

Rapid Transit Strategy

Public Engagement Report



HALIFAX

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Project Background

Rapid Transit Strategy

Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) is developing a strategy to establish a Rapid Transit Network.

Rapid Transit (sometimes referred to as Higher-Order Transit) is service that is typically separated partially or completely from general traffic to maintain higher levels of speed and reliability than can be achieved by transit vehicles operating in mixed traffic.



The goal of the Rapid Transit Network is to get people where they want to go, when they want to go, faster and more frequently – seven days a week.

Rapid Transit can be a key part of the municipality's shift to a more sustainable transportation system. Investing in Rapid Transit can help households reduce their transportation costs and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which helps to preserve our environment and meet the municipality's ambitious goals for climate change mitigation.

The Strategy includes two types of transit:

1. **Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)** is rubber-tired rapid transit service that often includes features such as dedicated bus lanes, off-board fare collection, and enhanced stops to provide high-quality, frequent and reliable bus-based service. The Strategy proposes four new BRT lines:
 - Dunbrack to Dartmouth Crossing (Purple Line)
 - Herring Cove to Spring Garden (Yellow Line)
 - Lacewood to Robie (Green Line)
 - Portland to Downtown (Red Line)
2. Additional **Ferry** service which could offer fast, direct connections to downtown Halifax using vessels capable of higher speeds than the current ferries. The Rapid Transit Strategy proposes connections between Downtown Halifax and Mill Cove, the foot of Larry Uteck Boulevard, and Shannon Park.

The strategy will also look at connections between transit and land use, encouraging development near stations so that new growth is transit-oriented and sustainable.

Engagement Program

An intensive two-week public engagement program was undertaken to give residents the opportunity to review the Rapid Transit Strategy and provide feedback. The objectives of the engagement were to:

- Inform residents what Rapid Transit is and what it could mean for the region
- Gauge the level of public support for Rapid Transit
- Gain feedback on specific aspects of the strategy to support decision-making
- Understand and respond to public and community stakeholder concerns and preferences

Engagement Opportunities

The Rapid Transit Strategy engagement plan was centred on these two components:

- Survey, including background content on the Rapid Transit Strategy
- Pop-up in-person sessions at locations throughout HRM, especially in neighbourhoods that would be serviced by the new network

Communications Strategy

Residents were encouraged to participate in the Rapid Transit Strategy Survey and pop-up sessions which were promoted by way of:

- Social media posts and advertisements (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)
- Shape Your City online engagement platform
- Website
- HRM Digital Screen Network

Engagement Results

Pop-up Sessions

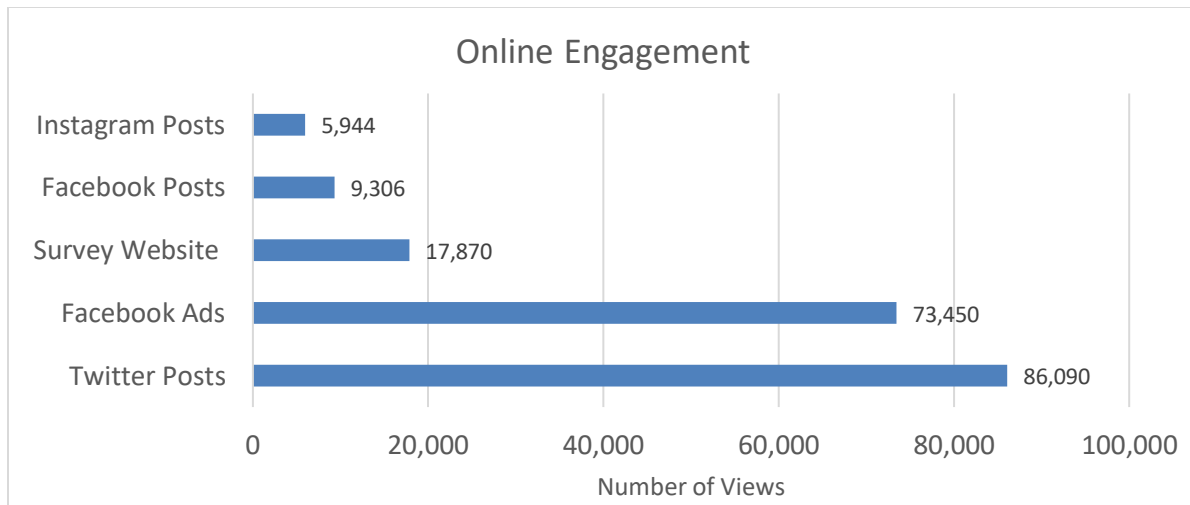
A total of nine pop-up sessions were held around the municipality. Staff were on hand to provide information and answer questions from the public. Nine poster boards were displayed with information about the proposed BRT and ferry routes, stop amenities, and plan details.

The pop-up sessions engaged a total of 939 people throughout HRM.



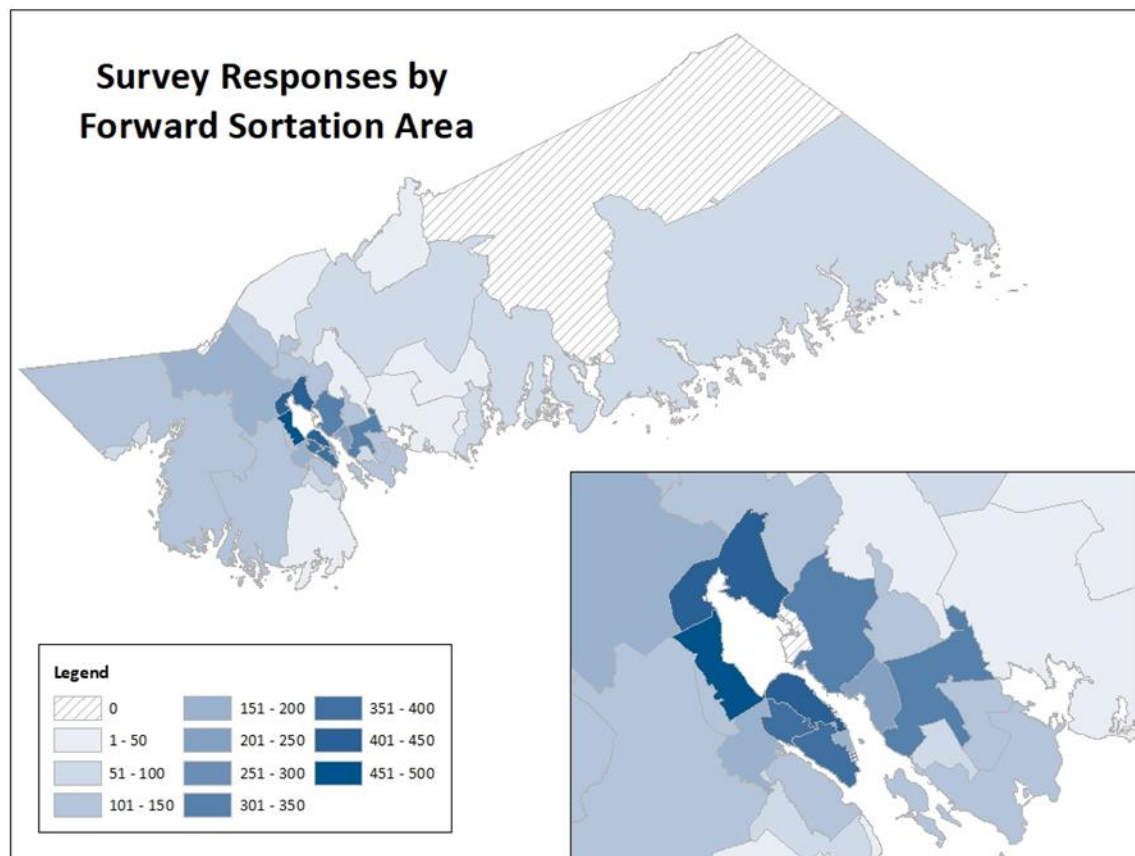
Social Media

A successful social media campaign was launched to inform residents about the Rapid Transit Strategy, provide information about the pop-up sessions, and invite residents to complete the survey. Twitter and Facebook posts made a big impression, resulting in an impressive number of visitors to the Shape Your City platform.



Survey Respondents Results

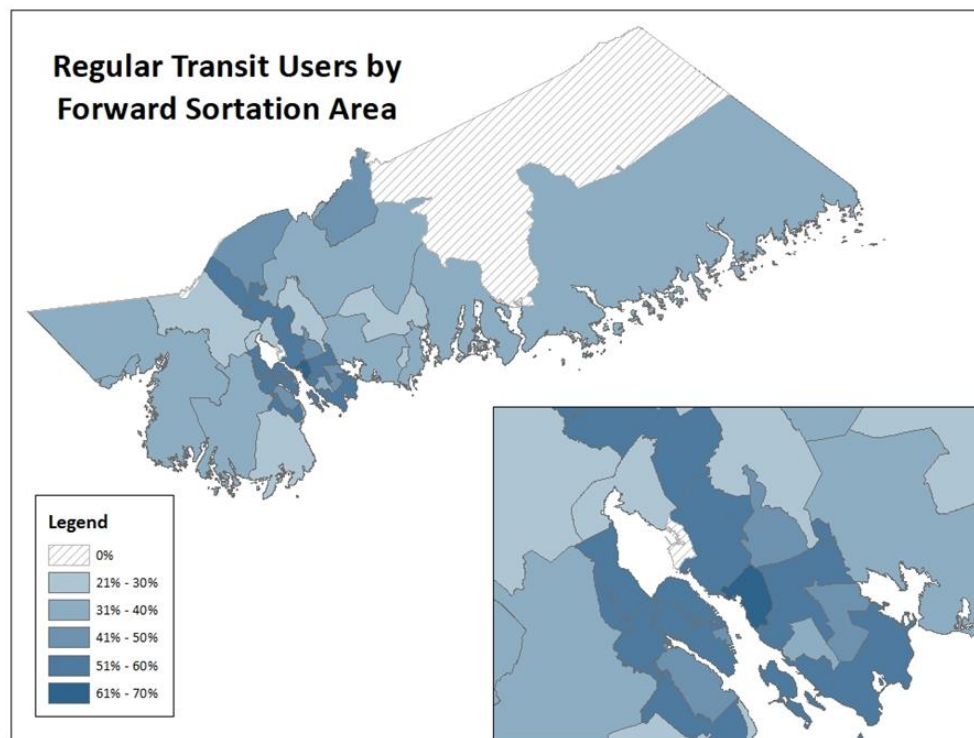
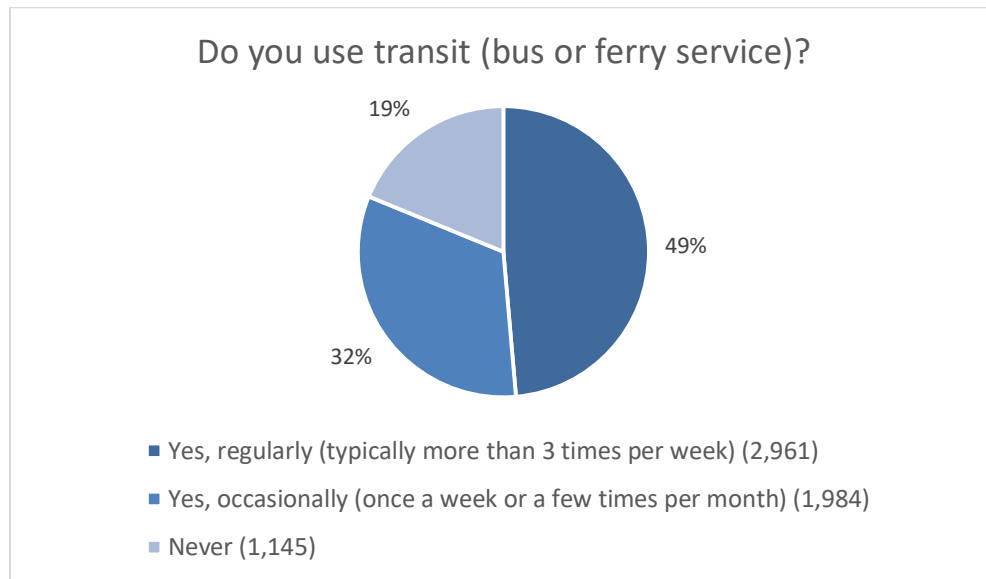
We heard from 6,125 people. 4,856 respondents gave a postal code within HRM, 79 gave a postal code in Nova Scotia but outside HRM, and 1,190 did not provide a postal code. The results below provide a breakdown of each question by the numbers, as well as some patterns based on where respondents live and how often they use transit.



Survey Results

How Respondents Use Transit

The majority of survey respondents who are regular transit users live in areas surrounding the Bedford Basin, with a higher concentration in areas such as Dartmouth, Sackville, and peninsular Halifax.

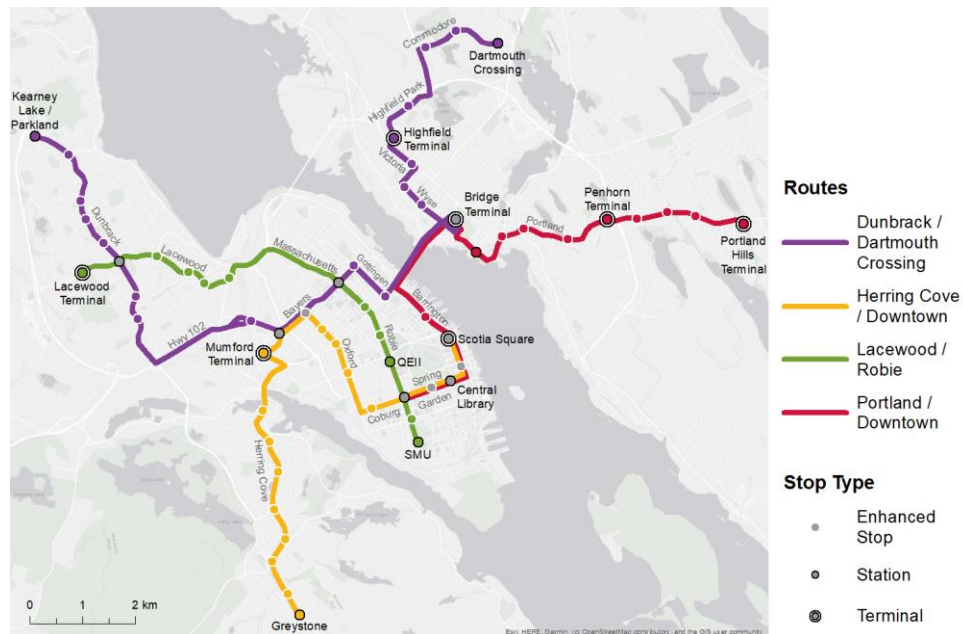


Support Level for BRT

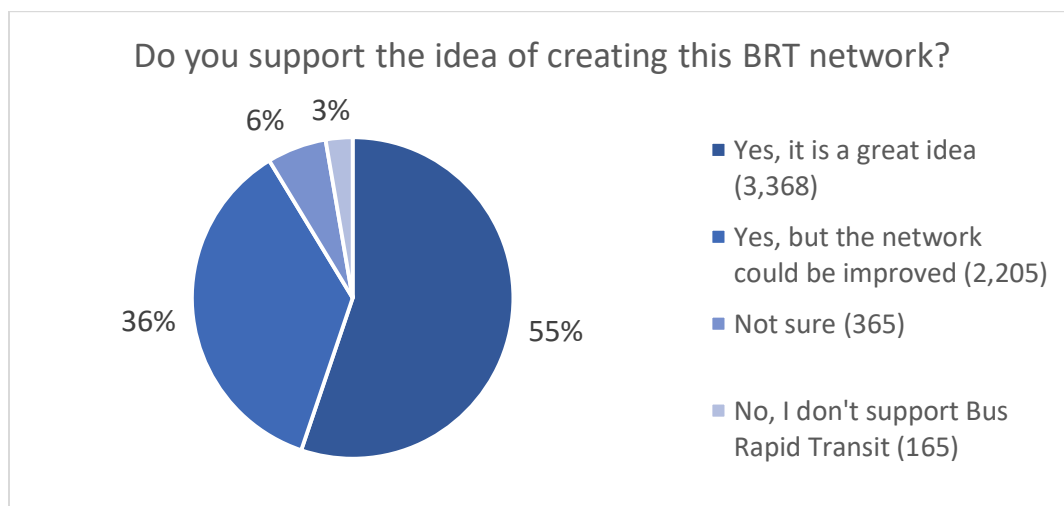
The core of the proposed Rapid Transit network is Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). We are proposing that the BRT service will have:

- Frequent, all day service: every 10 minutes or better, seven days a week.
- Fewer stops than a local route, with shelters at all stops.
- Dedicated bus lanes on parts of the route for more reliable service.

The map below shows the four proposed BRT routes with potential locations for the stops on each route.



The graph below illustrates the overall high level of support for the creation of the BRT Network.



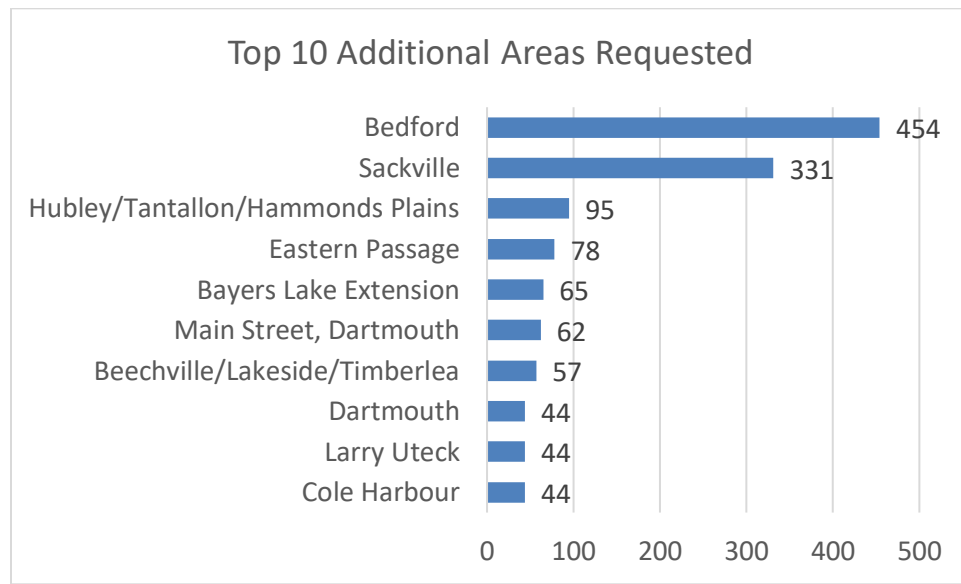
Suggested Improvements

We received 2,787 responses to the question, “If you think the network could be improved, or you don't support BRT, tell us why”. The following table conveys the most common feedback heard from respondents about each proposed route:

Purple line	• Respondents felt some concern about the proposed route being too long, and some suggested splitting it into two. • Some respondents expressed their desire to continue the route up into Bedford. • There was some disagreement among respondents about the directness of the route – some desired the route to travel via the Mackay bridge, while others preferred that the route go through downtown.
Yellow line	• Respondents expressed their desire for a more direct route to downtown, and recommended bypassing the Mumford Terminal / Bayers Rd. detour and continuing more directly to Spring Garden Rd.
Green line	• Some respondents were supportive of an extension to the Bayers Lake area, particularly in view of the new community outpatient centre in Bayers Lake.
Red line	• Most respondents were pleased with the routing, although some expressed concern about congestion on Portland St. or suggested an alternative corridor in Dartmouth. • There were mixed feelings about Gottingen St. not being used between North and Cogswell. Some respondents expressed desire for a rapid transit route on this corridor, while others didn't like the volume of buses.

Additional Areas of Service

We heard a lot of demand for BRT service in areas outside the scope of the proposal. Some areas were grouped together during analysis. Here are the top 10 areas where respondents asked for additional BRT service:



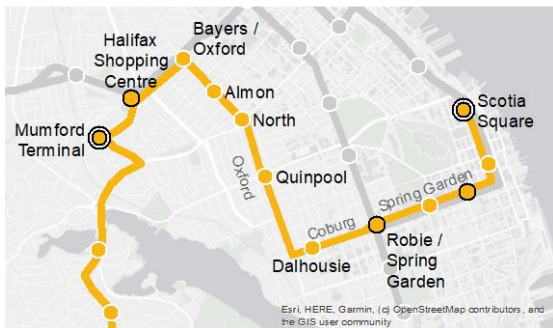
Yellow Line Route Preference

Participants were presented with two route options, shown in the maps below, for the Yellow BRT line. Option 1 would provide BRT service more directly to Dalhousie University and the University of King's College by travelling along Oxford Street and Coburg Street. Option 2 is a faster route which would provide BRT service to the QEII Health Sciences Centre facilities by travelling on Connaught Avenue, Quinpool Road and Robie Street. The route not served by BRT will be served by a frequent local bus route.

Participants were asked, "Which option do you prefer for BRT service?"

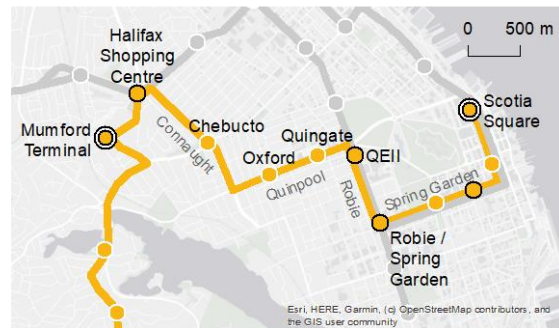
Option 1: Oxford/Coburg

Mumford to Spring Garden at Robie: 14–19 min

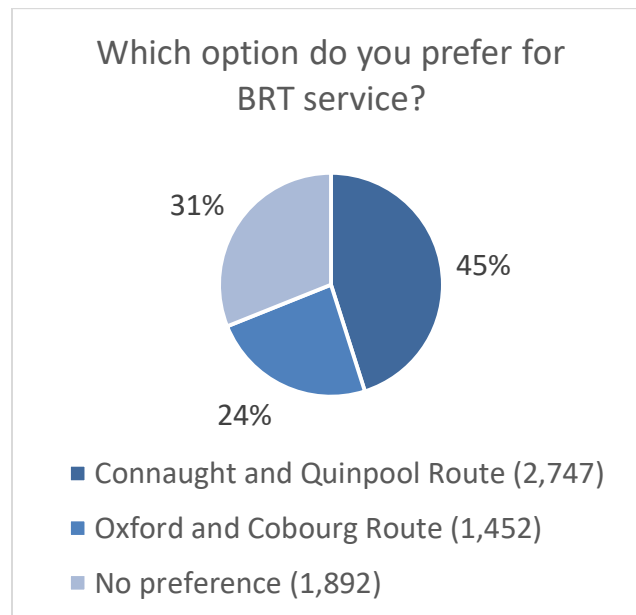


Option 2: Connaught/Quinpool

Mumford to Spring Garden at Robie: 8–16 min

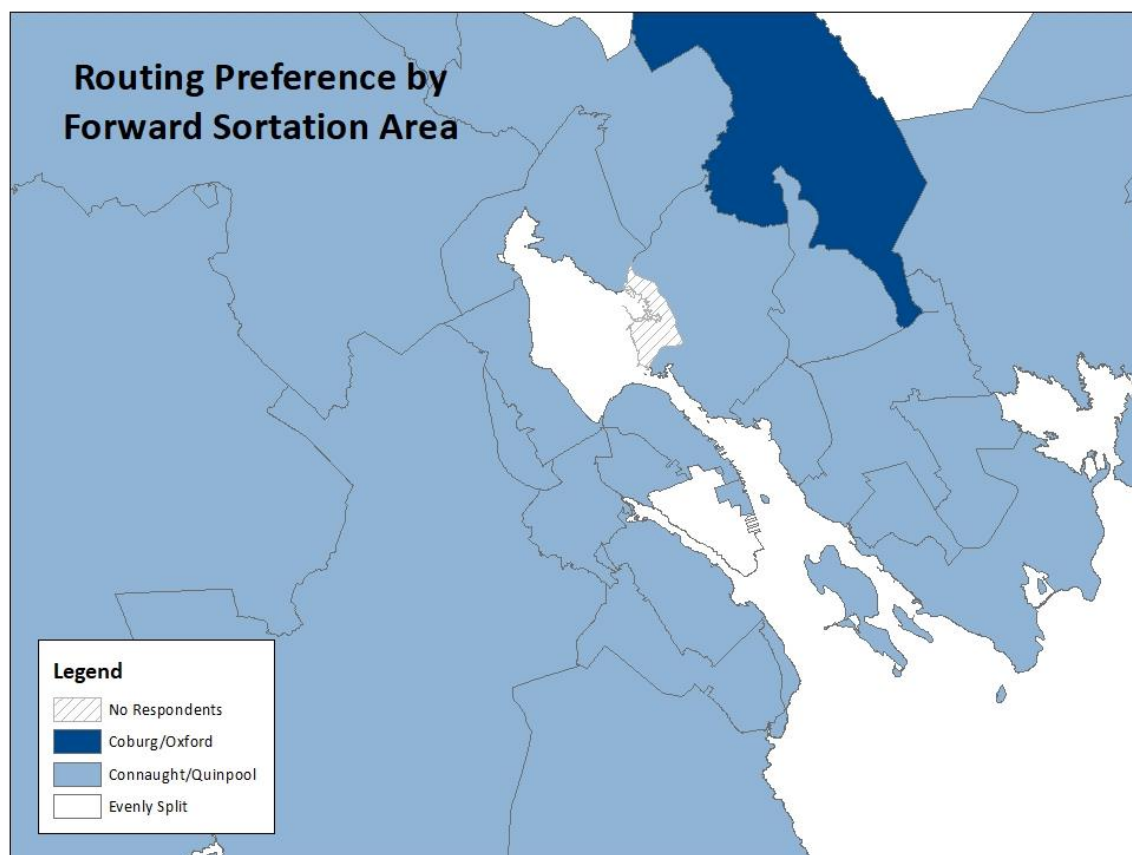


Most respondents were in favour of Option 2: Connaught and Quinpool. Respondents wanted service to QEII and the Quinpool Road commercial area.



Respondents in favour of Option 1: Oxford/Cobourg were focused on servicing students attending Dalhousie/Kings and SMU. Some expressed desire for a more direct route to downtown.

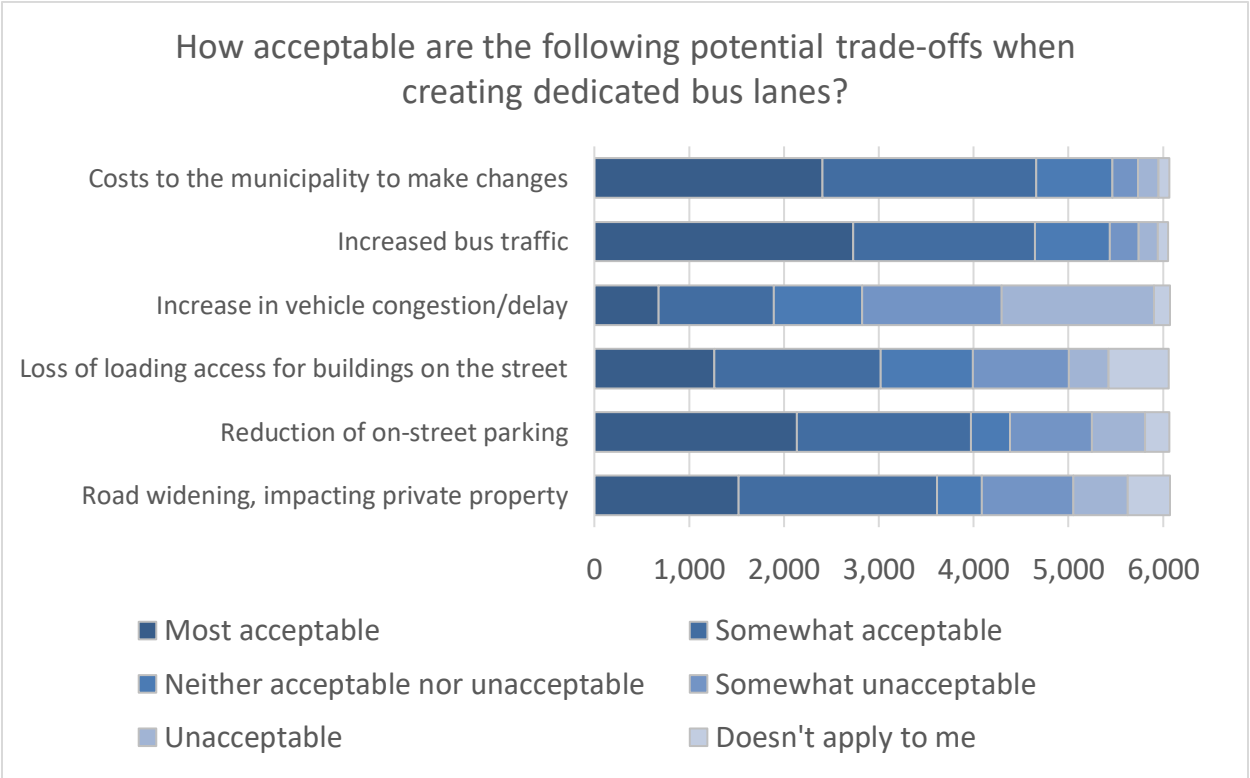
Geographically speaking, residents on the southern Halifax peninsula were split almost evenly on their preferred route. Residents of the Armdale and Spryfield neighbourhoods (which the line runs through) were in favour of Option 2: Connaught and Quinpool.



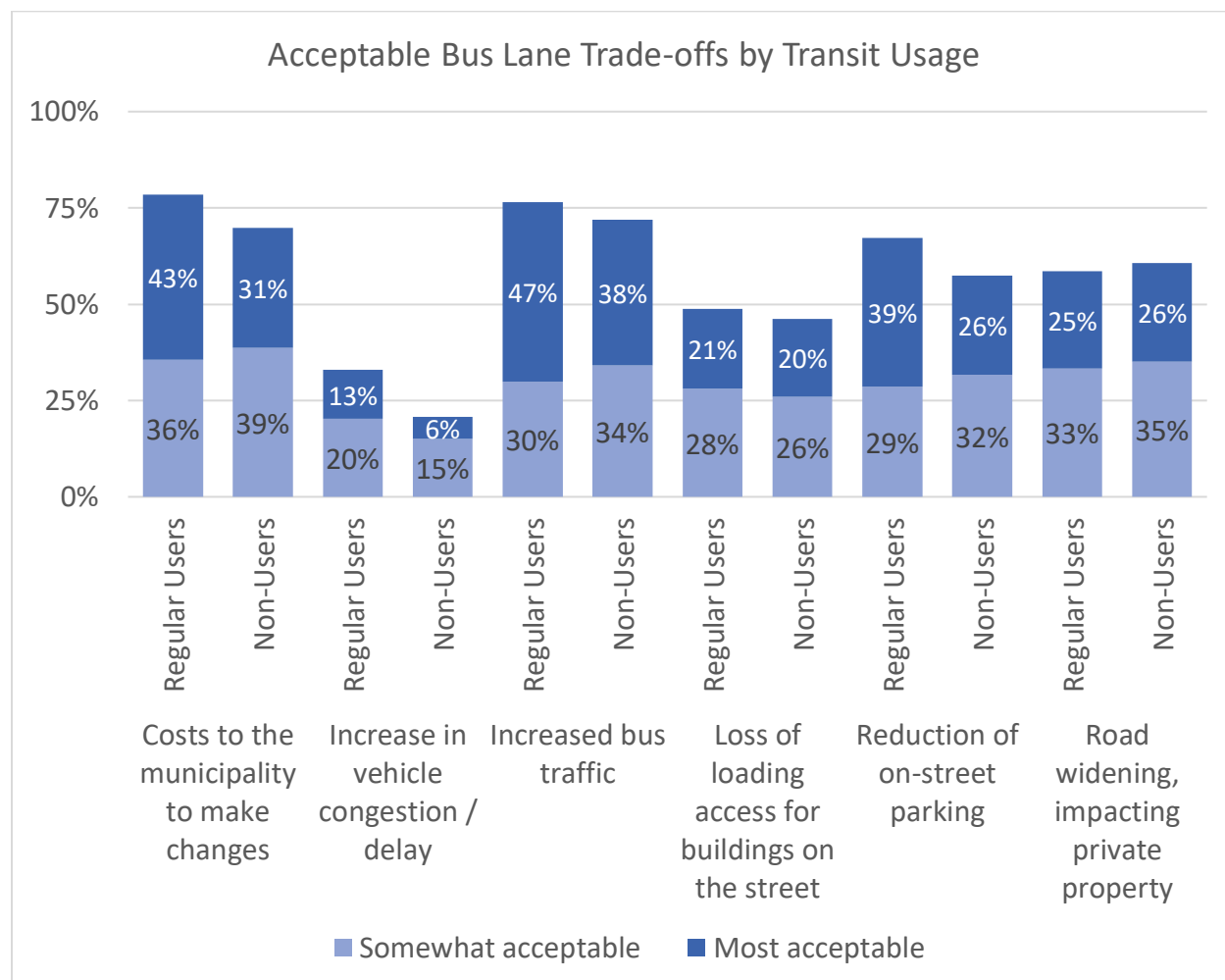
Bus Lane Trade-Offs

Dedicated bus lanes are a key part of BRT service. They allow buses to operate more reliably and improve transit travel times, making BRT more competitive with vehicles. Bus lanes are typically created by converting existing traffic or parking lanes, or by widening roads. Both options may create trade-offs.

Overall, most respondents felt that increasing bus traffic, costs to implement the lanes, and reduced on-street parking were the most acceptable trade-offs. Most respondents felt that increasing vehicle congestion to create bus lanes was the least acceptable trade-off.

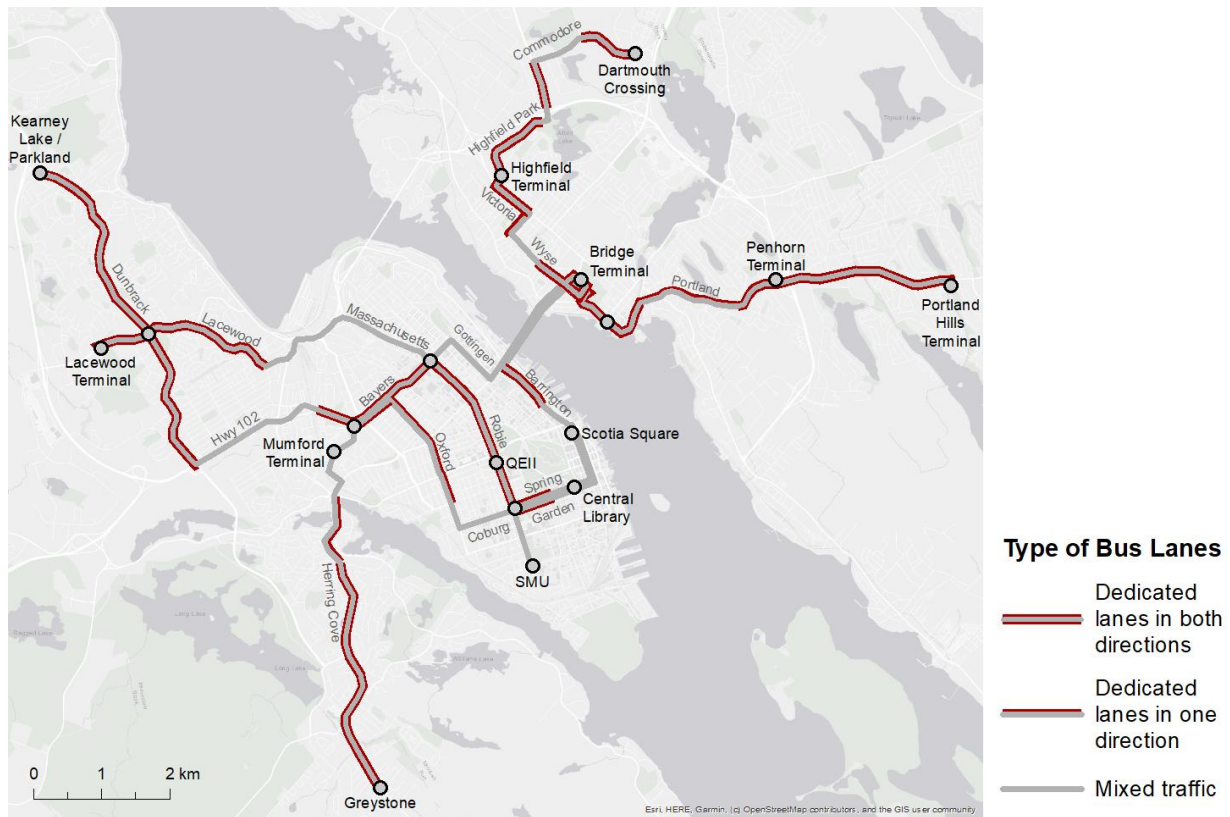


When comparing responses from those who are regular transit users and those who do not use transit, the answers look a bit different. Respondents felt that the cost to the municipality to make changes was largely an acceptable trade-off, regardless of whether they were transit users. Mainly, the loss of on-street parking and increasing vehicle congestion were of greater concern to non-bus users.

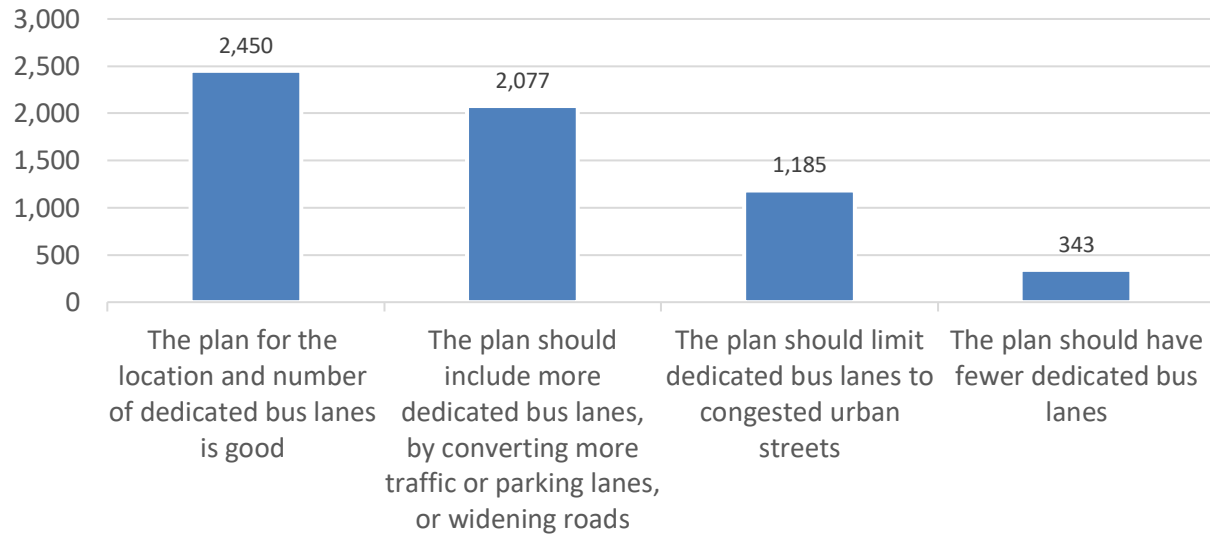


Proposed Network of Bus Lanes

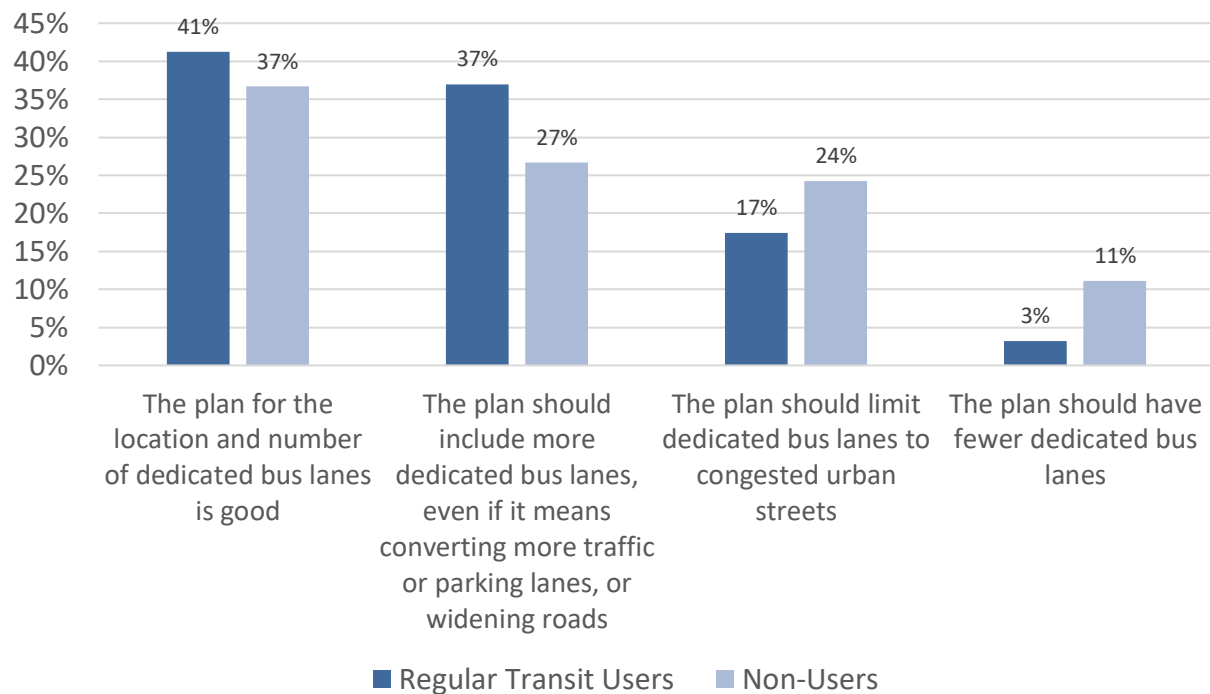
The majority of respondents supported the use of bus lanes in the proposal. Three quarters of respondents felt there was an adequate number of bus lanes in the proposal or that the plan required additional bus lanes. This sentiment carried over whether respondents were regular, occasional, or non-transit users.



Keeping in mind the trade-offs described in the previous question, what do you think about the proposed plan for dedicated bus lanes?

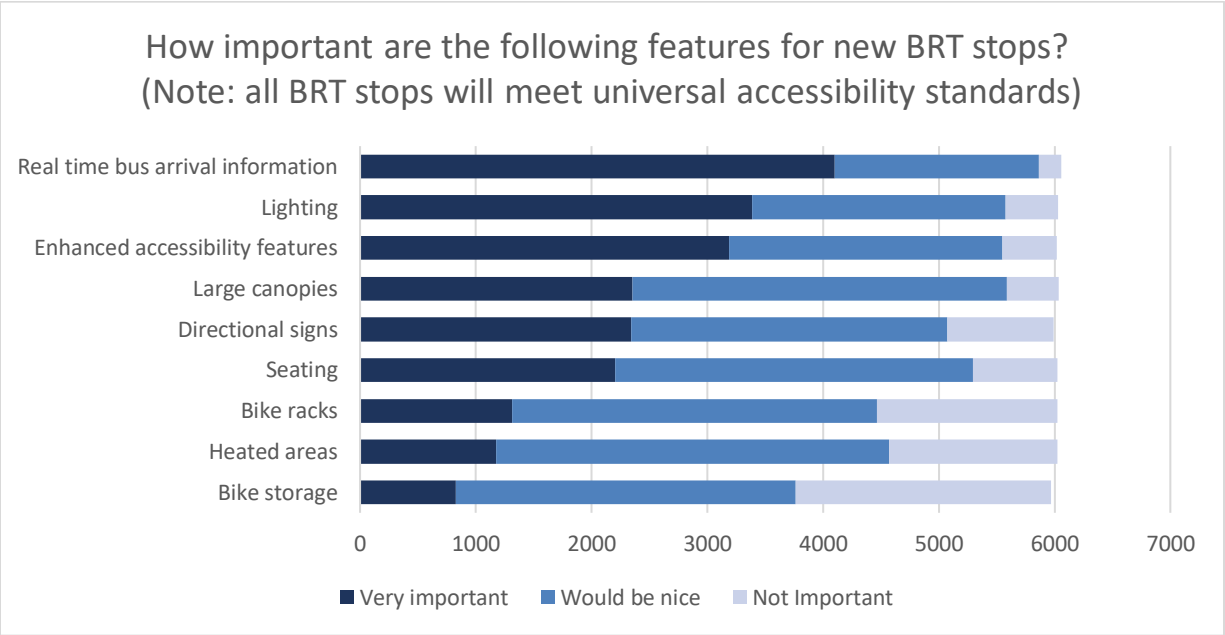


Bus Lane Responses by Level of Transit Use

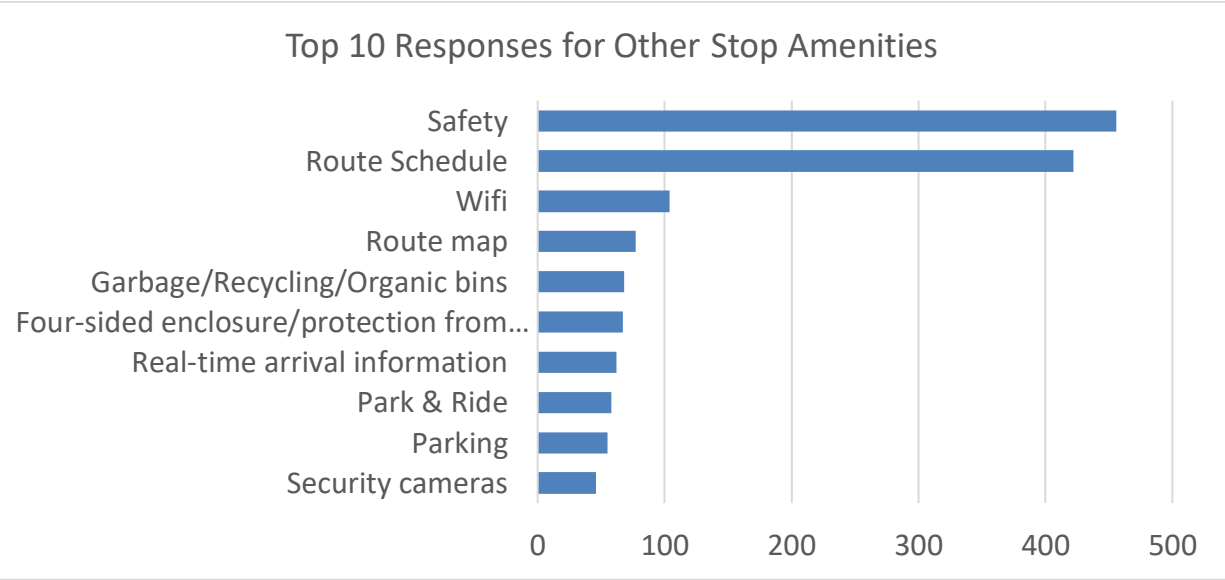


BRT Stop Amenities

BRT stops typically include more features than a regular bus stop to improve rider experience. Participants were asked to rate the importance of certain stop amenities. The responses are listed below. In the comments, many respondents explained that if BRT buses arrive every 10 minutes, heated areas would not be a high priority.

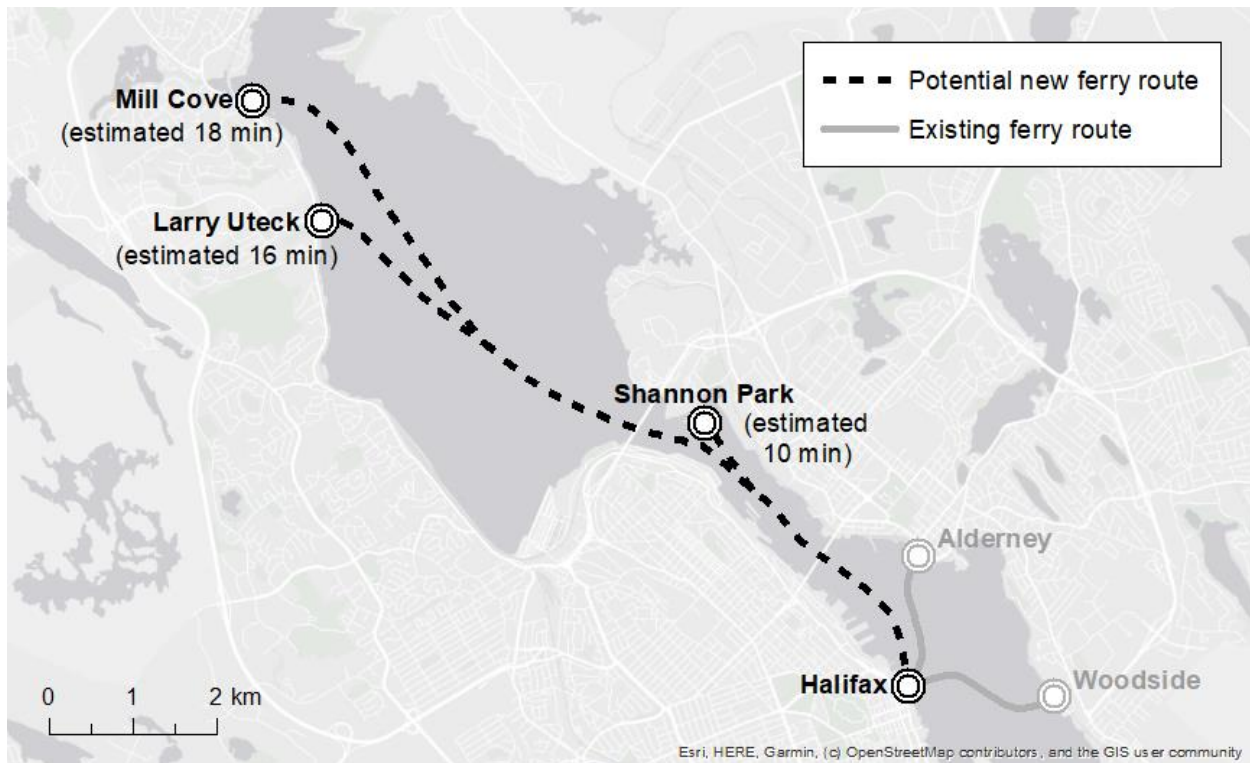


Others prioritized stop amenities to increase personal safety. These suggestions included lighting, security cameras, and emergency alarm systems.

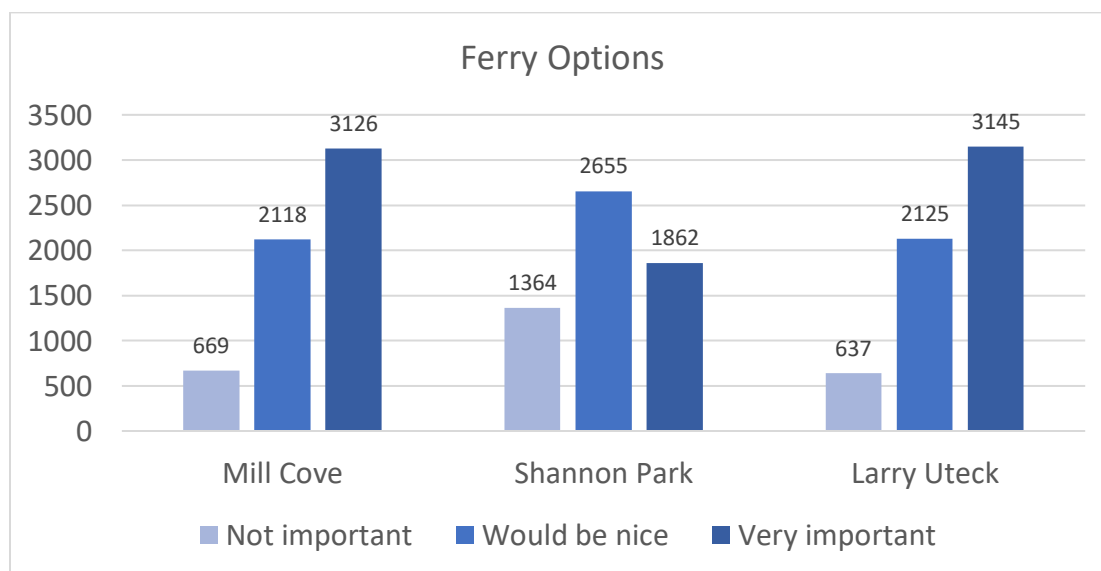


Ferry Route Options

Respondents were asked about the proposed ferry routes, which would connect riders to locations near Bedford to downtown, or Shannon Park to downtown, with travel times ranging from 10 to 18 minutes.



The overall support was very high for the proposed Larry Uteck and Mill Cove routes, and both routes were rated roughly evenly as being “very important”.

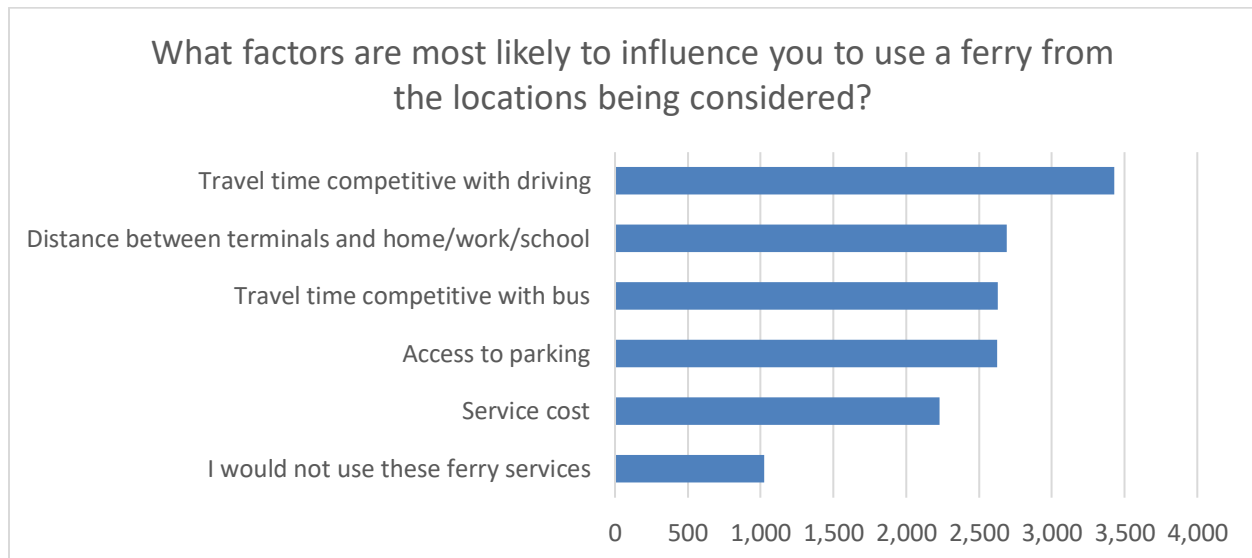


The following table highlights the most common feedback heard from respondents about each proposed ferry route:

Larry Uteck	• Respondents felt there are many people living in the surrounding area to support a ferry route. • There were some concerns about the area being congested with existing Transit routes • Respondents wondered about accessing the land beyond the existing railroad tracks • There was some concern about adequate land available in the area for Park & Ride facilities
Mill Cove	• Respondents cited existing and potential development in the area as positives • Most felt there was adequate land for Park & Ride facilities – some suggested a portion of the Sobeys parking lot (and noted the need for a pedestrian connection) • Many felt this location could provide a local tourism opportunity including shops or a market • Many felt this location could service people from Sackville, Fall River, Hammonds Plains, and even Larry Uteck
Shannon Park	• Respondents felt that this location made sense if development in the area will grow to support it • People could see the potential for a connection to Burnside, with appropriate transit connections • Respondents questioned the effect on local traffic if a Park & Ride is installed there • Some respondents expressed hesitation about having additional ferry service in Dartmouth • Some respondents expressed a desire for a cross-harbour connection from Bedford to Dartmouth

Factors That Would Influence Ferry Use

Overall, most participants reported they would take the proposed ferry routes if the travel time was competitive with driving. Responses were nearly equal across the next three responses, including distance between terminals and origin/destination, travel time competitive with bus, and access to parking. Finally, respondents reported that service cost would influence their decision to use the proposed ferry service.



Other Comments about the Proposed Rapid Transit Network

Participants shared additional valuable feedback and suggestions regarding the proposed Rapid Transit Network. One consistent desire from passengers was electronic fare payment options. Ideas ranged in scope from a reloadable card to paying for tickets via debit or credit card. Additionally, respondents expressed their desire for broader availability of ticket purchasing, which is currently limited to a small number of retailers. Halifax Transit has a project underway to implement an electronic fare solution.

Many respondents expressed their desire for a rail system, rather than BRT. There have been multiple investigative studies on this topic, but staff received direction from Regional Council in 2019 to no longer pursue commuter rail. Other rail-based transit such as Light Rail Transit (LRT) are considered to be cost prohibitive at this time.

Feedback was also received about existing routes, including those that have some transfer difficulties. This feedback has been passed along to Halifax Transit's Planning and Scheduling staff for their review.

More than one-quarter of the comments in this section of the survey expressed appreciation for the Rapid Transit Strategy, and for Halifax Transit as a whole.

Next Steps

We are grateful to all survey respondents and pop-up session attendees for giving your time and feedback to help shape this important project.

Staff are anticipating presenting the final Rapid Transit Strategy to Regional Council in 2020.

To ensure you receive ongoing information about Halifax Transit projects and news, please follow us on our municipal social media channels (@hfxgov, @hfxtransit) and register online at [shapeyourcityhalifax.ca](https://www.shapeyourcityhalifax.ca).

For more information about the Rapid Transit Strategy, please visit:

<https://www.shapeyourcityhalifax.ca/rapid-transit>