

# Findings and Conclusions from the Passenger Survey in Support of the MaineDOT Strategic Transit Plan 2025

**Background and methodology:** Data for this report was collected, analyzed and reported by Market Decisions, LLC. The survey assessed the reasons for using public transit; how often the rider used public transit; factors that were important to riders when using public transit and satisfaction with these factors; the likelihood of recommending public transit to family and friends, and factors about public transit that riders would change.

The survey was conducted among 649 randomly selected riders using bus, van and ferry service on one of Maine's 21 public transit systems. This included those using fixed route bus or ferry service, flex route, and demand response services. The percentages reported for the entire sample are within plus or minus 3.8% of that would be found if all passenger using public transit in Maine completed surveys.

The study team is aware that public transit agencies periodically survey their passengers with questions similar to those asked in this survey. The purpose of this effort was to gather information from a single, consistent survey gathering data across all transit systems at the same time. This study was designed to be statistically significant statewide by aggregating the responses by passengers from all transit systems, and not intended as a comparative analysis among transit systems.

## **What did we find from this survey?**

1. Passengers on public transportation in Maine had substantially lower incomes and were older than the general population of the state.
2. Almost one half of the passengers on public transportation did not have a vehicle available to them at any time.
3. Public transportation riders in Maine did so primarily to go to or from work, shopping, or medical appointments, and significantly less so for visiting family and friends, school, recreational activities, or running errands.
4. People taking public transportation in rural Maine were more likely to be going to or from shopping or medical appointments; 45% of people in urban areas were going to or from work.
5. There were noteworthy yet not surprising differences in the **demographics** and **primary purpose** of the trip among fixed route, flex route, and demand response passengers. (Please see page 2 for details)
6. Passengers on public transportation in Maine were very satisfied with the service they received, and most would recommend its use to family and friends.
7. Even passengers who were very satisfied with service identified factors where service can be improved.
8. There were differences in the **importance and satisfaction levels** with the factors of service among fixed route, flex route, and demand response passengers, passengers. (Please see page 3 for details)
9. Riders with fewer transportation options look for more from their transit service, but were also more appreciative of and satisfied with what they do receive.

## **Demographics and Primary Purpose of the Trip**

### **Fixed route passengers:**

Summary characteristics of fixed route passengers: trip purpose-going to work; more diverse mix of ages; ride more often; wider range of household incomes and higher household incomes than riders on other types of transit, but still lower incomes than statewide median and population.

- Primarily use public transportation to get to and from work and lesser so for shopping or medical.
- 58% ride public transportation at least 4 days/week and a majority saw it as a way to save money.
- Two thirds were employed, 16% were retired and 7% were unemployed; 15% were students.
- 5% of the passengers were disabled.
- The largest percentage of riders was aged 45 to 64 (36%), followed by those aged 18-34 (35%)...
- Had a higher household income than flex route or demand response passengers. Fifty-two percent have an annual household income of less than \$25,000 while 25% have household incomes between \$25,000 and \$49,999.<sup>1</sup>

### **Flex route passengers:**

Summary characteristics of flex route passengers: trip purpose-shopping or medical care; middle age and older; ride often; least likely to have a car; lower income than fixed route riders and much lower than statewide population.

- Primarily used public transportation for shopping, secondarily for medical appointments. 25% of the riders used it to get to or from work.
- Ride public transportation about the same number of days per week as fixed route riders.
- Were the least likely to have a car available at any time (55%)
- 30% were employed or self-employed, one third were retired, and 19% were unemployed.
- 14% of the passengers were disabled.
- The largest percentage were aged 45 to 64 (36%), followed by those aged 65 and older (27%).
- 84% percent have an annual household income of less than \$25,000; 12% have household incomes between \$25,000 and \$49,999.<sup>1</sup>

### **Demand response passengers:**

Summary characteristics of demand response passengers: trip purpose-going to medical care; ride 3 days per week or fewer; mostly older but also younger; higher percentage disabled; much lower income than the statewide population.

- Majority (70%) used public transportation for medical appointments and health care.
- 57% took public transportation 2 to 3 days per week; one fourth ride 4 to 5 days per week.
- 10% were employed, 35% were retired, and 20% were unemployed.
- 22% of the passengers were disabled, and 30% required assistance getting in or out of the vehicle.
- 67% did not have a driver license or choose not to drive.
- The largest percentage was aged 45 to 64 (40%), followed by those aged 18-34 (27%) and those aged 65 and older (25%).
- 85% have an annual household income of less than \$25,000 while 13% have household incomes between \$25,000 and \$49,999.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey shows that 23.2% of Maine households have annual incomes of less than \$25,000. 26.3% have annual household incomes between \$25,000 and \$49,999.

## Overall Importance and Satisfaction Levels with the Factors of Service.

**Importance:** Most riders rated all of the factors of service that were listed as very or somewhat important. Safety was the most central concern of all riders, with 92% of respondents rating it as very important. Concerns about cleanliness, crowding, and temperature were among the least important factors of service.

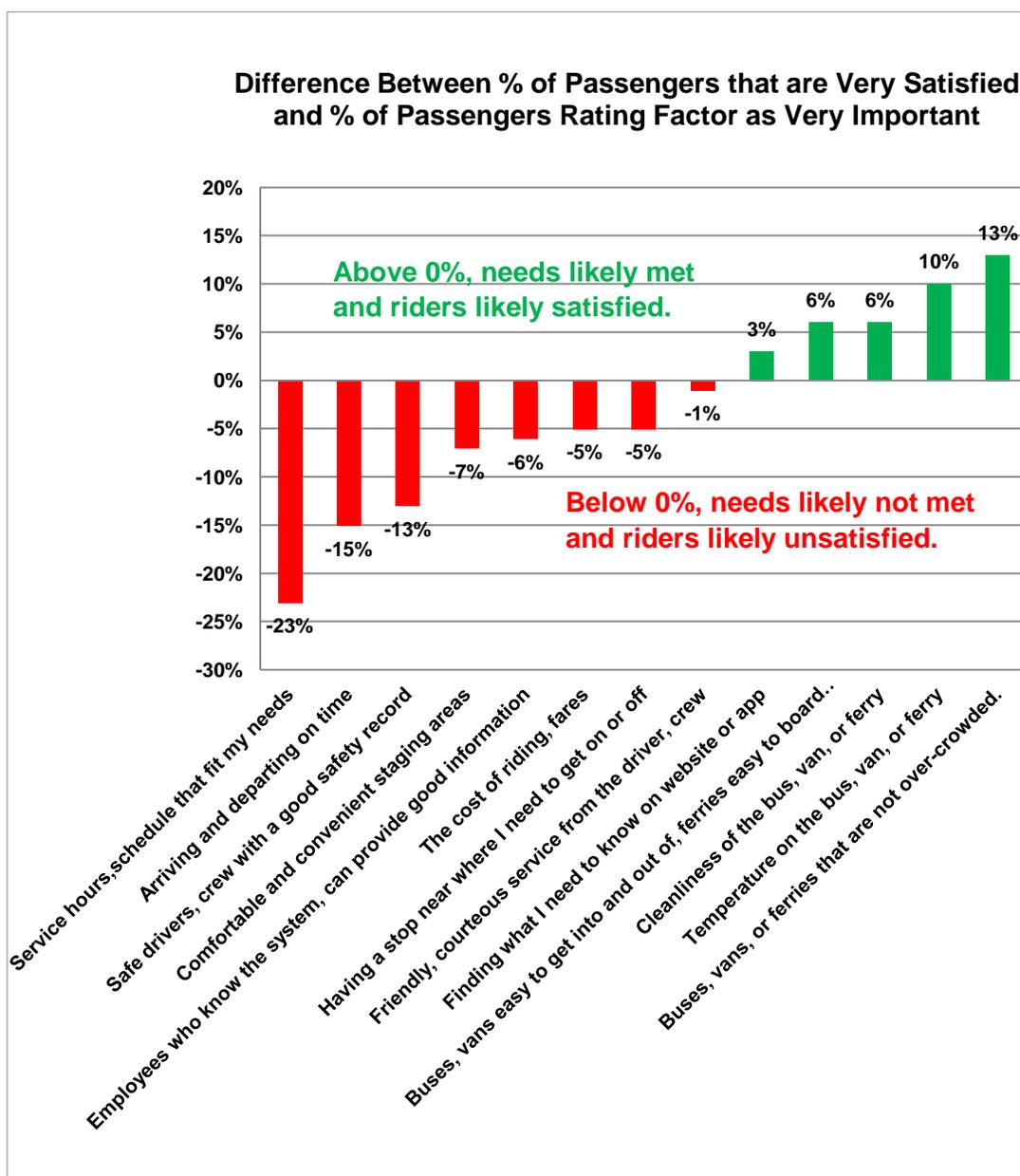
**Satisfaction:** Foremost among the findings of this study was the high level of satisfaction with public transit services. Across all factors of service measured, for all categories of rider, only one area reported satisfaction rates of lower than 90%: the ability to find information on a website or app.

**Observation:** The resulting analysis where almost every factor is important and passengers are satisfied with almost every factor was better scrutinized after reviewing the open-ended questions and comments. By inspection of the data and comments together, it appears that passengers made the distinctions between levels of importance and satisfaction at the “very” level.

How well are passengers’ needs being met? One way is to look at the differences between how important a service factor is to passengers and how satisfied they are with it. This can provide a general sense of how well expectations are met. The chart to the right summarizes the difference between satisfaction and importance by subtracting the percentage rating the service factor as **very** important from the percentage of passengers that were **very** satisfied with the service factor.

A negative percentage may suggest a factor where passenger expectations are not being completely met. For example, “service hours and a schedule that fits my needs” was a very important service factor to people, and they were the least satisfied with it.

This graph shows the data for all respondents, and the next page describes the results by types of service.



## **Importance and Satisfaction by Types of Service**

“Safe drivers” was the highest very important factor among all three types of service. However, there were differences in the responses concerning the importance of and satisfaction with other service factors among the types of transit services used, and whether they were in urban or rural areas. Passengers on fixed route services (urban areas) rated most factors as important, though not quite as highly as those using flex route or demand response services (rural areas), with one exception: scheduling that fits their needs. Flex route passengers were in general the most satisfied of any of the three route types. Comments about dissatisfaction as well as suggestions for improvement were likewise stratified by the type of service the passenger used.

356 riders (55% of all respondents) answered the open-ended question about changing or fixing one thing about the service. In priority order:

- 29% would like either expanded hours or dates of operation.
- 14% would like to see an increase in the number of stops or a reduction in time between trips.
- 11% saw the need to expand the geographic area of coverage.
- 11% simply wanted services to be more punctual.
- Other suggestions included increasing comfortable, handling complaints about staff or management, reducing the cost, improving the condition of busses, vans, or ferries, improving the information available on websites or apps, and improving transit facilities.

### **Fixed route passengers:**

Conclusions: Fixed route riders’ overall evaluation of the importance of all the factors was somewhat less than those using flex route or demand response services. They asked for extended days and hours of operation.

- 73% reported websites or mobile apps as very or somewhat important to them.
- Were least likely to be concerned about the physical environment: ease of boarding/disembarking, crowding, temperature, or cleanliness.
- 89% or greater satisfaction on all service factors.
- 21% of comments complained about bus being late that day, or frequently.
- 28% of fixed route consumer suggestions asked for expanded hours or dates of operation.

### **Flex route passengers:**

Conclusions: Flex route riders viewed all factors as important, and are the most satisfied of 3 service types with all service factors. Want expanded hours and days of service. Praised drivers.

- 96% considered safe drivers to be very important.
- 86% considered friendly and courteous service very important, more than any other group.
- Knowledgeable employees were also highly valued, with 81% considering them very important.
- 90% or more are satisfied with all service factors with the exception of online information or apps.
- 17% of comments mention dissatisfaction with lack of information about trip cancellations or schedule changes.
- 32% suggested expanding hours and days of operation; 19% suggested expanding the coverage area.
- 33% specifically offered praise for their driver
- 26% of comments in some way related to their general satisfaction, and 15% expressed how important their transit system was to their life.

### **Demand response passengers:**

**Conclusions:** Most factors were considered very important and satisfaction is high among these riders: Most dissatisfied of 3 types with timeliness of service.

- 98% considered safe drivers very important.
- 100% reported being satisfied or very satisfied with the safety record of their driver and with the service received.
- More than 90% were satisfied with all service aspects besides the availability of online information or mobile apps.
- Most likely to consider each of the service factors as very important (all areas but knowledgeable employees and friendly service).
- 30% were dissatisfied with the vehicle being late that day or frequently late, matched by dissatisfaction with days and hours of service.
- 17% suggested expanding hours and days of operation, and also suggested reducing the time between buses, reducing the cost, and working better to accommodate riders with special needs, disabilities and very young children. (all 13%)
- 36% offered comments praising their driver; 21% expressed concern about funding of the transit system.

### **Summary Conclusions from the Passenger Survey**

- I. There was no outstanding “Aha!” moment in reviewing the survey results (with the possible exception that “safe driver” was the highest in importance across all types of service).
- II. It is accurate that the perception about people who currently use public transportation are lower income and older.
- III. The more likely public transit passengers were to report an area of service as somewhat or very important to them, the more likely they were to be satisfied with that aspect of service.
- IV. There was a high level of satisfaction with public transportation among passengers on all types of service.
- V. Riders of public transportation are not a homogeneous population. There were distinct differences in the characteristics that define fixed route, flex route, and demand response riders.
- VI. Similarly, there were differences in what were the important service factors and corresponding levels of satisfaction with them depending upon the type of service they were riding, and whether they were in an urban or rural area.
- VII. Comments and answers to open-ended questions were valuable in sorting out importance and satisfaction. It appeared that many passengers indicated what they really meant when asked to describe what they were least satisfied about, or to tell us the one thing they would change or fix.

## **Implications for Future Service Planning**

- Most important, any future decision-making and planning will need to factor on key differences between rural and urban areas, the demographics of the population to be served, and the types of services that will be considered.
- With more than two-thirds of all riders having household incomes of less than \$25,000, the cost of a fare to ride public transportation is a factor to consider when designing public transportation services.
- Based on the importance of safe drivers to all survey respondents for all types of services, as well as the number of positive comments about individual drivers, driver selection, training and re-training should be a major component of all services being planned or currently in operation..