

SUBMITTED ON **April 9, 2021** BY:



Bridging the Gap Transportation Pilot

Mid-Pilot (Fourth Month) Summary

Prototyping Evaluation Report



Project Background

Transportation Innovation Lab Phase 1

The Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM) Transportation Innovation Lab (TIL) project was initiated in March 2018. The project was implemented by Common Good Solutions (CGS), guided by a local advisory committee, and overseen by the Department of Community Services under their Poverty Reduction Strategy.

While this project considered the transportation needs of individuals holistically, its primary focus was to **connect under- and unemployed individuals in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM) with employment opportunities across the Island by identifying one or more potential transportation solutions**. The project engaged three main stakeholder groups through the Lab process to: verify needs; generate, evaluate, and test potential solutions; and determine a path to implementation. These three stakeholder groups were: under- and unemployed individuals living in the CBRM, employers looking to fill labour shortages, and community organizations and advocates working in these areas. Throughout the Lab process, staff and council at the CBRM were also frequently engaged.

The TIL's first phase concluded in September 2018, and one solution idea--a point-to-point transportation service--was recommended by the Lab for testing.

Transportation Innovation Lab Phase 2

In December 2018, the second phase of the TIL was funded by the province. This phase further co-designed and tested the point-to-point prototype that was developed in the first phase of the TIL.

The test period for Phase 2 ran from April 2019 until October 2019, offering a six month period of testing and refinement of the model. The primary goal of this phase was to: **Implement and adapt the point-to-point solution idea to test its overall effectiveness at increasing transportation access for workers, and aspiring workers, who earn low incomes in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality.**

At the conclusion of the TIL's Phase 2, all prototyping learnings were shared with the province, including a recommendation to support an additional phase of testing in a modified on-demand subsidized taxi service with the free bus pass program.

Transportation Innovation Lab Phase 3: Bridging the Gap Transportation Pilot

In February 2020, the third phase of the TIL was funded by the province. This phase is intended to further test the on-demand subsidized taxi service model with the United Way Cape Breton's existing free bus pass program. The third phase of the test has a broad network of local partners supporting the initiative, with three local taxi companies participating, the Cape Breton Partnership, the Cape Breton Regional Municipality, and the United Way Cape Breton (managing partner) all working together to deliver the test.

Due to COVID-19, the third phase of the test was delayed until December 2020, and additional federal COVID-relief funds were obtained so the on-demand subsidized taxi service could begin with only one rider per vehicle, rather than linking riders, given health restrictions.

The test period for Phase 3 will be completed no later than July 2021, and all conclusions and learnings from this phase of testing will be shared with partners and the provincial government.

Mid-Pilot Activity Summary

Timing

This evaluation report covers the first half of the pilot, from mid-December 2020 to the end of March 2021, a fifteen week testing period.

Outreach, Promotion & Partners

United Way Cape Breton, as well as District 11 (the managing taxi provider), have handled the majority of the outreach to spread the word to interested users.

In addition, organizations have reached out over this period for additional information to share with their clients and members.

These organizations include:

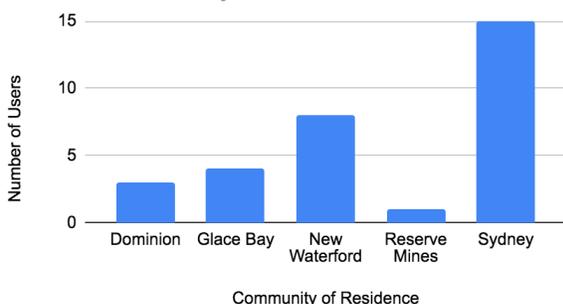
- Department of Community Services
- YMCA Nova Scotia Works Employment Centres
- The Hope Project
- New Dawn Home Care
- Pathways to Employment

Despite the pilot currently being at capacity in terms of projected use of subsidy dollars, United Way Cape Breton will continue to record interest from organizations interested in the service.

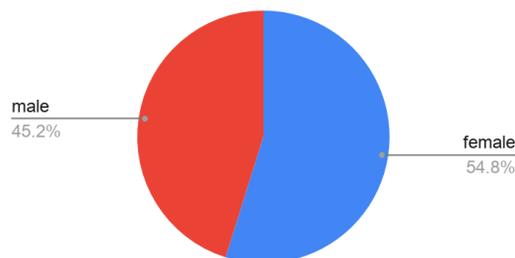
Current User Profile

A total of 31 users are currently registered and using the service. Users ranged in age from 18 - 57. They all reported currently being employed. The graphs below demonstrate key demographic information regarding the group of users. Three users reported having dependents.

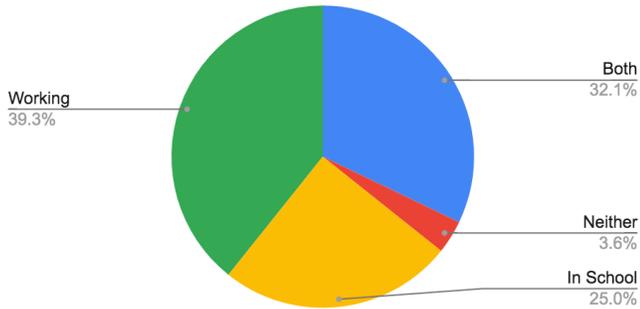
Users' Community of Residence



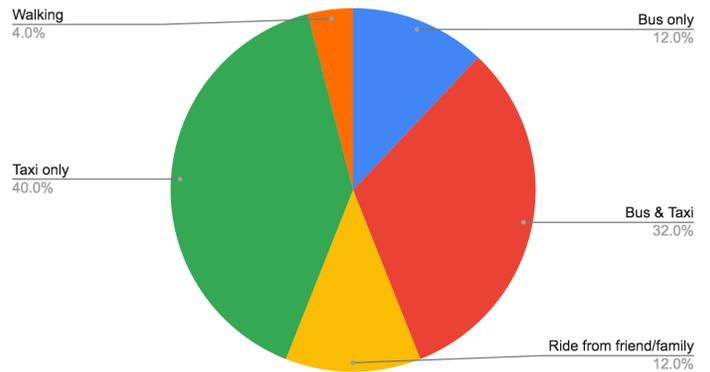
Users' Gender



Were you working or in school before joining the program?



How were you getting to work or school before?



When asked about their previous transportation situation to get to school or work, users reported:

- Spending on average \$24 per day, with the highest amount reported as \$90 per day.
- Length of time for transport was approximately 31 minutes on average per day, with the highest amount reported as 90 minutes a day.
- On a scale of 1 - 4 judging reliability of their previous transport (with one being unreliable and 4 being reliable), an average ranking of 3.25 was given.
 - When asked why this ranking was given, however, all respondents who took taxis reported they were very reliable but unaffordable.
 - "I call D11 and they are always able to come and get me to work on time."
 - "The taxi always comes when I call."
 - "Taxi is very reliable as the bus doesn't run when my shift starts."
 - "I always use the taxi service because it is reliable."
 - "Marg's Taxi is great but I am finding it very expensive."
 - "It is reliable, however it is not affordable. At times I cannot afford it."
 - Respondents who reported using the bus ranked reliability lower and reported that buses, while affordable, were not adequately reliable.
 - "The buses are not reliable or they don't show up. They often don't update the website. If the bus is full they will just drive by you."
 - "At times the bus doesn't show up."
 - "The bus has been affordable but not always reliable."
 - "It changed so much over the last two years, sometimes they eliminate routes at night and don't tell people."
 - "The bus isn't reliable as I can't get home so I have to take a taxi home."
 - "It can be difficult to arrange my day as I have to accommodate the bus schedule. There are times I cannot work due to no buses running."
 - "The bus is often not running, especially during COVID."

When asked whether their need for a ride changes based on other transport options available to them, 33% of respondents reported yes while 67% reported no.

Waitlist

The Bridging the Gap / Transportation Innovation Lab Phase 3 Pilot is currently full at 31 users. There are, however, 18 interested users currently sitting on the waitlist. Given constraints around subsidy budget, it will only be possible to add additional users if the linking of riders becomes possible in order to bring down the subsidy per ride per user.

Taxi, Ride & Subsidy Data

There have been three participating taxi companies over the course of the pilot. These companies cover the three most populated communities in the CBRM: District 11 is based in New Waterford, Marg's is based in Glace Bay, and Dynasty is based in Sydney. The data below shows a summary of the rides, subsidy dollars, user fare and revenue earned through the pilot.

Taxi Company	Total (one way) rides	Total Subsidy	Total User fare	Total Revenue Earned through Pilot
District 11	316	\$5,850	\$2,198	\$8,030
Marg's	224	\$2,884	\$1,322	\$4,206
Dynasty	320	\$3,111	\$1,709	\$4,820
Total	860	\$11,845	\$5,229	\$17,056

- Total eligible users up to the last invoice date is 31
- There are 18 people currently on the waiting list
- 860 one-way rides to date
- \$11,845 in subsidy used to date
- \$5,229 in user fares to date
- \$17,056 in total project revenue to date
- Average of \$13.77 in subsidy / ride to date
- Average of \$6.08 in user fare / ride to date
- Average of 4 rides per week per user to date

Approximate cost per week per user is currently \$55, or \$1707 in subsidy per week to support the current number of users (31). At these rates, it is anticipated that the pilot will end by July.

Feedback Summary

Organizational Partners

The survey was sent to six organizational contacts who are acting as the key current partners in the test. Four of them responded.

When asked about why they are interested in supporting users to participate in the pilot, they responded:

- **“The project can help users to lower their costs on transportation and improve their quality of life.”**
- **“The more people in the program, the more paychecks in the community to support local businesses.”**
- **“I think transportation is very important in keeping folks connected to their community.”**
- **“Provide much needed affordable transportation support to low income earners.”**

All respondents indicated they see positive changes as the result of the pilot. Their reasons included:

- **“The users told me their cost has been reduced on transportation and then they have more money to buy other stuff they need.”**
- **“Without such a financial burden, participants are generally less stressed.”**
- **“More people are able to access employment opportunities affordably.”**
- **“Participants feel supported.”**

All respondents also indicated that participating in the pilot has helped them to better achieve their mandate at their organizations. The reasons they provided for this response included:

- **“Helping people to access more resources and services is always our mission.”**
- **“It’s always been our mandate to provide affordable transportation for employment.”**
- **“This is part of our Poverty Reduction Strategy.”**
- **“The data collection piece is an enormous help!”**

All respondents indicated that participating in the process has strengthened their relationships with community organizations, community members, and local businesses/employers. While three of four respondents reported a stronger relationship with the provincial government through the pilot.

When asked about new or increased collaborations, all respondents reported more diverse and stronger connections to work on a broad array of community projects, not just limited to the transportation work. They also spoke about becoming known within the community as a leader on affordable, accessible transportation, and additional opportunities to expand on this role being leveraged. One respondent specifically mentioned the benefit of the data generated through this pilot, and how that data is helping them to demonstrate the need for additional transport support.

When asked about additional partners who may be interested in participating in the Bridging the Gap Transportation Pilot, the ideas below were generated, most were focused on partners that could help to build out and diversify the user base.

- Glace Bay and Sydney Call Centres

- International students - working through the organizations that support them
- Cape Breton University
- NSH - employees and patient transportation
- Sponsorship through businesses and employers - purchasing of passes on behalf of others
- ACAP Cape Breton - To support the development of environmental outcomes once riders are linked

There is interest, as well, expressed in linking the on-demand taxi service to Transit Cape Breton through the design of community bus hubs. Also, the use of technology to provide GPS data, digital passes, security cameras in vehicles, and a ride-sharing app so users can easily book rides in order to effectively scale the service and profile the project. There is interest in seeing the project adapt to focus on the creation of workplace bubbles, so that riders can be linked even with COVID restrictions, so the subsidy can stretch further.

Taxi Owners

In this month's evaluation we were able to hear from all three taxi owners who had subsidized rides during the pilot period.

When asked how satisfied they are with the service, two ranked very satisfied and one ranked satisfied. Their reasons for their rankings included:

- **"Doesn't just help people but it also helps businesses. It is good for everyone."**
- **"Ridership has picked up."**
- **"Customers are happy with the financial savings and the business revenue has increased."**

When asked how satisfied their drivers are with the service, two ranked very satisfied and one ranked satisfied. The reasons for their rankings included:

- **"The drivers make better pay as there is more work available."**
- **"Helps keep the drivers busy. More volume."**
- **"Drivers day-to-day hasn't changed much other than promoting the pilot."**

When asked about whether they've made any changes to their business because of this service, one respondent reported no changes, while the other two stated:

- **"Changed scheduling."**
- **"COVID hit the industry pretty hard so it's good to be working with other companies for a united vision."**

When asked if they anticipate any changes to their business in the coming months because of the service, all respondents stated if riders and demand continue to grow, they would add more vehicles and drivers.

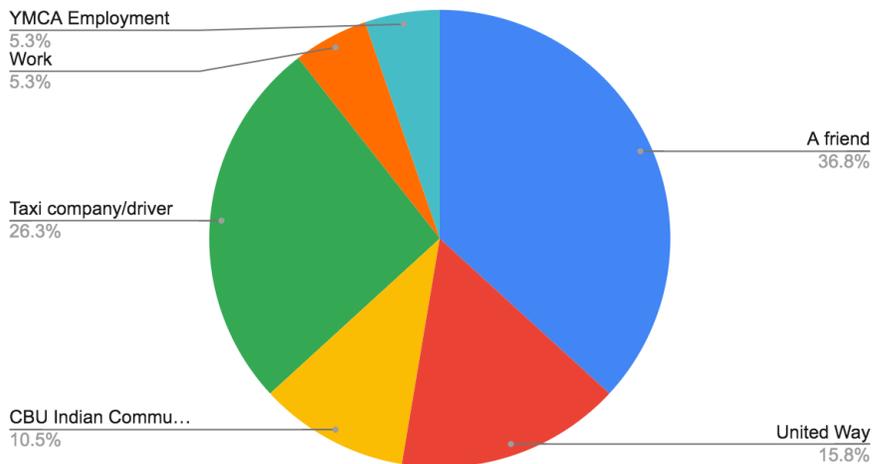
When asked about any improvements they'd like to see, two suggestions were offered. One was to see the service continue past the pilot, while the other was to begin to link riders to add more users.

Users

There are 31 users registered to use the service, and 19 provided evaluation feedback during this reporting period, representing a 61% response rate.

Respondents reported hearing about the service through a variety of channels.

How did you hear about the service?



When asked about why they wanted to participate in this program, all respondents stated it was to reduce the cost of transportation to get them to and from work. Some excerpts in their own words:

- **"I am a student, and, financially, I need support to go to work."**
- **"It is a great way to save money when I don't make a whole lot."**
- **"Affordable transportation, as I struggle to come up with funds for transportation to and from work."**
- **"I am not earning that much, it's a good way to save money."**
- **"I work almost every day and I use a lot of cab services. I would like to reduce that cost."**
- **"I cannot afford to go to work."**
- **"Financially, I couldn't do anything without this project."**

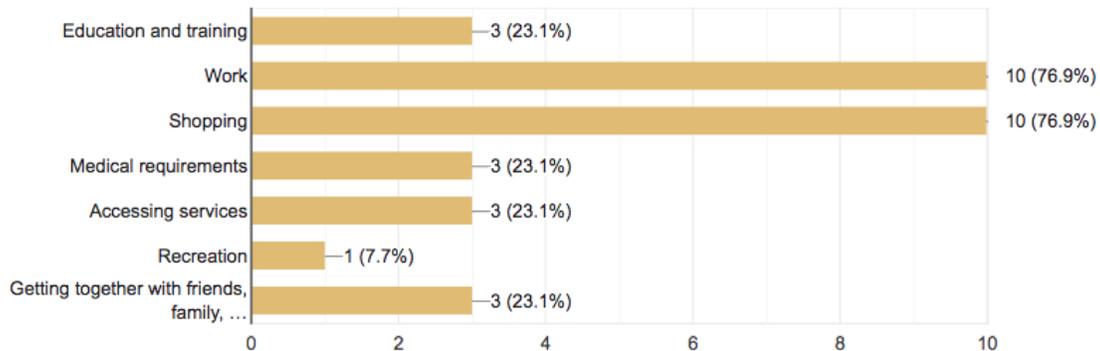
Ninety percent of respondents reported having used the subsidized taxi service to get to and from work since the pilot began; and 63% reported using the free bus service. No respondents reported using neither service.

When asked why they have not used either service, a couple of respondents indicated they weren't sure whether they were allowed to use the subsidized taxi service. While a few other respondents indicated they had not used the free bus pass as the only transportation they currently do is to work and back (and the bus does not run when they get on and off work), or that they do not live on a bus route so are unable to use the transit service.

Of the respondents who had used the free bus pass, they were asked what areas of their life they'd used the free pass for. Their responses are shown in the graph below.

If you used the free bus pass, what other areas of your life have you used the pass for?
Please check all that apply.

13 responses



When asked how satisfied they have been with the free bus pass, 92% of respondents stated very satisfied (4 ranking) and 8% of respondents stated satisfied (3 ranking). They provided the following reasons for their ranking:

- **“I can take the bus going to work.”**
- **“Without this support I am not able to work and go anywhere.”**
- **“I don’t have to pay \$60 to get a bus pass. Savings on the cost.”**
- **“It is easier to get anywhere with this free pass.”**
- **“I use the pass almost every day, and it saves me a lot of money.”**
- **“It makes transportation more affordable for me. I only ranked it a 3 out of 4 because it is difficult many times to get the bus, as I have to walk about 25 minutes before I can get to the bus stop. It is tricky when sidewalks are bad and cold weather, etc. I would give the free bus pass a 4 out of 4, the bus service itself less so.”**

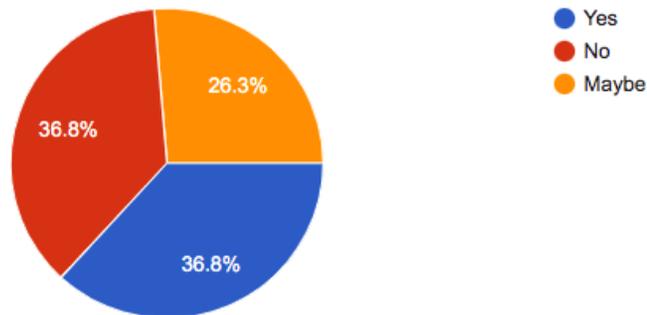
When asked how satisfied they have been with the subsidized on demand taxi service, 83% of respondents stated very satisfied (4 ranking), 11% of respondents stated satisfied (3 ranking), and 6% of respondents reported they were unsatisfied (2 ranking). The following reasons were provided:

- **“The taxi company sends taxis on time.”**
- **“Sometimes the taxi comes on time but sometimes it comes late. I have to wait 20 - 30 minutes.”**
- **“It is very helpful and I’m saving lots of money to go to work.”**
- **“The person who registered me was very polite and helpful and answered my queries, plus it has become very convenient for me to get to and from work.”**
- **“Taxi companies are very supportive.”**
- **“They did their job, but sometimes the taxi gets here 30 - 40 minutes late.”**
- **“Because if it was not available it would have been very difficult to afford transportation home from work and it saves me so much time.”**
- **“I am happy and relaxed. I am not worried about the cost of the taxi.”**
- **“The service is very good. The taxis come on time and are reliable.”**

The graphs on the next few pages demonstrate data from a series of questions asked to users to measure changes since they began using the service.

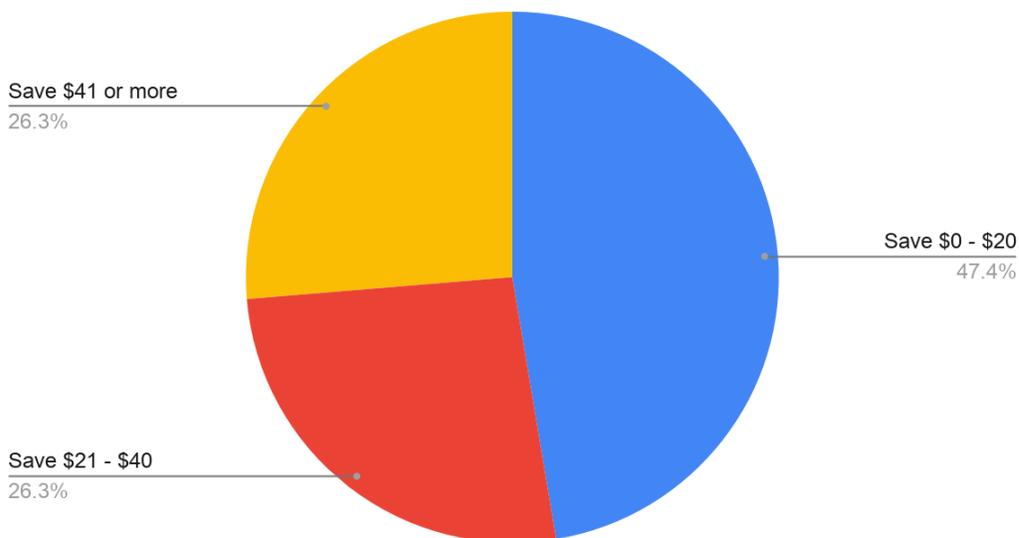
Do you think you would be able to access work if it was not for the subsidized taxi service or free transit pass?

19 responses



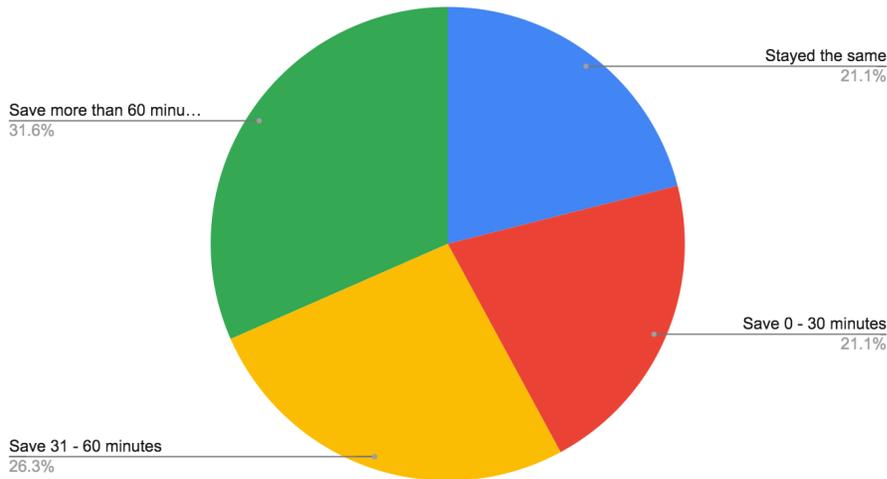
The above graph demonstrates that the service is helping users remain in employment, with 37% stating they would be unable to continue with work if not for the program, and an additional 26% unsure if they could maintain their employment without the program.

Change in daily transportation costs since using the service



As the graph above demonstrates, all respondents indicated they have saved money on daily transportation since using the service. If using the middle number in the range (e.g. \$10 when a respondent stated \$0 - \$20 in savings), a quick calculation estimates a daily savings of \$445 cumulatively for the 31 users in this pilot, which means that a significant amount of money is staying in the hands of low income workers.

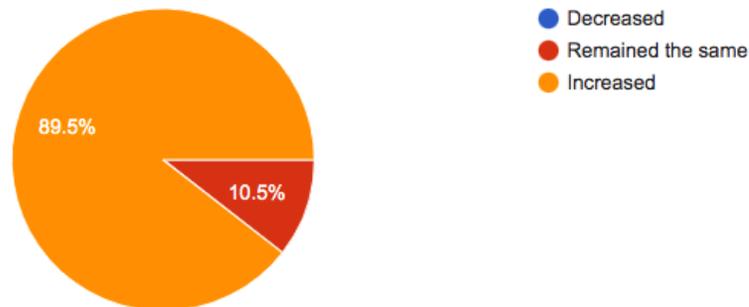
Change in daily transportation time since using the service



Twenty percent of respondents stated their travel time to work has stayed the same since using the service, while 79% reported a reduction in time. No respondents indicated an increase in travel time.

Has the reliability of your transportation to work decreased, remained the same, or increased since using the service?

19 responses



Ninety percent of respondents indicated an increase in transport reliability, while 10% stated the reliability has remained unchanged.

All respondents indicated they would recommend the service to others. Questions asked of respondents related to the linking of rides were also quite positive. Fifty-two percent of respondents stated they know of someone else at their work who would benefit from using the service, and 11% indicated they might know of someone else at their work who would be interested in using the service, suggesting opportunities for the linking of riders in the same workplace bubble.

Encouragingly, despite the pandemic, eighty percent of respondents said they would be open to sharing a taxi with a coworker to keep the service running for longer by stretching out subsidy use.

When respondents were asked about changes to their life since using the service, many positive comments were shared. Here is an excerpt from those responses:

- **“Less stress.”**
- **“I get to put more money towards bills.”**
- **“I have more money now for important things like groceries for my son and I.”**
- **“It is a lot easier now. I get to work on time since I started using the service. I can save more as well.”**
- **“Yes, I am able to use the money saved to buy food.”**
- **“Yes, I am able to get a job.”**
- **“Saves lots of money and time.”**
- **“Yes, I don’t have to worry about transportation to/from work!”**
- **“Yes, saves time and money and I can work on Sundays.”**
- **“Yes, it is easy for me to pick up more shifts.”**
- **“I saved money and reduced the stress I feel on trying to get a car.”**
- **“Yes, I can concentrate on work more, and less stress about worrying how to get there.”**

When asked about whether the program will make changes in their life that impact their future, respondents affirmed the positive impact it would have on them in their future, while also stating their concerns about the future if/when the program ends.. Here is an excerpt from those responses:

- **“Absolutely, I can now take another shift for work because I don’t have to put out so much now for taxis. I have extra money now for bills and groceries. I am not struggling as much as I was financially.”**
- **“Yes, if this service keeps going, it would be great for me to have peace of mind and not have to be worried about the cost for transportation.”**
- **“Yes, if this program discontinues, I cannot afford to take taxis to get to work and it psychologically hurts.”**
- **“Yes, being on time at a job is quite important. It will show me to be reliable.”**
- **“Yes, it has already changed my life and it makes transportation easier to go to work.”**
- **“It will be easier for me to get jobs with varied hours because I won’t have to worry about transportation if I can use a taxi service after the bus stops running in the evening.”**

When asked about improvements they would like to see to the service, almost all respondents stated they did not have any. Here are the few improvements that were suggested:

- **“Make it permanent.”**
- **“Keep it going.”**
- **“I’d like the taxis to come on time and not have to wait for 30 minutes.”**
- **“If the taxi service could allow us to go get groceries, it would be great, as it is pretty hard to carry lots of groceries by taking the bus.”**
- **More people are able to use the service.**
- **Improvement in communication with taxi drivers as at the beginning of the program the taxi driver was rude.**

Learnings & Adaptations

As identified in the report above, the Lab is a process where learnings and feedback from the test period are continually incorporated into the model.

Here is a summary of the learnings and adaptations we've had at the mid-way point of the pilot.

- 1) Conduct targeted outreach to employers and employees that work with current users in order to start linking users.** Targeting high impact employers to see if a partnership can be developed to build out the service to link employees' rides is critical at this point in the pilot. Partners identified large employers such as the call centres in Sydney and Glace Bay, as well as NSH as potential employer partners to approach. The subsidy dollars are all accounted for with the existing ridership using single-passenger trips for the remainder of the pilot so the linking of riders will be the only way to stretch the dollars to make it viable to add more users. Eighty percent of user respondents indicated a willingness to be linked with their coworkers in order to extend the pilot. Of these respondents, 12 stated they knew of coworkers who would be interested in using the service (10) or might know of coworkers (2). Start with these users to follow-up with their colleagues and employers to see if some successful employer partnerships could be brokered in order to test the linking of riders through a safer mechanism (existing workplace bubbles).
- 2) Engage CBU as a key partner in this work, as well organizations that support newcomers.** Many of the current users are CBU international students who are using the service to fill gaps in the current transportation complement in this region. CBU has been involved in transportation work in the community, subsidizing a Sunday bus service to the campus in the past, as well as participating in TIL meetings in previous phases. It would be valuable to reach back out to them as a partner in this phase of work and offer this option as a key service to support their students in accessing work opportunities while living in the community to complete school. Additionally, there are some key community partners that work on supporting newcomers, and the CBRM has recognized newcomer retention as a key outcome they are working towards to support population growth. Solving the transportation gap for these newcomers may be a key piece of the puzzle in having them feel open and able to stay in the community. Sharing this data with partners that have an interest in supporting international students, as well as trying to attract them to stay in the community post-graduation, may be a way to build out the partner network and possibilities leveraged through this pilot.
- 3) Begin to consider what comes after this pilot.** At the mid-way point of this pilot, it is clear that partners, users and taxi owners all want to see this type of service continue in some form or another. Starting conversations now about what comes next, including how to design something that takes the learnings from this project and pushes past the impact we were able to achieve, would be advisable, given the time it takes to mobilize large partnered initiatives such as this. Discussions with DCS are occurring about the possibility of running another pilot to support Employment and Income Assistance clients (ESIA). If an additional phase of testing is achieved, expanding the model to link in Transit Cape Breton in a more

meaningful way, through the use of bus hubs where taxis can take users part of the way and transit takes them the remainder, as well as the use of technology so that data can be more easily tracked, security is increased, and scalability is possibility will be integral. While this additional project offers strong possibilities for ESIA clients, it is important to recognize that many of the current users may not fall within that eligibility category. So also starting conversations about how to build opportunities to extend this support, such as through the linking of riders to bring down cost or through other subsidy methods (government support or employer support), should be considered.

- 4) **Communication could be strengthened.** There were a couple of users who indicated there were some gaps in communication that were negatively impacting their experience in the pilot. A couple of respondents stated they weren't aware they could use the subsidized taxi service, which indicates a lack of clarity at the time of registering, as all users are eligible to use both services. Additionally, a couple of users indicated challenges in communication and timeliness with their taxi driver. While most respondents reported great service from the partners and taxi drivers involved in the pilot, it is important that standards for communication throughout the pilot are high no matter the company or taxi driver one gets.