

TCAT TDP Public Engagement Summary: Fall 2020 Visioning Phase

Introduction

Public engagement is a crucial component of the TCAT Transit Development Plan (TDP). Along with the existing conditions assessment and input of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), it informs the planning process and helps in shaping an agreed-upon plan.

The TDP's first round of public engagement, held in October and November 2020, was designed to understand the public's vision and expectations for TCAT. Due to COVID-19, all public engagement sessions were held virtually; Open House and Focus Group sessions were hosted through Zoom while online engagement activities were developed through the [Social Pinpoint](#) platform. All Tompkins County residents were invited to participate in the process.

- The project team kicked off the first round of engagement with four one-hour online open house sessions (1pm, 2pm, 5pm, and 6pm) on October 14, 2020. At each session, the project team introduced the project, facilitated discussions, and provided a tutorial on how to use the online engagement platform and activities.
- In the weeks following the Open House, TCAT held multiple Focus Groups to hear from specific populations that may be less vocal in a large audience setting. Groups included rural riders, urban riders, college students, high-school students, senior riders, and campus commuters. Additionally, TDP Ambassadors, employed by TCAT, helped boost participation through in-person engagements throughout Tompkins County.
- Online engagement activities included an interactive mapping exercise, a survey, and an ideas wall. The platform was open to the public between October 14 and November 18, 2020. Highlights from the first round of public engagement can be found in the following sections.

Interactive Mapping

An interactive mapping activity was developed on the Social Pinpoint platform, consisting of two steps:

Step 1 asked participants to add a comment and/or suggest a new bus route by drawing and commenting directly onto the interactive base map. This map included all TCAT's routes and bus stop locations. Figure 1 shows the Step 1 interactive mapping results; a breakdown of the comment categories can be found in Figure 2.

Most comments received in this step were suggestions for improving bus access, six of which were specific suggestions for new bus stop locations. There were four suggestions for new bus routes and five suggestions for improving specific bus routes. The most popular request was for specific bus access

improvements from two large student residential complexes (Maplewood and Fairview Apartments) to a greater variety of supermarkets. Other popular comments requested bus stop upgrades and new bus stop locations, particularly around the shopping areas along South Meadow Street.

Step 2 of the interactive mapping activity asked participants to identify their top three travel destinations and the associated time and day of the week that they typically, or would like to, travel. Participants were able to add a destination directly onto the interactive map, followed by a two-question follow up survey. A total of **40** destinations were recorded, as shown in

Figure 3. Additional destinations were suggested by participants who were surveyed by TCAT Ambassadors.

Figure 1: Geographic distribution of public comments and suggestions (Step 1)

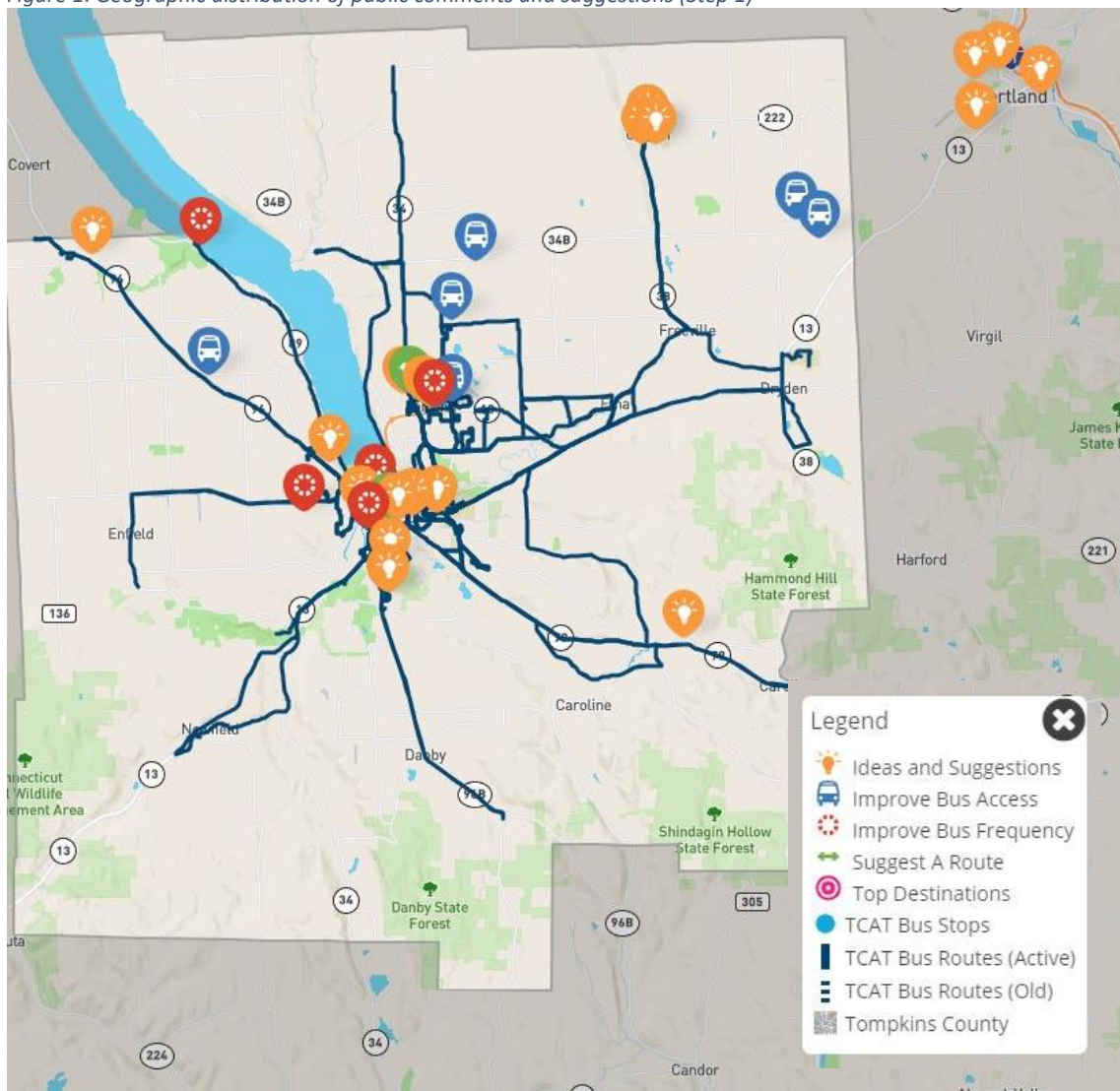


Figure 2: Breakdown of Interactive Mapping Comment Categories (Step 1)

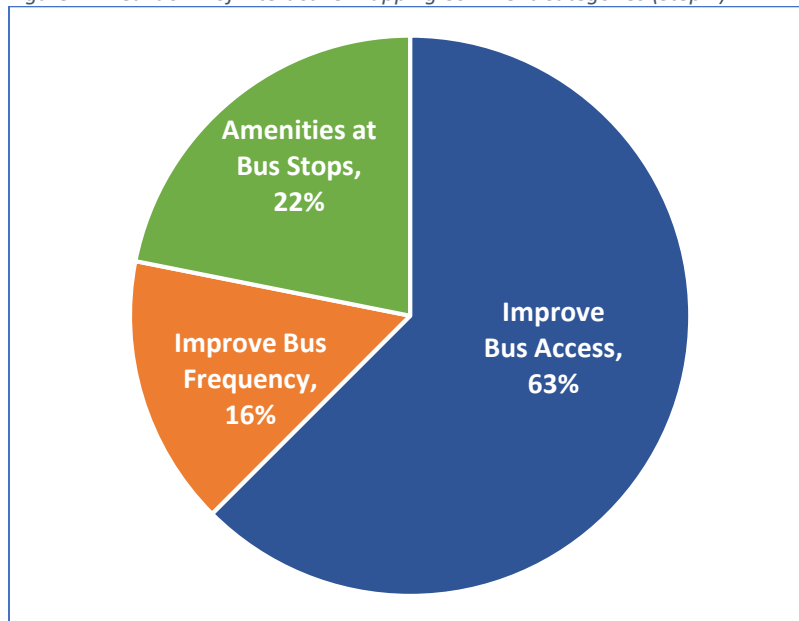
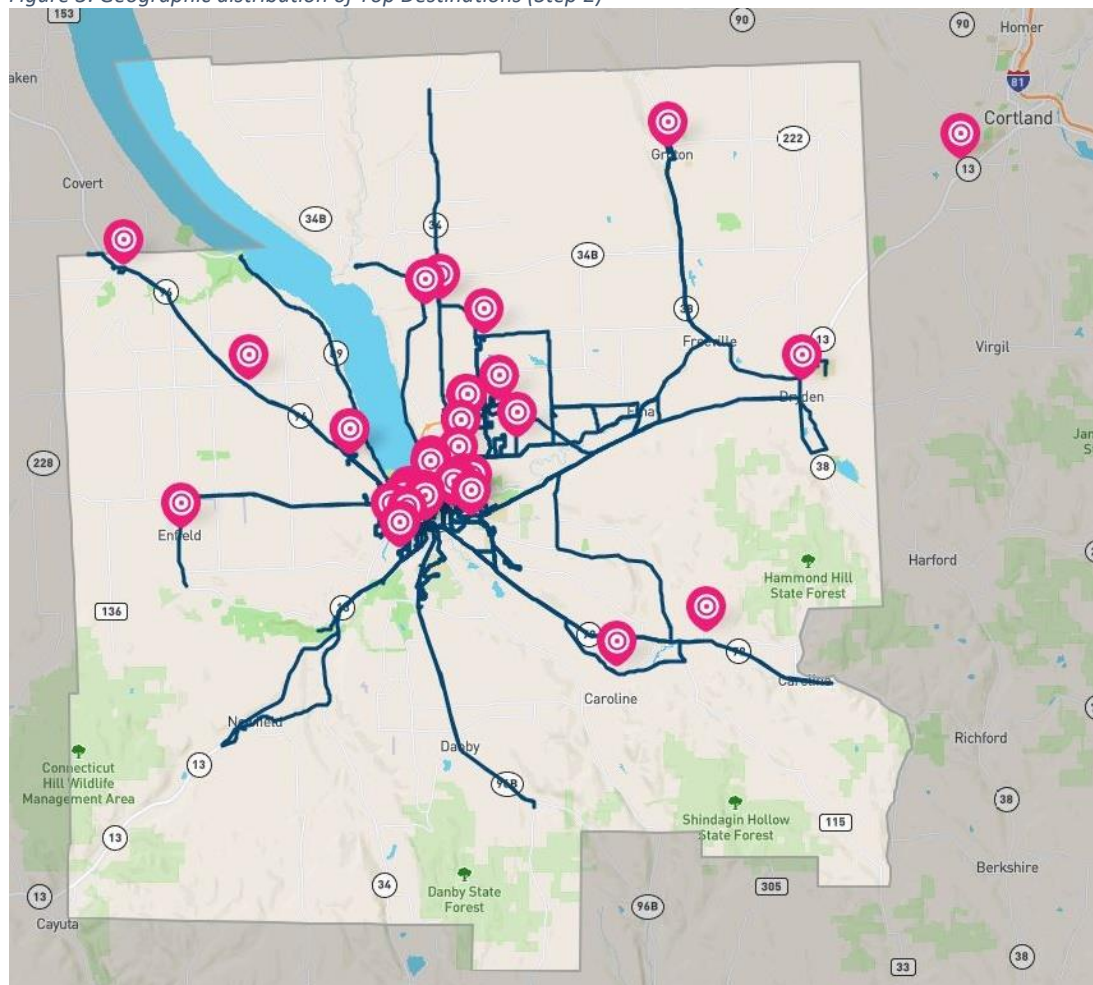


Figure 3: Geographic distribution of Top Destinations (Step 2)

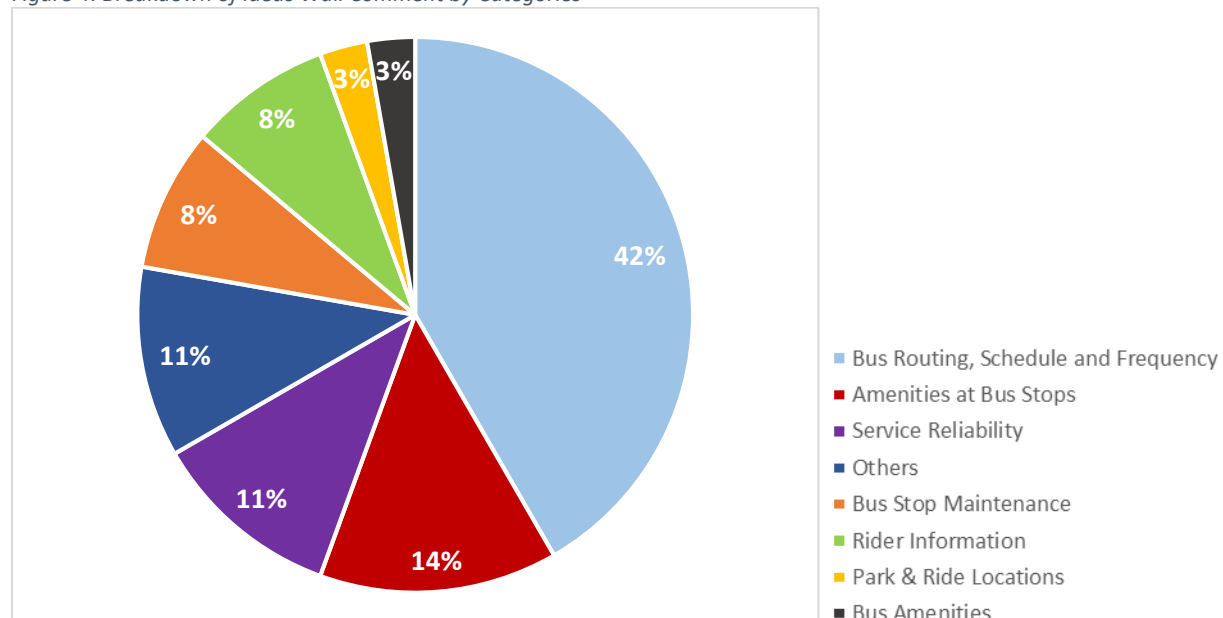


Ideas Wall

Participants were able to share general comments about TCAT bus services, unrelated to any specific location, on the Social Pinpoint ideas wall. Participants were able to add comments and inputs using one of the pre-defined comment categories. **Figure 4** summarizes the breakdown of the comment categories.

The majority of respondents had comments related to bus routing, scheduling, and frequency, as well as comments at specific bus stops and/or suggestions for new bus stop amenities. One of the most popular comments requested an improved downtown transit hub with waiting rooms and ticketing booths. Another popular comment requested more bus-only lanes to help improve bus service reliability.

Figure 4: Breakdown of Ideas Wall Comment by Categories

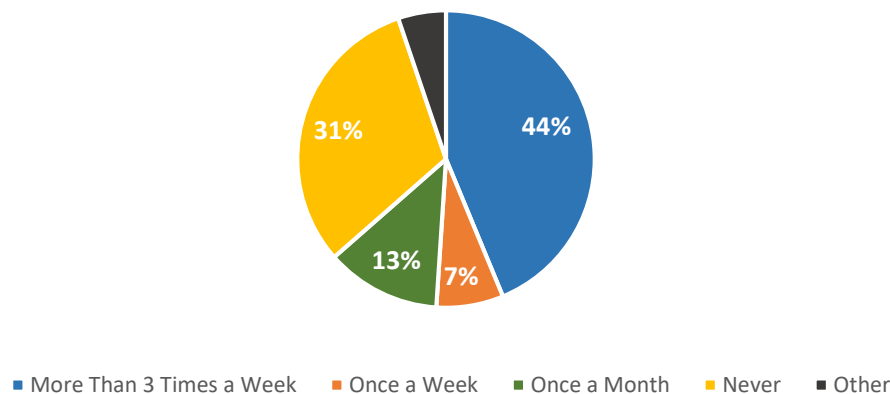


TCAT Service Survey

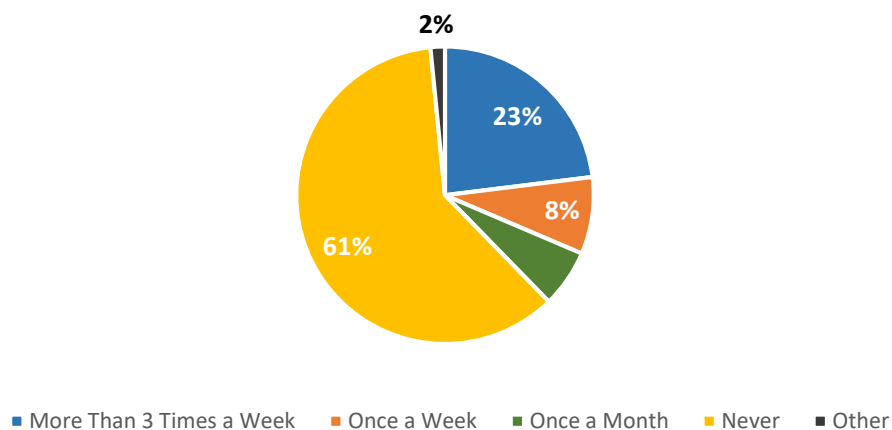
A survey was developed to solicit feedback from both current TCAT riders and non-riders. Participants were asked to provide input on their top TCAT destinations and routes, focusing on what is working now and what type of improvements or recommendations would be desired given a finite amount of resources. Typical demographic questions were also included to ensure equitable participation and to gain a better understanding of the respondents.

The survey was available on Social Pinpoint during the entire period of public engagement. A similar version of the survey was distributed by TDP Ambassadors. A copy of the paper version survey is included in **Appendix 1**. Key survey results are included here.

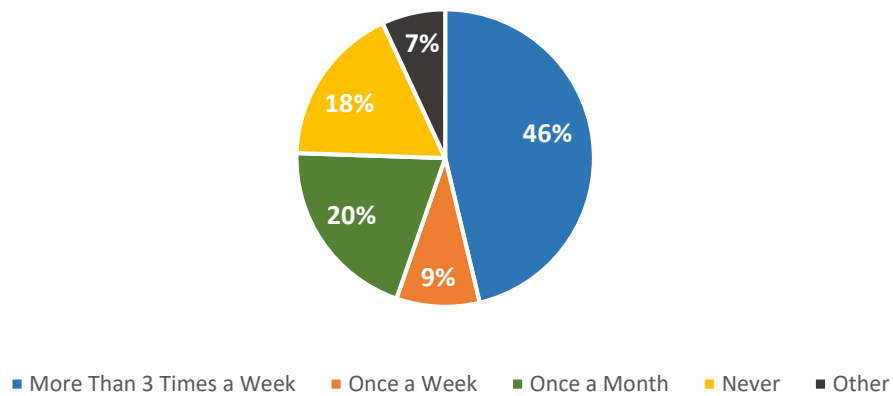
Q1.1: How often did you ride the bus before COVID-19?



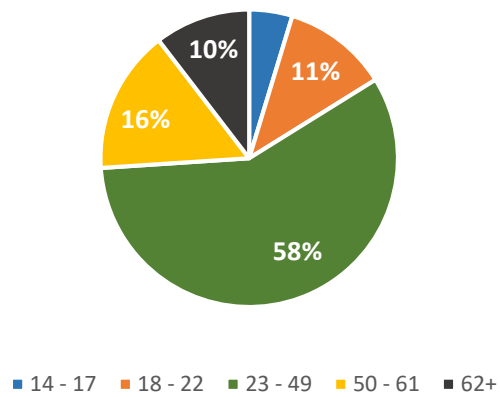
Q1.2: How often do you ride during COVID-19 conditions?



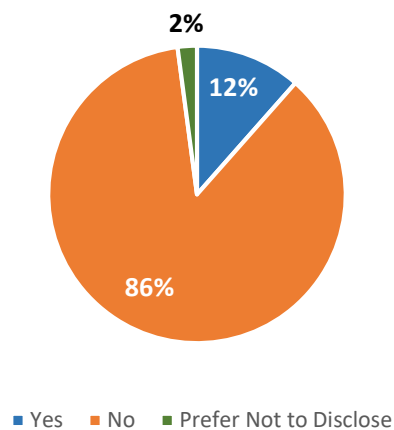
Q1.3: How often do you expect to ride after COVID-19?



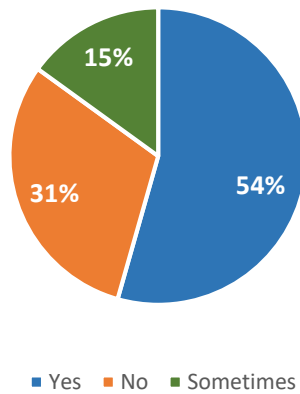
Q3: What is your age group?



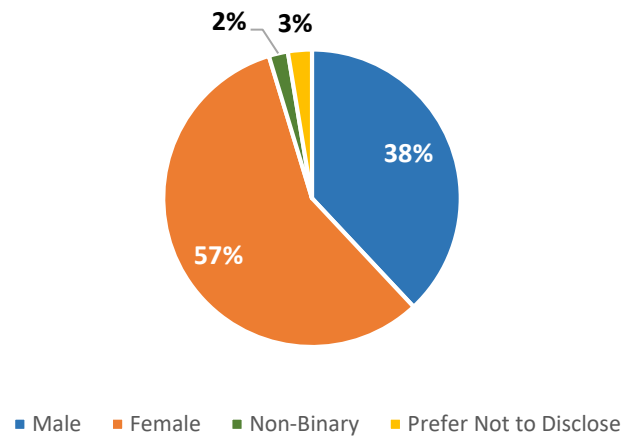
Q5: Do you experience a physical disability?



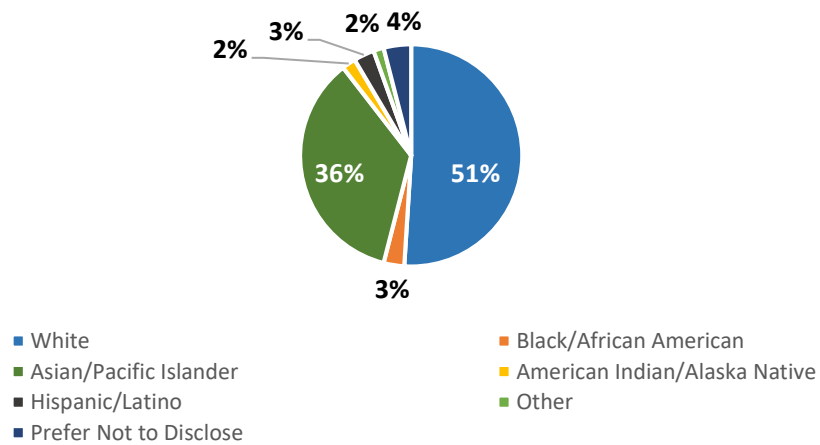
Q6: Do you have a car available?



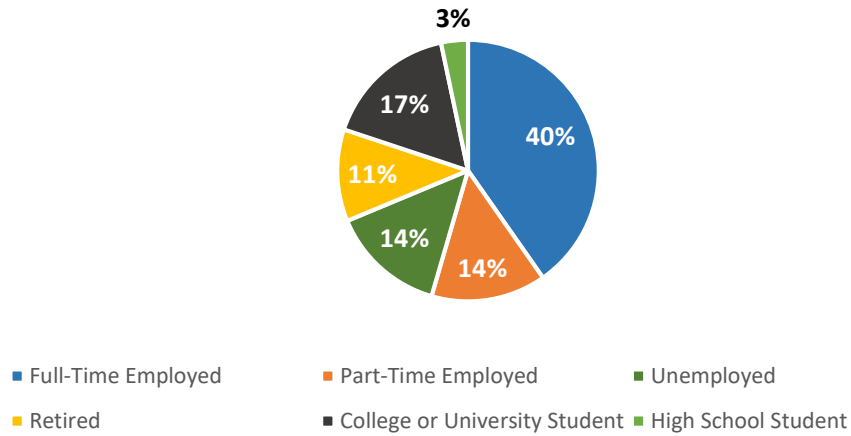
Q7: What is your gender?



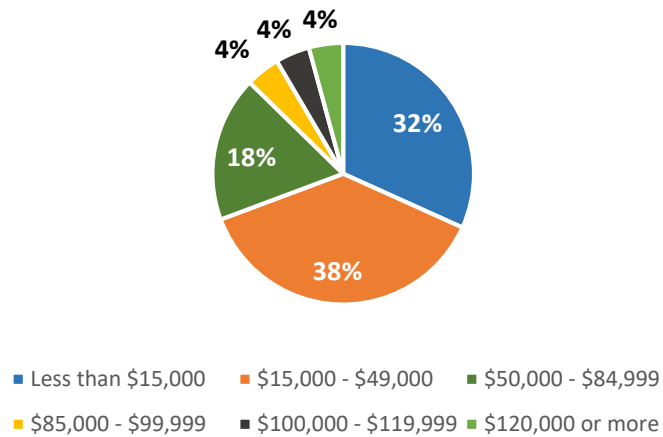
Q8: What is your race/ethnicity?



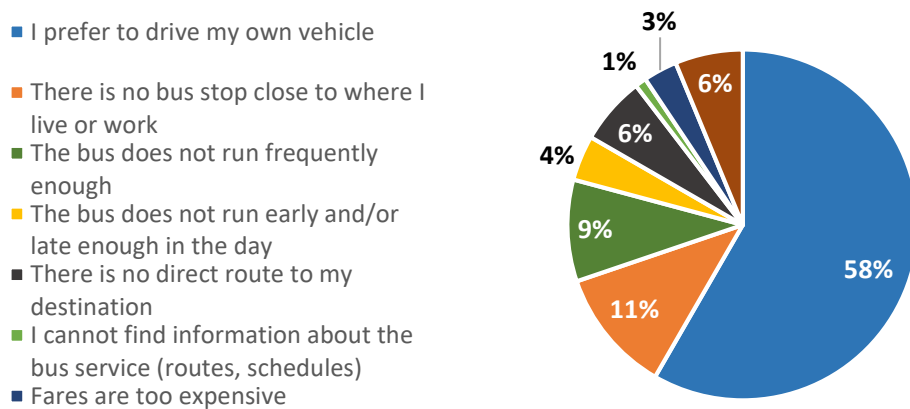
Q9: What is your employment status?



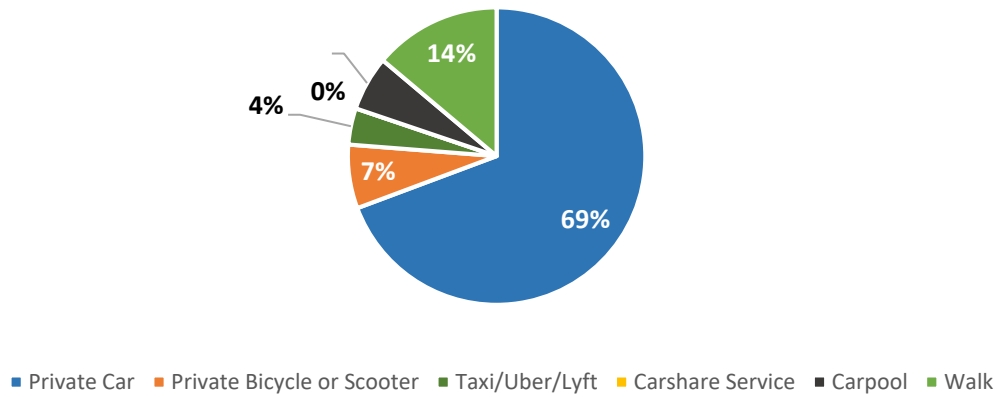
Q10: What is your household income?



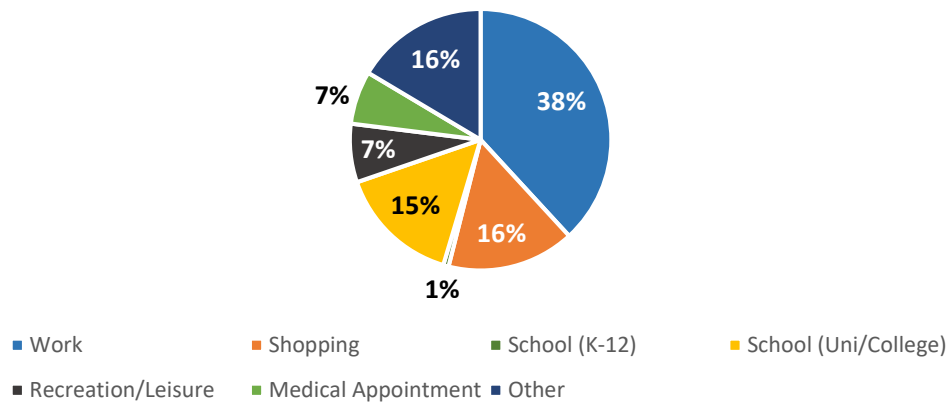
Q11: If you don't use public transit today, why not?



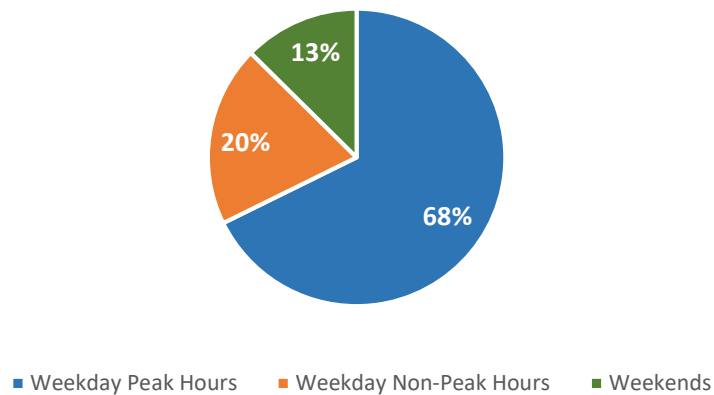
Q12: What mode of transportation you use most often?

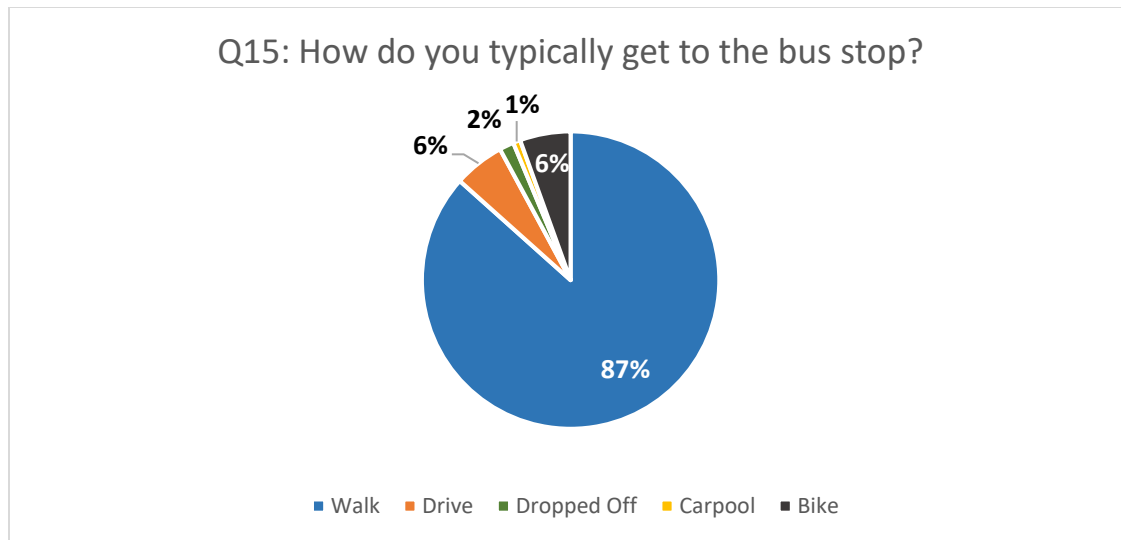


Q13: What is the primary reason you use the bus?



Q14: When do you usually ride the bus?





Ambassador's Program

To help with outreach for the TDP, TCAT hired a team of six transit ambassadors. The ambassadors served as liaisons between their communities and TCAT, enabling the organization to reach those not traditionally involved in transit planning. The ambassadors brought their enthusiasm and connections to the work, representing a wide range of communities in Tompkins County, from West Hill residents, to senior citizens, to Burmese refugees, to students. The ambassadors are listed in **Appendix 2**.

The ambassadors spent the months of October and November of 2020 conducting surveys and talking to community members, students, employers, riders and non-riders to learn more about the ways that people use the bus, and how TCAT can better serve their needs. The ambassadors are an integral part of the TDP process. With this program, TCAT can reach communities in Tompkins County that it may not have otherwise been able to.

Appendix 1: TDP Survey Questionnaire (Paper Version)

TCAT Travel Survey 2020																							
<p>1. How often do you ride the bus? (Select the closest option)</p> <p>1.1. Before COVID-19</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> More than 3 times a week</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Once a week</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Once a month</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Never</p> <p>1.2. Under COVID-19 Conditions</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> More than 3 times a week</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Once a week</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Once a month</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Never</p> <p>1.3. After COVID-19 (expected)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> More than 3 times a week</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Once a week</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Once a month</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Never</p> <p>2. What are your top 3 destinations in Tompkins County? What days and time you travel (or would like to travel) there? And do you use transit? (Fill in your top destinations in general, not just those for which you use transit)</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; margin-top: 10px;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 25%;">Site/ address</th> <th style="width: 15%;">Day(s) of the Week</th> <th style="width: 20%;">Time (please be specific, i.e. 2pm)</th> <th style="width: 40%;">Use Transit?</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> </tbody> </table> <p>3. What is your age group?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 14-17</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 18-22</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 23-49</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 50-61</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 62+</p> <p>4. What is your home ZIP code? (Fill in the blank)</p> <p>_____</p> <p>5. Do you experience a physical disability?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I prefer to not disclose</p> <p>6. Do you have a car available?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes</p> <p>7. What is your gender?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Female</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Male</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Non-binary</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I prefer to not disclose</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Self-describe: _____</p> <p>8. What is your race/ethnicity? (Check all that apply)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> White</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Black/African American</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Asian/Pacific Islander</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> American Indian/Alaska Native</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic/Latino</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (fill in the blank)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I prefer to not disclose</p> <p>9. What is your employment status? (allow up to two selections)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Full-time employed</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Part-time employed</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unemployed</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Retired</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> College or University student</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> High school Student</p> <p>10. What is your household income?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Less than \$15,000</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$15,000 to \$49,999</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$50,000 to \$84,999</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$85,000 to \$119,999</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$120,000 or more</p> <p>Questions for non-bus riders (only answer if you do not use the bus)</p> <p>11. If you don't use public transit today, why not?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I prefer to drive my own vehicle</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> There is no bus stop close to where I live or work</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> The bus does not run frequently enough</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> The bus does not run early and/or late enough in the day</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> There is no direct route to my destination</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I cannot find information about the bus service (routes, schedules)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Fares are too expensive</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (fill in the blank)</p> <p>12. What modes of transportation you use most often? (allow up to two selections)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Private car</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Private bike or scooter</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Taxi/ UBER/ Lyft</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Carshare service</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Carpool</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I usually just walk</p>				Site/ address	Day(s) of the Week	Time (please be specific, i.e. 2pm)	Use Transit?																
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Appendix 1: TDP Survey Questionnaire- Paper Version (cont.)

TCAT Travel Survey 2020

Questions for bus riders**13. What is the primary reason you use the bus?**

- ☐ Work
- ☐ Shopping
- ☐ School (K-12)
- ☐ School (University/College)
- ☐ Recreation/Leisure
- ☐ Other personal activities (medical appointment, visiting friends, etc.)
 - i. If you selected other please tell us more: _____

14. When do you usually ride the bus? (please choose one)

- ☐ Weekday peak hours (6:00 am – 9:00 am or 3:00 – 6:00 pm)
- ☐ Weekday non-peak hours
- ☐ Weekends

15. How do you typically get to the bus stop?

- ☐ Walk
- ☐ Drive
- ☐ Dropped off by someone
- ☐ Carpool
- ☐ Bike

17. Rank the following potential improvements (1 is most important, 5 is least important)

#__ Increase bus frequency

#__ Increase bus reliability

#__ Increase availability of bus route and schedule information

#__ Increase the number of destinations served

#__ Increase the time that the bus is in service (early/late service)

18. Do you have any additional feedback to share about the bus service and how transportation in Tompkins County might be improved? If yes, please let us know below. (Open ended)**End of survey****16. What TCAT bus routes do you usually take?**

In the following questions, please respond based on your experience with the route indicated above.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I can access the destinations that I need to get to by riding the bus					
The bus runs during the times that I need to travel					
The bus runs often enough					
The time it takes to go places using the bus is reasonable					
I prefer frequent service with multiple transfers over infrequent service with one-seat ride (minimum transfers)					
The buses run on time					

Appendix 2: List of the TDP Ambassadors

- **Shaniya Foster** grew up on West Hill and said that her concern for transportation safety and a strong desire to reduce transportation barriers drew her to the position. “Reliable transportation seems to be a common issue amongst my neighbors”, she said. “I truly believe there’s always room for improvement, especially in the transportation field. I am so very excited to listen to voices and suggestions on how we can better serve the community.”
- **Emily Hurwitz**, a senior at Cornell, said she hopes to help break down transportation roadblocks for students, especially those who are low-income and/or differently abled. Emily, who is studying psychology and music, said that what started as a simple love for transit-themed memes became a deep passion for equitable public transportation and community development, so she is excited to work with TCAT as a Transit Ambassador on the 2020 Transit Development Plan. She said she also wants to help bridge communications gaps for students needing information on how to use TCAT and to direct them to TCAT staff if they need assistance or have questions.
- **Rachel Kim**, who lives and works in Ithaca with her two children — a pre-teen and a teenager — has many strong supportive relationships with her family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. As an experienced TCAT user, Rachel frequently shows others how to navigate TCAT schedules, website, and real-time features at bus stops. “It is very important for people to feel comfortable and confident in their ability to use public transportation to get to where they need to go,” she said. “I am excited to be a Transit Ambassador because I love my community and the people in it. I am intrigued to talk to my community members and get to learn about their experience with using TCAT.”
- Since moving to Tompkins County from Burma, **Paw Htoo** has become proficient in English, earned an associate degree, and volunteered for numerous local service agencies including Catholic Charities, the Learning Partners, and Open Doors English. Her ability to speak in the Karen language reaches many in the Burmese community who need assistance in learning about TCAT and their transportation options. “A lack of English makes it difficult to ask questions or request help,” Paw said. “I can help TCAT identify the community’s transit needs and improve service for people who depend on buses for their daily life.”
- **Mike Galbreath**, who moved to the Ithaca area later in his life, said he has worked in local service industries where many people are confronted with tight budgets making public transit essential to their well-being. He said he hopes to reach out to those facing physical limitations in getting around including senior citizens and persons in the disability community. “I have used TCAT extensively since moving to Ithaca and, having worked in low-paying service jobs and now living in a retirement residence, I think I can bring a specific viewpoint to the table when it comes to public transportation.”
- **Suzanne Burnham** is a 1997 graduate of Tompkins Cortland Community College with an A.A.S in Human Services. She went on to receive a B.A. in Community and Human Services from SUNY Empire State College. She is a passionate advocate for individuals in recovery from substance abuse and has embodied this enthusiasm by serving as the Academic Outreach and Program Coordinator for College Initiative Upstate (CIU) since January 2017. Suzanne has lived in Ithaca, NY since 1992 and is the proud mother of two adult sons. She is also an active advocate for marginalized individuals in her community. Most recently, Suzanne was honored to receive the 2020 Tompkins Cortland Community College Distinguished Alumni award. Suzanne is an active member of the TCAT advisory committee, and a daily TCAT rider.