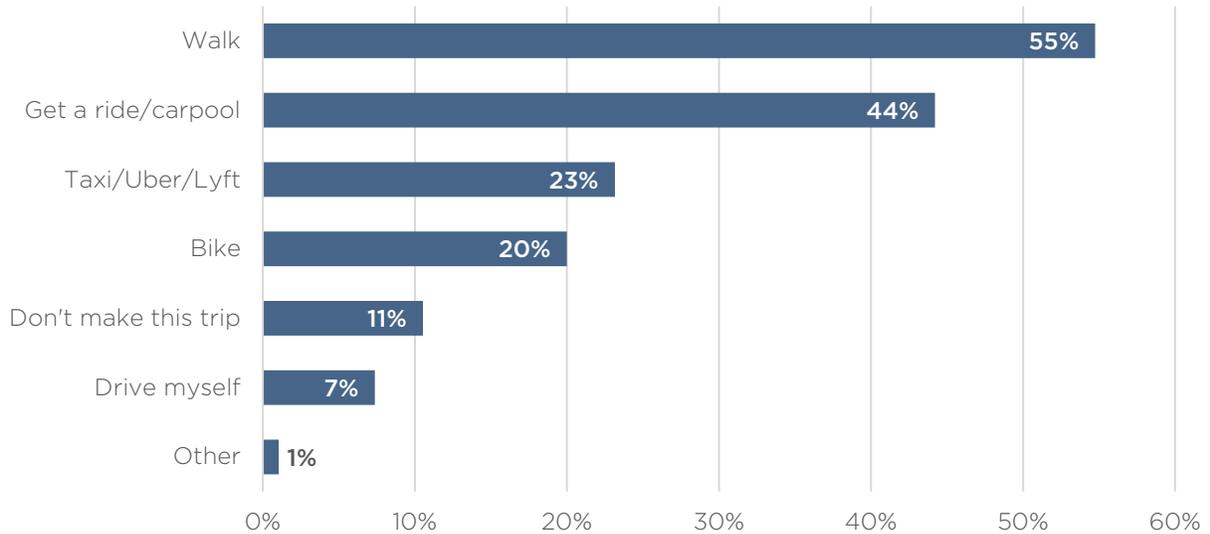


Alternative Modes

If 9 Town Transit bus services were unavailable, just over half of riders would walk to their destination. Walking was the most commonly identified alternative transportation mode (55%),

followed by getting a ride or carpooling (42%). Nearly a quarter of respondents would take a taxi, Uber, or Lyft, and 20% would bike. About 11% would simply not make the trip. Very few riders (7%) would drive themselves.

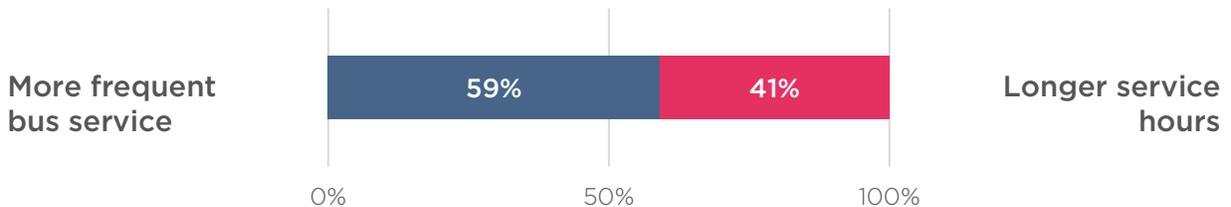
Figure 12: Alternative Modes for Completing Trip if Transit Unavailable



Priorities

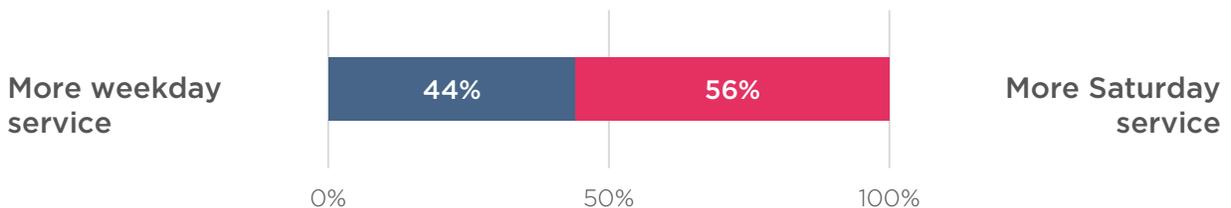
More frequent bus service vs. Longer service hours

9 Town Transit riders have a strong preference for more frequent bus service (59%) compared to longer service hours (41%).



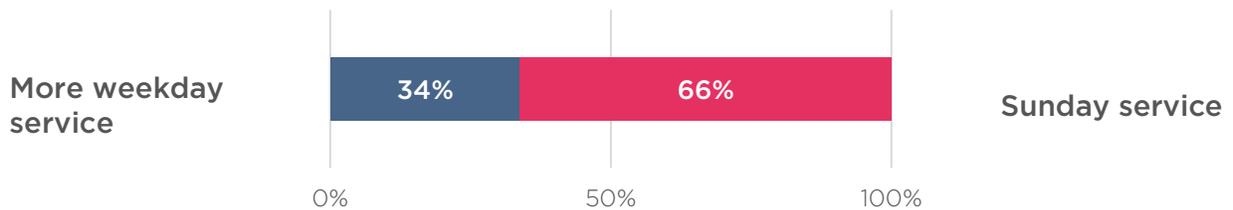
More Weekday Service vs. More Saturday Service

9 Town Transit riders prefer increased Saturday service (56%) over additional weekday service (44%) by a considerable margin. Saturday service is currently limited to two 9 Town Transit routes.



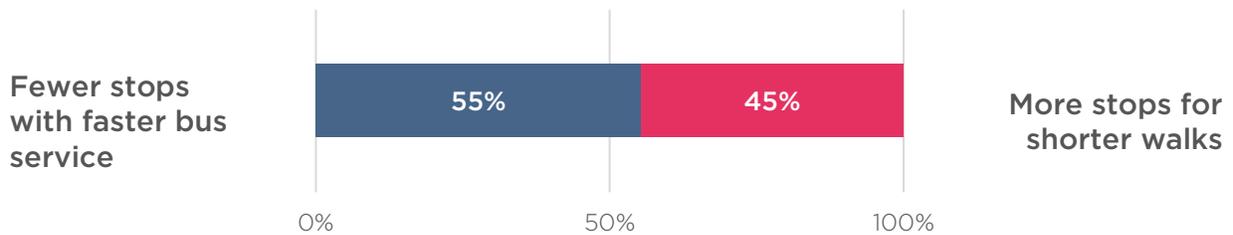
More Weekday Service vs. Sunday Service

Today, 9 Town Transit service does not operate on Sundays. When asked to prioritize either more weekday service or the introduction of Sunday service, two-thirds of respondents preferred adding Sunday service.



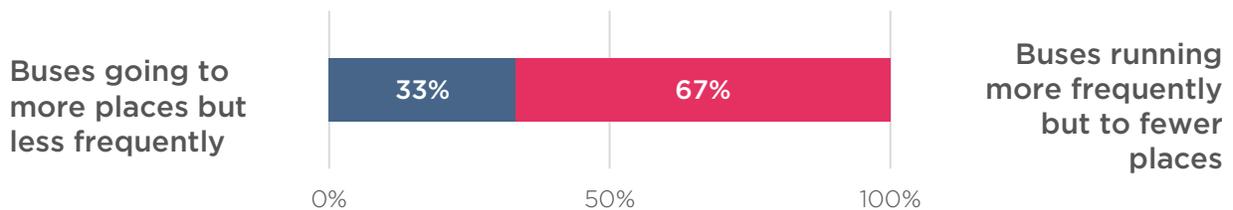
Fewer stops with faster bus service vs. More stops for shorter walks

55% of 9 Town Transit riders prefer having fewer stops with faster bus service rather than having more stops with shorter walks but slower bus service. Many riders may feel current bus routes have too many stops and slow down their trip.



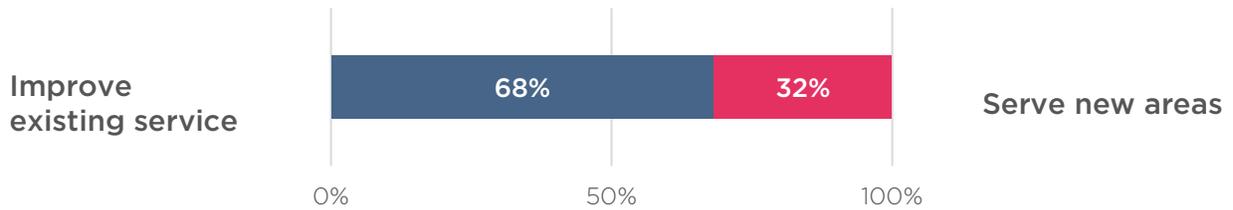
Frequency vs. Coverage

Respondents also overwhelmingly prefer higher levels of frequency (67%) on fixed transit routes rather than expanding service coverage to new areas in the region.



Improve existing service vs. Serve new areas

Ultimately, 9 Town Transit riders prefer improving existing service (68%) before adding new service areas. Rather than investing resources in creating new routes or extending existing ones, riders prefer more frequency and reliability along existing routes.

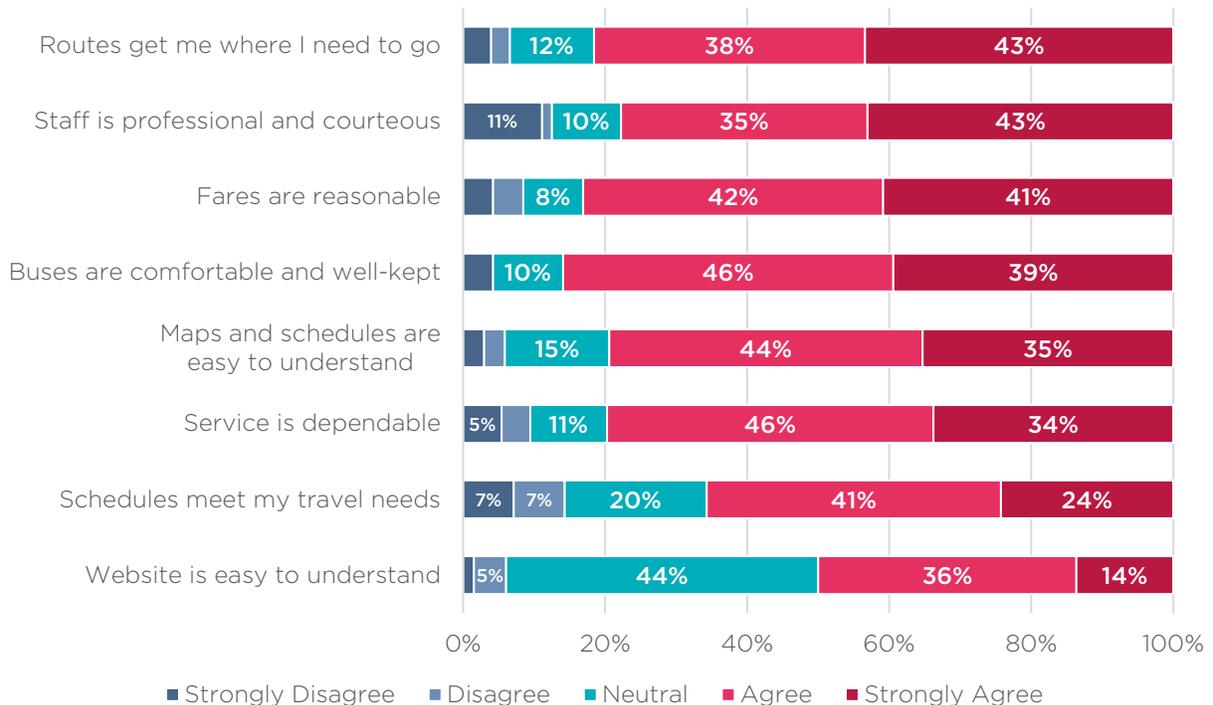


Satisfaction

Survey respondents were asked a series of questions regarding their perception of 9 Town Transit service features. Overall, 9 Town Transit riders are very satisfied with 9 Town Transit service. At least 80% of riders indicated that they agree or strongly agree with most elements: routes operate where riders need to go, fares are reasonable, buses are comfortable and clean, maps and schedules are easy to understand, and service is dependable.

Just half of 9 Town Transit riders indicated that they agree or strongly agree that the agency's website is easy to understand, while another 44% are neutral. 14% of respondents disagree or strongly disagree that schedules meet their travel needs, while 12% of respondents indicated dissatisfaction with staff professionalism and courtesy.

Figure 13: Satisfaction with 9 Town Transit Service and Features



Middletown Area Transit (MAT)

Rider Characteristics

Gender

MAT survey respondents are evenly split between male (49%) and female (51%) riders.

Age

About half of MAT survey respondents are between the ages of 36 and 64. Another 18% are ages 18 to 25, and 16% are ages 26 to 35.

Figure 14: Gender

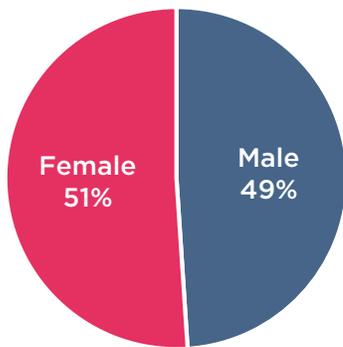
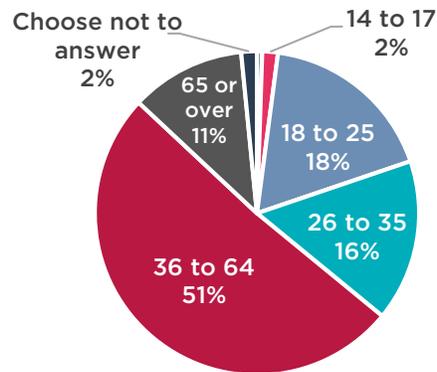


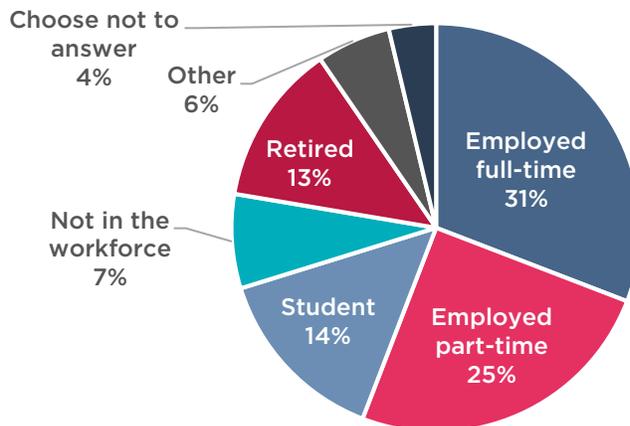
Figure 15: Age



Employment Status

About 30% of Middletown area transit riders are employed full-time, while a quarter are employed part time. Many of these riders probably depend on transit to reach their place of employment. In addition, 20% of riders are retired or not in the workforce, meaning individuals also use the transit system for non-work-related trips.

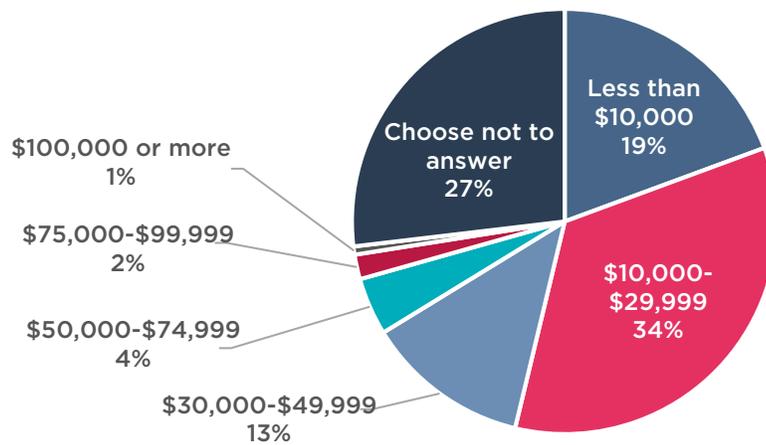
Figure 16: Employment Status



Income

At least two-thirds of MAT respondents reported living in households with incomes below the City of Middletown median (\$63,914), and over 70% of respondents reported incomes below the state median household income of \$93,870. About 53% of riders have household incomes of less than \$30,000, half the median household income. An additional 13% of respondents reported household incomes of \$30,000 to \$49,999. This finding suggests that many transit riders in Middletown live at or significantly below the poverty line.

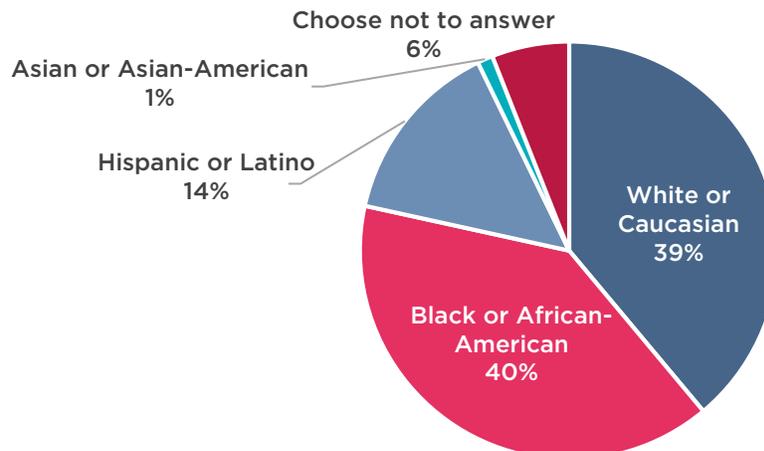
Figure 17: Income



Race/Ethnicity

Black or African American riders comprise 40% of MAT survey respondents, while White or Caucasian riders make up 39% of respondents. Hispanic or Latino residents constitute 14%. At least half of MAT transit riders come from historically disadvantaged communities. Middletown has a larger minority population than the 9 Town Transit Area: 13% of its population identifies as African American and 9% as Hispanic or Latino.²

Figure 18: Race and Ethnicity



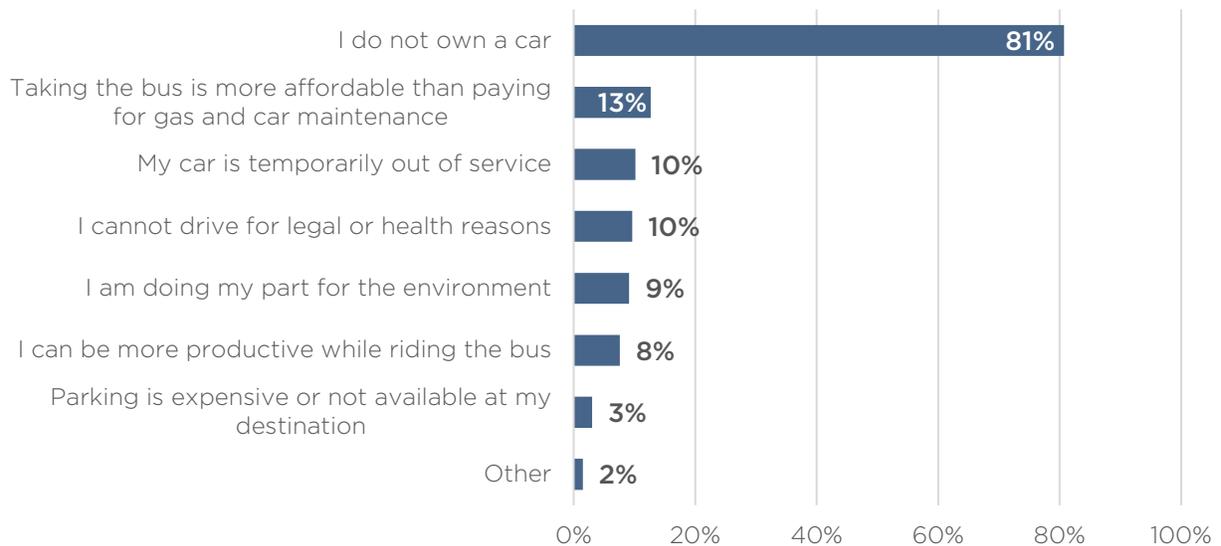
² US Census American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2013-2017)

Transit Use

Reasons for Using Transit

The vast majority of respondents (81%) reported using MAT because they do not own a vehicle. An additional 10% use transit because they cannot drive due to medical or legal difficulties, and 13% of respondents find taking the bus more affordable than driving. Furthermore, 13% of respondents take the bus due to its affordability relative to owning and maintaining an automobile. These findings further emphasize that many MAT passengers rely on transit service for transportation because they do not have other options.

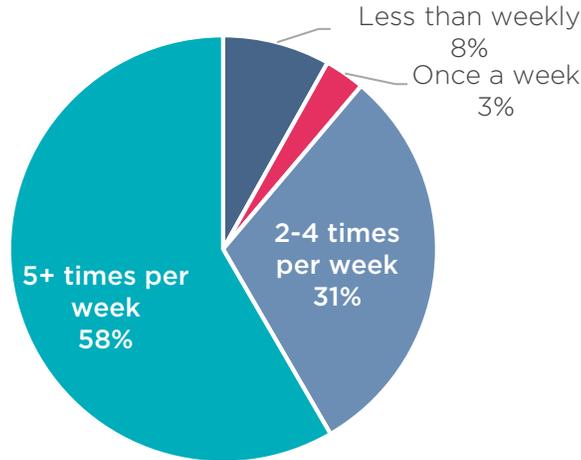
Figure 19: Reasons for Using Transit



Frequency of Transit Use

About 90% of Middletown Area Transit riders surveyed reported that they regularly rely on local bus services. Of these, 58% of survey respondents reported that they ride MAT almost every day, while another 31% ride two to four times per week. Only 10% of riders reported using local bus services once a week or less.

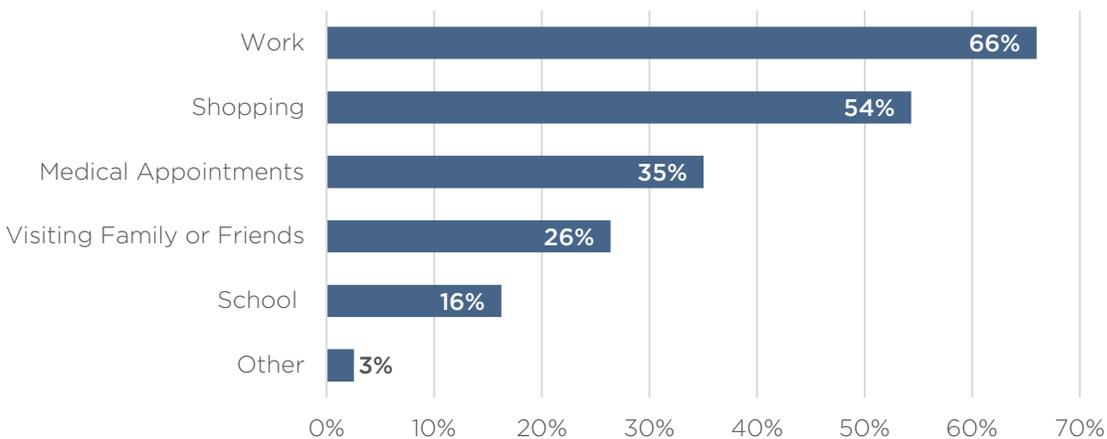
Figure 20: Frequency of Transit Use



Trip Purposes

Respondents reported using transit for a variety of trip purposes. Two thirds of MAT respondents reported using local bus services to reach their place of employment. Just over half of survey respondents reported using service for shopping trips, while 35% use MAT to access health services. About 26% use it for leisure or to visit family/friends, while 16% use it to get to school.

Figure 21: Transit Trip Purposes



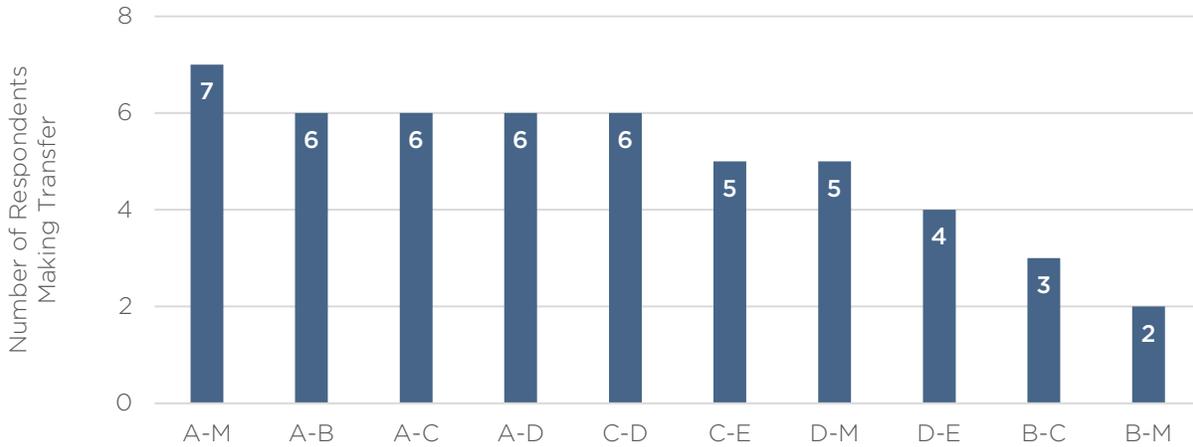
Transfers

Among the 195 survey respondents on MAT, 70 (36%) were making a trip that involved at least one transfer. The most common transfer made by riders (seven respondents) was between Route A Saybrook Road and the M-Link. The following trips involving a transfer were each reported by six respondents:

- Route A Saybrook Road & Route B Wesleyan Hills
- Route A Saybrook Road & Route C Washington Street

- Route A Saybrook Road & Route D Newfield Street
- Route C Washington Street & Route D Newfield Street

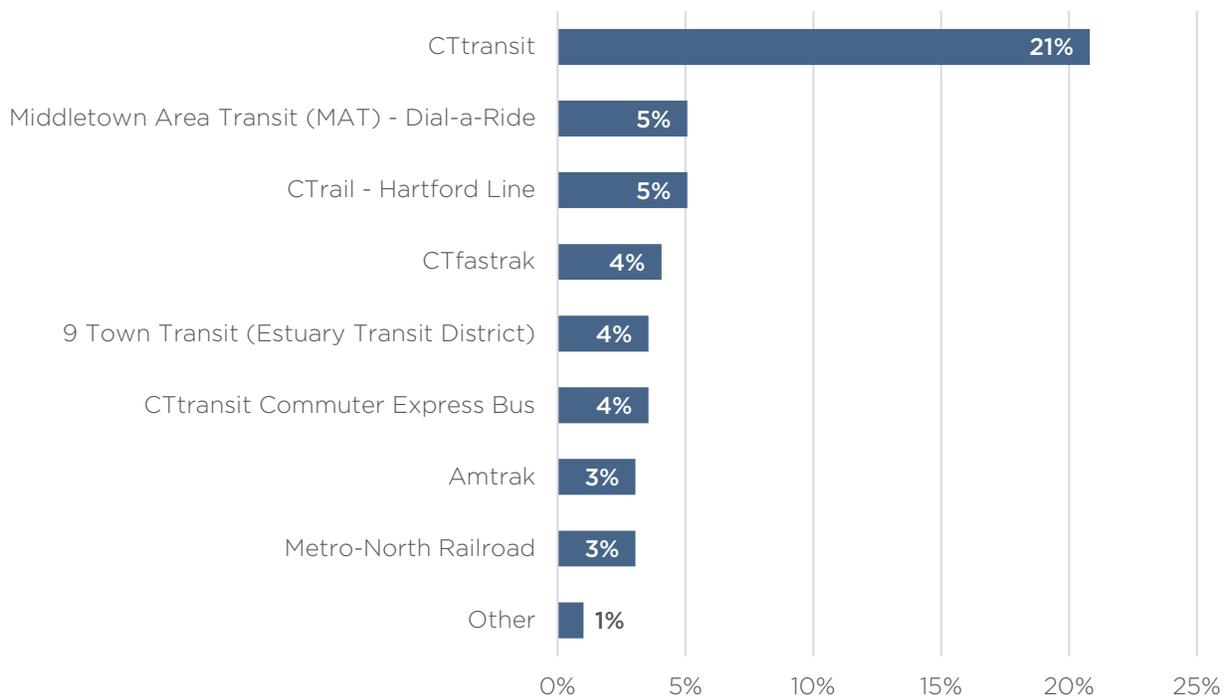
Figure 22: Top 10 MAT Route Transfer Pairs



Use of Other Services

Riders were also asked about their use of other transit services in the region beyond the 9 Town Transit service area. Over 20% responded that they use CT*transit* local routes, which include service to New Haven, New Britain, and Hartford. 5% report using MAT's ADA paratransit service in addition to fixed-route service. 5% also reported using the C*Trail* Hartford Line. In addition, 4% of riders reported using 9 Town Transit services.

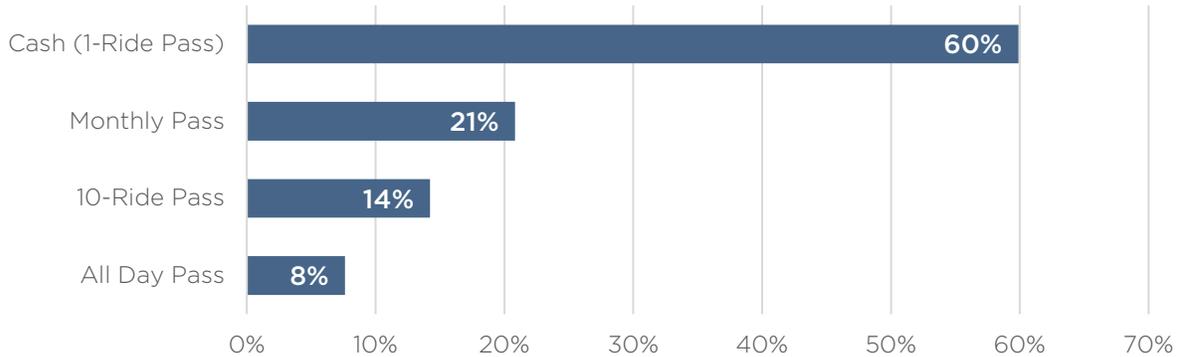
Figure 23: Use of Other Transit Services



Fare Payment

A majority of MAT respondents (60%) use cash as their primary payment method. Another 21% of respondents use a monthly pass, while over 14% use a 10-Ride Pass.

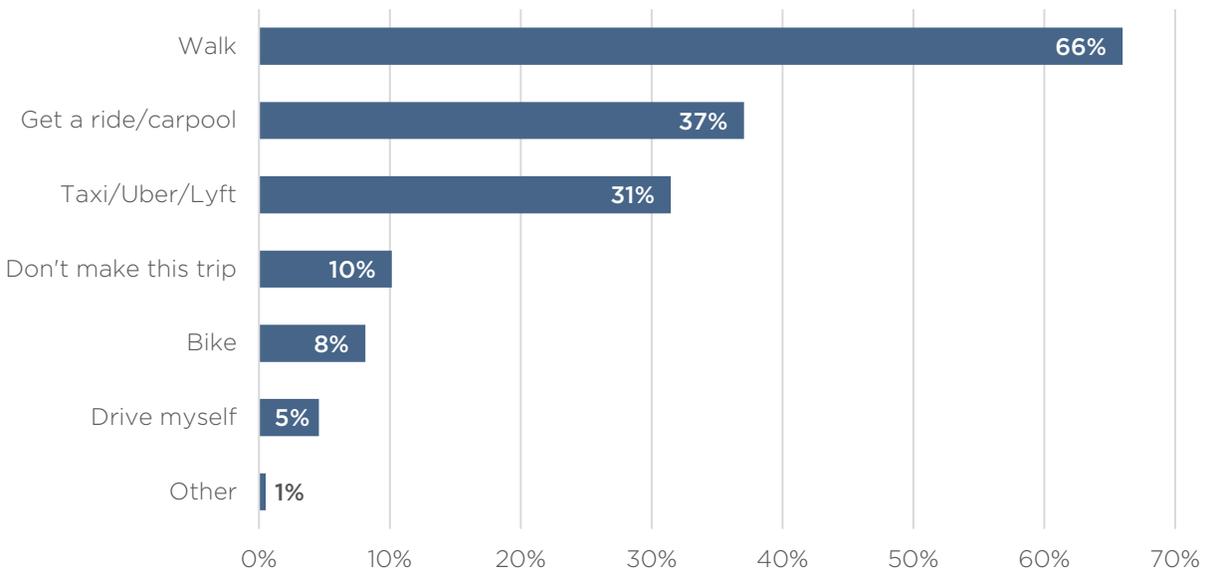
Figure 24: Fare Payment Methods



Alternative Modes

If Middletown Area Transit bus services were unavailable, 66% of riders would walk to their destination. Just over a third of respondents (37%) would carpool or get a ride to their destination, while 31% would use a taxi, Uber, or Lyft to reach their destination. 10% of respondents would not make their trip if transit was not available. Only 5% of respondents responded that they would drive alone, indicating that few MAT riders are choosing to use bus services instead of their personal vehicle.

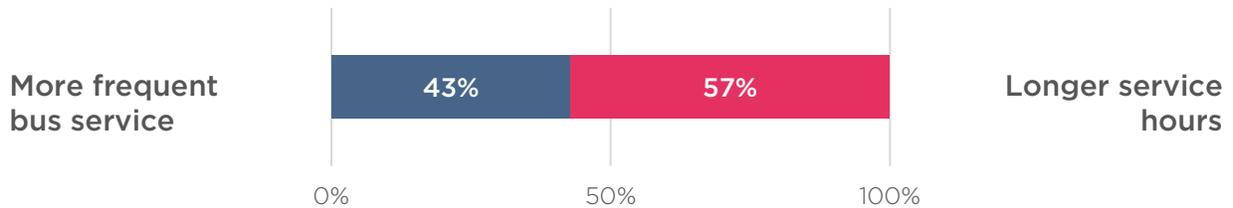
Figure 25: Alternatives Modes for Completing Trip if Transit Unavailable



Priorities

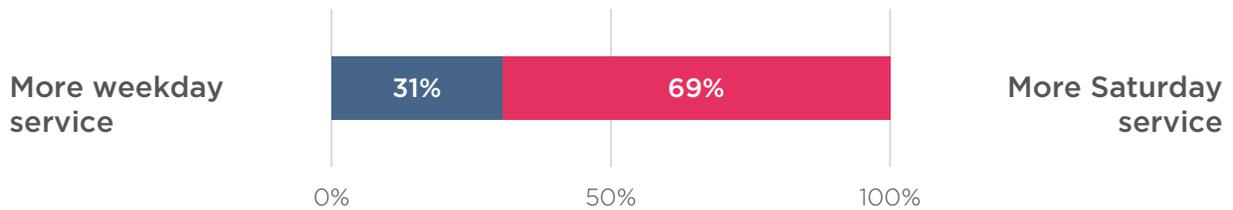
More frequent bus service vs. Longer service hours

MAT riders have a strong preference for longer service hours (57%) compared to increased frequency (43%).



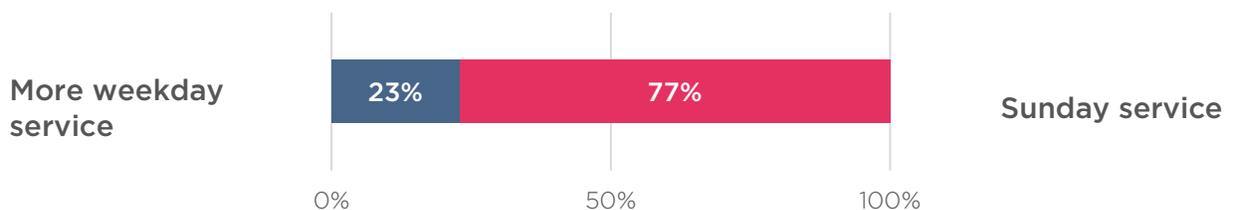
More Weekday Service vs. More Saturday Service

Adding more Saturday service is a higher priority for respondents than providing more service on weekdays. Respondents reported a strong preference for providing more Saturday service (69%) over more weekday service (31%).



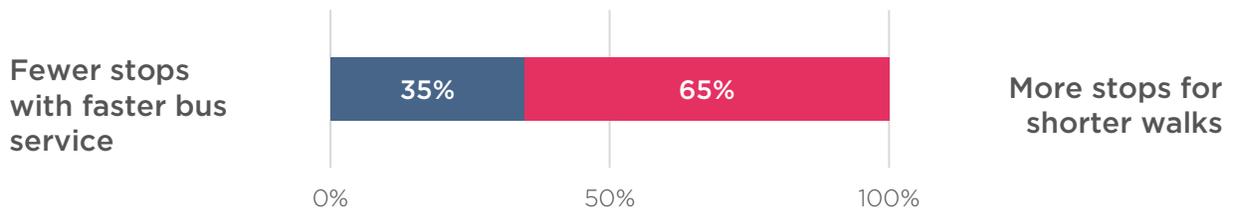
More Weekday Service vs. Sunday Service

Today, MAT service does not operate on Sundays. When given an option of increasing weekday service or adding service on Sundays, respondents expressed an overwhelming preference for the introduction of Sunday service (77%) over providing more weekday service (23%).



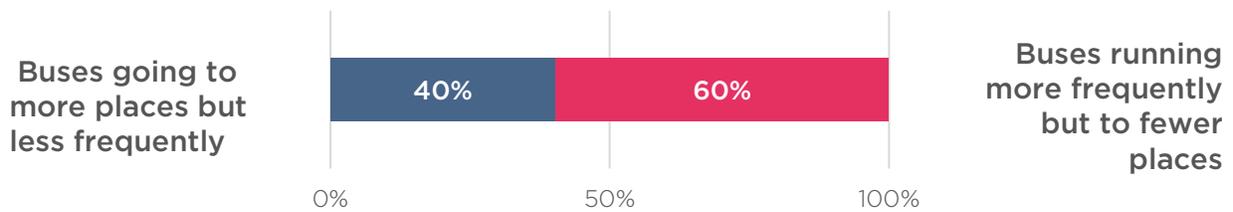
Fewer stops with faster bus service vs. More stops for shorter walks

65% of MAT respondents prefer adding additional stops to create shorter walks for individuals to reach their stop, compared to 35% who would rather than have fewer stops with faster bus service (35%).



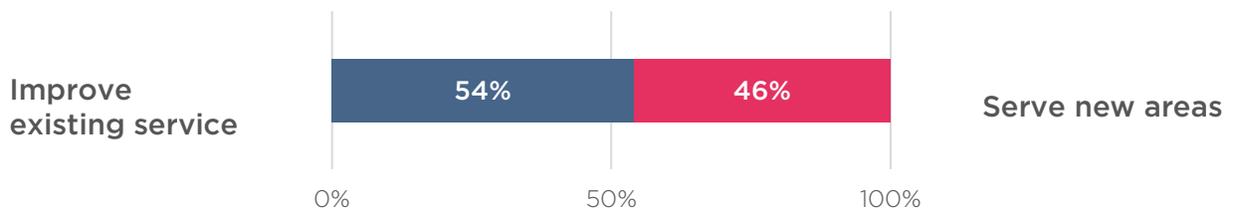
Frequency vs. Coverage

Respondents reported a preference for higher levels of frequency (60%) rather than expanding the coverage area across the region (40%).



Improve existing service vs. Serve new areas

MAT riders overall are relatively split between improving existing service and expanding the service area. Riders slightly prefer improving existing service (54%) rather than serving new areas (46%). Rather than investing resources in extending or creating new routes, riders prefer more frequency and reliability along existing routes.



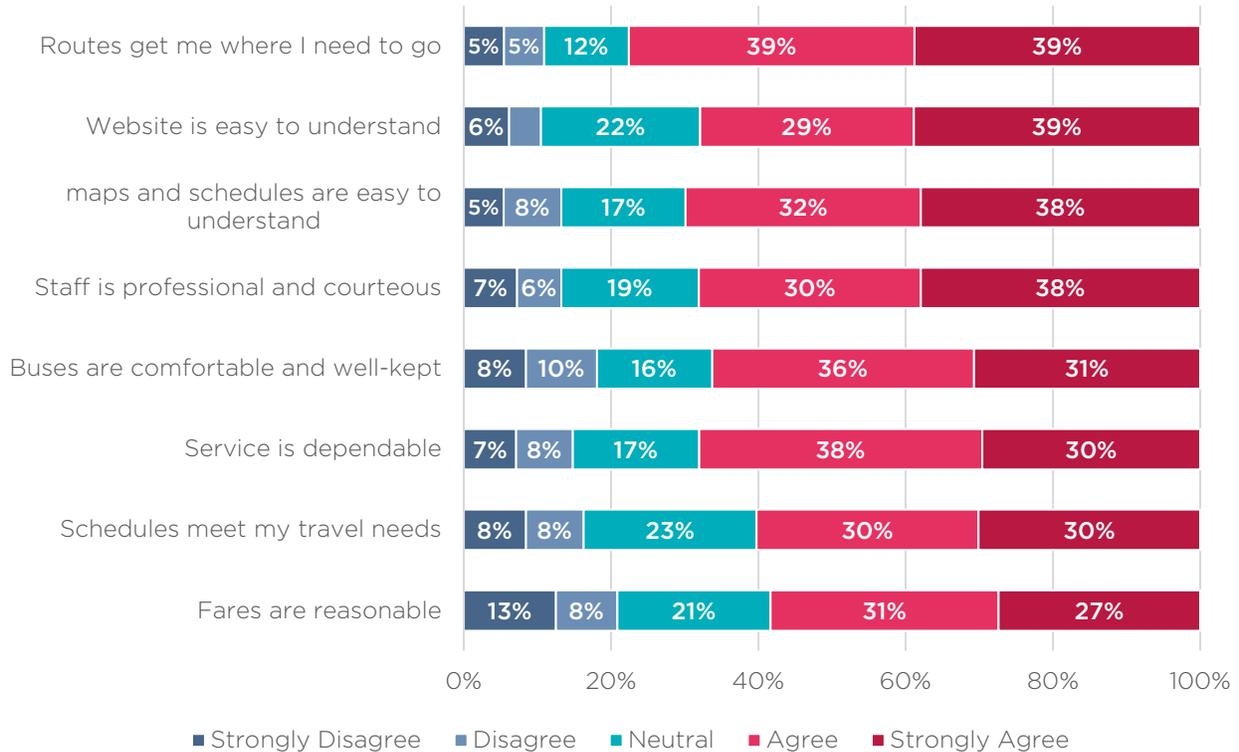
Satisfaction

Survey respondents were asked a series of questions regarding their perception of Middletown Area Transit service features. The results indicate that Middletown Area Transit riders are very satisfied with service and staff overall. Over 60% of riders indicated that they strongly agreed or agreed with the existing fare structure. The fare structure exhibited the highest perception of discontent amongst all the categories with 42% of riders disagreeing or feeling neutral about fares. Riders are also highly satisfied with staff professionalism and vehicle quality (68%

and 67% respectively). Most customers agreed that routes provide them access to their destinations (78%).

Middletown Area Transit riders indicated they were mostly neutral about the website (22%) and whether the schedules meet travel needs (23%). This suggests that many may not use the website nor feel empowered to voice their concern over the existing schedule. Furthermore, 16% of respondents disagree all together that the schedule meets their travel needs.

Figure 26: Satisfaction with MAT Service and Features



Key Findings

Rider Characteristics

- Twice as many 9 Town Transit respondents are 65 or older as compared to MAT respondents, while a larger share of MAT respondents are ages 36 to 64.
- A larger share of MAT respondents are employed full-time, compared to a larger share of 9 Town Transit respondents who are not in the workforce.
- Significantly more MAT respondents report having an income of \$10,000-\$29,999, while a larger share of 9 Town Transit respondents chose not to report their income.
- Nearly three-quarters of 9 Town Transit respondents identified as White or Caucasian. This is double the share of MAT respondents, while more than half of MAT respondents identified as a minority.

Transit Use

- Significantly more MAT respondents reported not having a car as a reason they use transit (81%) as compared to 9 Town Respondents (57%), while 9 Town Transit respondents are more likely to be unable to drive due to health or legal reasons (28%).
- The majority of MAT respondents are daily riders (five days a week or more), while most 9 Town Transit respondents use the service weekly or two to four days a week. Among all respondents, frequent riders have lower incomes, suggesting that these individuals do not have a choice but to use transit because they cannot afford alternatives. As incomes increase, the proportion of individuals using transit frequently decreases.
- Respondents for both services reported using transit for similar trip purposes, primarily for work followed by shopping and medical appointments. Similar shares of respondents also report using the same type of fare media, with a majority using cash. MAT respondents are more likely to use a monthly pass, while 9 Town Transit respondents are more likely to use a 10-trip ticket or a senior/disabled monthly pass.

Priorities

- 9 Town Transit respondents prefer increased service frequency over longer hours, while MAT respondents prefer longer hours of service. Currently, 9 Town Transit routes generally operate every two hours, while MAT routes mostly operate every 50 minutes.
- Respondents from both systems overwhelmingly prefer increasing Saturday service over more weekday service, and all expressed an even stronger preference for adding Sunday service over increasing weekday service. This was particularly pronounced for MAT respondents (77%).
- 9 Town Transit respondents prefer fewer stops with faster service, while MAT prefer more stops with shorter walks to stops at the expense of travel speed.
- Respondents from both systems prefer increasing frequency and improving existing services over expanding service coverage to serve new areas.