



North Central Area Transit

Public Engagement Summary

September 2025

Prepared on behalf of North Central Area Transit and the City of Ottawa, Illinois by SRF Consulting Group, Inc.



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Introduction

In 2024, the City of Ottawa and North Central Area Transit (NCAT) initiated the process of developing a systemwide Strategic Plan. To support this effort, the City of Ottawa and NCAT staff conducted a variety of public engagement activities. This Public Engagement Summary document outlines strategies that have been used to share information with and gather input from the community. These engagement activities include:

- Rider and community survey
- Open houses
- Focus groups
- Community events
- Transit Advisory Group (TAG) meetings
- Briefing for the City Council of the City of Ottawa

The intended outcome of public engagement in support of the Strategic Plan was to inform stakeholders about the planning process and the scope of potential future service changes to build awareness of and support for the plan. Additionally, community involvement was considered in the establishment and refinement of transit goals and desired outcomes. The process created meaningful opportunities for community members to provide input that shaped the project.

Rider and Community Survey

The survey was made public in October 2024 via SurveyMonkey and was also distributed on paper in both English and Spanish. Promotion occurred in-person at community events and open houses; additionally, online promotion was conducted via the NCAT website, Strategic Plan project website, and on social media. Key findings are outlined in the following sections.

When the survey closed in January 2025, there were 240 responses to the rider and community survey (including partial responses). Questions sought to understand both NCAT users' and other community members' current travel habits and decisions, as well as to gather information about their needs and preferences. Of the total number of respondents, 31 percent are active NCAT riders.

Respondent Demographics

The survey included nine questions to help understand who took the survey.

Respondents were widely distributed across LaSalle County, but four communities supplied the bulk of answers. Out of 149 responses, 28 percent lived in Ottawa, 14 percent in Peru, 14 percent in LaSalle, and 13 percent in Streator. The remaining 31 respondents (21 percent) either lived in smaller towns (e.g., Mendota, Seneca, Marseilles) or wrote in an "other" location, underscoring the plan's need to address both the Ottawa, Peru, and LaSalle areas, as well as numerous low-density rural areas.

Asked about their gender identity, 70 percent indicated female, 28 percent male, and two percent selected "self-describe." This imbalance should be kept in mind when interpreting travel-behavior questions, as women often report different trip-making patterns and safety concerns than men.

Nearly two-thirds (66 percent) of participants were 55 or older, reinforcing the importance of senior-friendly service design. Table 1 shows the results for the 122 responses to the question regarding age.

Table 1. Survey Respondents Age

Age Band	Share
65 +	34 %
55-64	32 %
45-54	14 %
35-44	14 %
25-34	6 %
18-24	<1 %
< 18	0 %

Asked if they are of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, six percent indicated “yes,” 88 percent indicated “no,” and seven percent indicated “prefer not to say.” Ninety-two percent of respondents indicated they are white, while only a handful of respondents indicated any other race. About six percent of respondents preferred not to indicate their race. Although LaSalle County is predominantly white, there was a slight underrepresentation of minorities in the response pool. Asked about which language respondents speak at home, nearly all respondents indicated English—only one respondent indicated that they spoke Spanish at home.

Respondents’ household incomes were more varied but skewed lower (Table 2). Approximately one-third of respondents indicated a household income of less than \$30,000. Lower-income residents tend to ride transit more often and are likely more sensitive to fare levels.

Table 2. Respondents’ Household Incomes

Income Band	Share
\$14,999 or less	15%
Between \$15,000 and \$29,999	14%
Between \$30,000 and \$49,999	12%
Between \$50,000 and \$74,999	12%
Between \$75,000 and \$99,999	6%
Between \$100,000 and \$124,999	14%
Between \$125,000 and \$149,999	4%
Between \$150,000 and \$199,999	1%
Between \$200,000 and \$299,999	1%
\$300,000 or more	0%
Prefer not to say	19%

Respondents were also asked if they have access to an automobile for personal use. While 66 percent said “yes,” 30 percent of respondents said that they do not have access to an automobile, indicating a strong need for transit among this group. The remaining four percent indicated that they have access to another type of personal vehicle.

The last demographic question asked respondents about their digital and financial resources, as well as mobility devices. They were able to select all that applied to them from the options below (Table 3). While the majority of respondents indicated having access to these resources, a sizeable proportion of respondents do not. This is an indication that NCAT should consider continuing to use traditional methods of scheduling rides via phone and accepting cash payments, in addition to modern systems. Additionally, a sizeable portion of respondents (16 percent) indicated using a mobility device, so it will be important to continue to use vehicles and services that accommodate mobility devices.

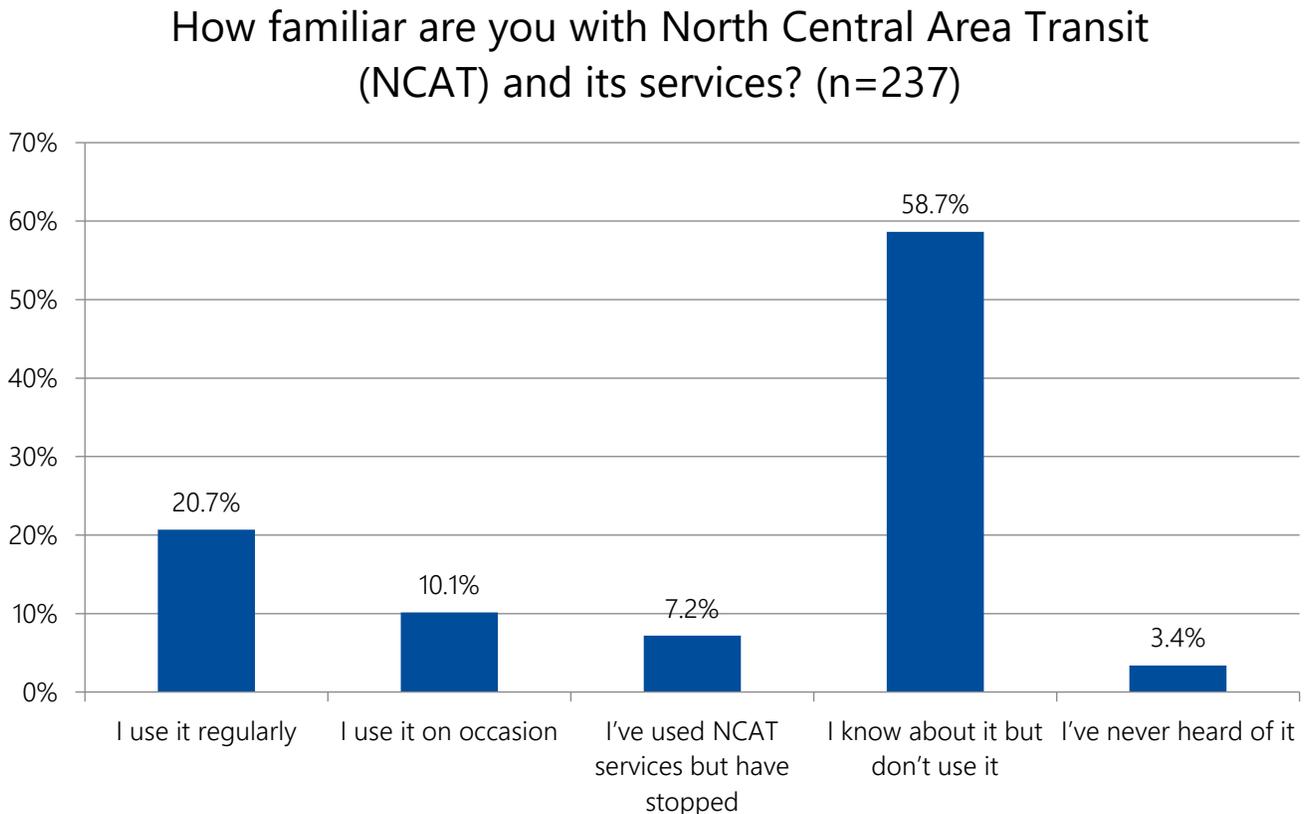
Table 3. Use of Digital Resources, Financial Resources, and Mobility Devices

Income Band	Share
I access the internet regularly	83%
I have a cell phone	79%
I have a smartphone with internet access	80%
I have an email address	88%
I have a credit card or debit card	84%
I use a mobility device	16%

System Familiarity

Survey results indicated that knowledge of NCAT is high (Figure 1) – less than five percent of survey respondents reported having never heard of the service. Nearly 60 percent of total respondents are familiar with the service but do not use it. Among respondents who are active riders (73 total), two-thirds use NCAT regularly and one-third use NCAT on occasion.

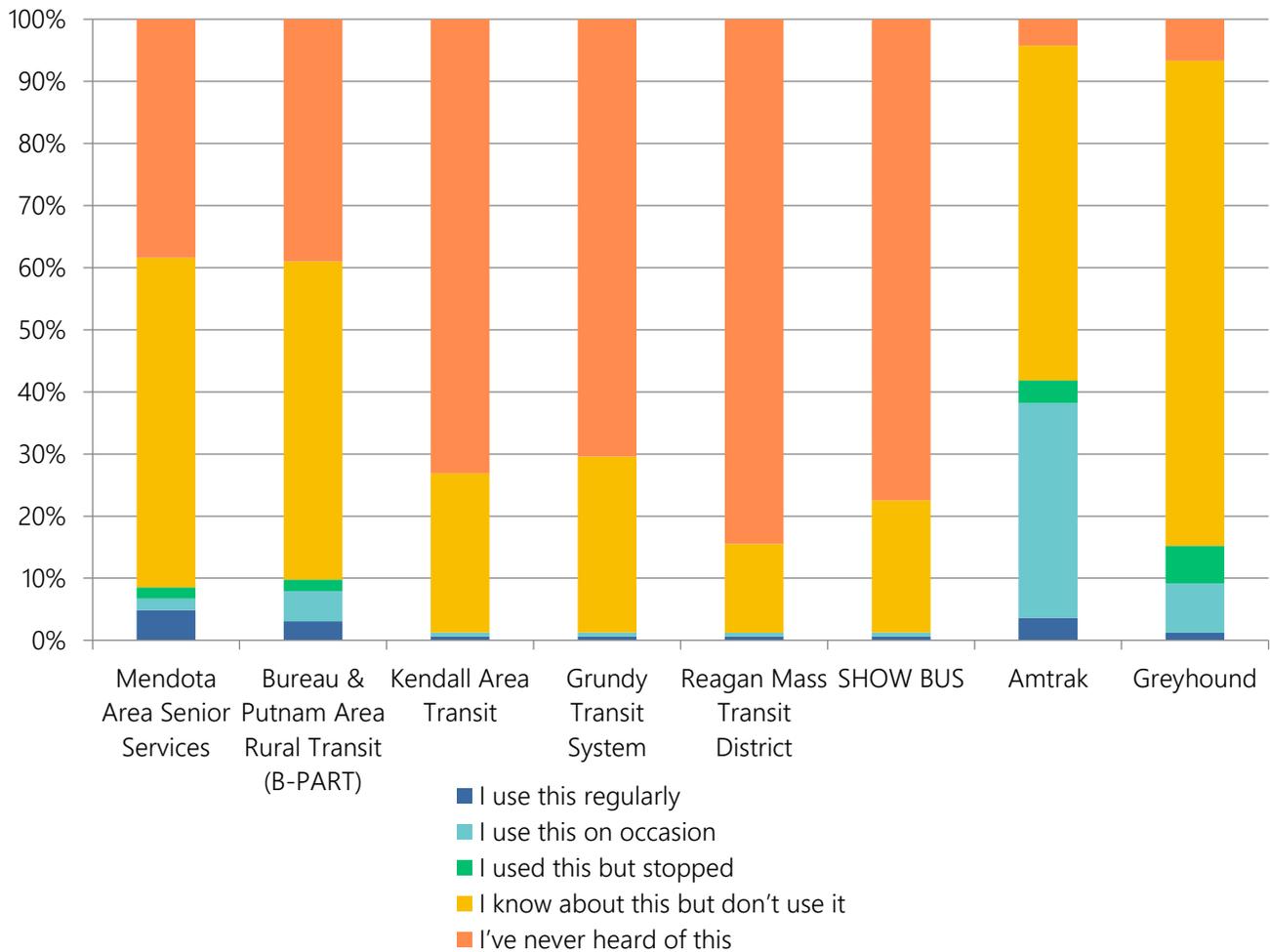
Figure 1. Familiarity with NCAT



As shown in Figure 2, when asked about other mobility services in the area, survey respondents were generally unfamiliar with out-of-county mobility services. Notable exceptions include B-PART and MASS, each of which just under 10 percent of survey respondents reported having used before. Amtrak and Greyhound also have relatively high familiarity levels relative to other mobility services, and they also tend to experience more frequent usage than other services.

Figure 2. Familiarity with Other Mobility Services

How familiar are you with other mobility services in and around LaSalle County? (n=168)

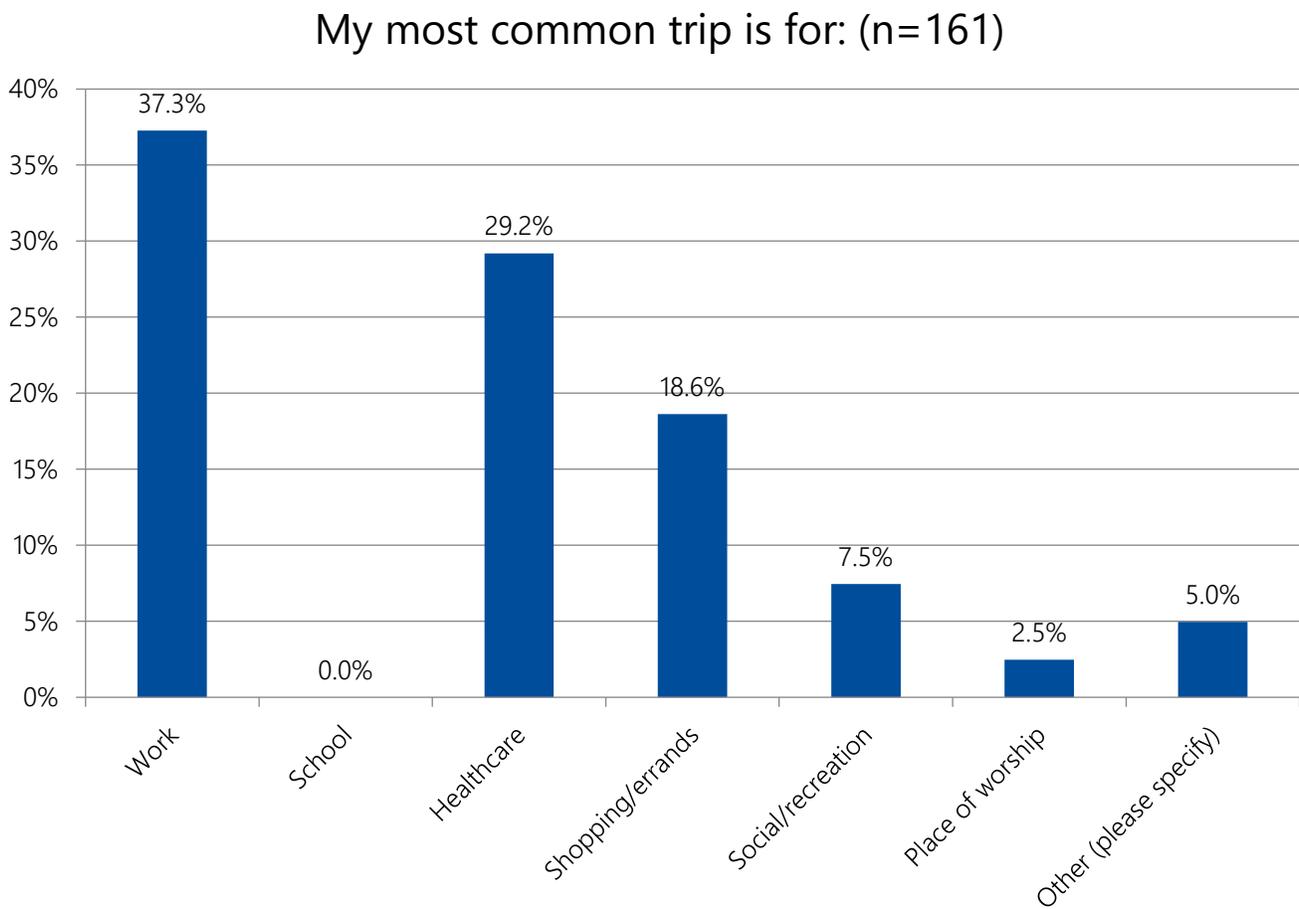


Trip Attributes

Respondents were asked a series of questions about the kinds of trips they make, along with various aspects of those trips. Survey respondents reported that their most common trip purposes include work (37 percent), healthcare (29 percent) and shopping/errands (19 percent). Notably, no survey respondents reported that their most common trip purpose is travel to school (Figure 3).

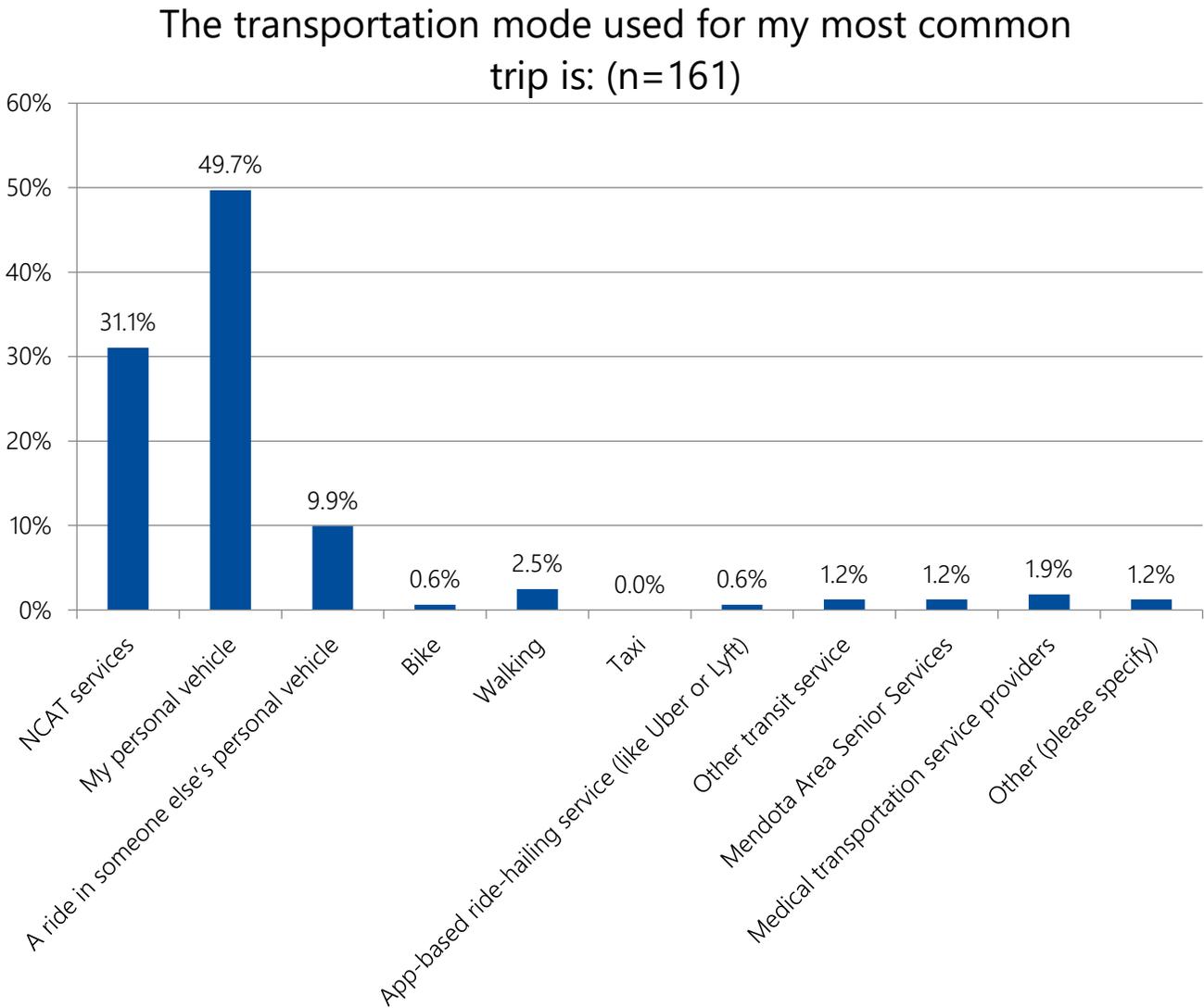
Among NCAT riders, these responses varied, with the top responses including healthcare (44 percent), work (35 percent), and social/recreation (10 percent). It's notable that healthcare jumps up as the most common trip purpose among NCAT riders, something that NCAT should continue to prioritize when planning service in the future.

Figure 3. Trip Purpose



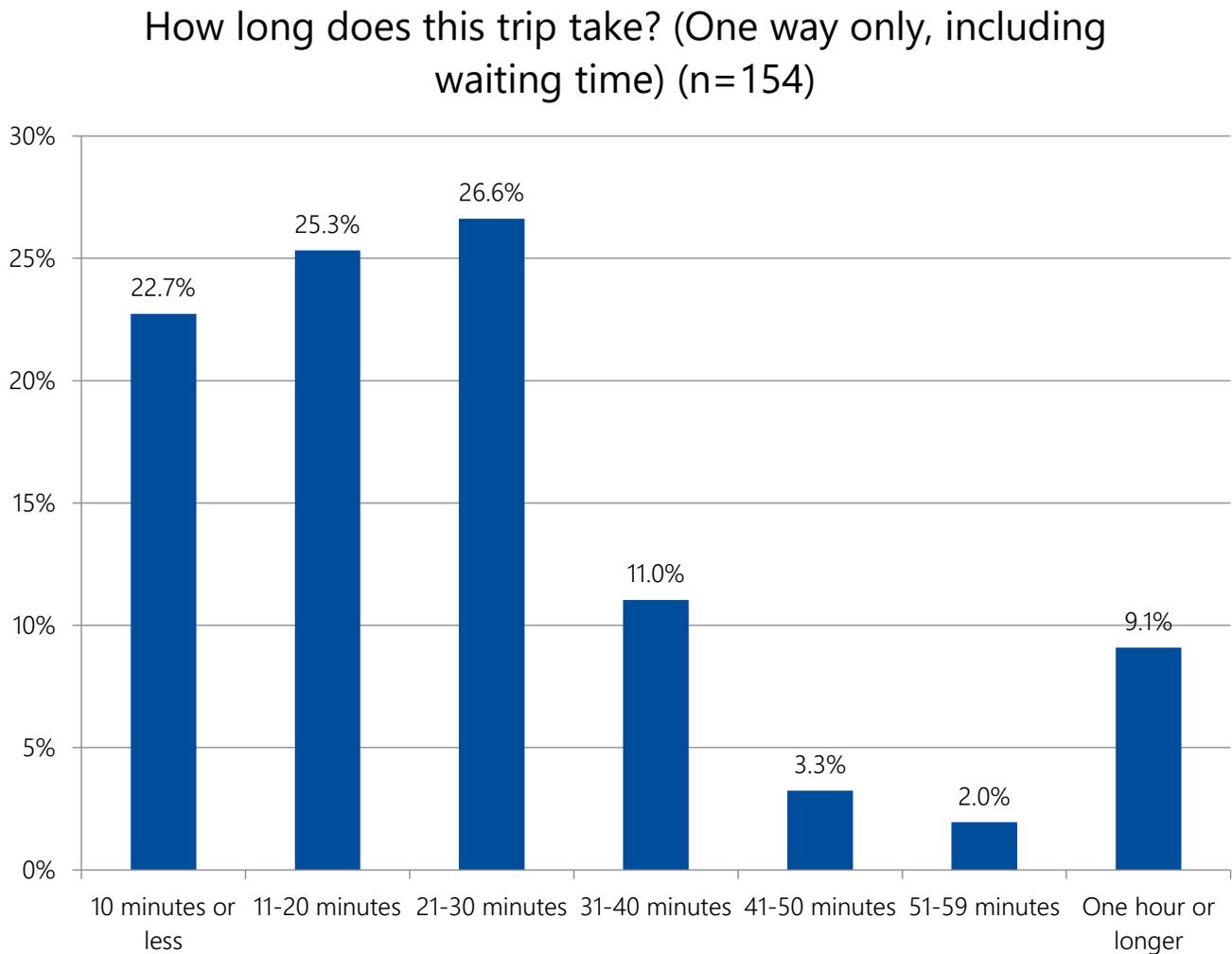
When asked about the mode they use for their most common trips, about half of all respondents reported using a personal vehicle (Figure 4). However, among active NCAT users, 77 percent use NCAT for their most common trip purpose. Approximately 10 percent reported receiving a ride from someone else, with approximately five percent reporting that they use a transportation service other than NCAT, including Uber or Lyft.

Figure 4. Mode Choice



Respondents were also asked about the duration of their most common trips. Respondents' most common trip tends to take 30 minutes or less among both the general respondent population and active NCAT rider respondents (Figure 5). Trips 10 minutes or less are more common among all respondents (23 percent) than active NCAT riders (17 percent). This could be an indication that NCAT riders without vehicles may be foregoing shorter trips that they would take if service were more readily available.

Figure 5. Trip Duration

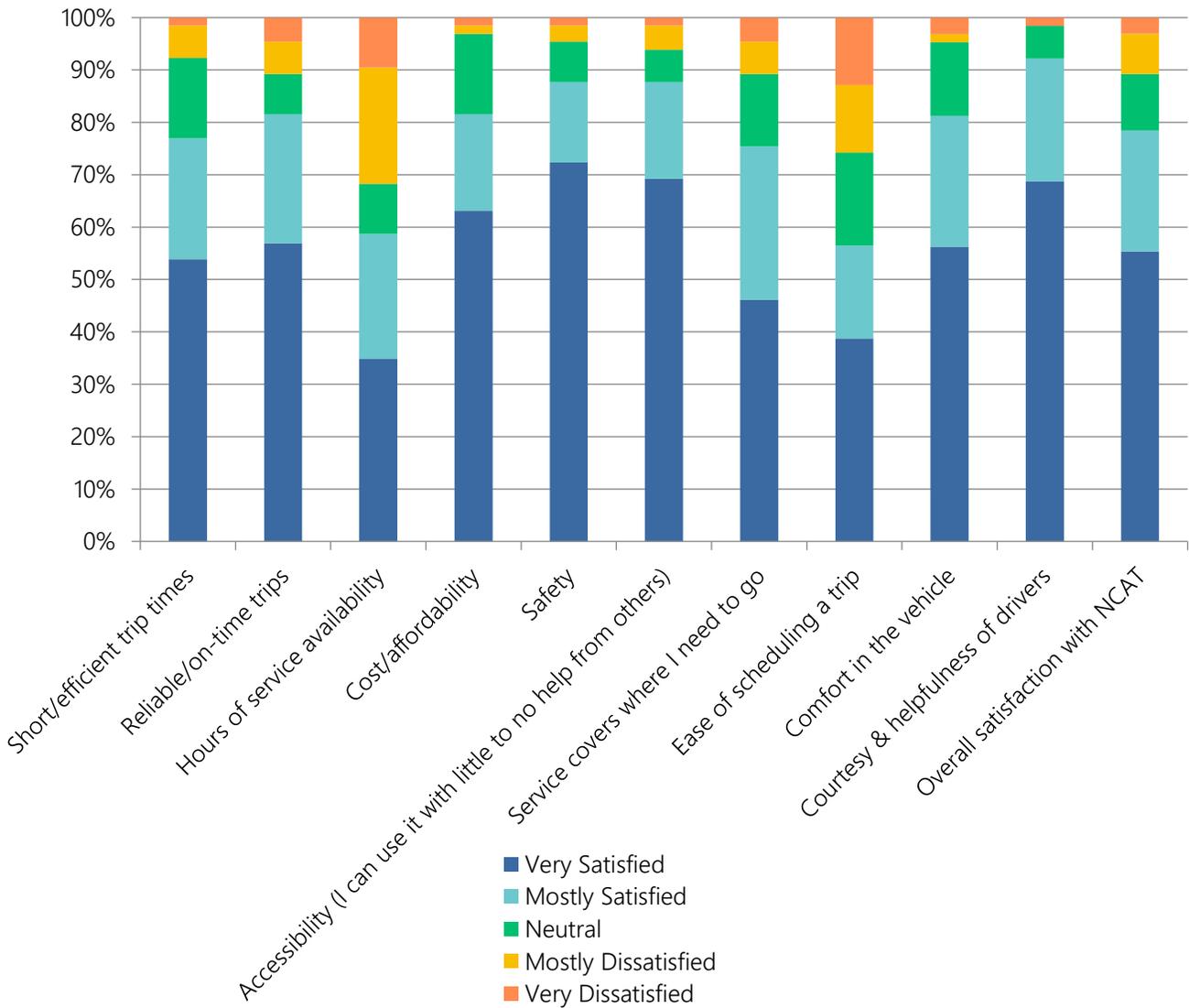


NCAT Satisfaction

Of those survey respondents who reported using NCAT either often or on occasion, there are generally high rates of customer satisfaction (Figure 6). Riders are most satisfied with the service’s safety, drivers, and accessibility; they tend to be least satisfied with hours of service availability, ease of scheduling, and service area coverage.

Figure 6. NCAT Service Satisfaction

How satisfied are you with the following NCAT service characteristics? (n=66)



Survey respondents were also asked their opinions about potential factors discouraging NCAT use (Figure 7). The top factors reported by all survey respondents overall (including both NCAT riders and non-riders) were:

1. NCAT does not operate on weekends (25 percent)
2. It's too difficult to schedule a trip (23 percent)
3. NCAT does not operate during the weekday times I need (18 percent)
4. I need to travel outside of LaSalle County (14 percent)

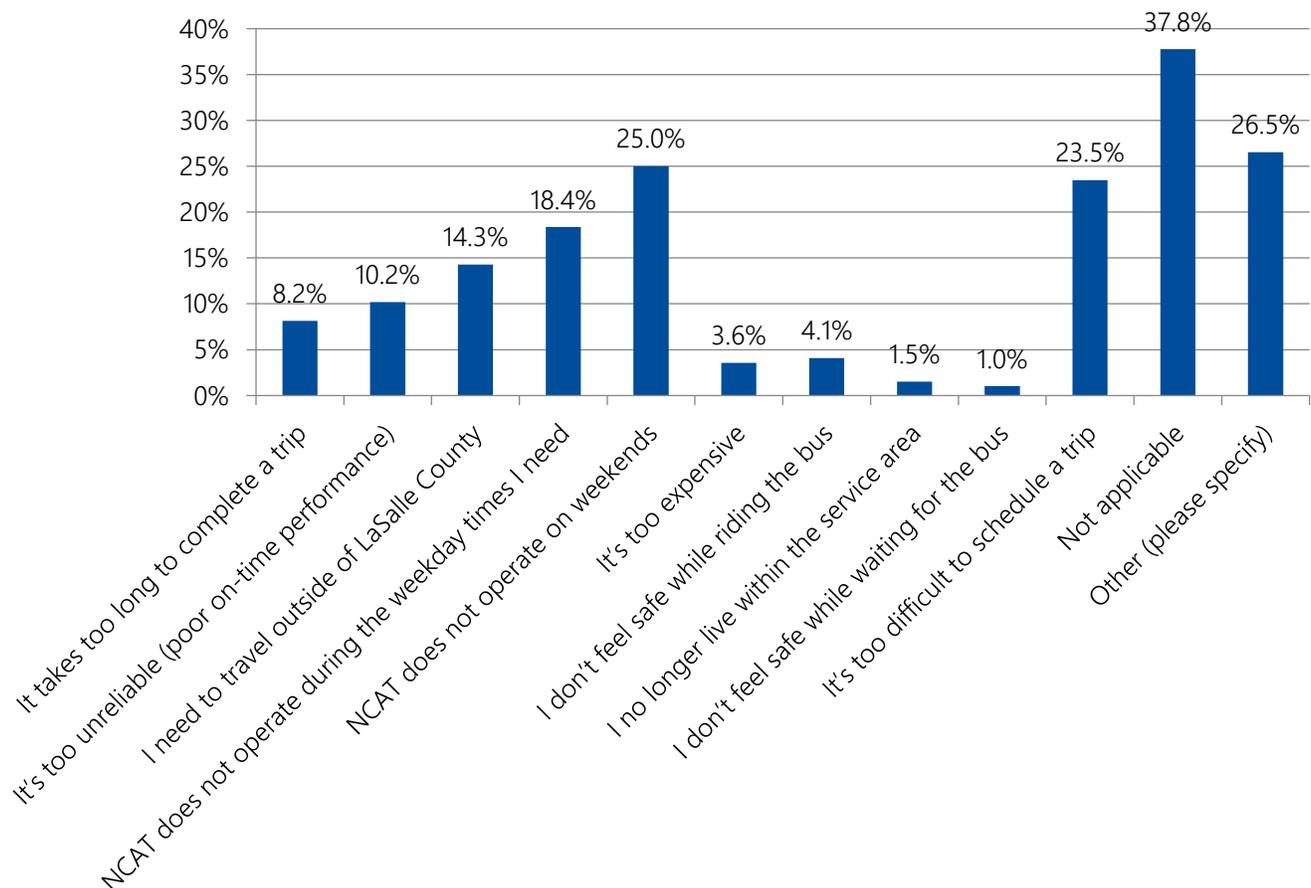
Similarly, the top factors reported by NCAT riders specifically were:

1. NCAT does not operate on weekends (42 percent)
2. NCAT does not operate during the weekday times I need (32 percent)
3. It's too difficult to schedule a trip (23 percent)
4. I need to travel outside of LaSalle County (17 percent)

Factors such as trip cost, safety, travel speed, and reliability were not reported as significant deterrents.

Figure 7. Factors Discouraging NCAT Use

Do any of the following reasons discourage you from using NCAT services? (Select all that apply) (n=196)

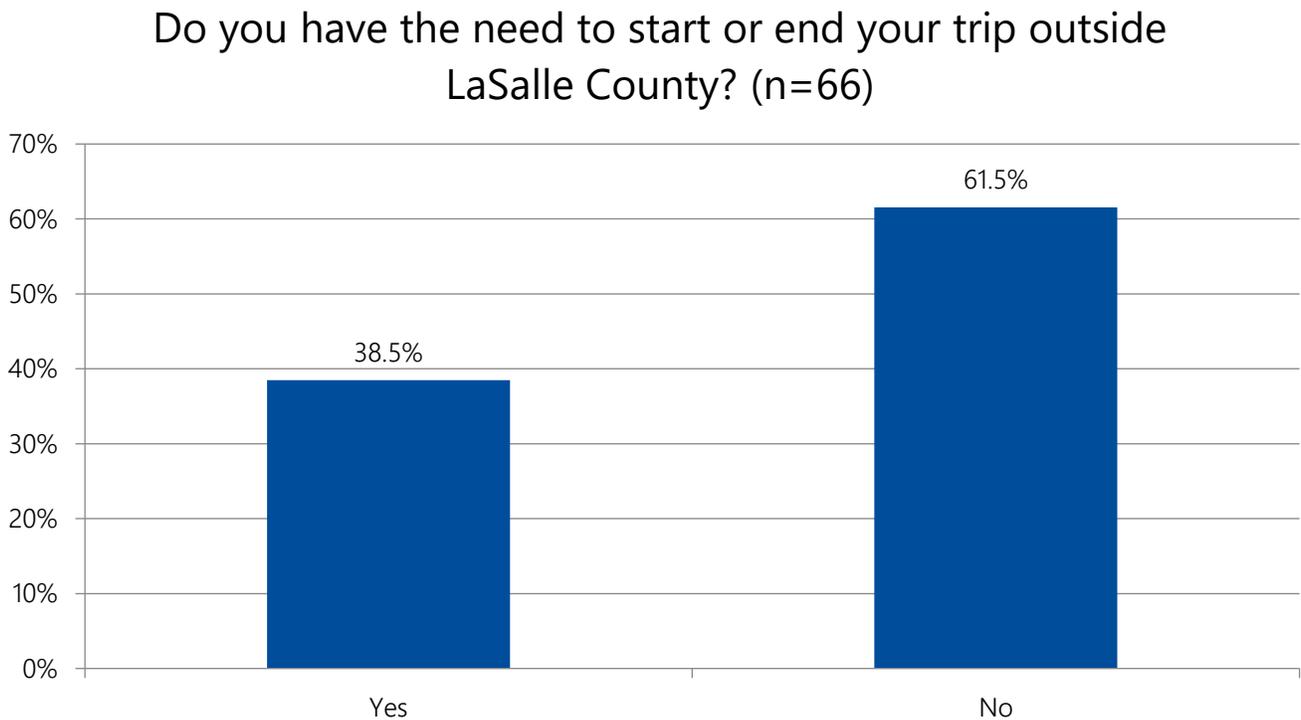


Transportation Needs and Opportunities

To assess the needs and preferences for public transportation services across survey respondents, people were asked whether they have a need to travel outside of LaSalle County (Figure 8). A sizeable minority (just over 38 percent) of respondents reported a need to start or end their trips outside LaSalle County. Notably, 65 of 66 responses to this question were from active NCAT users.

Generally, those who do travel outside the county rely on friends, family, and/or coworkers (six respondents) or the use of other services like BPART and MASS (five respondents).

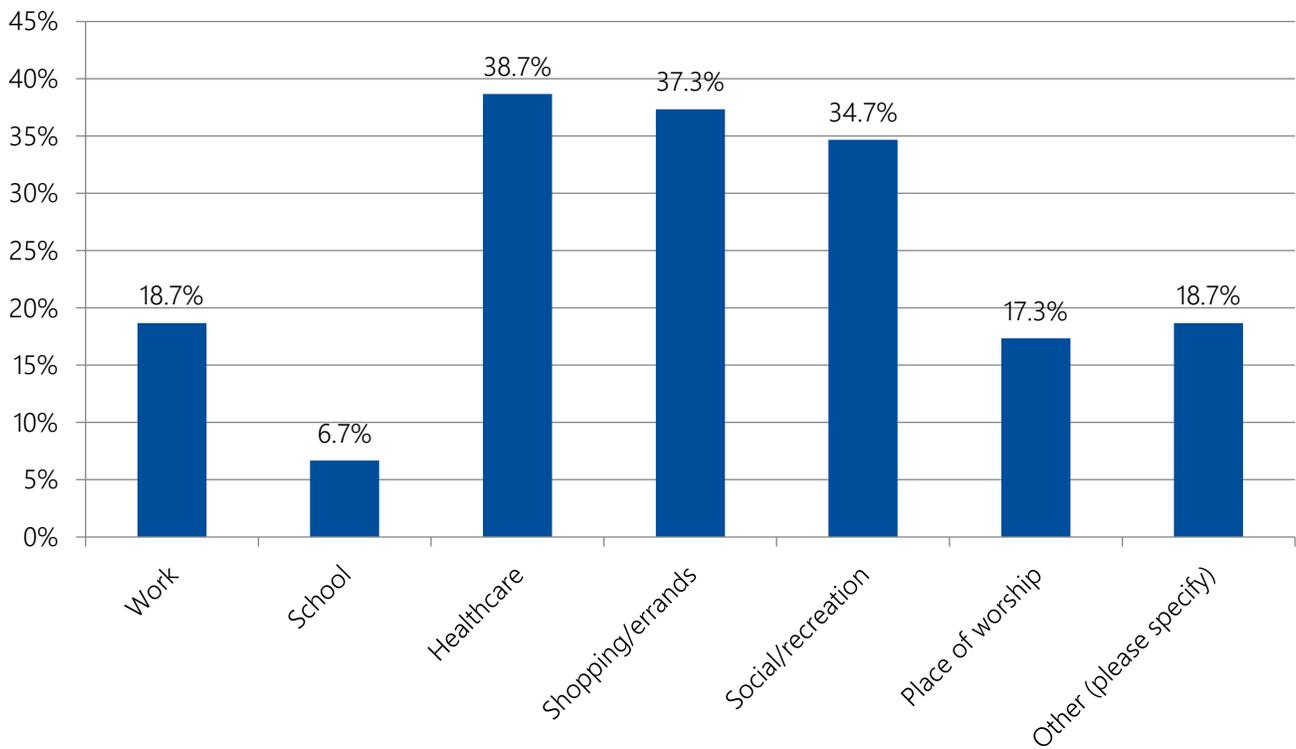
Figure 8. Out-of-County Trip Needs



Survey respondents were asked what types of trips they might be missing due to a lack of transportation (Figure 9). They were able to select all the options that applied to them. The three most common trip purposes people miss, by far, are healthcare, shopping/errands, and social/recreation. With work being a relatively low percentage, this could imply that many respondents are able to get to work but are unable to take trips outside of work. This strongly implies that residents need easily accessible and affordable transit for trip purposes other than work. There were no trends discerned from the option to fill in "other."

Figure 9. Types of Trips Missed Due to Lack of Transportation

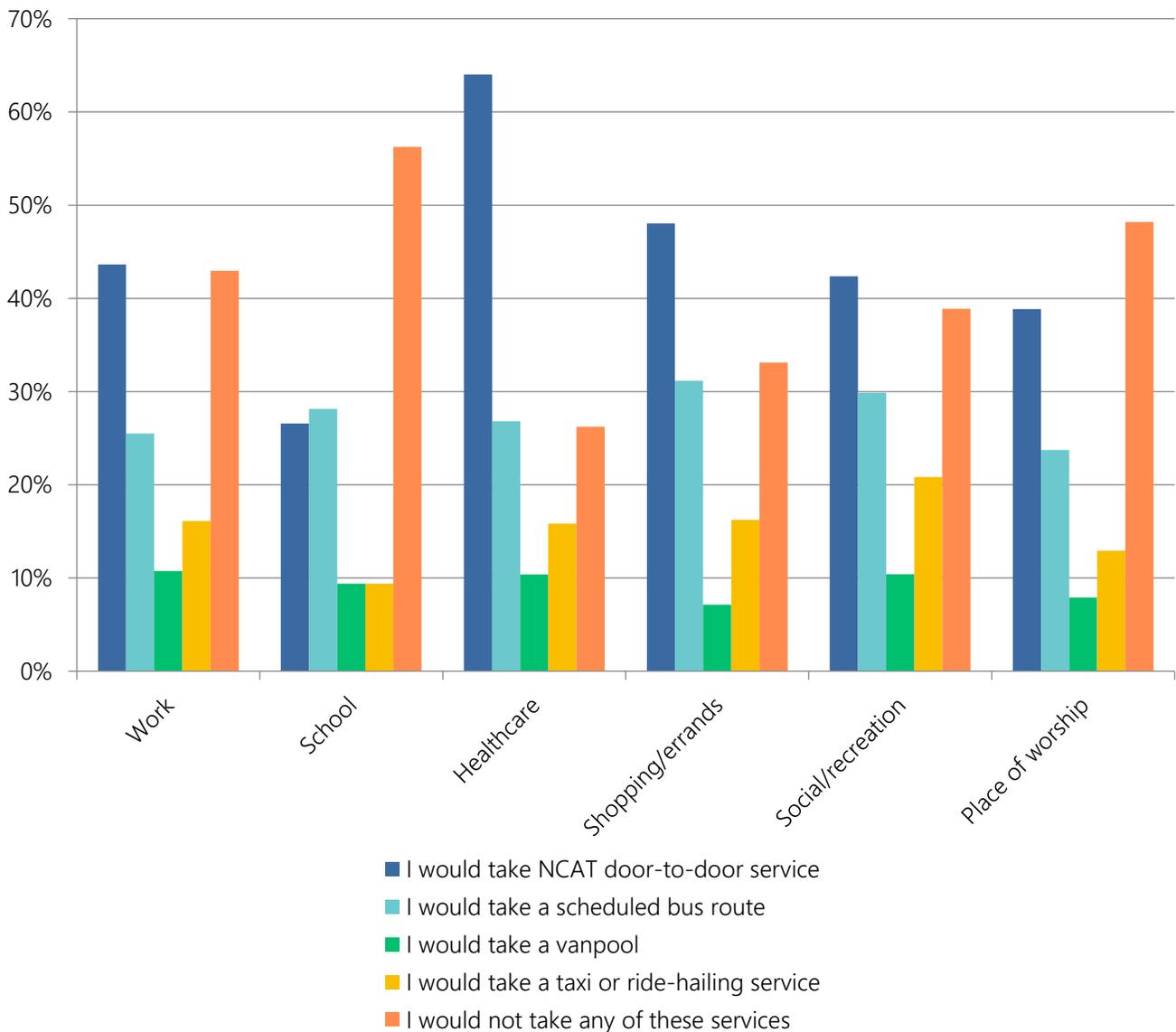
If there are trips you are not taking due to a lack of transportation, what type of trips are they? Select all that apply.



Survey respondents were also asked about their willingness to use different service types (Figure 10). Respondents reported that they are most willing to take NCAT for healthcare, shopping/errands, and work trips. About 20 to 30 percent of respondents reported that they would take a scheduled bus route for most trip purposes. However, active rider respondents reported a lesser willingness to take a scheduled bus route or a taxi/ride-hailing service as opposed to NCAT's demand response service. Interest in vanpool and taxi/ride-hailing service is relatively low for all trip purposes, with active NCAT riders reporting interest below 10 percent for all purposes.

Figure 10. Willingness to Use Different Service Types

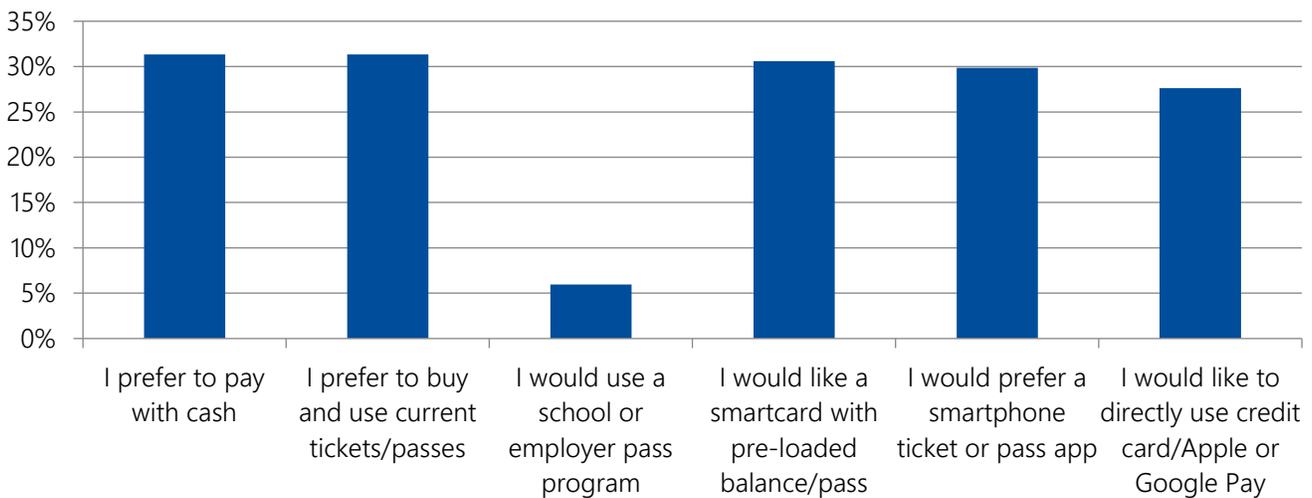
Would you use any of these services for the following purposes? (Select all that apply) (n=169)



Respondents were asked how they would prefer to pay their fare and given the option to select up to two fare payment methods (Figure 11). The method selected least, by far, was a school or employer pass program. This may be an indication that many survey respondents are not students or employees. The remaining options were selected almost equally. This indicates that NCAT should provide a variety of fare payment options that include cash and technology.

Figure 11. Fare Payment Preferences

How would you prefer to pay for your fare? Select up to two.



Finally, respondents were given the option to write an open-ended response if they had any additional thoughts regarding future mobility services in LaSalle County or improvements to NCAT service. The following summarizes the 48 responses, grouped into key themes.

SERVICE AVAILABILITY & SPAN

- Many respondents asked for Saturday service and late-night coverage to support social trips, shift workers (especially 2nd/3rd shift), and people leaving bars safely.
- Longer daily hours were requested so riders can reach early medical appointments, work start times before 8 a.m., and return trips after 5 p.m.
- Regular trips to regional medical hubs, particularly OSF St. Francis in Peoria and Prompt Care facilities, were suggested; one idea was a morning departure and mid-afternoon return to match discharge times.

SCHEDULING BOTTLENECKS

- Chronic overbooking and long lead times (often 2–3 weeks) discourage use; riders report being denied even short in-town errands such as pharmacy runs.
- Online or app-based booking and better call-center capacity were proposed to streamline the process.

COVERAGE MODEL

- While riders appreciate demand-response, many favor a hybrid network with predictable fixed routes—for example, a daily loop connecting LaSalle, Peru, and Oglesby; healthcare and shopping shuttles; or designated stops county-wide.
- Several comments advocate reserving dedicated vehicles for seniors and people with disabilities while operating other buses as general-public circulators.

FLEET, COMFORT & SAFETY

- Riders request well-maintained vehicles, especially for wheelchair users.
- Some cited rude drivers or unruly riders; suggestions include policies to remove intoxicated or disruptive passengers and customer-service training for staff.
- One rider was concerned that the service is “curb-to-curb” rather than true door-to-door suggesting riders want help with multiple grocery bags and mobility needs.

CAPACITY & RESOURCES

- Many suggest hiring more drivers and using more vehicles to cut waiting times and accept short-notice trips.
- There was some concern that fares are high for low-income and rural residents.

SPECIALIZED RIDER GROUPS

- Healthcare patients (dialysis, hospital discharges, therapy) and children in childcare needing therapies were highlighted as underserved under current scheduling windows.
- Elderly residents living alone rely on NCAT for monthly grocery runs and want higher bag limits.

PUBLIC PERCEPTION

- Some respondents see insufficient transit as a barrier to employment, education, and basic errands in rural LaSalle County, underscoring a broader desire for expanded public transportation.
- Many respondents expressed strong appreciation—“great service,” “best in the area,” “proud sponsor”.

Public Engagement Events

In addition to the survey, the project team has hosted and participated in several public engagement events, including community events, open houses, and focus groups. These activities are summarized in the following sections.

Community Events

Staff attended the annual Burgoo Festival hosted by the LaSalle County Historical Society in October 2024 to both promote NCAT service to the public and to gather input for the project.



At the Burgoo Festival, staff spoke to approximately 75 community members and gathered some feedback from the public. Event attendees highlighted that NCAT service is difficult to schedule due to high demand, with rides booked weeks in advance. Some expressed interest in extended evening and weekend service to allow for recreational trips. There was also a suggestion that NCAT could serve visitors staying at the Holiday Inn Club Vacations Fox River Resort in Sheridan to help them navigate the area.

In-home caregivers noted that their clients rely on NCAT when other transportation options are unavailable. However, some attendees perceived inefficiencies in the service, pointing to empty buses and challenges in filling last-minute cancellations. Riders expressed a preference for the newer vans over the cutaway buses. Additionally, several people mistakenly believed NCAT was only for seniors or individuals with disabilities, indicating a need for clearer public communication. Medical staff members took flyers and surveys to share with their colleagues, helping to expand outreach efforts.

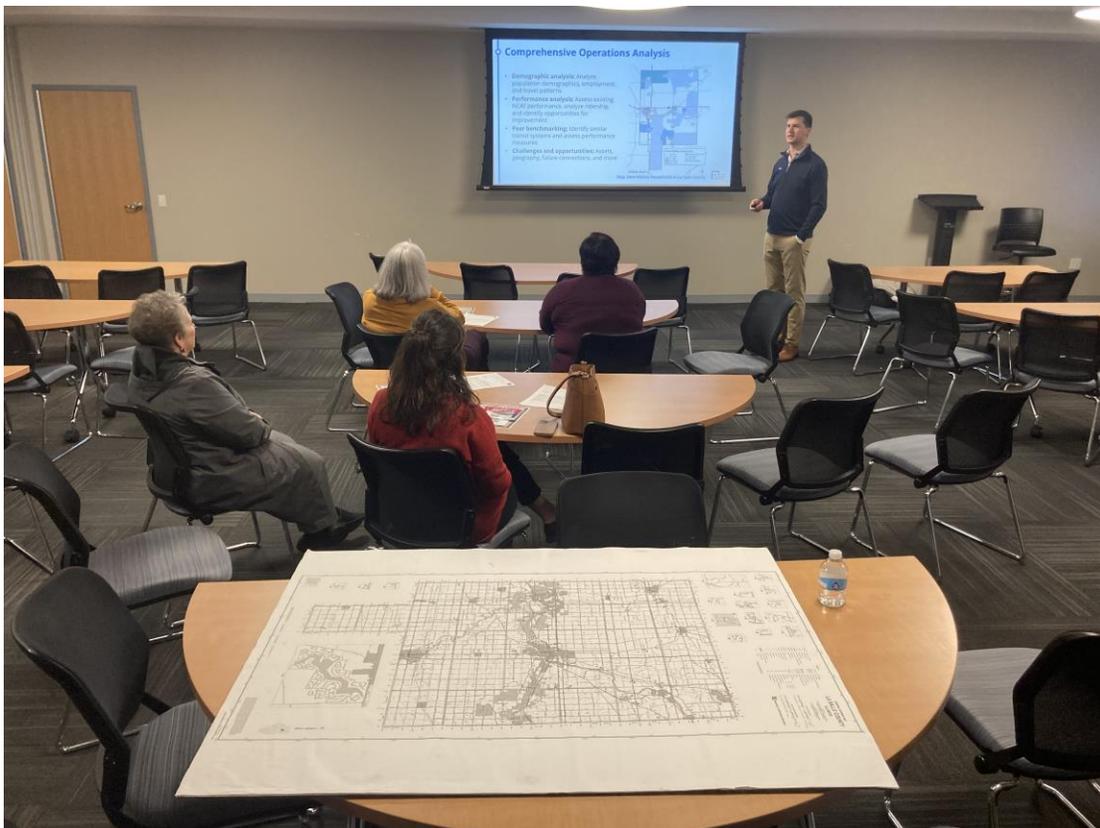
Additionally, after the service scenarios were drafted, the project team staffed a table at the Ottawa Family Pride event on June 14, 2025. The primary purpose of staffing a table was to drive traffic to the Future Service Framework Feedback Survey (see a summary of findings on page 21).

Open Houses

In November 2024, the project team hosted open houses at both Illinois Valley Community College (IVCC) and the YMCA. Over these two days, staff engaged with just under 100 people and were able to have some discussions with community members, including active NCAT riders and an operator.

Several key themes emerged from public feedback:

- **Service Hours & Accessibility:** Many attendees expressed a need for later service hours, especially for community college students.
- **Language Barriers:** There is demand for better access to NCAT services for Spanish speakers, among other non-English speakers.
- **Affordability & Coverage:** Those unfamiliar with NCAT were impressed by its low fares and service area.
- **Rider Notifications & Scheduling:** While riders appreciated booking reminders, some noted that occasional failures in the system led to confusion about whether their ride was coming.
- **Community & Institutional Support:** Representatives from community colleges, medical centers, and care facilities stressed that NCAT is critical for their clients and offered to help distribute surveys.



An NCAT driver also provided insight into a couple potential service improvements:

- **City Route Runs:** There is high demand for bringing back city runs (fixed-route or flexible services), which could improve efficiency. A pilot program for limited service was suggested.
- **Scheduling Software Issues:** Drivers noted that current scheduling does not allow enough time between trips, creating logistical challenges.

While many attendees had heard of NCAT—often through friends, family, or colleagues—few were riders themselves. Interest in the service tended to be on behalf of a family member or someone they worked with rather than for personal use. Attendees highlighted the service’s usefulness for those who typically drive but face barriers such as car troubles, high gas prices, or the inconvenience of coordinating carpools.

Members of the Transit Advisory Group (TAG) suggested that outreach should focus on meeting potential riders where they are, such as at senior homes and low-income housing communities, and they volunteered to compile a list of potential partners and stakeholders. A LaSalle County board member brought up a potential partnership with the county nursing home, which is considering acquiring an additional vehicle for transporting residents. Instead, the board member suggested exploring whether NCAT could meet this need, and discussions will continue regarding establishing a possible service agreement.



Focus Groups

The project team hosted two focus groups in February 2025, one each with community organization representatives and with government stakeholders, to gain a greater understanding of the desired project outcomes.

Community Organization Focus Group

This group consisted of representatives from the following organizations:

- LaSalle County Veteran Service Office
- The Housing Authority for LaSalle County (HALC)
- Heritage Corridor Destinations
- Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)
- IVCC
- OSF HealthCare
- Illinois Valley Center for Independent Living (IVCIL)
- Pavilion of Ottawa
- Perfectly Flawed Foundation

The group emphasized that NCAT is a critical transportation service for many residents, providing access to essential services such as medical care, housing appointments, and education. Without it, many individuals have limited or no alternative transportation options. However, there is a strong need for increased trip availability, as wait times to schedule rides are often too long, and some demand exists for same-day service. Expanding the service window—especially later into the evening and on weekends—was another priority expressed by participants.

Countywide coverage remains essential, as many riders need to travel between jurisdictions. While organizations are open to exploring alternative service models, such as limited fixed-route transit or microtransit, they want to ensure these changes do not compromise access to transportation across the county. Funding was also a key concern, with potential opportunities to increase revenue through grants and partnerships with local organizations and employers. However, there remains an ongoing challenge in securing a long-term, sustainable funding source. While any new tax would be difficult to implement, a property tax increase would be particularly challenging.

Participants generally agreed that NCAT should receive larger and more consistent contributions from other municipalities. However, NCAT's governance structure within the City of Ottawa complicates efforts to secure regional funding, creating an obstacle to broader financial support.

Government Stakeholder Focus Group

This group consisted of representatives from the following government jurisdictions:

- City of Mendota
- City of Streator
- LaSalle County
- City of LaSalle
- Village of North Utica

Government stakeholders are still in the process of understanding NCAT's role in their communities, including its governance structure, service offerings, and how riders access transportation. There is interest in improving operational efficiency by increasing the rate of shared trips and exploring the use of smaller vehicles, along with support for cost-effective service expansions.

Stakeholders expressed mixed opinions on the need for Amtrak connections. A major concern was NCAT's governance structure within the City of Ottawa, with some believing there should be stronger incentives for other municipalities to contribute financially and participate in decision-making. There is also a concern that NCAT's growth could place a financial strain on the city.

The County Board is not currently engaged in transit discussions, and while stakeholders did not see property taxes as a viable funding solution, they did not propose alternative tax options.

In addition to the government stakeholder focus groups, the project team met once with the City Council of the City of Ottawa toward the beginning of the project to brief them on the scope of the project.



Future Service Framework Feedback Survey

In the spring of 2025, the project team published a brief survey to solicit feedback on NCAT's Draft Future Service Framework. This set of draft service recommendations was published on the NCAT Strategic Plan project website and accompanied by a link to this survey. The purpose of this survey was to ensure that input received from the public during the initial round of engagement was reflected in the project's recommendations and to continue to involve stakeholders and community members in the planning process. Responses served as an input during the finalization of project recommendations and phasing decisions. Key findings from this survey are outlined on the following pages. In total, the survey received 58 responses; the number of responses to each question is noted individually.

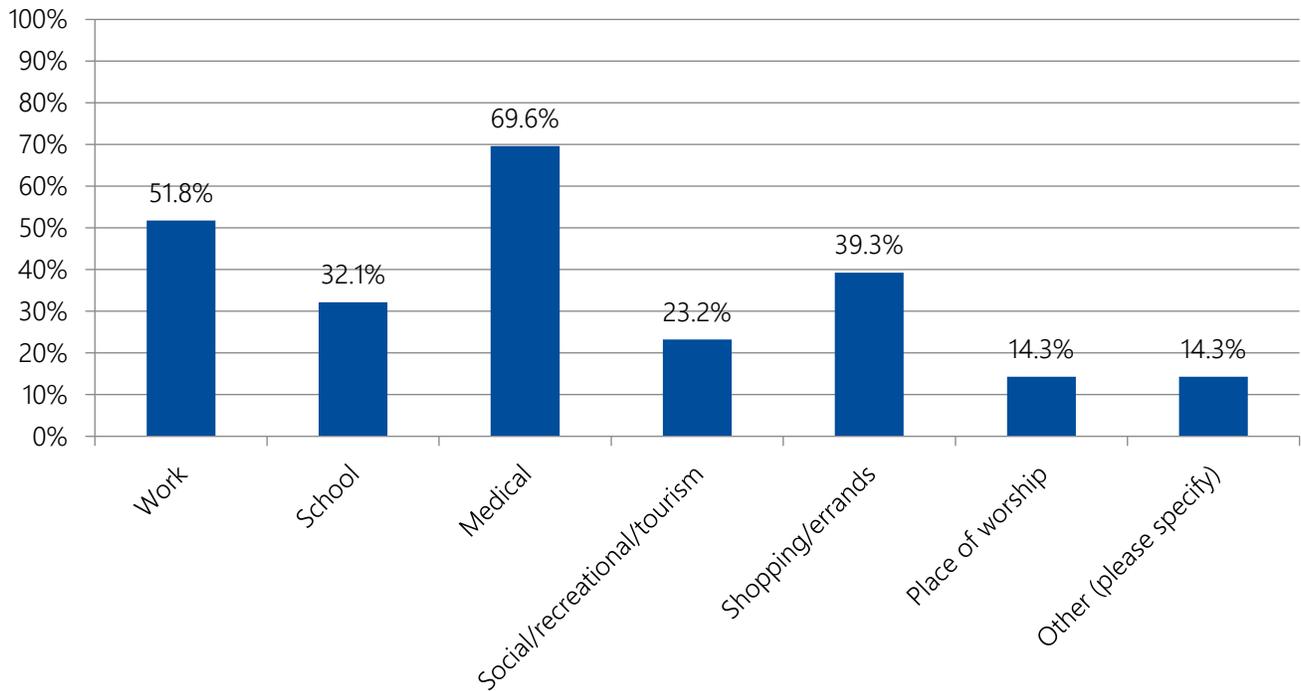
Travel Preferences

To understand the preferences and goals of participants evaluating project recommendations, the project team first asked about the types of transit trips most important to participants (Figure 12), as well as the desired specific travel patterns (Three-quarters of survey respondents indicated that they would like to use NCAT services to travel between two towns in LaSalle County. Most respondents also reported a desire for in-town trips, and over a third would like to make connections outside NCAT's current service area. These results broadly align with conclusions drawn from the first project survey,

Figure 13). Respondents were able to select multiple responses to both questions. Compared to responses in the first round of engagement (Figure 10), survey participants here were slightly more likely to express a desire to use NCAT for medical trip purposes; work, shopping, and errands were also popular response categories in both surveys. Responses marked "Other" included visits to the courthouse (3), transportation for individuals with disabilities (2), and agency appointments (1).

Figure 12. Trip Purpose

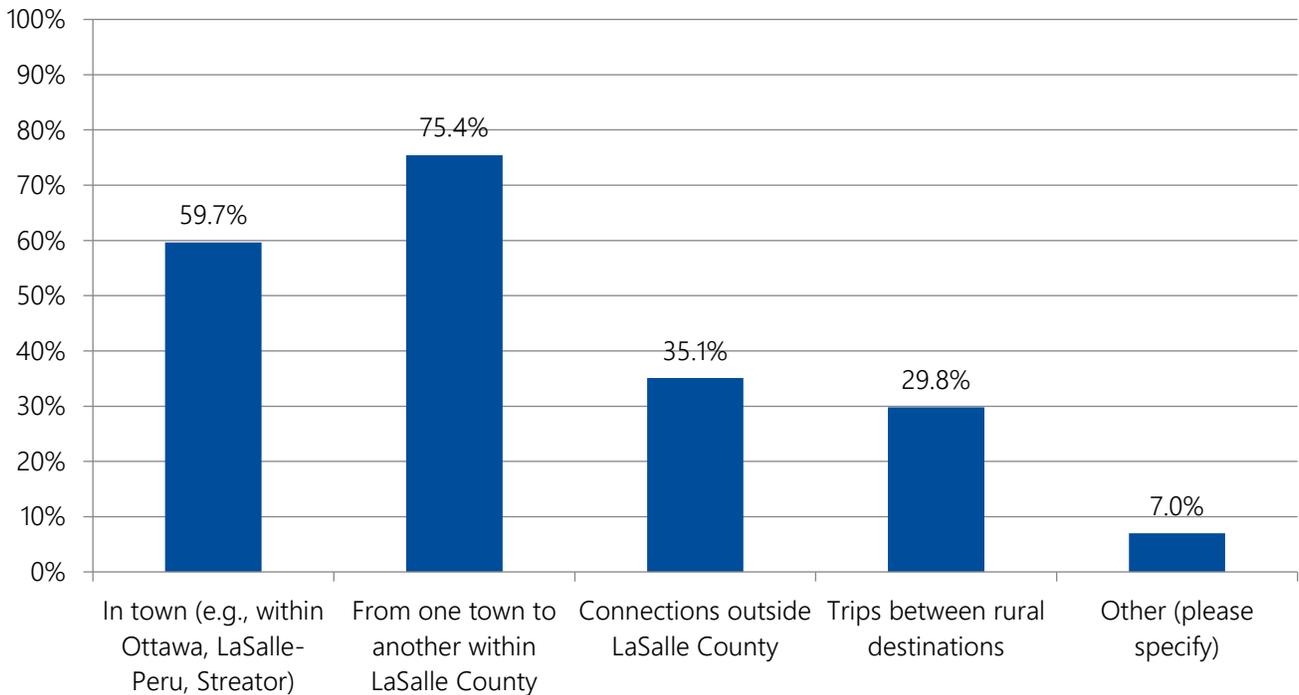
What types of transit trips are most important to you? (n=56)



Three-quarters of survey respondents indicated that they would like to use NCAT services to travel between two towns in LaSalle County. Most respondents also reported a desire for in-town trips, and over a third would like to make connections outside NCAT's current service area. These results broadly align with conclusions drawn from the first project survey,

Figure 13. Travel Destination Preference

Where would you like to travel using NCAT services? (n=57)



Service Scenario Feedback

After providing initial information related to travel preferences, respondents were then asked to rank each of the proposed service scenarios in the Draft Future Service Framework. Table 4 shows the results of this exercise, with values closer to 1 indicating a higher average ranking and values closer to 4 indicating lesser preference. Overall, respondents preferred the fixed or deviated route alternatives, while microtransit was viewed less favorably and may be seen as a supplement to other service types.

Table 4. Ranking of Service Scenarios (n=57)

Service Scenario	1	2	3	4	Average Rank
Deviated Routes	19	13	11	14	2.35
Regional Routes	15	14	17	11	2.42
Expanded Demand Response	19	8	14	16	2.47
Microtransit	4	22	15	16	2.75

Survey respondents had additional opportunities to provide written feedback about what they liked and did not like about the Draft Future Service Framework. The following trends emerged from 32 comments discussing favorable attributes of these service scenarios:

- Riders value door-to-door service in rural areas outside Ottawa, LaSalle, Peru, Streator, and Marseilles
- Door-to-door service is essential, especially for those with special needs and for medical trip purposes
- Support for flexible options like demand-response, microtransit, and deviated routes
- Expanded hours (5am-10pm), weekend service, and scheduling flexibility are beneficial for work trips
- Transit is used for jobs, court, probation, agency appointments and healthcare access
- Scheduled routes are viewed as an asset to the community and provide options to those who can't or don't schedule ahead of time

Additional feedback was provided from those who had suggestions on how to better address transportation needs, access key destinations, and improve service scenarios, based on 26 responses:

- Nine responses specifically indicate no additional comment
- Riders dislike that geographical expansion outside of LaSalle County is not proposed
- Skepticism over ability to sustain ridership on fixed/deviated/scheduled service if implemented
- Strong desire for weekend service regardless of mode
- All flexible service types face barriers in scheduling or enrollment processes
- Need to address the absence of short-term ride requests on flexible services, as well as delays

Conclusions from this survey were discussed in detail during the scenario phasing process. Public input on these recommendations was incorporated into the final Future Service Framework document.

Transit Advisory Group Meetings

The project team hosted four dedicated meetings with the NCAT Transit Advisory Group (TAG), one each in November 2024, February 2025, May 2025, July 2025. The TAG includes operations and technical staff from NCAT as well as representatives from LaSalle County, local municipalities, community organizations, and human/social services providers. The group's role in the project is to shape the technical analysis of the study and provide the project team with technical input, as well as assistance with resolving policy issues. The TAG members also represent their respective constituents and communities in terms of identifying needs and preferences related to improved transit in the county.

Meeting Findings

The first TAG meeting in November 2024 served as an introduction to the project process and work conducted to date. This included a look at preliminary data from the Comprehensive Operational Analysis (COA) and a brief summary of the project's initial engagement efforts in October 2024.

With this information covered to frame the discussion, the project team led a visioning session with opportunities to discuss NCAT's vision and goals, system performance, customer experience, and future opportunities for improvement. The results of this exercise, guided by NCAT and the project team's understanding of the need for this strategic planning process, are shown in Figure 14.

The second TAG meeting in February 2025 covered the full set of key findings from the COA, including information on recent changes at NCAT, common travel corridors, and popular destinations. This meeting also included a summary of existing plans in the region, information about neighboring transit systems, and more detailed analysis of demographics, employment, operations trends, travel patterns, and peer transit systems. Finally, the project team reviewed funding and governance structures and outlined the forthcoming stages of the project, including a framework for future service scenarios, an explanation of service options to be evaluated, and upcoming engagement activities to further inform the development of NCAT service.

In the May 2025 TAG meeting, the project team presented the breadth of transit options considered for LaSalle County. The group dug deeper into the four proposed service scenarios: Deviated Fixed Routes, Microtransit Zones, Regional Routes, and Expanded Demand-Response. For each one, the team presented proposed service characteristics (such as routing alignments, service spans, frequencies, and service zones), as well as preliminary ridership and cost estimates. The group discussed the benefits and potential drawbacks of each of the service options, which were used in the formation of the final scenario phasing.

The final TAG meeting, in July 2025, focused on governance and funding challenges for the system. The consultant team highlighted vulnerabilities in state and federal funding streams, particularly the Downstate Operating Assistance Program (DOAP) and Medicaid reimbursements, as well as the insufficiency of current local match sources. Ottawa provides the bulk of support through cash, in-kind insurance, and staff time, while many other municipalities contribute less, which underscores the political and historical challenges of advancing a broader countywide or regional approach.

Several governance and funding alternatives were reviewed, including remaining with the City of Ottawa, shifting to LaSalle County, creating a new countywide Mass Transit District (MTD), joining an existing district like Reagan MTD, or forming a non-profit. Each option carried trade-offs related to political feasibility, administrative capacity, and funding potential. TAG members emphasized the need for phased implementation—continuing under Ottawa in the near term while building broader municipal support and preparing groundwork for an eventual MTD. Key takeaways were the urgent need to establish stronger local cash contributions, the risks of overly complex governance, the importance of grounding decisions in travel pattern data, and the need to adapt to evolving state legislative frameworks.

Figure 14. TAG Meeting #1 Summary

<p>Strategic Plan Motivation</p>	<p>With growing ridership and an increasingly diverse user base, NCAT must develop strategic plans for service, governance, and funding to ensure the long-term sustainability of high-quality transit services.</p>
<p>Vision</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible & Inclusive: Serve the whole county with affordable and safe ADA-accessible services. • Equitable & Economic: Reduce barriers to employment and enhance mobility for all. • Efficient & Expanded: Improve reliability, extend service hours and add weekend service, and explore new service types. • Strengthened Partnerships: Local government and stakeholder organizations work together on sustainably-funded transit.
<p>Improve Service, Access, and Connectivity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand transit service hours, including evenings and weekends. • Develop tourism-oriented transit services to support regional attractions. • Enhance service coverage, particularly in areas north of I-80. • Offer on-demand rideshare options to complement existing services. • Assess need for fixed and deviated routes where appropriate. • Connect to Peoria rail, Amtrak, Greyhound, and any other future services.
<p>Facilities, Fleet and Technology</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a one-stop transit center or mobility hub. • Integrate technology, such as apps and real-time trackers • Upgrade and expand the vehicle fleet with modern, hybrid models. • Establish an in-house maintenance facility.
<p>Staffing and Partnerships</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen staffing to support growing service demands. • Foster partnerships with employers to support workplace transportation needs. • Improve coordination with other transit providers for seamless travel. • Secure additional funding to support expanded services and infrastructure. • Increase community engagement and buy-in for transit initiatives.

Conclusion

This document provides a comprehensive overview of public input gathered through surveys, focus groups, and community engagement efforts related to NCAT services. The survey, conducted from October 2024 to January 2025, received 240 responses, with 31 percent from active NCAT riders. Findings indicate high awareness of NCAT, but many community members remain non-users. The most common trip purposes among riders are healthcare, work, and social or recreational trips, while the general population primarily travels for work, healthcare, and errands. Satisfaction levels are generally high, particularly regarding safety, drivers, and accessibility, though respondents expressed concerns about limited service hours, difficulty in scheduling trips, and geographic coverage gaps.

Across various engagement efforts—including focus groups with community organizations, government stakeholders, and the general public—a consistent theme emerged: NCAT is a critical service for access to essential needs, including healthcare, housing, and employment, particularly for those without alternative transportation options. However, challenges such as limited trip availability, long scheduling wait times, and a lack of weekend and evening service hinder accessibility. These concerns were echoed in the project’s second public surveying effort. Countywide coverage remains a priority, and stakeholders and the public are open to alternative service models such as limited fixed routes or microtransit, provided they do not compromise the availability of countywide service.

Funding remains a pressing concern. While there is interest in securing new funding through grants and partnerships, there is skepticism about relying on property taxes. The governance structure of NCAT, currently managed within the City of Ottawa, presents challenges to broader financial contributions from other municipalities, leading to calls for stronger incentives for regional investment and decision-making.

Overall, public engagement findings illustrate both the essential nature of NCAT and the significant challenges that must be addressed to improve service efficiency, expand access, and ensure long-term fiscal sustainability.