
MEMORANDUM

LNTC-C 14-2019

Subject: Niagara Region Transit Public Opinion Survey Results

Date: September 25, 2019

To: Linking Niagara Transit Committee

From: Rob Salewytch, Program Manager, Transit Services

This memorandum is to provide Committee with an update on the results of the recent Niagara Region Transit (NRT) Public Opinion survey. Niagara Region's goal of moving transit forward seeks to connect people to neighbouring municipalities and greater opportunities. A key aspect of this goal is to improve the service of NRT in order to meet the needs of both current and future transit users. To facilitate this goal, staff conducted a public opinion survey from July 26 to August 16, 2019. As the majority of NRT ridership throughout the school year is students, completing the survey during the summer months helped to reduce bias in the data and ensure a wider sample size. The purpose of the survey was to gather feedback from the community and use it to identify who is, and who is not using the service; to highlight successful areas of the business; and to highlight opportunities for improvement.

This survey was designed to encourage feedback from both riders and non-riders. Riders were classified as those who had been on an NRT bus in the last month and non-riders were classified as those who had not. Furthermore, it asked the participants questions regarding service levels, why they did or did not use transit, transit-related features or amenities that they might like added to the service, and their overall satisfaction with the service.

In addition to targeted web advertisements on social media, niagararegion.ca/transit, and municipal websites, transit-supported co-operative education students also went to various locations around the region to conduct surveys in person in order to reach a broader audience (Refer to Figure 1 below).

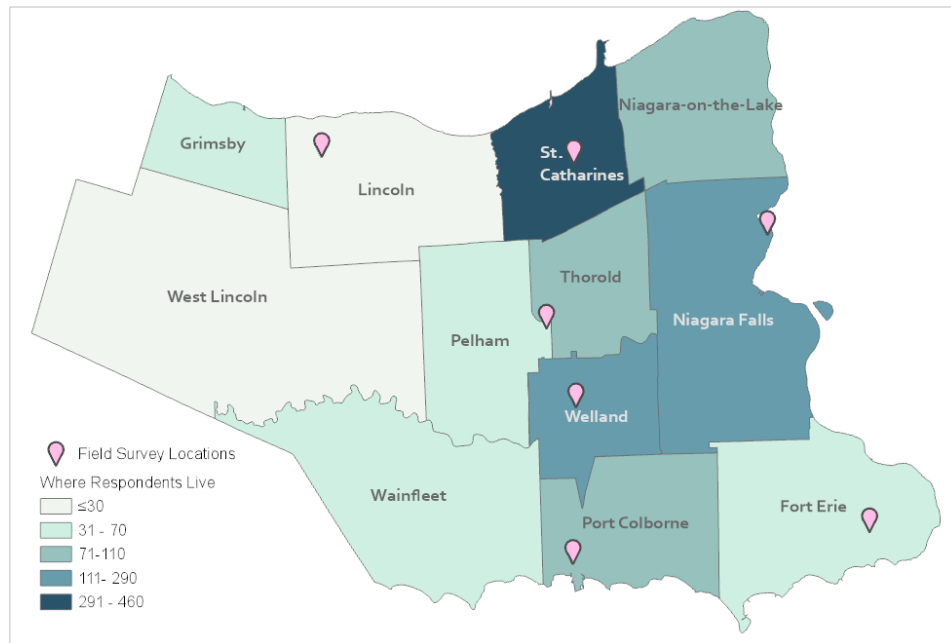


Figure 1: Map of Survey Response Locations

Overall, the data showed that 1532 surveys were completed with the majority of participants residing in St. Catharines, Niagara Falls and Welland and using transit to commute to work as well as run errands. Although the gender and age categories were relatively balanced, more responses were completed by females (58%). The highest response rate was among those aged 25-34 (18%). Figure 2 below provides additional details of the gender and age distribution of the respondents.

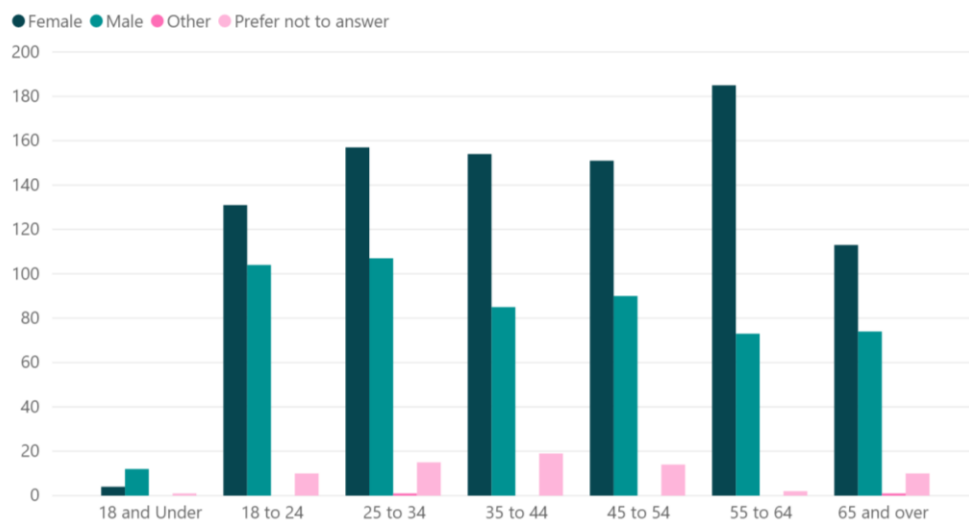


Figure 2: Gender Distribution (Categorized by Age)

The survey results highlighted that the majority of NRT riders are satisfied with the service, with only 15% of respondents noting that they are unlikely to recommend it to others. More importantly, safety and cost were not seen as barriers to the service among both males and females of all ages. However, real-time information was viewed as very important to the rider (refer to Figure 3) and without it, riders found that there were barriers that included missing connections and long wait times. With the September 2019 deployment of real-time information for NRT in the Transit App, riders can now view departure and arrival times, possible delays and receive push notifications. As this was not available for the riders during the survey, NRT views this as a notable success in driving rider satisfaction.

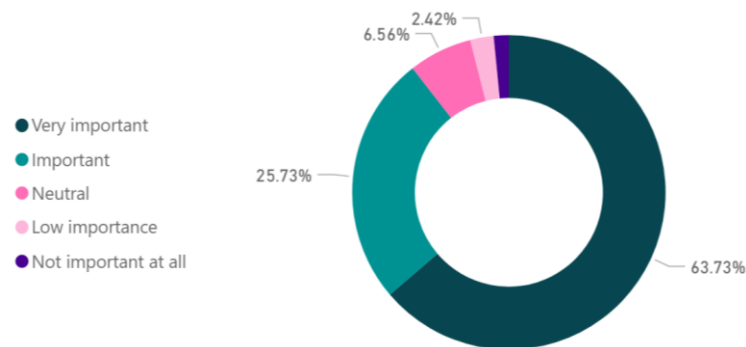


Figure 3: Importance of real-time information to riders

Although the satisfaction rates are high, the respondents also noted areas of the business that could be improved. The main areas of improvement noted by the respondents were: regional coverage (service area), extended hours of service, and increased frequency. Of those three areas, extended hours of service and increased frequency were requested substantially more often than regional coverage (Refer to Figure 4). Specifically, 37% of people that responded to 'How can we improve service for you?' said that they would like to see the buses run earlier and later in the day, seven days a week including holidays. Several respondents specifically noted that service on Sundays and holidays would be extremely beneficial. For example, the lack of services on Sundays and holidays are seen as a barrier to those who would utilize transit to get to/from work because either the service hours do not align with their start and/or end times; or, they work on Sundays when transit is not an option. Fortunately, staff had previously identified this opportunity for improvement and has already received budget support to initiate service on both Sundays and holidays (LNTC-C 21-2018). Staff is currently working with the Inter-municipal Transit Working Group (IMTWG) to identify when in 2020 these improvements can be implemented.

Similarly, 35% of participants noted that increased frequency would help to improve their satisfaction with transit services. Several of the participants that responded as

neutral, unsatisfied or very unsatisfied noted that wait times between buses was too long and that more buses and/or increased frequency would improve the service for them. Since September 2018, NRT has made a number of updates to the transit schedule with a noticeable increase in service hours and frequency. Service time has increased from approximately 71,000 hours for 2018/2019 to approximately 136,000 for 2019/2020, which represents an increase of approximately 52% in one year. At the time of the survey the new service hours for 2019/2020 were not in place, therefore riders should now see a significant improvement to service hours and frequency (LNTC-C 11-2019).

Regional coverage was, marginally, the third most noted opportunity of improvement. Currently, NRT is successfully providing connections between St. Catharines, Niagara Falls and Welland. However, the data shows that residents of Niagara’s western municipalities, plus Fort Erie, Niagara-on-the-Lake and Port Colborne all feel that coverage needs to be implemented or increased in order to better serve these municipalities. As committed to Council during the 2019 budget, NRT staff is working with the IMTWG on a pilot project to evaluate potential micro-transit opportunities in Niagara’s western municipalities to help connect people in more rural areas of Niagara to transit hubs and increase ridership and accessibility. In addition, Niagara Region has recently uploaded the Port Colborne Link (Route 25) and the Fort Erie Link (Route 22) routes. These uploads provide more flexibility for the local transit services in those respective municipalities to expand their services to connect with inter-municipal transit with the aim to meet the needs of its community.

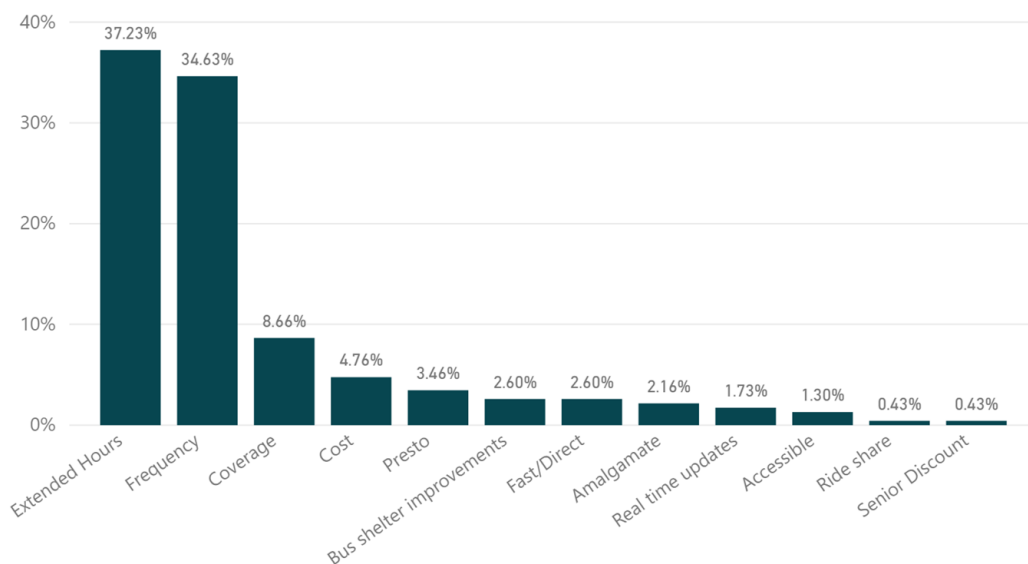


Figure 4: Opportunities for Improvement

Other areas of improvement that were touched upon by participants were: express services, amalgamation and fare integration. Participants suggested that amalgamating transit across Niagara would improve transit synchronization which would increase efficiencies and create opportunities to link municipalities via express routes thus better connecting riders to local transit systems to reach their desired destination. Participants also believe that creating a more integrated service would allow for better connection times, faster service between municipalities and the ability to use the same transit pass for all transit. Staff is happy to report that these elements are already under review and that the IMTWG is currently working on a fare integration strategy which includes a common fare technology platform (LNTC-C 10-2019).

In summary, the survey's goal was to gather insight into the rider and non-rider experience to help improve the service. Upon completion and review, the survey highlighted that although most participants are satisfied with NRT, they would like to see region-wide coverage, extended hours of service and increased frequency. It also highlighted that improvement opportunities exist with respect to micro-transit, fare integration, and real-time data, all of which are currently under evaluation as part of the IMTWG's 2018-2019 workplan. Therefore, the survey was successful in providing staff with insight and feedback that will help guide future decisions aimed at improving transit services region wide.

Respectfully submitted and signed by,

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