

AFFORDABLE TRANSIT PASS STUDY

Engagement Summary



Project Overview

Transport poverty, the lack of affordable and accessible transportation, affects roughly 40 per-cent of low-income Canadians, especially in larger urban centres. The inability to afford transit services often deepens economic and social exclusion by restricting access to vital resources like jobs, education, groceries, and healthcare. This not only increases personal financial strain but also impedes social participation, reduces community engagement, and fosters isolation, all of which diminish overall social well-being.

To respond to these challenges, an Affordable Transit Pass Study and program are being introduced to better serve low-income transit riders, both current and future. This initiative aligns with the broader objectives outlined in the 2040 Transportation Master Plan, such as expanding transit use and maintaining revenue streams.

The study focusses on fare equity, aiming to develop strategies that fairly distribute transit costs among diverse user groups. Drawing inspiration from Kamloops's KamPASS program, it will explore pricing structures, partnership opportunities, and the financial implications of various models. The research will also assess administrative workflows, program implementation, potential shifts in ridership, and the costs and benefits of offering inclusive access to both conventional transit systems and HandyDART.

About the study

The study will involve consultations with key Kelowna Regional Transit partners, community groups, and other stakeholders to ensure the proposed recommendations effectively address Kelowna's diverse community needs. It will also explore potential synergies with other local initiatives, such as the City's Rec & Ride Summer Youth Pass program and consider how the recommendations align with City Council priorities and broader municipal strategies.

The Affordable Transit Pass Study is exploring the potential for a reduced-fare transit program that could work alongside existing fare options. Through this study, we are:

- Analyzing how people currently use transit and where gaps may exist
- Looking at how other communities support access through fare assistance programs
- Exploring ways to build on local programs (like the City's Rec & Ride Summer Youth Pass) to create more connected services
- Engaging with community members, service providers, and regional partners
- Developing and evaluating program models that are inclusive, practical, and financially sustainable

It is important to make sure public transit keeps up with the growing community. Feedback will help create a new fare option for people facing financial challenges. By sharing their input, participants help make the program truly meet the needs of our community.

Engagement Overview

Engagement for the Affordable Transit Pass Study ran from June 24th – July 15th. During engagement, information about the project was shared with the community with the goal of gathering input about current transit usage, why they use transit, and gauge interest in a reduced cost transit fare program. Using the City's online engagement platform, **Get Involved Kelowna**, was used to host both the survey, and a Q and A section. The survey was live for three weeks and 693 contributions were received, along with six questions asked by the public on the webpage.

The insights gathered through the survey will be combined with feedback from community engagement sessions involving key partners who support low-income and vulnerable populations to ensure the program reflects real needs and lived experiences. Peer scans from other regions are helping identify best practices and lessons learned. Together with data analysis, these insights will guide the development of an affordable, equitable program that works alongside existing fare options.

Limitations: results from public surveys such as this are a collection of opinions and perceptions from interested or potentially affected residents and those with an existing affinity for the topic - and not a statistically random sample of all Kelowna residents.

93%

answered 'yes' or 'mostly' to finding the information easy to understand

89%

answered 'yes' or 'mostly' to having enough information to participate in a meaningful way

69%

answered 'yes' or 'mostly' to understanding how their input is being used



Promotion

To ensure meaningful engagement, promotion included both region-wide digital promotion like Google and social media ads, as well as direct notification (emails, posters at bus stops, phone calls).

Traditional (Daily Courier ad) and digital methods (Castanet) of promotion only reach certain demographics (residents 24-69 years old with a household income of more than \$60,000). To make sure the engagement opportunity reached individuals below the financial threshold, the City partnered with United Way, Interior Health, and other social organizations in the region to promote the survey directly to those most likely to benefit from an affordable transit pass. Posters with study information and a survey link were provided to these organizations to share and display in common areas. In collaboration with BC Transit, 80 temporary signs were also installed at bus stops and exchanges across the region to further raise awareness.

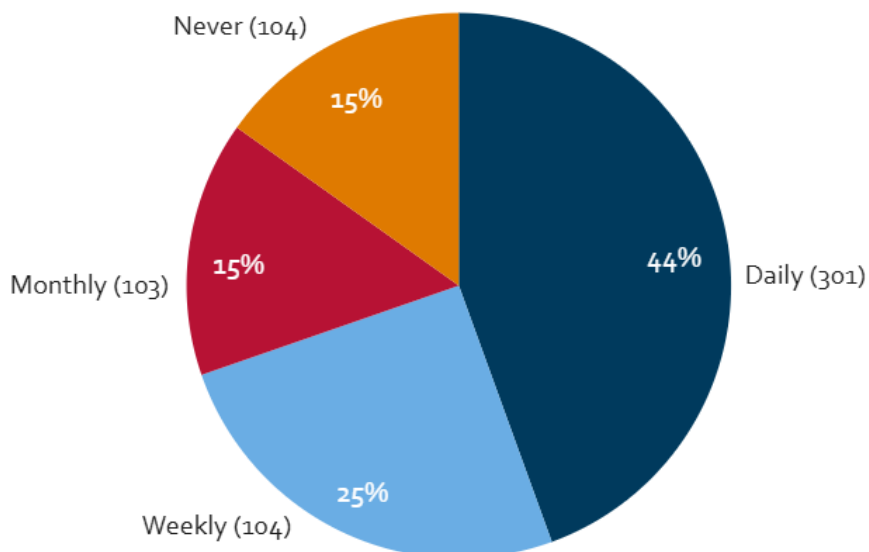
A news release was also sent out to local media and picked up by a variety of outlets, along with being sent to an e-subscriber list of more than 1,200 residents.



Current transit use at a glance

Frequency

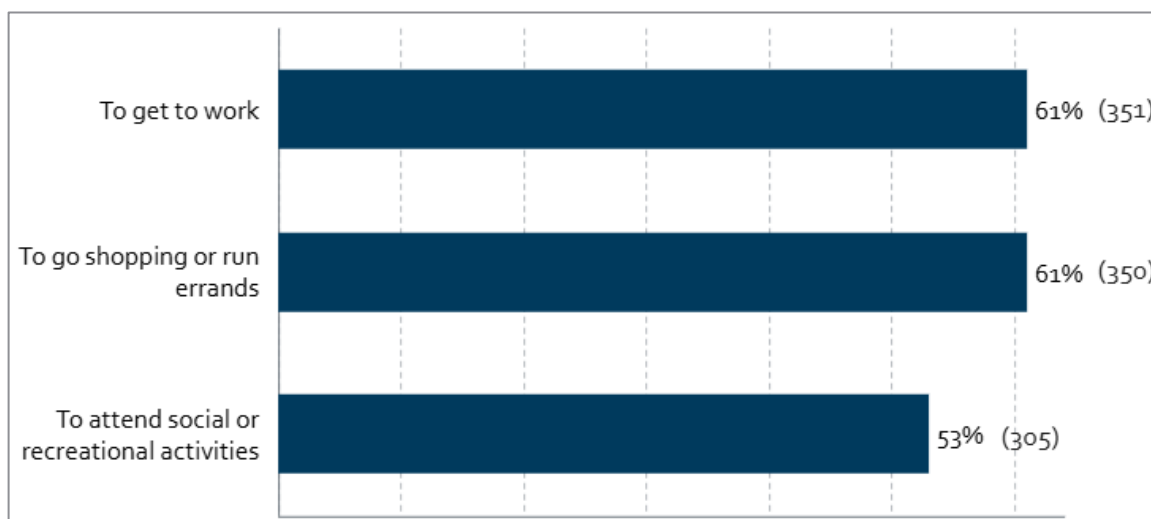
Of those who responded to the survey, over 60 per cent stated using transit daily or weekly.



97 per cent use regular transit service with the top three fare products being single ride cash, Umo and adult 30-day passes.

Reasons for using transit

Getting to work and running errands were the top reasons respondents selected for using transit.

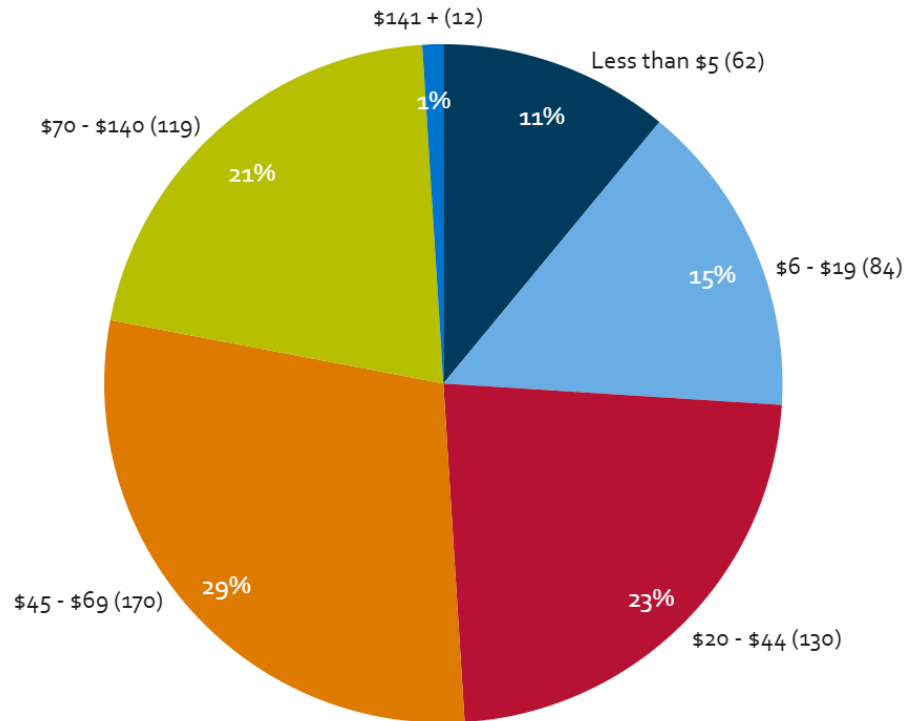


Reasons for not using transit

The top three reasons were transit being too infrequent, fares are too expensive, and service is too unreliable. Transit service not taking respondents where they need to go (37 per cent) and not having access to a personal vehicle (27 per cent) were in the top five reasons for not using transit. Understanding these reasons is essential, as one of the Council's current priorities to reduce road congestion and enhance transit services. Gaining insight into non-usage patterns can inform strategies for improvement.



More than 70% of respondents reported spending between \$20 and \$140 per month on transit fees, with \$45 - \$69 being the most common spend.



Benefits of transit from non-users

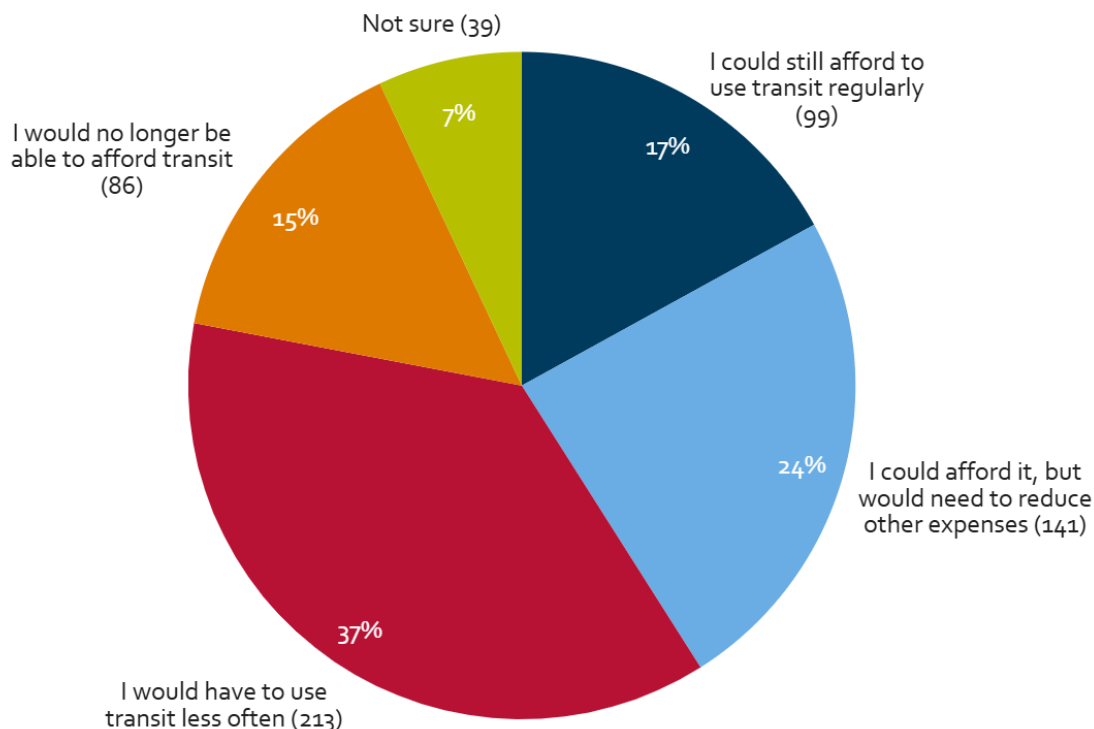
Since the subsidized transit pass affects all taxpayers, it's important to understand why non-users support transit. Selecting all that apply, the top three reasons for support are below, followed by "supporting a more equitable and inclusive community" (62 per cent) and they "made need to use it in the future" (63 per cent).





Interest in an affordable transit pass

Understanding affordability challenges and how it affects transit usage helps inform the case for introducing a new affordable transit pass. When asked if transit fares were to increase, would it affect respondents' ability to afford using public transit, only 17 per cent said they would use it regularly. Most would have to use it less often, reduce expenses elsewhere, or stop using it altogether.



Over 60 per cent (355) stated they have already needed to reduce their transit usage due to cost, so it is not surprising that 84 per cent (573) would apply for a reduced-cost transit fare program if eligible.

1.9 people per household would apply for a pass if eligible

0.5 people per household between 13 and 18 years old would apply for a pass if eligible

Key points



Most respondents stated they currently use transit and 81 per cent (552) were Kelowna residents.



Quite a few respondents buy single ride fares or use a Umo cash balance pointing to either infrequent or less regular use of transit or possibly challenges affording higher cost fare options.



People use transit for a variety of reasons, not just to travel to work or school.



Transit usage could be higher among respondents if service were better and safer, and fares were less expensive. Many choose to walk or bike to supplement their transit use.



There is support for transit among non-users and a clear recognition of transit's role in providing mobility for those who can't afford other modes of transportation.



Most people are spending between \$20 and \$140/month on transit fares. \$45-\$69 being the most common spend.



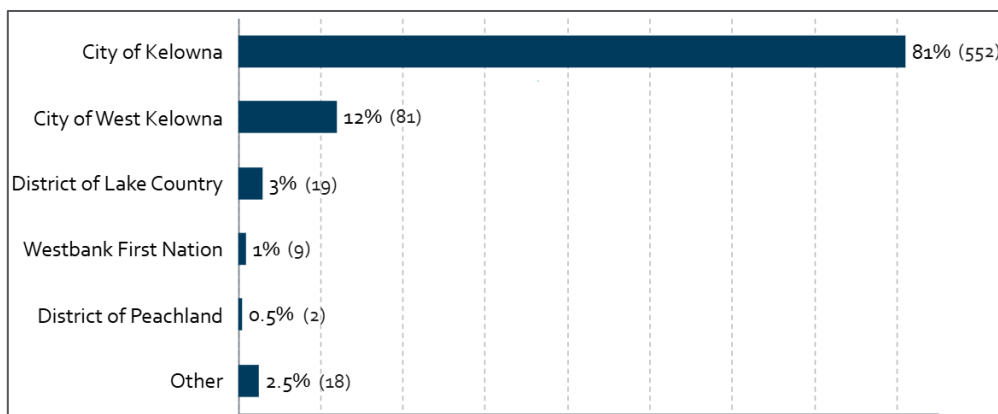
Over 60 per cent of respondents state they'd had to reduce transit use due to cost in the past, and many would have to either cut other expenses or reduce transit use further if fares increased. Many would apply for reduced fare support if eligible.



Over 80 per cent of participants said they would apply for an affordable transit pass if eligible.

Demographics

Over 80 per cent of respondents identified as residing in Kelowna, with the most popular area codes being V1X, Rutland up to Ellison, and V1Y, Central Kelowna including downtown. Downtown Kelowna and Rutland have higher levels of transit usage and would be the most interested in participating in this engagement.



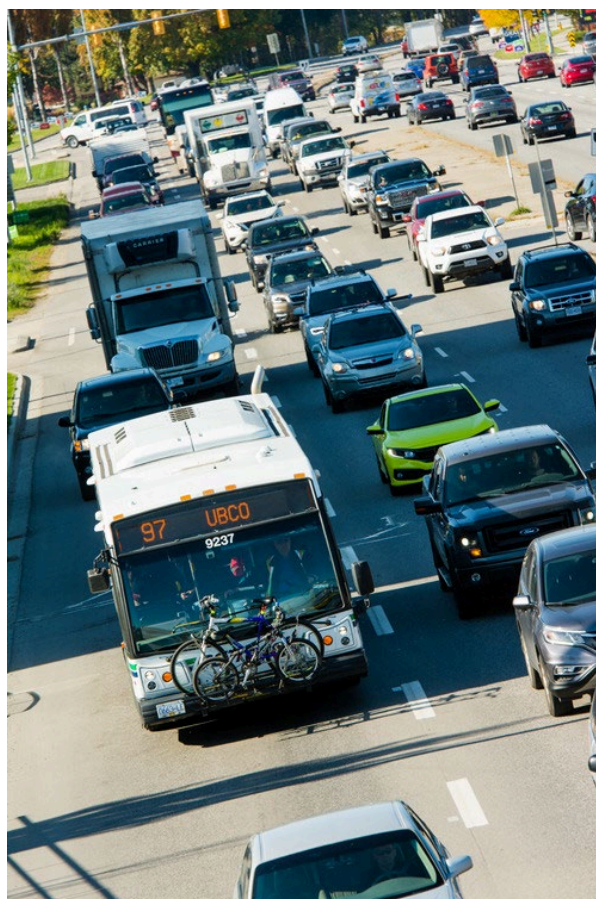
Next Steps

The Affordable Transit Pass Study survey results highlight some key opportunities to shape a fare option that supports residents facing affordability challenges. As was heard clearly through the survey, even small increases in fare could make transit unaffordable for many, leading them to cut back, make trade-offs in other areas, or stop using transit altogether.

Cost was consistently identified as one of the top barriers to transit use, and many respondents shared that they've already had to reduce their usage due to affordability. These insights - along with information about how people currently use transit, what they spend, and who might benefit from a reduced fare - will help guide the development of a program that meets real community needs while working alongside existing fare options.

This input will also support the evaluation of program alternatives, help identify administrative workflows, guide implementation planning, and assess potential shifts in ridership and revenue. It will also inform how inclusive access can be expanded across both conventional transit and HandyDART services.

As Kelowna continues to grow, it's essential that public transit remains accessible. Community feedback is helping to build a fare option that reflects real needs and supports equitable mobility across the Central Okanagan.





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