SUBMITTED ON
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COMMON GOOD SOLUTIONS

COMMON GOOD CAPE BRETON

# Bridging the Gap / Transportation Innovation Lab Phase 3 Pilot

## Final Evaluation Report

United Way Cape Breton

CAPE BRETON REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

Cape Breton Partnership

NOVA SCOTIA Community Services

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# Executive Summary

## Project Background

Transportation in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM) has negatively impacted residents living with low incomes and their ability to connect with education and employment opportunities. The United Way Cape Breton launched a free bus pass program for low income residents in 2017 to support them in accessing areas where Transit Cape Breton (TCB) is available. Concurrently, the Transportation Innovation Lab (TIL) was initiated in 2018 to support under- and unemployed individuals by designing and testing solutions focused on filling the gap when TCB service was not adequate in meeting their employment-related transportation needs.

The third phase of the TIL resulted in testing a model that paired the United Way's free bus pass program with an on-demand subsidized taxi service. This report outlines the activities and learnings from this third pilot phase.

## Phase 3 Testing Activity Summary

### Testing & COVID Context

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic at the beginning of Phase 3 resulted in four fundamental shifts to the Phase 3 testing plan:

1. There was no shared transport for the on-demand subsidized taxi service for the majority of the testing period. Users were taken as individual riders instead, and fewer total riders were able to be a part of the pilot as a result.
2. United Way Cape Breton was able to secure additional funding to support the testing period so that subsidy dollars to support single-use riders would not be used up too quickly.
3. United Way Cape Breton was slower to accept individuals into the program, starting with just a few riders in the first couple of months and then opening up to more participants.
4. The greater amount of subsidy dollars and slower start to ridership allowed for a longer test period than was originally proposed.

### Understanding Phase 3 Users

A total of 38 users were registered to use the service during the Phase 3 test. Users lived in five main communities in the CBRM, with the majority of users living and/or working in the biggest centre, Sydney. All of the users were currently employed at the time of registration, and worked primarily in the service sector. Users used a variety of options to get to work prior to joining the pilot, with the majority using personal taxi, or some combination of personal taxi and another means of transport. Comments around taxi use prior to the pilot centred around the fact that it offered reliability that TCB did not but was unaffordable for users.

## Taxi, Ride & Subsidy Data

There were three participating taxi companies in the pilot, based out of the three most populated communities: Sydney, Glace Bay, and New Waterford. The three tables below show a summary of data from the taxi, ride and subsidy activity.

**Totals from Phase 3 Data**

| Total (one way) Rides | Total Subsidy | Total User Fare | Total Revenue Earned through Pilot |
|---|---|---|---|
| 3250 | $42,159 | $20,669 | $62,814 |

**Averages from Phase 3 Data**

| Average subsidy per ride | Average user fare per ride | Average number of rides per week per user |
|---|---|---|
| $12 | $5.9 | 3.7 |

**Linked Ride Transport Data from Phase 3**

| **Linked Transport Summary Data** | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of Riders | Number of Rides | Total Savings for Users | Total Subsidy Savings | Total Fare Reduction |
| 20 | 10 | $8 | $132 | $140 |
| **Impacts** | | | | |
| Riders | Rides | Users | Subsidy | Taxi Companies |
| Riders could be accommodated with less budget, allowing support to last for longer for these riders. | Ten rides instead of twenty were required to transport these users under a linked transport model, increasing efficiency, reducing costs, and generating larger impacts. | Users saw minimal reduction in fare, but did not report any decrease in reliability or increase in time under the shared transport model. They seemed willing to participate in the shared transport model for the benefit of extending the service rather than fare savings. | The government saw a significant savings in subsidy dollars to support these users through the linking of rides. A savings of over $13 in subsidy per ride was realized by just adding one additional user to each vehicle. | The taxi companies saw a reduction in their overall revenues through the shared transport model, but two were motivated to make this change as it reduced their gas costs and built greater efficiency in the model. They also are motivated to create a model where government partners see long-term viability in the subsidy required. |

# Feedback & Impacts from Community Voices Involved

## Organizational Partners

The organizational partner survey was sent to six individuals and was completed by three, a 50% response rate. All partners saw a positive change in the community from the pilot and felt participating had helped to strengthen their relationships and ability to achieve their own mandates.

## Taxi Owners

We were able to hear from all three taxi owners who participated, representing a 100% response rate. They all rated the pilot as very effective for both their businesses and their drivers. They stressed the significant role the pilot had played in maintaining their business during COVID lockdowns.

## Users

Of the 38 registered users, 21 provided final evaluation feedback, representing a 55% response rate. The majority of respondents identified as youth (under 30 years of age) and/or newcomers or immigrants. Users reported greater satisfaction with the on demand taxi service than the free bus pass program, though all said they would recommend the pilot to others. Only 24% of users felt they would be able to maintain their employment without the pilot.

All users reported a reduction in daily transport costs, and none reported an increase in travel time or a decrease in reliability. Users reported significant impacts to their lives since joining the pilot; 81% were able to take more shifts at an existing job and 57% were able to develop additional savings.

# Next Steps: Phase 4

At the mid-way point of the Phase 3 pilot, it became clear that partners, users and taxi owners all wanted to see the service continue. Following this feedback, project partners, under the leadership of the United Way Cape Breton, began advocating for and designing a fourth phase for this work. Funding was confirmed in July 2021 from the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services. In addition to maintaining support for Phase 3 users, conversations have begun around how to design a program for individuals currently on Employment and Income Assistance. Centering the program around linking to Transit Cape Breton (TCB) buses will allow subsidy dollars to be efficiently used.

# Learnings & Adaptations

The Lab is a process where learnings and feedback from the test period are continually incorporated into the model and our collective understanding of how to best meet the needs of participants. A summary of the key learnings and adaptations from Phase 3 is below.

1) Stronger communication and streamlined tracking and monitoring
2) Finding ways to more actively engage with municipal partners
3) Including taxi partners in co-designing the model and increasing shared taxi rides
4) Strengthening the link to Transit Cape Breton
5) Bringing employers into the Solution
6) Considerations around climate change

# Project Background

## Community Context

Access to transportation is more than just a means of movement; it can dramatically limit or expand the opportunities available to people based on where they live. For an individual or family living in poverty, transportation can mean the difference between accessing jobs, quality food, recreation opportunities, schooling, and healthcare-- all core components of upward socioeconomic mobility.

In many regions throughout North America, there is a correlation between higher levels of poverty and limited access to public transportation.[1] The Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM) is one such region where levels of poverty are high and access to public transportation is low. Twenty percent of those living in the CBRM are considered low income based on the low-income measure after tax rate (LIM-AT)[2], and the region has an unemployment rate of 17.4%[3].

An impending 30% cut of the CBRM's public transportation budget in 2014 motivated community leaders to form the Community Transportation Working Group (CTWG) to kickstart discussion and action towards better community transportation. Out of their two year study, the CTWG identified a number of areas to address gaps and enhance transportation in the CBRM. In these discussions, employers identified their struggle to fill job vacancies due to limitations around transportation, and transportation users commented on the difficulty of using public transport to get to work.

The ability to fill the gap in transportation services was noted as an area of future interest for its potentially high impact. Two years later, the Transportation Innovation Lab (TIL) was initiated to explore whether an opportunity could emerge from these interrelated challenges.

## United Way Cape Breton: Free Bus Pass Program

The United Way Cape Breton has administered its free bus pass program since 2017 in the CBRM. The program is designed to support individuals living in poverty who are looking for employment, are currently employed, are in a community program, or attend school. The program gives individuals a free bus pass for a six-month period.

Prior to United Way's involvement in the TIL Phase 3 Project, 168 six-month free bus passes were distributed in the CBRM to low income residents through the free bus program. Through this work, the United Way has grown into a leader in the community around affordable transportation.

## 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 Nova Scotia Department of Community Services under their Poverty Reduction Strategy.

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[1] White, 2015. *Stranded: How America's Failing Public Transportation Increases Inequality.*

[2] Statistics Canada, 2018. *Census Profile, 2016 Census, Cape Breton Regional Municipality*

[3] Ibid.

While this project considered the transportation needs of individuals holistically, its primary focus was to **connect under- and unemployed individuals in the 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 CBRM.**

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 was 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 CBRM, 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 was completed in August 2021.

# Phase 3 Testing Activity Summary

## Testing & COVID Context

This evaluation report covers the entire Phase 3 testing period from December 2020 - August 2021. Phase 3 testing was originally intended to run from March 2020 - June 2020; however, the onset of the COVID pandemic meant that the testing period was put on hold for a significant period.

The COVID pandemic made testing our originally proposed model of shared transport impossible to do in a safe and responsible manner. Therefore, for almost a year, plans to launch the test were put on hold with the hope that testing of the original model would be possible at a later date. Once it became apparent that the COVID pandemic was not going to end quickly, the project team worked on revising the original testing plan to allow for the test to occur under the new realities of COVID restrictions.

This meant four fundamental shifts occurred to the Phase 3 testing plan:

5. There was no shared transport for the on-demand subsidized taxi service for the majority of the testing period. Users were taken as individual riders instead.
6. United Way Cape Breton was able to secure additional funding to support the testing period (they called this additional funding Bridging the Gap funds), so that subsidy dollars to support single-use riders would not be used up too quickly.
7. United Way Cape Breton was slower to accept individuals into the program, starting with just a few riders in the first couple of months and then opening up to more participants once they were sure the available subsidy dollars could sustain their use.
8. The greater amount of subsidy dollars and slower start to ridership allowed for a longer test period than was originally proposed (went from a four-month test period to a nine-month test period).

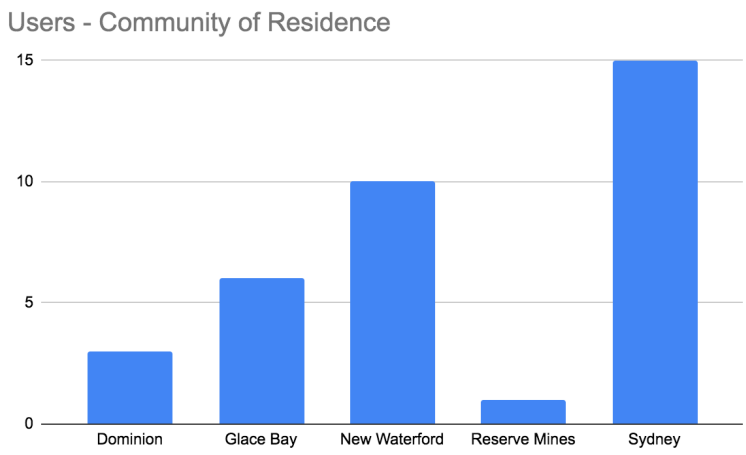
Though we had hoped we could test a different type of model, one that more strongly demonstrated the advantages of shared on-demand transport, the data from our test clearly demonstrates that the low-income workers using the service were primarily essential workers. Even during times of lockdown in Nova Scotia, the majority of eligible riders were still using our service to get to and from work. Their requirements for support to get to their places of employment did not diminish due to COVID; very few were able to work-from-home and maintain their jobs. So, ultimately, we are grateful this project was able to shift its model to meet the realities of COVID in order to support these workers in their transportation needs at a time when there were many other stressful realities at play.

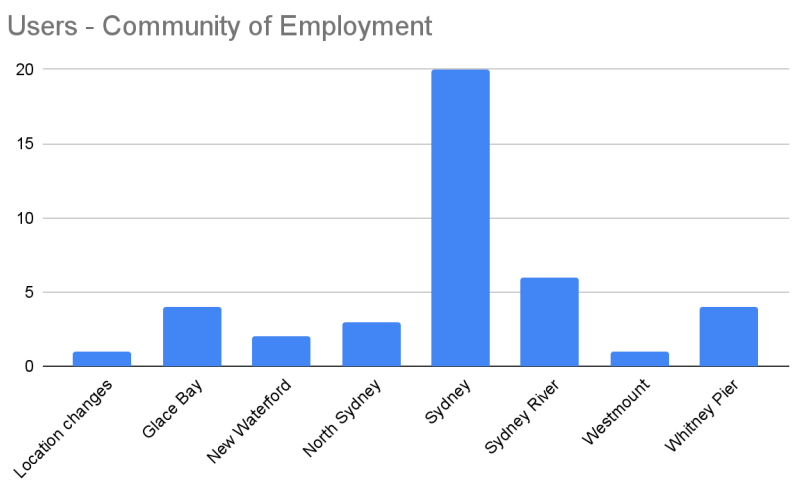
## Understanding Phase 3 Users

A total of 38 users were registered to use the service during the Phase 3 test. Users ranged in age from 18 - 60 years old. 32 was the average age of users. Four users reported having dependents, and 56% identified as female.

### Communities of Residence and Employment

Users were most likely to reside in Sydney, the most populated centre in the CBRM. New Waterford, while smaller than Glace Bay, was the next most common place for users to reside, likely because of the significant transportation challenges in that community and the key role in recruitment the managing taxi provider played, who is also from New Waterford. No users were from the Northside of the CBRM, as the two taxi providers who served this region declined to participate in the pilot.



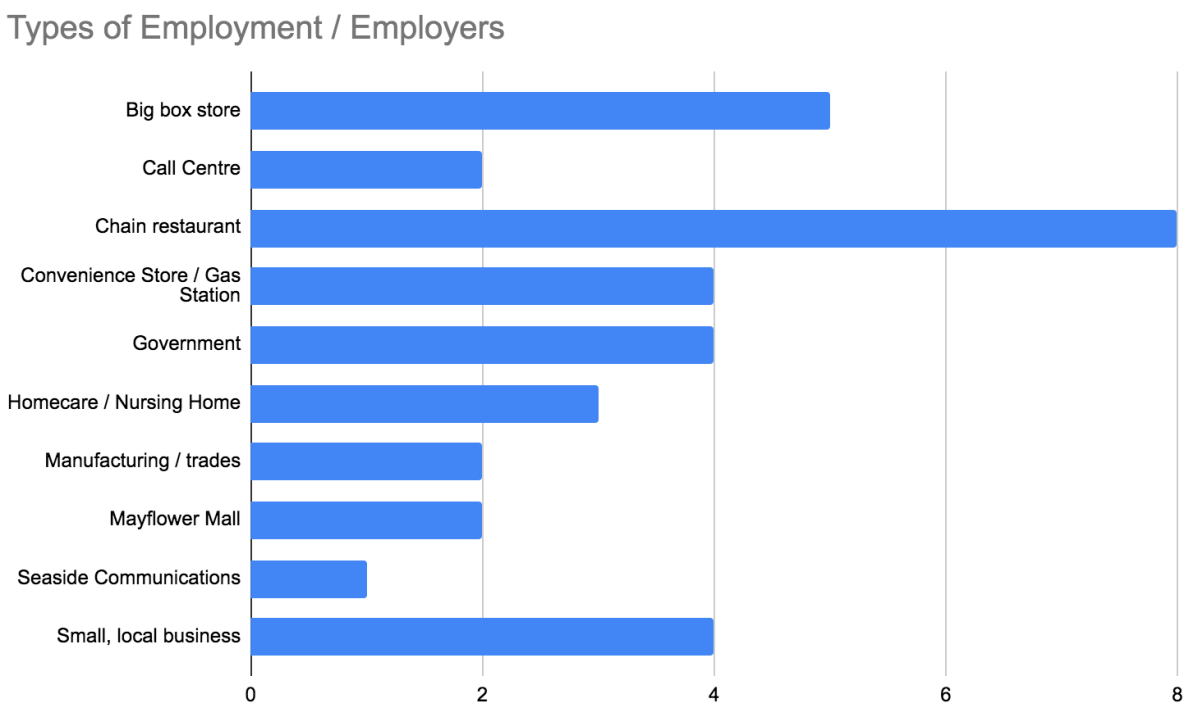




The most common location for employment was in Sydney, where the majority of employers are based in the CBRM. It is important to note that three users worked in two jobs in two different communities concurrently, and one user had a job where they went to different homes all the time. There is no TCB bus service for users who reported working in Sydney River or Westmount (7/38 users).

Over the course of the project period, some users also moved or had their employer move them to a different location. Whenever possible, United Way worked with these users to find a transportation compromise that allowed them to keep their job, maintain affordable rates for the user, and not draw down the subsidy dollars to an extent that was unsustainable for the program.

## Employment

All of the users reported that they were currently employed at the time of registration, though throughout the course of the pilot, some users lost their jobs, especially during times of COVID lockdown, so no longer required the service. There were users in the pilot, however, who were able to secure new jobs or go back to previous jobs when they reopened and indicated it was a big help to know they could continue to use the service to get to that new or renewed job opportunity.



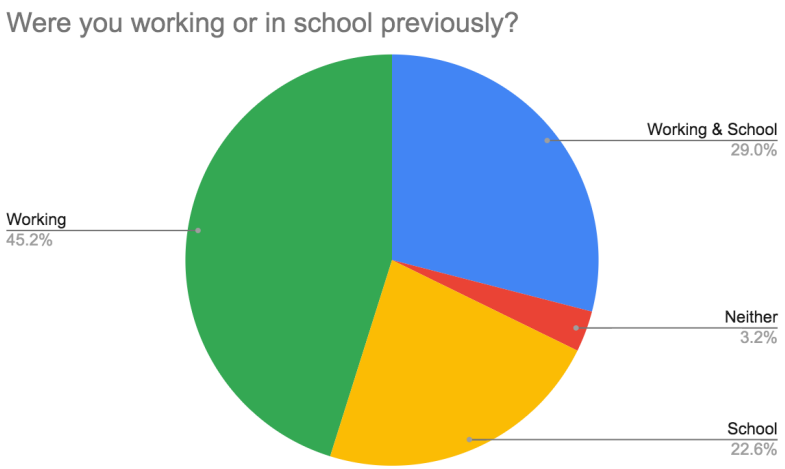

Users worked at a variety of employers in a range of employment types. The most frequent employer in the big box store category was Walmart and McDonalds was the chain restaurant most individuals worked at. Other frequent employment responses included Needs convenience store, as well as working at the hospitals (listed under the government category). It is evident from the data on types of employment/employer that users were likely being paid minimum wage or low wages, and that they worked primarily in the service industry.

During the intake process, users identified currently working 1 - 5 shifts per week. Though data on ride usage from the invoices generated during the pilot shows us that once on the service, many increased their employment levels, with some users' ride data suggesting they were using the service to get to shifts 7-days a week.

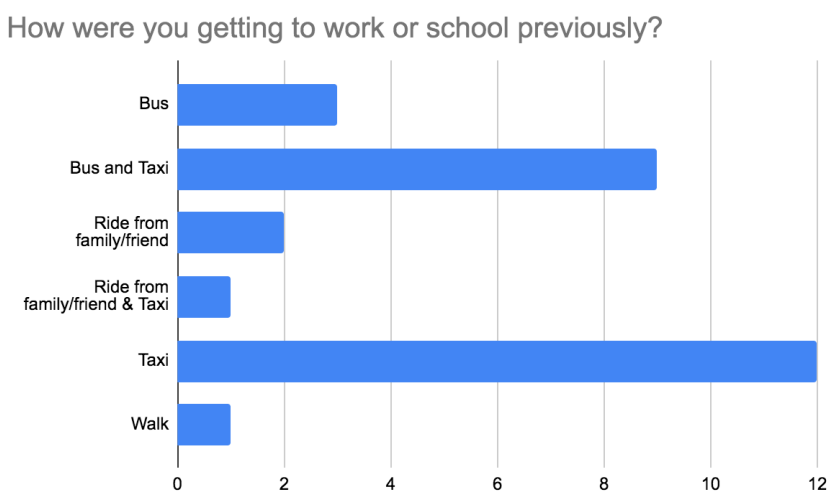
## Transport to Work - Past and Present

Twenty-three percent of users reported that they had used the service in Phase 2 of the TIL, and one registered user and one waitlisted user were actively involved in designing the service in Phase 1 of the TIL. So we continued to see engagement built throughout the lab process carry through.

All but two of the individuals who registered for the service identified that they intended to use the free bus pass as well as the subsidized taxi service. However, the new bus passes that were issued to support users from July onwards, were only picked up by ten individuals, suggesting that use of the subsidized taxi service was more prevalent. Users have to pick up bus passes at the CBRM, and their offices were shut during COVID lockdowns, so this also prevented users from accessing their passes.




Almost all users were working or in school previously, and they reported the following in terms of the transport they used to get there prior to joining the pilot (see chart below). Only ten percent of users reported being able to use TCB solely. Most were using personal taxis, either on their own (43%) or in combination with the bus (32%) or rides from friends or family (4%). Demonstrating that personal taxis, while extremely expensive, are the primary way users were accessing employment.



When users were asked about the amount of money they spent on their transport to work or school previously, responses ranged from $0 - $90 per day, with a cumulative total of $791 per day for all users. The average amount that users spent on transport prior to participating in the pilot was $24 per day. They reported that their transport took on average 30 minutes, with a range of responses from 5 minutes to 90 minutes.

On a four-point scale, with one being very unreliable and 4 being very reliable, they rated their previous transportation experience an average of 3.4. When asked why this ranking was given, 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."**
- **"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."**
- **"D11 is a reliable taxi but the bus is not running a lot in New Waterford. "**
- **"There is no bus service in Westmount."**

When asked whether their need for a ride changed based on other transport options available to them, 37% of respondents reported yes. Responses to this question were primarily around whether or not they could catch a ride with a friend, family or coworker or limitations in bus scheduling.

## Waitlist

The Phase 3 Pilot stopped accepting new users part-way through so that subsidy dollars would last for existing users for the time period committed. There were, however, additional individuals who contacted the United Way or participating taxi providers expressing their interest in joining the pilot. Over the course of the project period, 114 individuals reached out to get put on a list of interested users. No advertising or marketing of the pilot was done, so for this number of individuals to reach out shows there is considerable unmet transportation needs in the region.

## Taxi, Ride & Subsidy Data

There were three participating taxi companies over the course of the pilot. These companies cover the three most populated communities in the CBRM: District 11 is in New Waterford, Marg's is in Glace Bay, and Dynasty is in Sydney.

The data below shows a summary of the rides, subsidy dollars, user fare and revenue earned.

| Total (one way) Rides | Total Subsidy | Total User Fare | Total Revenue Earned through Pilot |
|---|---|---|---|
| 3250 | $42,159 | $20,669 | $62,814 |

Over three thousand rides were provided over the pilot period, which resulted in over $60,000 in revenue to the three local participating taxi companies, with users covering approximately one third of this cost and subsidy dollars supporting the remaining portion of the fare.

| Average subsidy per ride | Average user fare per ride | Average number of rides per week per user |
|---|---|---|
| $12 | $5.9 | 3.7 |

As stated in the 'Testing and COVID Context' section above, it was not possible to link the majority of riders during the pilot period because of concerns about safety and COVID rules. However, towards the end of the pilot, once vaccination rates began to rise and restrictions eased, two of the three participating taxi providers were able to link a handful of riders. The data comparing these shared rides versus costs if users had been taken as individuals is found in the table below.

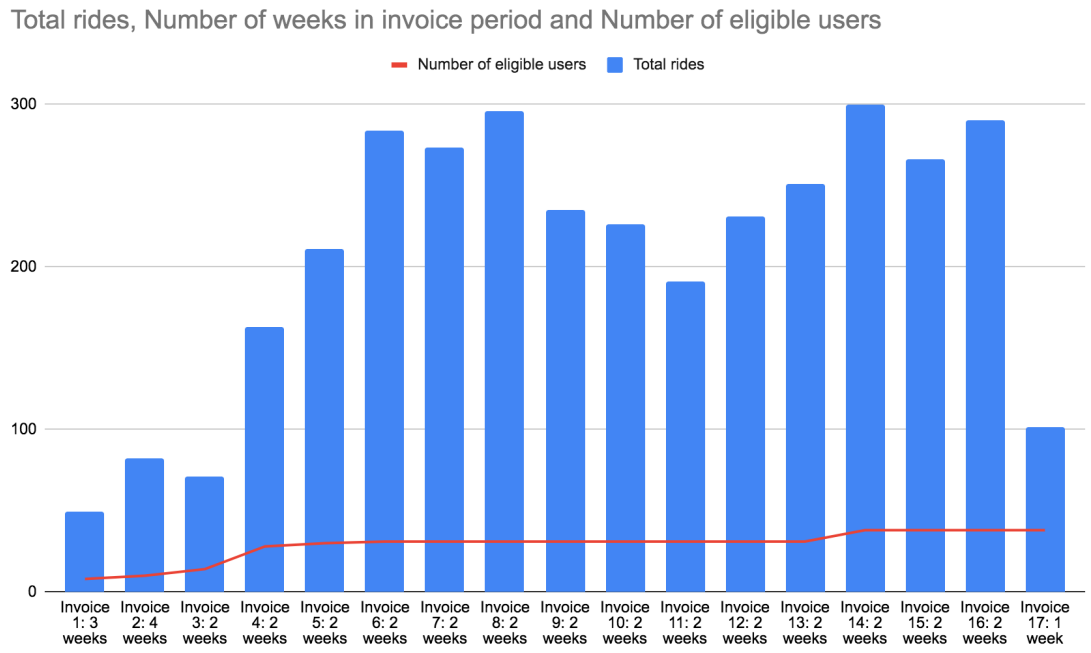
| Taxi Provider | # of Shared Rides | # of Users in Shared Ride | User Costs - Shared vs Individual | Subsidy Costs - Shared vs Individual | Total Fare - Shared vs Individual |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **D11** | 7 | 2 per ride | In-community trips: $5 - $8 for both users vs $8 - 10 for both users<br>Out of community trips:<br>Remained the same at $14 for both users | In-community trips: $5 for both users vs $8 - $10 for both users<br>Out of community trips: $16 for both users vs $36 for both users | In community trips: $10 for both users vs $16 - 20 for both users<br>Out of community trips: $16 for both users vs $36 for both users |
| **Dynasty** | 3 | 2 per ride | In community trips:<br>Remained the same at $8 for both users | In community trips: $0 for both users vs $8 for both users | In community trips: $8 for both users vs $16 for both users |
| | | Total cost | $104 vs $112 | $90 vs $222 | $194 vs $334 |

The data from the shared rides demonstrates that the two taxi companies took a bit of a different approach in terms of the shared ride model, and that greater clarity and consistency for taxi companies, users, and provincial partners should be developed moving forward.

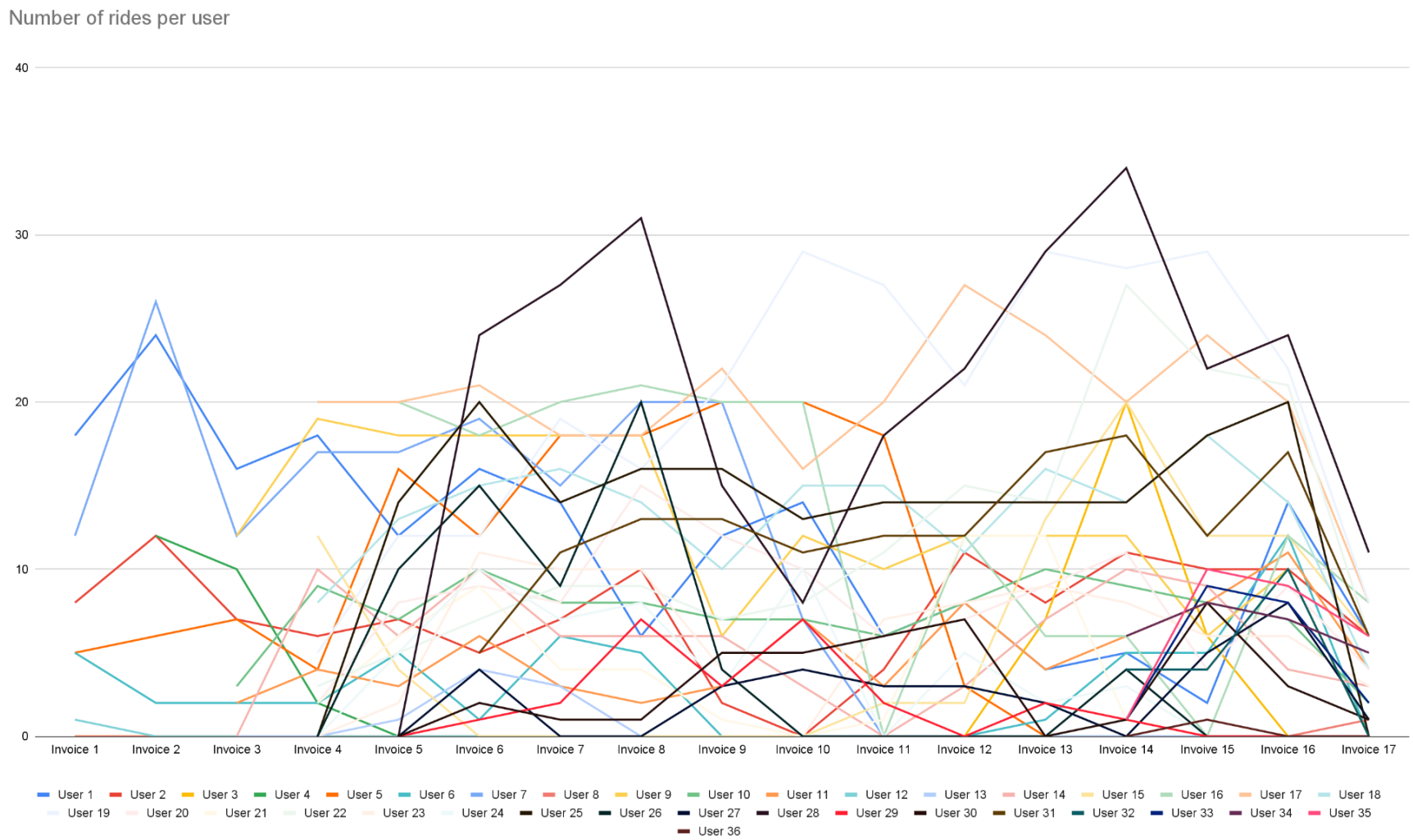
The data from these ten shared rides shows the significant positive impacts on the model, in particular in the subsidy required to support the model, even if only two riders are able to be linked. Total savings from these ten shared rides resulted in $8 in savings for the twenty users, $132 in savings in subsidy, and $140 reduction in total revenue for the taxi providers. A summary of the impacts from linked transport is found in the table below.

| **Linked Transport Summary Data** | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of Riders | Number of Rides | Total Savings for Users | Total Subsidy Savings | Total Fare Reduction |
| 20 | 10 | $8 | $132 | $140 |
| **Impacts** | | | | |
| Number of Riders | Number of Rides | Users | Subsidy | Taxi Companies |
| More riders could be accommodated with less budget, allowing support to last for longer for these riders. | Ten rides instead of twenty were required to transport these users under a linked transport model, increasing efficiency, reducing costs, and generating larger impacts. | Users saw minimal reduction in fare, but did not report any decrease in reliability or increase in time under the shared transport model. They seemed willing to participate in the shared transport model for the benefit of extending the service rather than immediate fare savings. | The government saw a significant savings in subsidy dollars to support these users through the linking of rides. A savings of over $13 in subsidy per ride was realized by just adding one additional user to each vehicle. | The taxi companies saw a reduction in their overall revenues through the shared transport model, but two were motivated to make this change as it reduced their gas costs and built greater efficiency. They also are motivated to create a model where government partners see long-term viability in the subsidy required. |

Total rides grew over the pilot period, as more users were added to the service, with the exception of the lockdown in Spring 2021. The last invoice was only for a one-week period so saw fewer rides.



This graph is designed to show an overall picture of usage during the pilot period, rather than to identify any one user and their ride behaviour. It demonstrates the amount of variation in the number of rides users took over the pilot period, as well as the difference in use between riders. In a single two-week invoice period, one user used the service 34 times, while others did not use the service at all in some periods or only a handful of times. Of the 38 users registered, 36 of them used the subsidized taxi service at some point in the pilot. The two users who did not use the service were added in the last month of the pilot and never participated.



# Feedback & Impacts from Community Voices Involved

Three surveys were created for the three main stakeholder groups involved in the pilot. These stakeholders included:

1) Organizational partners - Representatives from the four organizations partnering to provide leadership for the pilot: United Way Cape Breton (managing partner), Cape Breton Regional Municipality, Cape Breton Partnership, and District 11 (managing taxi provider). They were asked in an online survey to reflect on their role as partners leading this initiative.
2) Taxi companies - The owners of the three participating taxi companies: District 11, Marg's and Dynasty participated in an online survey to share perspectives about the impacts for their companies and their drivers in being involved in the pilot.
3) Eligible users - An online survey was created for all users who participated in the pilot to gather their feedback on the impacts to their lives from participating in the pilot and what changes they would like to see moving forward with the model. Users who could not be reached by online means, were also called on the phone or given hard copy surveys from taxi drivers to complete during their rides.

## Organizational Partners

The organizational partner survey was sent to six individuals and was completed by three, a 50% response rate.

Survey respondents all stated that they decided to participate in the pilot because of the significant gap in affordable transportation options in the region that limit low waged workers' ability to connect with employment. All identified that this project aligned with their own priorities of poverty reduction, transportation, and economic development.

All respondents stated they saw positive changes in their community from the pilot (2 respondents said "strongly agree" and one respondent said "agree"). When asked about the changes they saw occur through the pilot, all respondents mentioned the positive impact it has had on individuals' ability to increase their financial security, take new jobs, or increase shifts with existing jobs. There was also mention of other spin off benefits they had heard about from users, such as having more money to purchase food or visit with friends and family.

Two of the three respondents felt that the pilot had helped them to better achieve their own mandate with work. They spoke about benefits such as working with a strong collaborative team to support more individuals, as well as understanding users' needs better so they can design supports that fit the gaps.

All respondents reported that participating in this initiative has strengthened their relationship with community organizations, community members, and local businesses and employers. While two of three identified their relationships with the provincial government have been strengthened.

Two respondents reported that their partnerships with the other partners leading the initiative has strengthened over the pilot period, helping to reduce siloing in the community of partners working on

similar goals but not collaborating. And one respondent spoke about the change to their relationship with the provincial government and to community members since their participation in the pilot, stating, **"it has given us a better position with the province in terms of advocacy in poverty reduction, and specifically transportation solutions within CBRM...we've gained a lot of trust in community with the program as well."** This respondent also identified that they have been able to increase staff resources through a new part-time position to increase their capacity to support in this area.

When asked about whether any of their assumptions had shifted since being a part of the pilot from the learnings gathered through this test, two respondents spoke about their deeper understanding of the issues around transportation from the users' perspective. One specifically referenced the challenges that newcomers are experiencing in the CBRM because of the transportation gap; **"newcomers are facing transportation barriers at an incredible level."** While another spoke more generally about learning about the challenges individuals face in every area of their lives if they do not own a vehicle, especially in the winter months. The other respondent spoke about learning how **"the more information you have the better it will go."** This demonstrates there is a learning from partners in terms of the process to conduct a successful pilot that not only achieves outcomes for users in that period of time, but works to capture the learnings from the period to adapt and build the case for support in the future.

## Taxi Owners

We were able to hear from all three taxi owners who participated in the pilot, representing a 100% response rate.

On a scale of one to four, with four being very satisfied with the pilot, all taxi owners ranked they were very satisfied with their overall experience. Their reasons stated for this ranking were because the program ran smoothly, clients were punctual, and because it helped their business, with specific mention of how it helped them weather the downturn in business due to COVID.

All of the participating taxi owners also ranked that their taxi drivers were very satisfied with the pilot. Two of the respondents stated their reason for this ranking revolved around giving them more work, especially during slow times, which in turn led to an increase in the pay that drivers were able to take home. Another respondent stated that their drivers enjoyed all the people they were able to meet and drive through the pilot.

When taxi owners were asked about what the revenue from this pilot (over $60,000) has meant for their business, all were extremely grateful for this support and spoke about the significant impacts it had on their business, especially during the COVID lockdowns. They stated, **"[i]t meant that I could stay in business"** and **"it was quite helpful especially during the COVID shutdown"** and **"I believe this was the saviour of taxis during lockdown times."** When asked if they had made any changes to their business since participating in the pilot, all of the of the respondents stated that it just allowed them to maintain their business, especially during COVID, while one identified they were able to make some updates to their fleet.

In terms of any final thoughts, the taxi owners expressed a desire to see the program succeed, both for their own drivers and businesses, but also for the users they support. One stated that, **"I believe the program is a great opportunity for young workers and students who find it difficult to cover transportation costs on top of their everyday expenses."** They identified that the program is filling a critical need for low-waged individuals, including supporting their taxi drivers in having more stable income. The program helps to bring the transport providers in the area and those requiring transportation closer together to meet this gap.

## Users

Of the 38 users registered to the service, 21 provided final evaluation feedback, representing a 55% response rate.

Users were asked if they identify with any equity seeking groups, resulting in the following breakdown:

- 58% identified as a youth (under 30 years old)
- 50% identified as a newcomer or immigrant
- 33% identified as a person of colour
- 8% identified as a person living with a disability
- No one identified as African Nova Scotian or Persons of African Descent, Mi'kmaq and Indigenous Peoples, or a current Income Assistance Recipient

For those that identified as a newcomer or immigrant, they were specifically asked whether the new access to transportation supports has impacted their ideas about living in Cape Breton. Seventy-five percent of respondents stated it had a positive effect, with comments such as **"it has made my life more content"** and **"I can afford to work here."** While one respondent stated that it ultimately had not made the difference, and that they had moved to Halifax because of the better transportation and employment prospects, **"I moved to Halifax to get a better job and better bus system."**

When users were asked what made them want to participate in the pilot, the majority of the comments related to increased affordability. Users stated, **"I was unable to afford my transportation to and from work"** while another stated that **"it's very helpful to control costs."** Three users identified the difference in costs from when they had to pay their own personal taxi fare are significant; **"I'm a single mom of three and it makes it a lot easier to pay $7 than it is to pay $20 a ride."**

There were also many comments around people not trusting or not being able to use the TCB service to get to employment. Some of this was due to the nature of their jobs that were outside of their control and did not match the bus service, such as **"I work in an on-call job. The on demand service works best for me,"** and **"I really needed help getting home from work as there is no bus at that hour,"** as well as **"I stay in Sydney and work in North Sydney where I can just work according to the bus schedule. But since the transportation program start[ed], I am very flexible to my schedule and can get more hours."** While other comments were more general about users feeling unable to

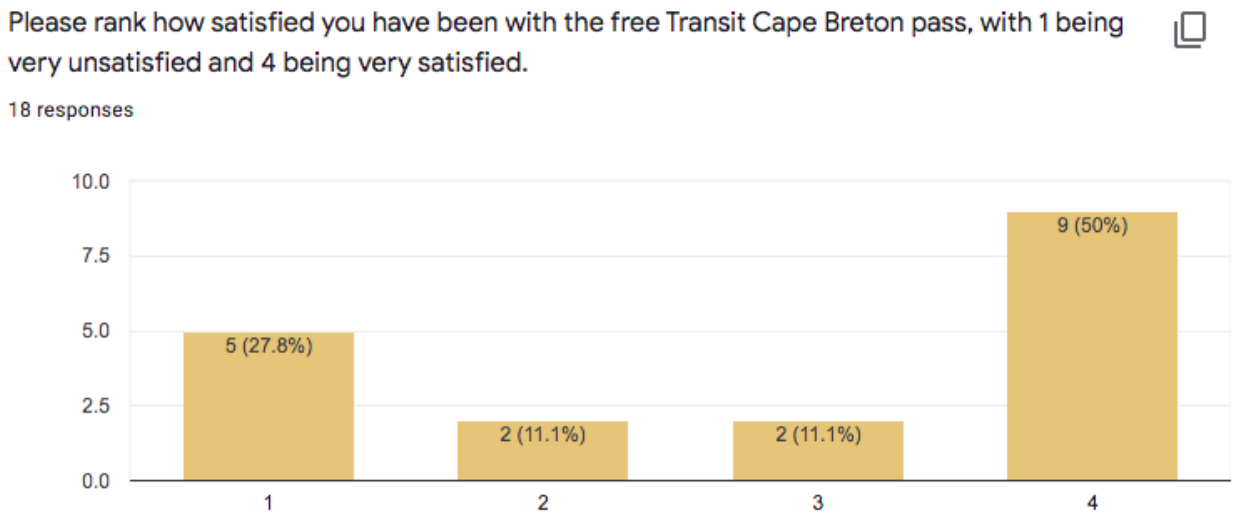
use TCB to reliably get to employment, **"the bus system in Sydney does not work for people to get to work on time"** and **"I moved back home to work and the bus schedule was not for me."**

Ninety-five percent of respondents identified that they had used the subsidized taxi service during the pilot, while only 57% identified having used the free bus pass. It was clear from the data that some users did not know about the free bus pass was a part of the program, had experience barriers in picking up their pass from the CBRM, or had not been motivated to go and pick up their free bus pass because they did not believe TCB would sufficiently meet their transport needs.

For those that had used the bus service, they reported a range of other life activities they were able to get to during the pilot using the free bus pass. These included:

- 85% used the free bus pass to get to work
- 69% used the free bus pass to access services
- 62% used the free bus pass to go shopping
- 54% used the free bus pass to get to education and training
- 54% used the free bus pass to access recreation
- 54% used the free bus pass to spend time with friends and family
- 39% used the free bus pass to access medical requirements

When users were asked to rank how satisfied they were with the free bus pass program, rankings were varied, with some expressing satisfaction and some expressing dissatisfaction.



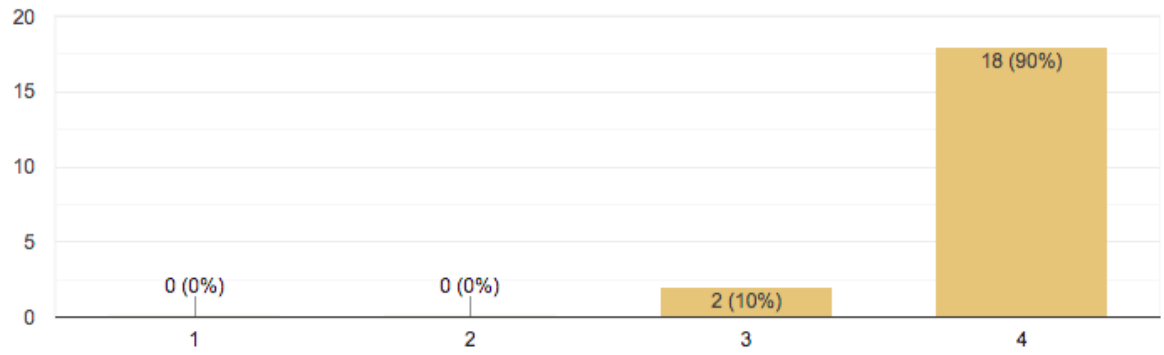

The reasons for satisfied rankings to this question were primarily centred around the cost savings for individuals in not having to pay for bus fare themselves over the pilot period, as well as how it allowed them to participate more fully because the cost of transport was not a barrier. Comments such as **"good for seeing my family"** and **"as someone who would travel using the bus often, I saved probably over $100 a month"** were offered. Whereas users who gave a dissatisfied ranking either stated they did not know the free pass could be used for other activities and did not feel it met their needs for work transport, or that they did not feel the bus was sufficient in meeting any of their transport needs. Comments such as **"I didn't understand the pass was part of the project. I can't**

**use the bus for work but I will use the pass for shopping and other things I need to do"** and **"bus times are not good. It takes too long to go to shopping or appointments"** demonstrate this.

When users were asked to rank their satisfaction with the on demand taxi service, all users ranked that they were satisfied with the service.

Please rank how satisfied you have been with the subsidized on demand taxi service, with 1 being very unsatisfied and 4 being very satisfied.

20 responses

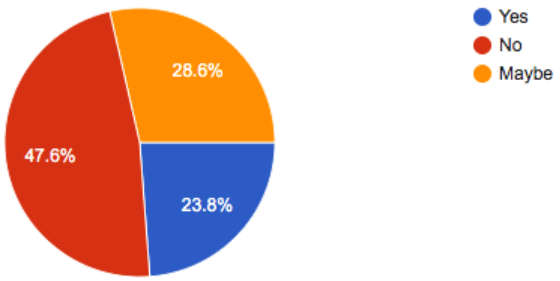



The reasons users provided for this positive ranking were primarily around the cost and time savings. Users stated they were able to work more and take shifts that normally they would have had to decline because of a limited bus schedule. Here is a sampling of some of these positive comments: **"it's half the cost now, to get back and forth to work, this helps me save time and money. It is more convenient and affordable for me, as I am a single mom"** and **"it has helped me to work more hours and I can save some money now."** Other comments were around the reliability of the service, and strong customer service of the taxi providers, such as **"the taxi was much more reliable than the bus"** and **"everytime I call for taxi they are on time and all taxi drivers are so good."** There was one comment that was more negative in nature, identifying that the costs for users were still too high; **"it was a good program but I still needed to pay too much to go to work."**

When users were asked if they felt they would still be able to access work if it was not for the pilot, only 24% felt sure that they could continue to maintain their employment.

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

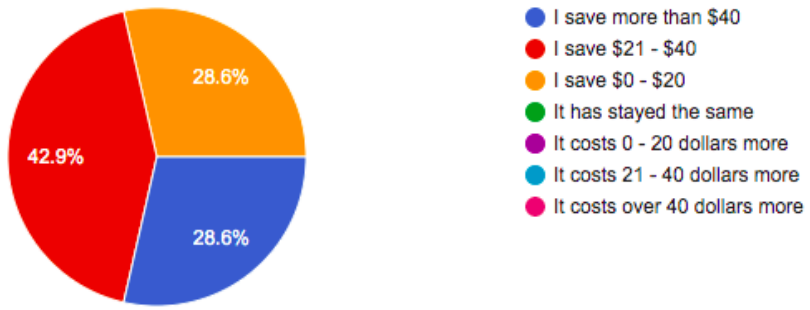
21 responses



All users reported a reduction in daily transportation costs since using the service, with 29% saving more than $40 daily, 43% saving $21 - 40 daily, and 29% saving $0 - $20 daily. 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 $576 for the 21 respondents. This means that a significant amount of money is staying in the hands of low-income workers each day.

On average, have your daily transportation costs to attend work changed since using the service (estimate based on return trip)?

21 responses




Users also reported either a reduction in travel time (62%) or travel time having remained the same (38%). No users reported an increase in transport time to get to work. If using the middle number in the range (e.g. 45 minutes when a respondent stated 31 - 60 minutes saved), a quick calculation estimates a daily time savings of 621 minutes or 10.4 hours for the 21 respondents. This means a significant amount of time is made available to the pilot participants in their lives.

On average, has your daily travel time to attend work changed since using the service (estimate based on a return trip)?

21 responses


Users reported that reliability for their transport to work has either increased (57%) or stayed the same (43%). No users reported that their transport reliability had decreased, and all respondents indicated they would recommend the service to others.

Users were also asked about the impacts on their lives since using the service. In the closed-ended question, users were asked to identify whether they had been able to do any of the following:

- 81% were able to take more shifts at an existing job.
- 57% were able to develop additional savings.
- 48% were able to purchase more or healthier foods.
- 38% were able to spend more time with friends and family.
- 33% were able to remain in a job they would have lost because of transport issues.
- 24% were able to access more recreational and social activities.
- 19% were able to take a new job.
- 14% were able to access more consistent medical care.
- 8% identified they were able to purchase a vehicle during the pilot.[4]
- 5% were able to access new education and training opportunities.

When respondents were asked an open-ended question about the biggest impact on their lives since using the service, most comments were around affordability and reliability, as well as the ability to save, spend in other important areas of their lives, and take more shifts. The impacts are best heard through their voices, so a collection of quotes is found below.

**"Many impacts. 1. More money for my family. 2. Time saved. 3. Less stress. I can think about home payments and opportunities for my children (sports, college, university)."**

**"I have been able to afford to go to work and buy groceries. Before entering the program I would have to decide which to spend my money on."**

**"It was too expensive to pay the taxi bills and really hard to find a job near my place. This program helped me a lot by saving me time and money."**

**"I am not so worried. It makes me feel content."**

**"This program allows me to put the money I save in taxi fare towards my children."**

**"I was spending $50 each time I needed to get to work. The taxi company was great as they would allow me to charge the taxi, but, on payday, my bill was so high that it was comparable to a heating bill in the winter!"**

**"Being a part of the subsidized taxi transportation program has greatly impacted my personal financial security. I rely on taxis daily to reach my job because owning a car is not financially feasible for me at this time. This program has allowed me to further accumulate savings for the future as well as contribute to an emergency savings fund."**

**"It has made my work schedule really flexible and makes it easy to earn more money and make savings."**

**"The money I didn't have to put out for taxis, it helps me greatly financially. I have also been able to take other shifts that I wouldn't have been able to before. This program is wonderful to me."**

[4] Two individuals who live and work at the same place purchased the vehicle together while another purchased a vehicle separately.

## Next Steps: Phase 4

At the mid-way point of the Phase 3 pilot, it became clear that partners, users and taxi owners all wanted to see the service continue in some form or another. Following this feedback, project partners, under the leadership of the United Way, began advocating for and designing a fourth phase for this work. Funding was confirmed in July 2021 from the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services.

Conversations have begun around how to design a program for individuals currently on Employment and Income Assistance (ESIA). Centering the program around Transit Cape Breton (TCB) buses will allow subsidy dollars to be efficiently used, which will support a 9-month pilot. The aim will be to bring program participants to a bus stop, whenever possible, for them to ride transit to their final destination. With this model, we expect the ridership of TCB busses to increase, which supports an essential service in the CBRM, and it will also broaden the geographic map included in the pilot.

The use of technology will also be crucial to the Phase 4 pilot. The pilot will accommodate approximately 60 new users, which will greatly increase the amount of data captured. Integrating technology solutions into each area of the pilot (collecting and reporting on invoice data, participant intake, and ride requests) will be a priority.

It is recognized that many of the current users in Phase 3 do not fall within that eligibility category for Phase 4, but the existing users participating in Phase 3 will be included in the Phase 4 program, to ensure that their transportation support is maintained, bringing the total number of participants to approximately 100 users.

An additional change to be incorporated into the Phase 4 pilot will be broadening the scope of eligible activities to include social engagements. This change reflects an increased understanding and prioritization of the World Health Organization's Social Determinants of Health, of which social inclusion is part.

Additionally, at a time when carbon pollution from transportation continues to be a major source of emissions in Nova Scotia, this test encourages further exploration between poverty reduction targets and environmental targets in helping to decrease the number of single rider personal taxi fares.

# Learnings & Adaptations

The Lab is a process where learnings and feedback from the test period are continually incorporated into the model and our collective understanding of how to best meet the needs of those the pilot grows.

Here is a summary of the learnings and adaptations from the pilot period.

## 1) Stronger communication and streamlined tracking and monitoring

It was identified by organizational partners and users that there were gaps in communication that resulted in some confusion in the pilot and some missed opportunities. Most notably, some users who joined the pilot in the latter half, were not aware of the free bus pass support, so were unable to take full advantage of the benefits of the pilot. This may have been due to the fact that users identified in the latter half of the pilot were sometimes brought forward by managing taxi providers because of the desire to find users who would be able to be linked. It will be important that all users, no matter who brings them into the pilot, are given the same information upon entering the program, and likely will require an initial touch point with the United Way to ensure this consistency.

Also, the model rolled out for the linking of riders was also slightly different based on the two taxi companies that provided this type of service. It is important that there is greater clarity on a chosen model, clear communication about this model, and expectations around tracking of this model. No matter the stakeholder involved, the service should be applied and analyzed uniformly.

Finally, organizational partners struggled to reach many of the users in the pilot, investing considerable time trying to track down users and get evaluation feedback or understand their participation in the model. Ninety-one percent of users from Phase 3 identified that they had access to a device that can connect to wifi so it may be an opportune time to switch to primary modes of communication that are automated online, with a backup communication option for users without access. Organizational partners and taxi owners both recognized that Phase 4 of the pilot, with its increasing number of users and added components to the test model, will only bring added complexity. Therefore having clear and streamlined avenues for easy communication with users, between partners, and with taxi providers will be key to the success of this next phase.

## 2) Finding ways to more actively engage with municipal partners

Phase 3 of the pilot saw a deepening of the relationship with some CBRM staff. CBRM granted regulatory approval for Phase 3, accepted the Federal government subsidy funds on behalf of the managing partners, and worked with United Way on providing access to the free bus pass program, including offering in kind support. All of these individual roles were vital to the success of the pilot; however, CBRM municipal leaders and senior staff continue to remain outside of the cohort of partners actively supporting this work. The success of this project will ultimately depend on finding ways for local decision-makers to buy-in to the solutions being offered, and work with the managing partners to enhance these solutions.

The newcomer and youth perspective is particularly important to capture as a part of this pilot for this reason. Newcomers and youth make up much of the actively seeking labour force in CBRM, filling

critical labour gaps for local employers. Retention of newcomers and young people is also an area that is of major focus for local governments and agencies in Cape Breton as a population growth strategy. As demonstrated through their participation in this pilot, newcomers and young people feel this transportation gap and it makes them question their ability to remain in the community. Demonstrating the extent to which active participation on this project supports newcomer and youth retention, by strengthening CBRM's essential services, would help to make the case for their greater municipal involvement and support.

United Way will be presenting to CBRM Council in September 2021 on results from this phase of the pilot and inviting them to be more active participants in the next phase of work, to truly see themselves as part of the solution being built in the community around transportation, and the benefits it brings to the municipality and its citizens.

### 3) Including taxi partners in co-designing the model & increasing shared taxi rides

Taxi owners spoke about their excitement about the next phase of support for the model. They hope to see greater opportunities for shared transport, as they understand this is a key component to making sure their partnership with the province can last and that the model for users provides good value. They also see opportunities to link riders helping to reduce their gas costs and wear and tear on their vehicles. However, they are concerned that a new pilot will be rolled out in a manner that their staff do not have the capacity to support. So, they want to be actively involved in the co-design of this new model, and ask that it be brought on slowly so they can adjust to it before receiving significant demand.

As the data suggests, a key avenue to scale the service and achieve a sustainable model is by significantly increasing the focus on linking of riders to make required subsidy dollars per ride decrease. While COVID prevented this from meaningfully occurring in Phase 3, the initial learnings from the ten shared rides showed considerable promise in the reduction of subsidy required to support those users. Finding more ways to link users, either through calls that come through for taxis from individuals outside of the pilot or by targeting certain intermediaries who can support the linking of users, may be a key to seeing a wider adoption of the shared on-demand model. Without a more fulsome test of this model, it is hard to know the impacts that it could have on the overall transportation complement available to low income riders, but the initial seeds we observed show promise.

Additionally, with a considerable number of new users joining Phase 4, it will mean the processes for invoicing, tracking, monitoring and evaluation must be made more streamlined and matched to the capacity of the partners that will need to maintain these systems. The hope is that technological solutions can help with labour-intensive processes at some point in this service model. However, whether or not technological solutions are available for Phase 4, it will be important that whatever systems are set in place are realistic. Taxi companies also mentioned that they may require more frequent invoicing to recoup the subsidy costs to support more users so that their cash flow is able to be maintained.

## 4) Strengthening the link to Transit Cape Breton

While TCB played a key role in supporting the free bus pass program, communication between TCB staff and United Way was minimal throughout the course of the pilot, resulting in the United Way not knowing until the end of the pilot that many individuals had never picked up their bus passes and data on passes being lost by TCB staff. The data from users is fairly clear that the majority still have concerns about TCB's reliability and effectiveness as a transportation solution. Therefore, Phase 4's intent to link users to TCB routes may cause some push back from users, as well as a reduction in the reliability and timeliness of the solution offered. In order to avoid this decline, TCB should be an active partner in Phase 4 of the pilot, and considerations must be given to ensure that people can still access the type of reliable and timely transportation they require. This may mean focusing on bringing TCB riders to only certain routes, so that there is a greater guarantee of service quality.

A key opportunity to scale this model is through partnering with TCB to offer a combined service. However, it will be important to listen to users along the way to understand where gaps may be, as well as being adaptive and responsive to making changes. When users were asked about the changes they want to see moving forward, the only changes they offered were wanting to see improvements to TCB schedules and coverage, and wanting to see the on-demand taxi service support remain. It is important that Phase 4 finds a way to support their desire for building stronger links to reliable TCB service, which may reduce their feeling that access to taxi service must remain.

## 5) Bringing Employers Into the Solution

Employers in the CBRM have struggled since COVID restrictions have eased to get the labour force they require to operate their businesses. It was clear from the data that certain local employers were benefiting from the pilot, such as McDonald's, Needs, and Walmart, with numerous employees from these locations participating in the pilot. However, it was not apparent that the employers were aware of the program, their employees' participation, and the benefits they were receiving. Users reported having greater flexibility in their work scheduling, accepting more shifts, taking new jobs, and maintaining employment they would have lost because of transportation barriers. All of these factors resulted in supporting employers, particularly at a time of significant labour shortage. United Way has identified that communicating this benefit to employers will be an important part of Phase 4. They will try to work with one or two employer champions who can help to tell the story of impact and demonstrate that by supporting this initiative the benefits they in turn receive.

## 6) Considerations around Climate Change

The focus of the TIL has always been on poverty reduction and supporting low income individuals in reducing transportation barriers through whatever means necessary to help lift them out of poverty. However, ride sharing and taxi-bus solutions are also being explored in the Nova Scotia context, as well as around the world, for the benefits that they can offer in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, especially in rural and semi-rural communities. While greenhouse gas reduction is not a key aspect of the TIL, the realities of climate change require that this lens is considered in new initiatives being explored in our communities. Therefore, having some tracking mechanisms in place to demonstrate spin-off impacts in the area of climate for Phase 4 may be of value.