Municipality of Red Lake
Transit Feasibility Study

Final Report

December 2025

Executive Summary

The Municipality of Red Lake has completed a Transit Feasibility Study to determine whether a municipally supported public transit service should be introduced, and which model would best fit local needs, budgets and operating realities. The study draws on local demographics, land use, existing travel behaviour, peer benchmarks and two rounds of public/stakeholder engagement including a community survey which received 312 responses. The intent of the study is to provide clear, evidence-based guidance for future transit decisions for the Municipality.

Community Context

The Municipality is geographically dispersed, comprising of distinct townsites at Red Lake, Balmertown, Cochenour, Madsen, Starratt-Olsen and McKenzie Island. Most trips rely on the use of private vehicles. Seniors, youth, lower-income residents and people with disabilities face barriers reaching healthcare, groceries, school and recreation due to geographic distance and a lack of alternative travel options. Existing options such as taxi are limited by cost.

Official plans and policies including strategic and community plans have identified local transportation as a priority.

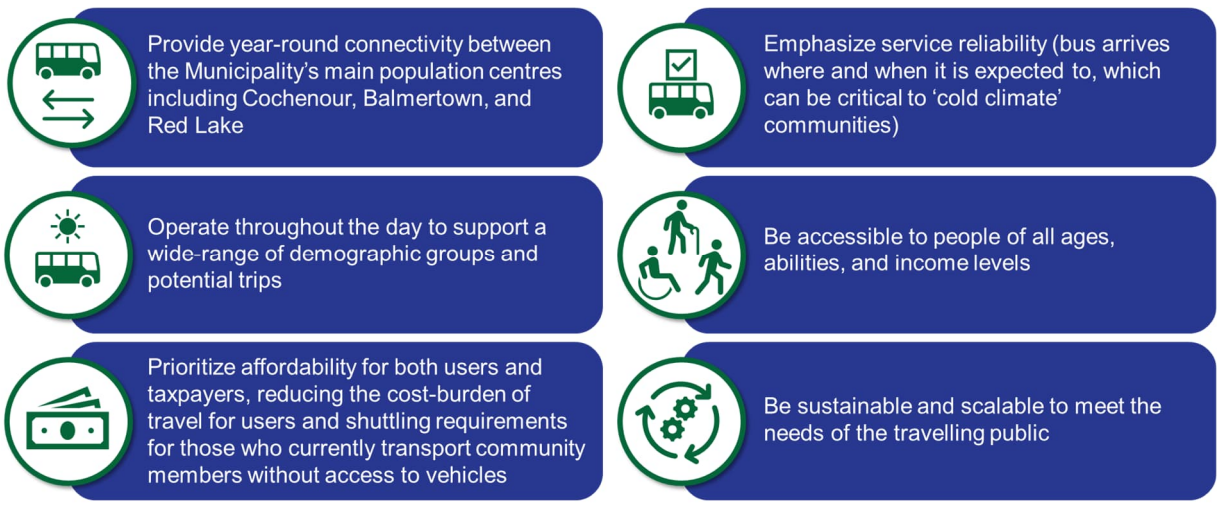
Public Input Highlights

The community indicated that they are looking for public transportation that would provide connections between communities and access to groceries, recreation, medical services, school and work. Nearly half of community survey participants indicated they would prefer a fixed route public transportation service. Desired service periods include weekday peaks, midday and some evenings/weekends.

Transit Vision for the Municipality

As part of the study a vision for transit was developed to guide the development of appropriate options. **Public Transit in Red Lake will provide equitable, reliable, affordable and efficient travel options for the community, supporting access to key amenities for the majority of Red Lake residents.**

Transit will be designed to:



Options Evaluated

Five public transportation models were developed and assessed through a Multiple Account Evaluation which analysed criteria including coverage, reliability, flexibility, scalability and cost. The options are outlined in **ES - 1**.The Multiple Account Evaluation performed is shown in **ES - 2.**

ES - 1: Overview of Public Transportation Options

	Public Transportation Options				
	1: Fixed Route	**2: Traditional OnDemand**	**3: Hybrid**	**4: OnDemand Microtransit**	**5: Community Partnership**
Service Structure	Fixed route between Cochenour and Red Lake	Low tech dial-a-bus and app-based OnDemand available within defined zone	AM and PM peak fixed-route with midday OnDemand within defined zone	High tech app-based OnDemand available within defined zone	Partner with existing community service organizations to leverage existing vehicles in community 1-2 days a week
Period of Operation	**← Weekday All-Day (6am – 7:00pm) →**				Periodic / Based on Availability

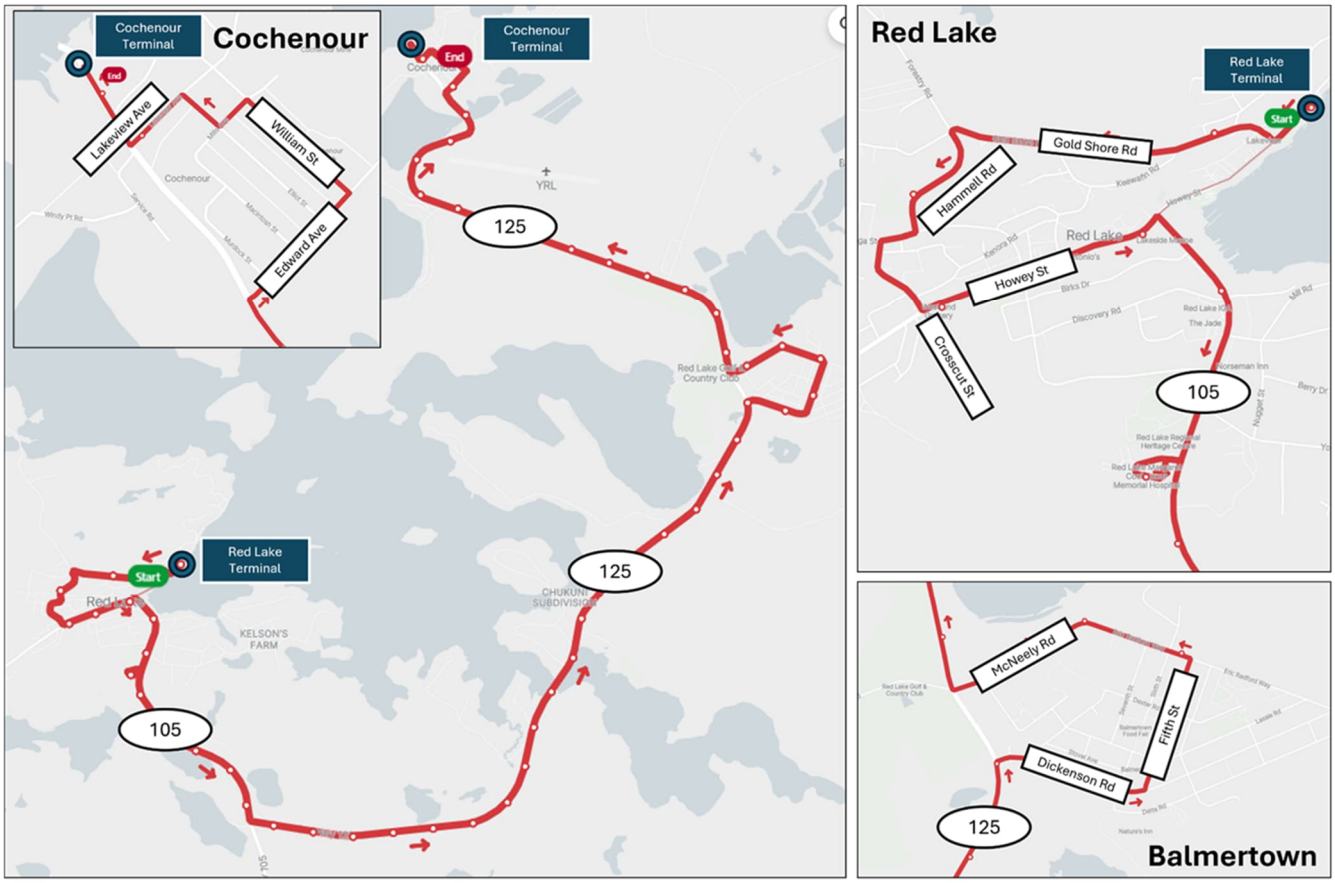
ES - 2: Multiple Account Evaluation for Proposed Options

○ - Very Poor ◔ - Poor ◑ - Moderate ◕ - Good ● – Very good		Option 1: Fixed Route	Option 2: Traditional OnDemand	Option 3: Hybrid (Fixed Route + Traditional OnDemand	Option 4: OnDemand Microtransit	Option 5: Community Partnership
Service Performance & Reliability	**Coverage**	◕	●	●	●	To be determined
	Reliability	●	◔	● / ◔	◕	○
	Travel Flexibility	◔	●	◔ / ●	●	○
	Trip Directness	◕	◔	◕ / ◔	●	To be determined
	Frequency	90 minutes	OnDemand	90 minutes / OnDemand	OnDemand	As available
	Periods of Operation	Weekdays 6am – 7pm	Weekdays 6am – 7pm	**Fixed:** Weekdays 6am – 9:30 am **OnDemand:** Weekdays 10am – 3:30pm	Weekdays: 6am – 7pm	1-2 days per week, as available
	Accessibility	●	●	●	●	○
	Walking Distance to Stop	◕	●	◕ / ●	●	●
Operational Performance	**Estimated Annual Ridership**	10,000	10,000	10,000	30,000	1,000 – 2,000
	Vehicles Required	1 active 1 spare	1 active 1 spare	1 active 1 spare	2 active 1 spare	1 active
Implementation & Scalability	**Ease of Implementation**	◑	◔	◔	●	◕
	Operating Complexity	●	◑	◑	●	◔
	Scalability	●	●	●	●	○
Cost & Financial Sustainability	**Capital Cost**	$140 – 200k	$140 – 200k	$140 – 200k	$90 – 140k	Negligible
	Estimated Annual Operating Cost	$250 - $300k (Weekday All-Day)	$250 - $300k (Weekday All-Day)	$250 - $300k (Weekday All-Day)	$525 - $575k (Weekday All-Day)	$40 - $80k (1-2 days per week)

Recommended Solution

Based on feedback received through public consultation, it is recommended that the Municipality implement Option 1 – a Fixed Route connecting Cochenour Ferry Terminal to Downtown Red Lake with deviations through Balmertown, as shown in **ES - 3**. The proposed route will provide connections to Downtown Red Lake, I.G.A, the hospital complex, Downtown Balmertown, the Municipal Office, Cochenour Arena, and Miss McKenzie II Ferry Dock.

ES - 3: Option 1 - Fixed Route



The route is recommended to operate weekdays 7:30 AM – 6:00 PM every 90 minutes, and a draft schedule is provided in **ES - 4**. This option would best meet public priorities for reliability and inter-community connectivity. Furthermore, fixed routes are simpler in terms of operations and easily scalable to the community's needs. Between 11 and 27 passenger rides are anticipated each weekday, resulting in an annual ridership projection of between 2,770 and 6,800.

ES - 4: Draft Schedule for Option 1 - Fixed Route

07:30 – 16:30 · Every 90 min · 14 trips (7 Inbound, 7 Outbound)

Days	Pattern	Runtime	1	13	18	1	2
M - F	A	35 min	07:30	07:31	07:44	08:02	08:03	08:05
M - F	A	35 min	09:00	09:01	09:14	09:32	09:33	09:35
M - F	A	35 min	10:30	10:31	10:44	11:02	11:03	11:05
M - F	A	35 min	12:00	12:01	12:14	12:32	12:33	12:35
M - F	A	35 min	13:30	13:31	13:44	14:02	14:03	14:05
M - F	A	35 min	15:00	15:01	15:14	15:32	15:33	15:35
M - F	A	35 min	16:30	16:31	16:44	17:02	17:03	17:05

+ Window + Trips

Days	Pattern	Runtime	5	1	18	12	1
M - F	A	37 min	08:15	08:20	08:21	08:39	08:51	08:52
M - F	A	37 min	09:45	09:50	09:51	10:09	10:21	10:22
M - F	A	37 min	11:15	11:20	11:21	11:39	11:51	11:52
M - F	A	37 min	12:45	12:50	12:51	13:09	13:21	13:22
M - F	A	37 min	14:15	14:20	14:21	14:39	14:51	14:52
M - F	A	37 min	15:45	15:50	15:51	16:09	16:21	16:22
M - F	A	37 min	17:15	17:20	17:21	17:39	17:51	17:52

Costs and Funding

Estimated capital costs are shown in **ES - 5**. Capital costs include vehicle acquisition ($170,000) and supporting infrastructure ($460,000), which combined is $630,000.

ES - 5: Estimated Capital Costs for Option 1 – Fixed Route

Item	Units	# Of Units	Unit Cost	Total Per Item ($)
VEHICLES				
Passenger Van (Gasoline or Diesel)	Vehicles	2	$85,000	$170,000
SUPPORTING INFRASTRUCTURE				
Bus Stop Landing Pad		20	$2,000	$40,000
Bus Shelter and Bench		9	$8,000	$72,000
Localized Sidewalk Extension[1]	km	0.8	$435,000	$348,000
TOTAL				**$630,000**

Estimated annual operating costs is approximately $238,000 including fuel, maintenance and labour based on recommended service hours and peer-indexed all-inclusive rates as shown in **ES - 6.**

ES - 6: Annual Operating Costs for Option 1 – Fixed Route

Annual Service Hours	2,646
Cost per Service Hour	$95
Annual Operating Cost Estimate	$238,000

ES - 7 summarizes key financials, expected revenues and operating costs for both low and high ridership projections.

ES - 7: Financial Performance for Option 1 – Fixed Route

	Low	High
Ridership Projection	**2,770**	**6,800**
Total Annual Revenue	$13,850	$34,000
Operating Cost	$214,000	$214,000
Net Operating Cost	$200,150	$180,000
Cost Recovery	**7%**	**19%**
Cost per Capita	$48.88	$43.96

[1] Assumes construction of a full sidewalk along the southwestern side of Highway 105 between Howey Street and the hospital. More limited alternatives could be considered, such as a 90m sidewalk between Discovery Road and Howey Bay Road, if costs are prohibitive.

There are various funding opportunities available for the Municipality to support both capital or operational costs. A summary of the available funding is outlined in **ES - 8**.

ES - 8: Summary of Available Funding

Program Name	Purpose	Funding Available	Eligible Expenses
Canada Public Transit Fund Targeted Funding Stream	Enhance public transit nationwide	$3 billion annually across Canada	Major projects, system maintenance, active transportation infrastructure
Rural Transit Solutions Fund	Support rural, remote and indigenous transit services	Up to $10 million per project (capital stream)	Vehicles, infrastructure, accessibility features, start up costs
Ontario Transit Investment Fund	Address transit service gaps in rural Ontario communities	$5 million annually across Ontario	Operating costs (admin, driver wages etc.) and capital costs (vehicles etc.)
Ontario Gas Tax Fund	Expand transit infrastructure and increase	$380 million in funding available 2024-2025	Operating costs, capital investments, vehicle replacements, safety improvements etc.

Implementation

A draft implementation plan is outlined in **ES - 9**, pending council approval.

ES - 9: Implementation Plan

Activities	Q4 2025	Q1 2026	Q2 2026	Q3 2026	Q4 2026	Q1 2027	Q2 2027	Q3 2027
Council Endorsement								
Funding Applications								
Service Procurement								
Contract Award								
Marketing and Education								
Service Launch								

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1. Introduction

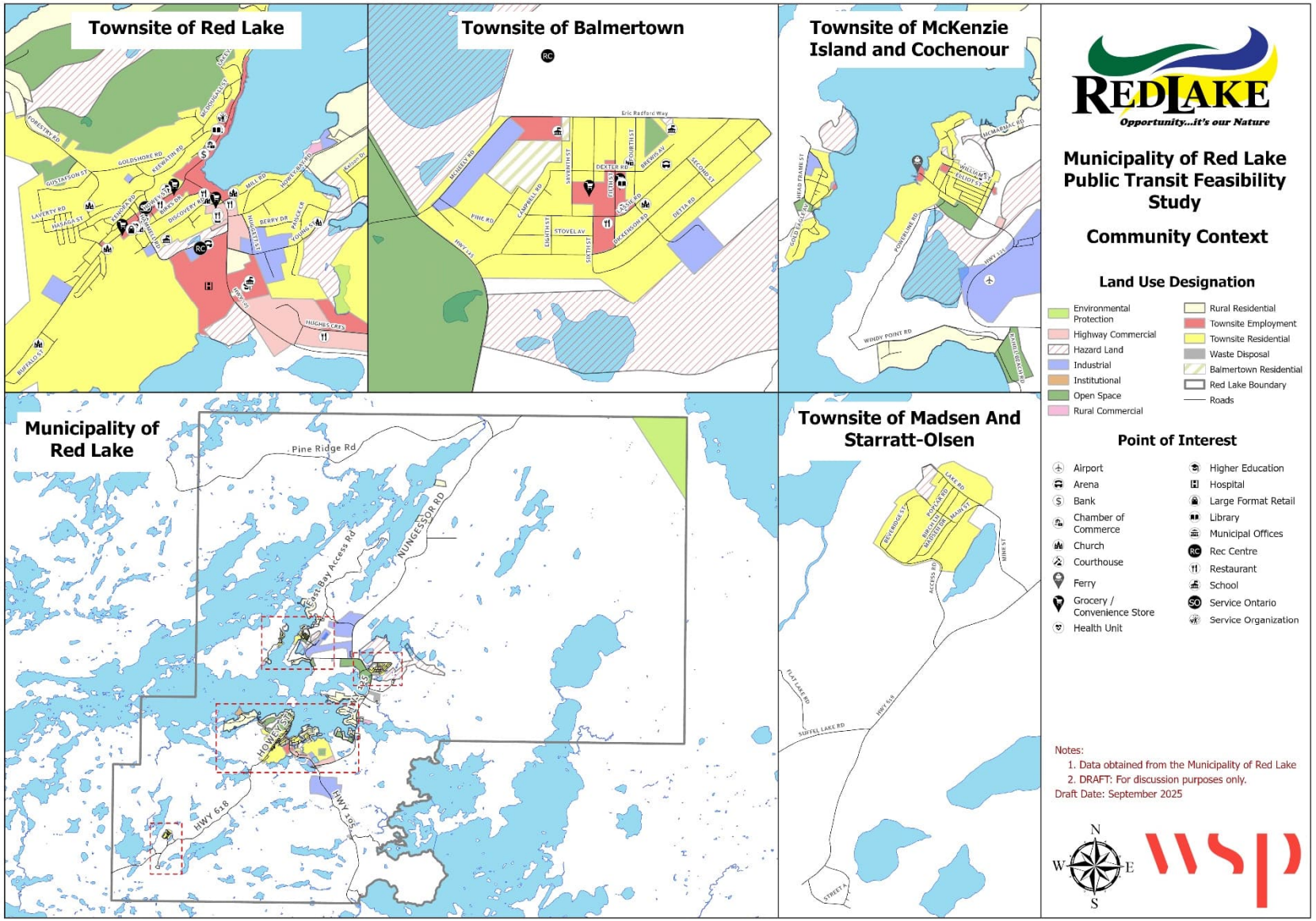
The Municipality of Red Lake (the “Municipality”) has initiated a Transit Feasibility Study to assess the potential for establishing a municipally supported public transit service within the Municipality’s boundaries. The study is focused on determining whether local transit service is appropriate for the community at this time and if so, identifying the most appropriate service model based on local needs, affordability and operational feasibility. The findings of the study will provide Council and municipal staff with the information needed to make informed decisions about future transit service implementation.

1.1 Background

The Municipality of Red Lake is located in northwestern Ontario and encompasses several distinct communities including Red Lake, Balmertown, Cochenour, Madsen, Starratt-Olsen and McKenzie Island as shown in **Figure 1-1**. It serves as a regional hub for surrounding communities and covers a large geographic area. The Municipality’s economy is driven by the gold mining industry, with seasonal changes in population and activity.

With a population of approximately of 4,100 (as per 2021 Statistics Canada data), residents of the Municipality face unique transportation challenges due to geographic isolation, long travel distances between communities and limited public transportation options. Currently, most residents rely on personal vehicles for travel, with alternative motorized transport options consisting of local taxi services or informal arrangements for travel. This reliance on private transportation creates barriers for seniors, youth, low-income individuals and others who do not have access to a vehicle, making it difficult to reach health, social, recreational and essential services within the Municipality.

Figure 1-1: Municipality of Red Lake



1.2 Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to assess the feasibility of implementing a public transit system or alternative service model that is responsive to the community's unique needs. The study aims to:

- Identify community travel needs and barriers, including who needs to travel, where, when, and how often;
- Develop service concepts that are realistic and tailored to the local context;
- Evaluate service options using criteria such as service coverage (types of trips served and not served), potential ridership, costs, and alignment with Municipal goals and priorities
- Provide high level operating and capital costs and potential funding sources;
- Recommend a preferred service concept, if feasible, and provide steps for implementation

2. Stakeholder and Public Engagement

2.1 Who was Consulted

Consultation and engagement activities were designed with the intention of examining background context and public and stakeholder preferences, exchanging ideas, and collaboration with the following audiences:

- **Stakeholder Groups:** From the outset of the study, a select group of representatives from key organizations were engaged to provide insights for the planning process. This included Municipal staff and organizations that provide services in the community, including:
    - Red Lake Indian Friendship Centre
    - Community Support Services
    - Harmony Centre for Community Living
    - Northwestern Health Unit
    - Age Friendly Program
    - New Starts Women Shelter
    - Red Lake Family Health Team
    - Firefly
    - Community Counselling and Addiction Services
    - Canadian Mental Health Association
    - OPP
    - KDSB
    - Red Lake Taxi Cabs Inc
- **General Public:** Residents and community members provided insights on existing travel barriers and ideas of what they would like to see incorporated into a potential public transportation system in the Municipality.

2.2 Overview of Consultation

As part of the consultation and engagement program developed or the Transit Feasibility Study, in person and virtual methods were utilized. These included open houses, workshops and an online survey designed to accommodate diverse needs and preferences. The approach enabled the collection of a wide range of perspectives and insights. The engagement process was carried out in two phases as

described below. Consultation highlights are presented in **Section 3.3** and **Section 3.4** and are detailed in **Appendix A**.

2.2.1 Description of Phases

Phase 1

The focus of this phase was to develop a deeper understanding of the existing conditions, barriers and opportunities. Key engagement activities during this phase included a Stakeholder Engagement Session, Public Open House #1 and a Community Transit Survey.

Phase 2

The second round of engagement focused on developing and evaluating transit service options that could potentially be implemented to serve the Municipality. Input from stakeholders and the public helped shape the recommended public transit option. Key activities included select in-depth conversations with stakeholders and Public Open House #2.

2.2.2 Timetable of Consultation

The consultation process encompassed the following meetings and activities outlined in **Table 2-1**.

Table 2-1: Overview of Consultation and Engagement Activities

Meeting	Format	Date
Stakeholder Workshop	In-person	September 25, 2025
Public Open House #1	In-person	September 25, 2025
Community Transit Survey	Virtual and In-person	September 25, 2025 – October 10, 2025
Additional Stakeholder Discussions	Virtual	October, 2025
Public Open House #2	Virtual	November 18, 2025

3. Existing Conditions and Needs Assessment

This section provides a comprehensive overview of the current transportation context in the Municipality. It begins with a review of relevant municipal policies and planning documents to establish the framework for considering the introduction of public transit solutions. The demographic review examines population size, distribution, age groups and key trends while the socio-economic review analyses factors such as employment, income levels, and community characteristics. Together these elements provide an understanding of the baseline conditions, challenges and opportunities that will inform the development and evaluation of potential transit options for Red Lake.

3.1 Community Layout and Land-Use

The Municipality is characterized by both urban and rural land uses, spread across several distinct townsites. Residential, commercial and institutional uses are primarily concentrated within the townsites, with the largest populations found in Red Lake and Balmertown.

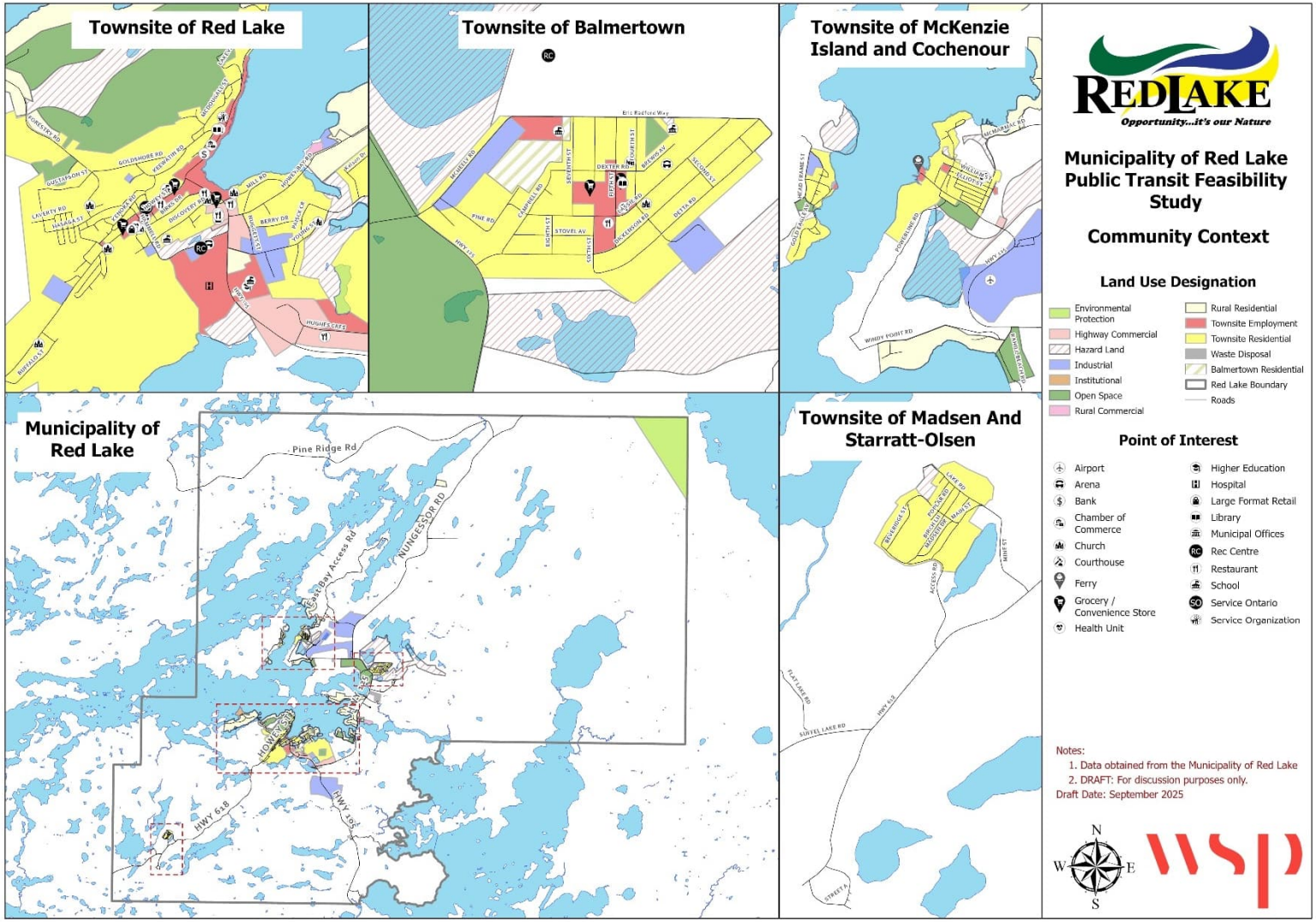
Red Lake, particularly along Highway 105 and Howey Street, functions as a central business district offering a range of retail stores, restaurants and banks. This area also includes key institutional facilities including the Red Lake Margaret Cochenour Memorial Hospital, the Red Lake Public Library and government offices. Educational institutions in Red Lake include Red Lake District High School, Red Lake Madsen Public School, and St. John Catholic and Etoiles du Nord.

Balmertown serves as the administrative area for the Municipality with the main Municipal office, Furthermore, Balmertown also contains the Balmertown Recreation Centre, the Balmertown branch of the public library and the Golden Learning Centre.

Cochenour is most notable for the Cochenour Arena and the ferry terminal providing access to McKenzie Island. Madsen, McKenzie Island and Starratt-Olsen are primarily residential in character, with minimal commercial or institutional facilities.

Figure 3-1 provides an overview of the land use designations in the Municipality along with key destinations that could be classified as trip generators for transit.

Figure 3-1: Municipality of Red Lake Land Use Context



3.2 Policy Context

To support the development of potential transit solutions this section highlights the key provincial and municipal policies and plans that influence transportation planning in the Municipality. The review identifies existing objectives, priorities, and requirements that will shape the feasibility and design of any future transit service.

3.2.1 Provincial Policy Review

The Province of Ontario has a suite of policies that support the adoption of, or impact the provision of, transit. These policy documents provide guidance to local municipalities which can range from suggested actions to legislated requirements. **Table 3-1** provides an overview of provincial policy impacting potential transit in the Municipality of Red Lake.

Table 3-1: Summary of Provincial Planning Documents

Document	Relevant Guidance
Northern Ontario Growth Plan (2011)	The Northern Ontario Growth Plan provides guidance to align provincial decision-making and investment for economic and population growth in Northern Ontario. As it relates to transit, the Northern Ontario Growth Plan sets out that: • Economic and service hubs should maintain official plans that provide for a range of transportation options. • Strategic core areas should be the preferred location for major capital investments in integrated public transportation systems. Connectivity between transportation modes including rail, road, marine and air should be enhanced.
Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2005)	The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act built environment guidelines and O.Reg.239/02 provide technical and legislative requirements for improving accessibility within transportation systems to create an inclusive environment.

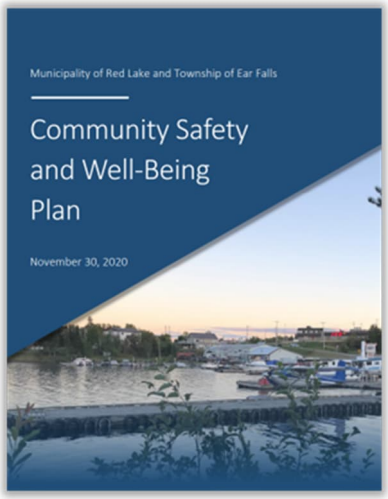
3.2.2 Municipal Policy Review

Municipality of Red Lake Official Plan 2015

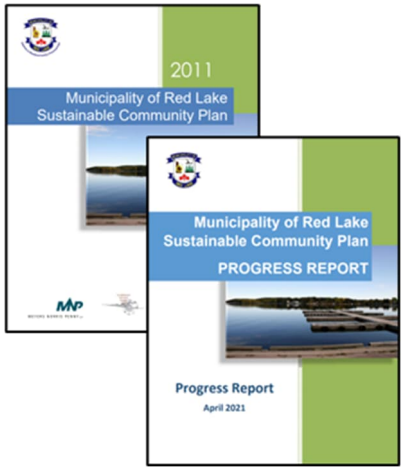
The Official plan sets out guiding principles for sustainable development in the Municipality, emphasizing the creation of compact communities that use land and infrastructure efficiently. It prioritizes the protection of the natural environment by reducing pollution and supporting energy efficient development. The plan encourages mixed-use neighbourhoods with access to parking, cultural and recreational amenities, and promotes safe, accessible travel through a multimodal transportation system. Transportation policies within the plan support a safe and efficient network that prioritizes alternative modes such as walking, cycling, skiing and snowmobiling, with the goal of enhancing mobility, connectivity and fostering a healthy, sustainable and active community.

Community Safety and Well-Being Plan

This plan focuses on improving safety and well-being for all community members through proactive strategies, particularly by enhancing access to services for vulnerable groups. Key findings from the plan highlight transportation as a critical factor for achieving social and economic priorities. Community engagement identified the need for improved local and regional transit options, with affordable and accessible transportation within the Municipality and to Ear Falls seen as essential for better health outcomes, housing stability and social inclusion. The plan notes that lack of reliable transportation is a significant barrier to accessing health services and social support especially for youth, seniors, low-income residents and people with disabilities.



Sustainable Community Plan 2011 and Sustainable Community Plan Progress Report



The Sustainable Community Plan was developed to ensure that the Municipality's growth is balanced with Environmental sustainability, aiming to preserve resources for future generations. The plan emphasizes the importance of infrastructure quality and capacity to support social, commercial and industrial development in an environmentally sustainable manner. **Among proposed strategies, the plan calls for a study to determine the public transportation needs of residents and businesses, a process that is currently underway through this study. The plan also recommends implementing a rural public transportation system based on the findings of this assessment that is currently being delivered.**

Municipality of Red Lake Strategic Plan 2024-2027

The Strategic Plan for 2024-2027 outlines the Municipality's key directions for growth and development. It focuses on positioning the Municipality as a responsive regional service hub by expanding government investment, stimulating economic development and community revitalization, and making targeted investments in infrastructure to support modern, efficient operations. This plan also prioritizes efficient citizen centred services and the expansion of municipal revenue. **Notably, one of the top three priority project identified to improve quality of life in the Municipality is the implementation of a local transportation program for the community.**

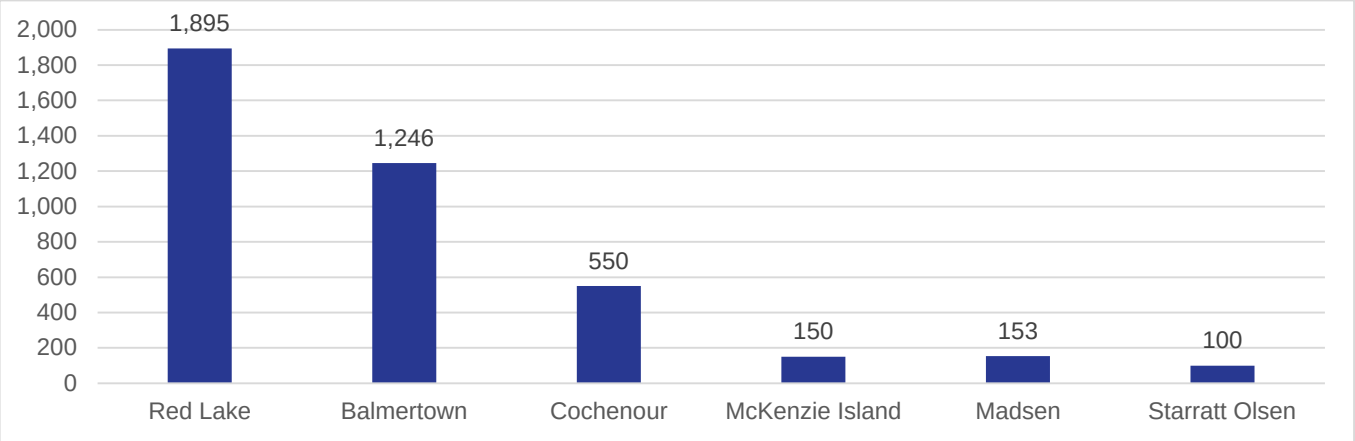
3.3 Community Profile and Current Travel Context

Analysing socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the Municipality is a critical step in developing an effective and inclusive transit feasibility study. This data provides insight into who lives in the community, how they travel and what barriers they may face in accessing transportation. This section highlights current demographic, socio-economic and travel patterns in the Municipality drawing from the 2021 Census produced by Census Canada.

3.3.1 Population Profile

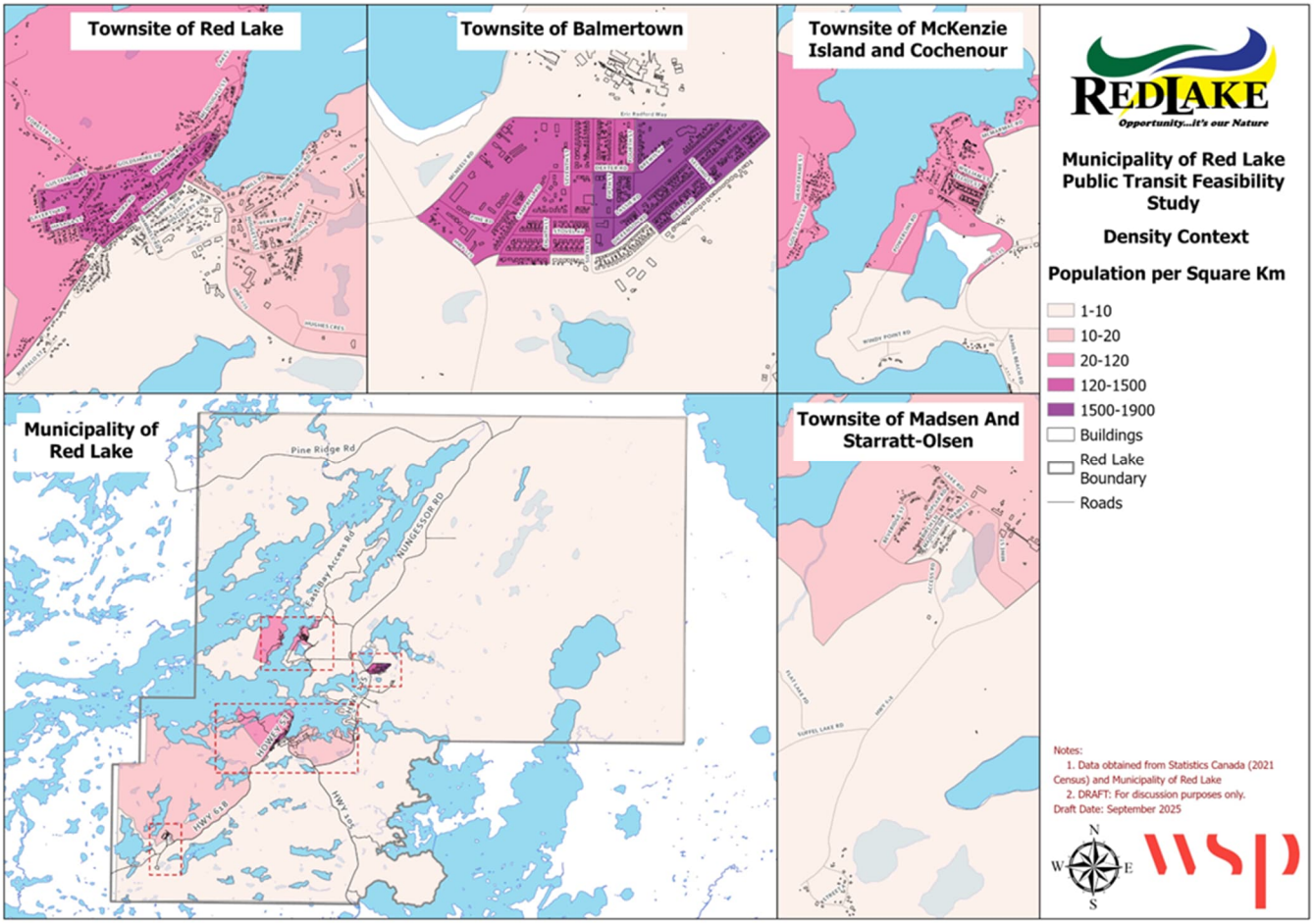
The Municipality has a total population of approximately 4,100 residents distributed across the Municipality's five distinct communities. Red Lake is the largest community with 1,885 residents, followed by Balmertown (1,246), Cochenour (550), Madsen (153), McKenzie Island (150) and Starratt-Olsen (100) as shown in **Figure 3-2**. **Figure 3-3** displays population density by Census Dissemination Area (DA), which varies significantly across the Municipality with Red Lake and Balmertown reaching over 500 people per km^2, while smaller communities such as McKenzie Island and Starratt-Olsen remain below 50 people per km^2.

Figure 3-2: 2021 – Population Breakdown by Community



Source: Statistics Canada, 2021

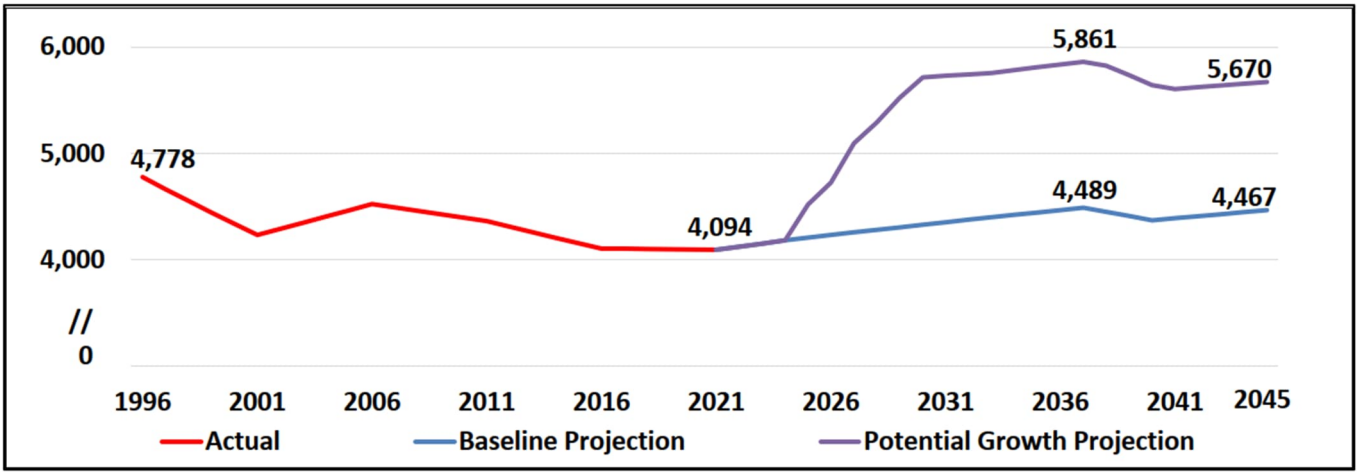
Figure 3-3: Population Density by Census DA in Red Lake



Source: Statistics Canada, 2021

An overview of historical population and future projections, sourced from the *Red Lake Community Capacity Study (2025)* is shown in **Figure 3-4**. The population has declined overall over the past 25 years, though the population has been relatively stable since 2016. Looking ahead, the *Community Capacity Study* outlines two distinct projection scenarios that illustrate how future population trends may vary depending on economic conditions. The Baseline Projection assumes modest growth of approximately 400 people to a 2045 population of 4,467. A Potential Growth Projection driven by high job growth from economic development suggests a significant increase with the population potentially reaching 5,670 by 2045, a growth of over 1,500 people.

Figure 3-4: The Municipality of Red Lake Historical and Projected Population

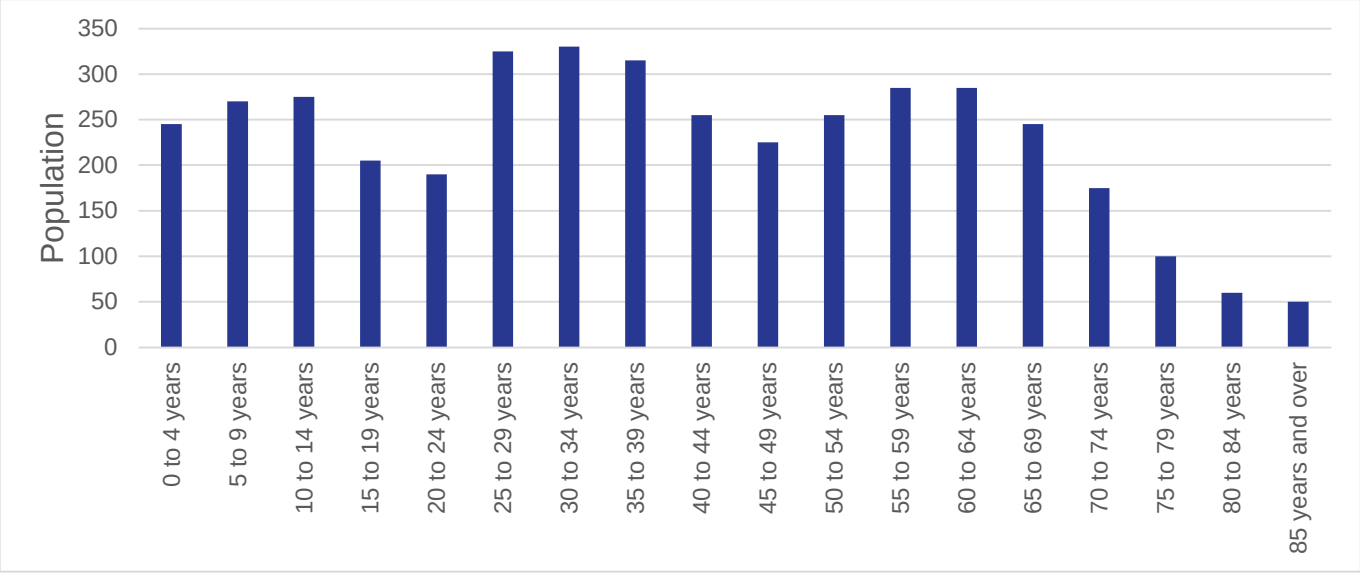


Sources: Ontario Ministry of Finance 2024; Statistics Canada 2002, 2007, 2012, 2017, 2023a, 2024.
Notes:
1. Projections for the Municipality of Red Lake were prepared by InterGroup Consultants Ltd.

Source: Municipality of Red Lake Community Capacity Study, Chukuni Communities Development Corporation (2025)

The 2021 Census data shows the population of the Municipality is distributed across a wide range of age groups as demonstrated in **Figure 3-5**. The largest group consists of adults aged 25-39, while the 20 to 24 age group shows a noticeable dip in comparison. There is a strong youth presence, particularly in the 0 to 14 age range, and the population remains relatively steady across the 35 to 59 middle age brackets. Seniors aged 65 and over account for 15% of the population, totalling approximately 630 individuals. In addition, 825 people are nearing retirement age, representing a significant portion of the community who may require assistance with travel and mobility in the near future.

Figure 3-5: Population Age Distribution in the Municipality of Red Lake



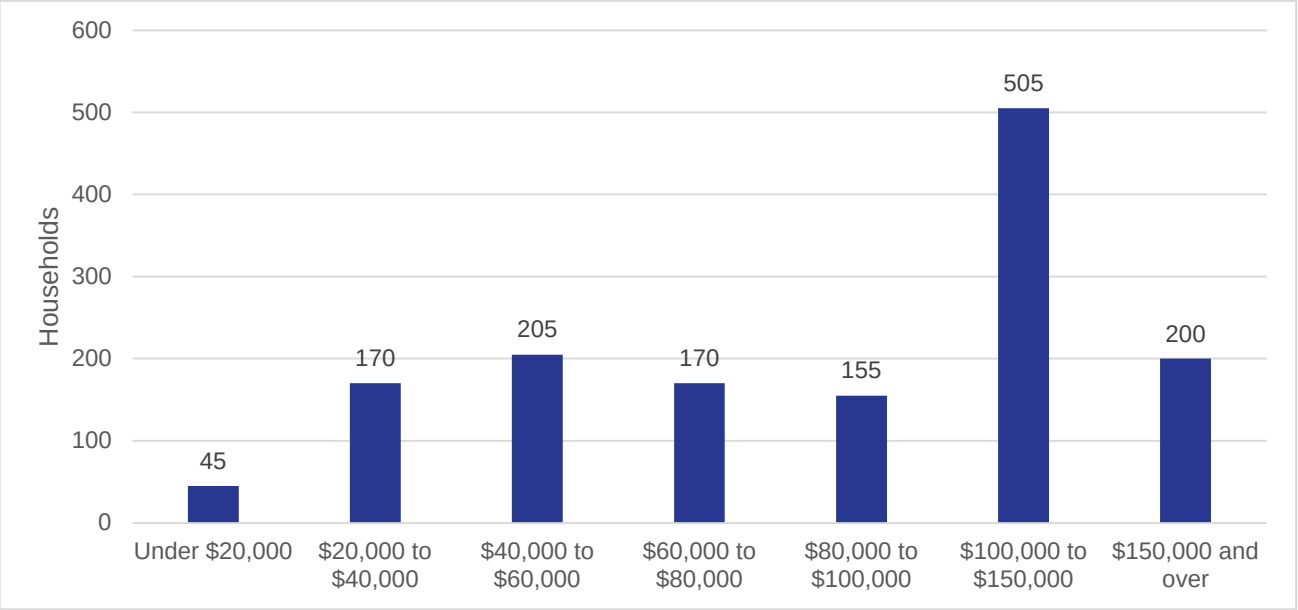
Source: Statistics Canada, 2021

Demographic data for the Municipality indicates that 23% of the population identifies as Indigenous. Additionally, 5% of residents are immigrants.

3.3.2 Economic Profile

Household income data from the Municipality shows a range of income levels as shown in **Figure 3-6**. The largest group (505 households) fall within the $100,000 to $150,000 income bracket. A significant portion of households also earn between $40,000 and $100,000, with 205 households in the $40,000 to $60,000 range, 170 households in the $60,00 0to $80,000 range and 155 households in the $80,000 to $100,000 range. At the higher end, 200 households report incomes over $150,000, while 45 households earn less than $20,000. This income distribution provides insight into the economic profile of the community and is relevant for assessing affordability and accessibility considerations in public transportation planning.

Figure 3-6: Average Total Household Income Distribution in the Municipality of Red Lake

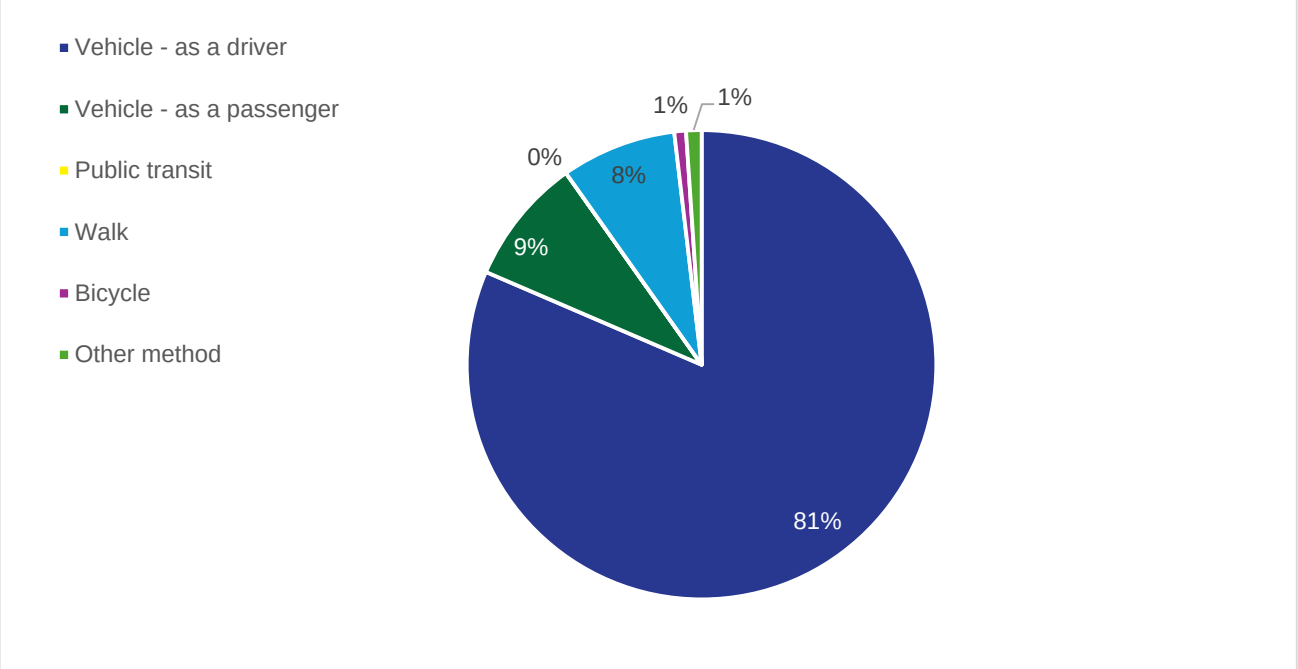


Source: Statistics Canada, 2021

3.3.3 Current Travel Context

The modal split in the Municipality (**Figure 3-7**) reveals a strong dependence on personal vehicles, with 81% of trips to work made by individuals driving themselves. An additional 9% of travel occurs as passengers in vehicles. Walking accounts for 8% of trips, while other modes and travelling by bicycle each represent 1%. The reliance on private vehicles, combined with the absence of public transit options indicates a need to explore strategies that support alternative modes of travel and improve accessibility for non-drivers.

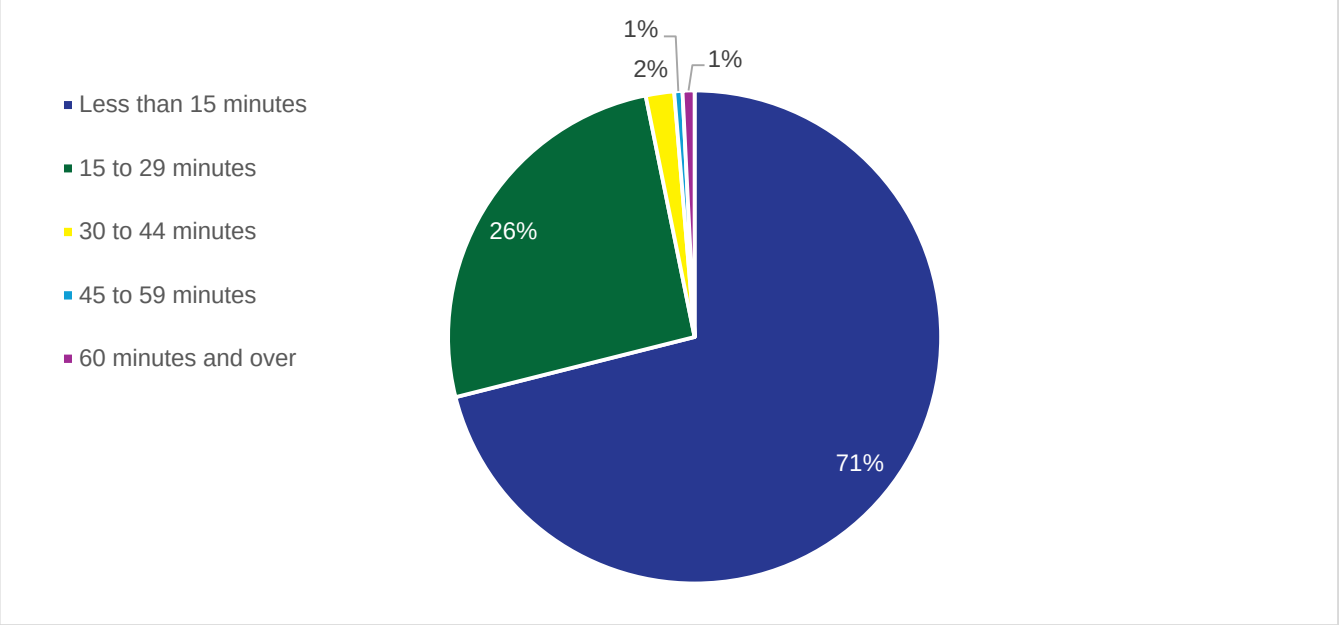
Figure 3-7: 2021 Modal Split in the Municipality of Red Lake



Source: Statistics Canada, 2021

The breakdown of commute durations based on journey to work data (**Figure 3-8**) shows that most residents have very short travel times. About 71% of commutes are under 15 minutes, while 26% fall between 15 and 29 minutes. 2% of trips take 30 to 44 minutes and 1% last 45 to 59 minutes or more than an hour. This indicates that while longer trips to Ear Lake or beyond may occur from time to time, the overwhelming majority of work related travel is occurring within the municipality itself.

Figure 3-8: Journey to Work Commute Duration in the Municipality of Red Lake



Source: Statistics Canada, 2021

3.3.4 Existing Formal and Informal Transportation Options

While the Municipality does not currently have its own public transit service, several not-for-profit and private operators transport individuals around the community. A summary of these services is provided below.

Community Support Services

Community Support Services provides transportation to medical appointments and grocery shopping for individuals without access to an automobile. For a trip within Red Lake, the cost is $7.50 and for trips to other communities $8.50 is charged. Users are expected to call 48 hours in advance to prep-book a ride. The service is operated by volunteers and it is noted that there is a shortage of volunteers needed to operate the service, which limits options for customers.

Transportation for Community Programming

The Red Lake Harmony Centre and Red Lake Indian Friendship Centre are community organizations serving the municipality. While neither offer a formal transportation service, both provide transportation for participants of their programs out of necessity.

Taxi services

Two taxi services are available within the Municipality including Red Lake Taxi Cabs Inc and Le Taxi which provide for-hire services to clientele upon request. Maximum fees for taxis are set by the Municipality. As of December 2025, the rates are as follows:

Meter Rates (Red Lake Only)

- $7.00 for the first 1/20 kilometre

- $0.15 for every 1/25 kilometre

Set Rate Maximums

- Red Lake to Balmertown: $35.00
- Red Lake to Cochenour: $40.00
- Red Lake to Madsen: $35.00
- Balmertown to Cochenour: $30.00
- Balmertown to Madsen: $55.00
- Cochenour to Madsen: $60.00

*An additionally $11.00 is added to the Cochenour trips if the drop off location is McKenzie Island (winter only).

3.4 Round 1 Stakeholder and Community Engagement

As part of the first round of stakeholder and community engagement, community organisations, municipal staff and the public were consulted to gain a deeper understanding of travel behaviour and overall expectations for public transportation. Feedback was gathered through a Community Transit Survey (completed by 312 participants) Stakeholder Workshop (12 attendees) and the first Public Open House (25+ attendees). A summary of the key feedback and findings is provided in this section.

3.4.1 Stakeholder Workshop and Public Open House #1 Findings

The comments and feedback received during both the Stakeholder Workshop and Public Open House #1 were grouped into key themes and are outlined in **Table 3-2**.

Table 3-2: Summary of Stakeholder and Public Engagement Findings

Theme	Key Comments and Feedback
Existing barriers that limit community members' ability to travel within the Municipality	• Limited operators for services like the taxi • High cost of taxi making the service inaccessible to the vulnerable population • Large distance between the various communities within the Municipality • Weather conditions such as heavy snowfall pose challenges for those travelling • Lack of active transportation infrastructure such as sidewalks and bike lanes

Theme	Key Comments and Feedback
	• No street lighting posing safety concerns at night • No access to personal vehicles for some in the community
Key locations a public transportation service should serve	• Grocery stores (Balmertown Food Fair, I.G.A etc.) • Cochenour Arena • Red Lake Recreation Centre • Red Lake High School • Red Lake Medical Centre / Pharmacy • The post office • The airport • Banks • Service Ontario • Beaches • The golf course
Who would benefit most from public transportation	• The vulnerable population • Youth • Seniors, especially those who can no longer drive • Persons with disabilities • Foreign workers • Those looking to access healthcare • Businesses and employers
Potential barriers to public transportation usage	• Using public transportation is not as convenient as driving personal vehicles • Cost to use the service • The transit service may not provide access to certain desired destinations • Lack of reliable service • Long wait time for buses • Bus stop locations may be too far from desired destinations

Theme	Key Comments and Feedback
	• If the service doesn't operate at desirable and useful times • Winter conditions such as heavy snow fall that may prohibit walking to bus stops • Lack of cell phones and technology barriers (for booking OnDemand type services) • Mobility challenges that may prohibit use of transit
Vision of a successful public transportation system	• Fully accessible system • A system that serves a diverse population during peak hours, midday and times when there are high levels of activity in the Municipality • Safe, comfortable, consistent, reliable and clean system • Environmentally sustainable

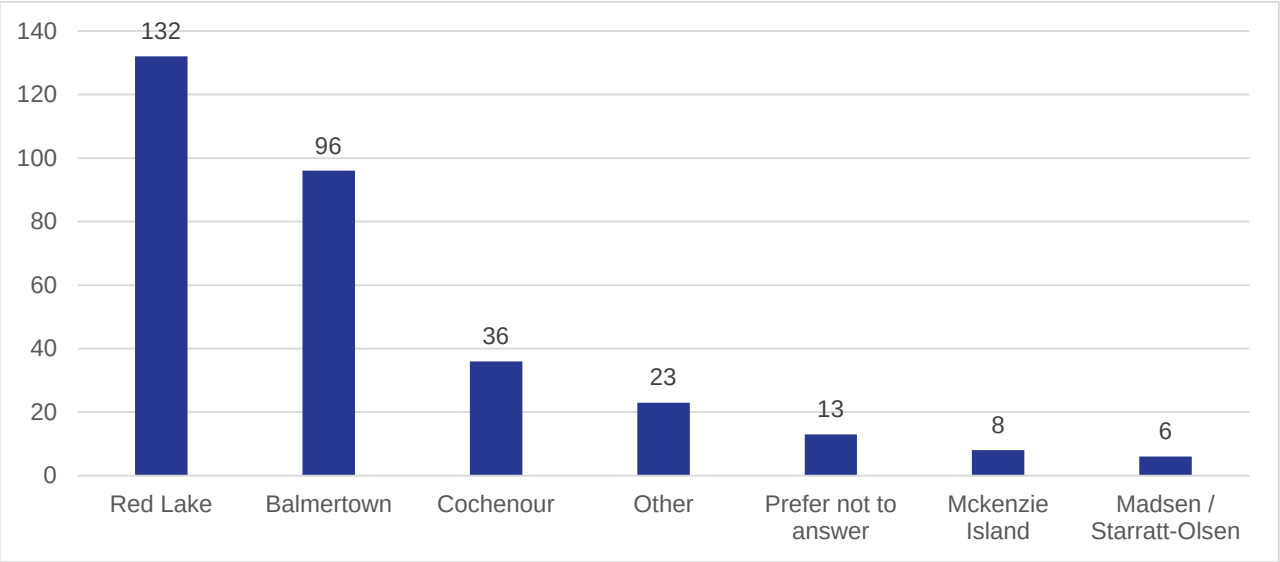
3.4.2 Community Transit Survey Results

A community transit survey consisting of 22 questions was conducted from September 25 to October 10, 2025. The survey was offered in both hardcopy and online formats to maximize community participation. In total, 312 responses were received, including 39 hardcopy submissions and 273 online. A summary of the key findings is presented below, with full survey results provided in **Appendix A**.

Respondent Place of Residence:

Survey respondents generally reflect the population distribution across the Municipality. A large majority of survey respondents reside in Red Lake or Balmertown. However, there was also meaningful participation from other parts of the community including Cochenour, McKenzie Island, and Madsen/Staratt-Olsen, as illustrated in **Figure 3-9**.

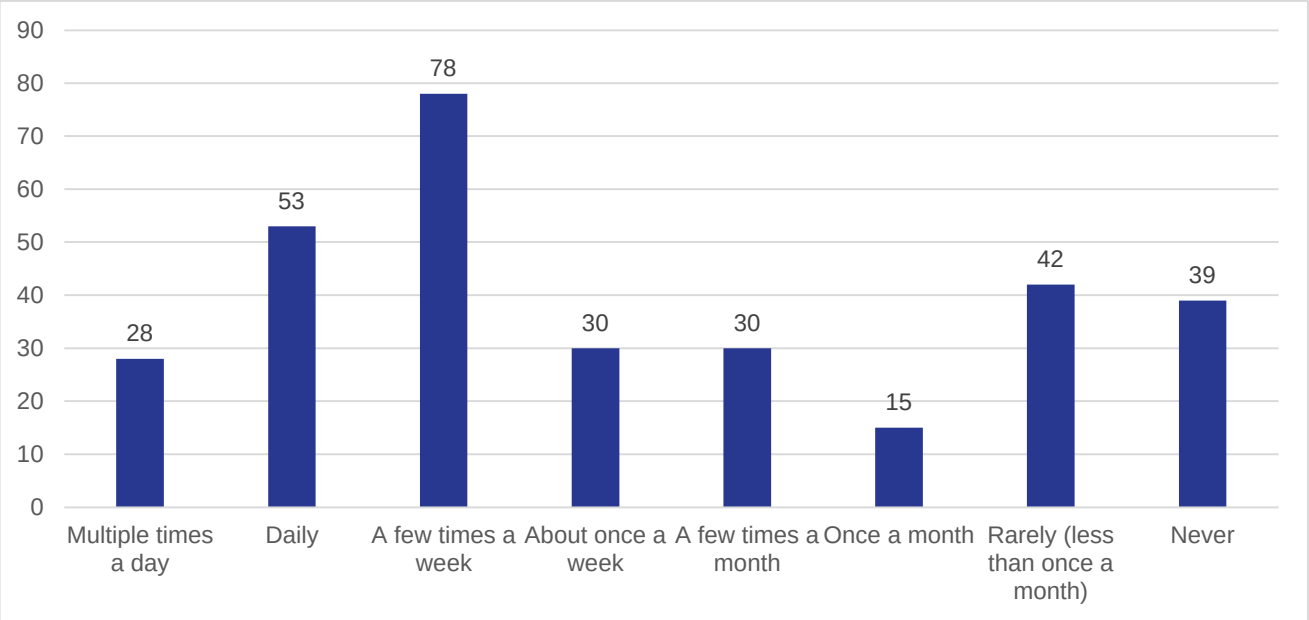
Figure 3-9: What Community Respondents Reside in



Desire for Local Transit Service:

If public transit were available in the municipality, 60% of respondents indicated that they would use public transit at least once a week, while approximately 26% stated they would likely use it once or multiple times each day, as shown in **Figure 3-10**.

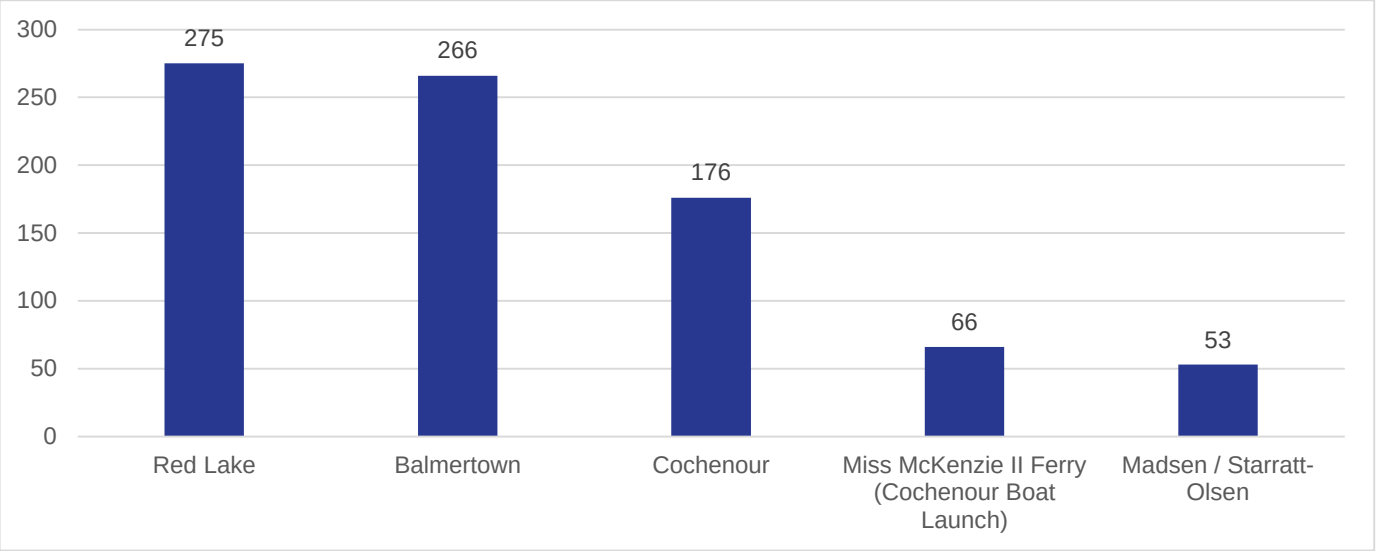
Figure 3-10: How Often Respondents Would Use Public Transit



Where Transit Should Operate:

Red Lake, Balmertown and Cochenour are the top three communities' respondents indicated they would like to access by transit, as shown in **Figure 3-11**.

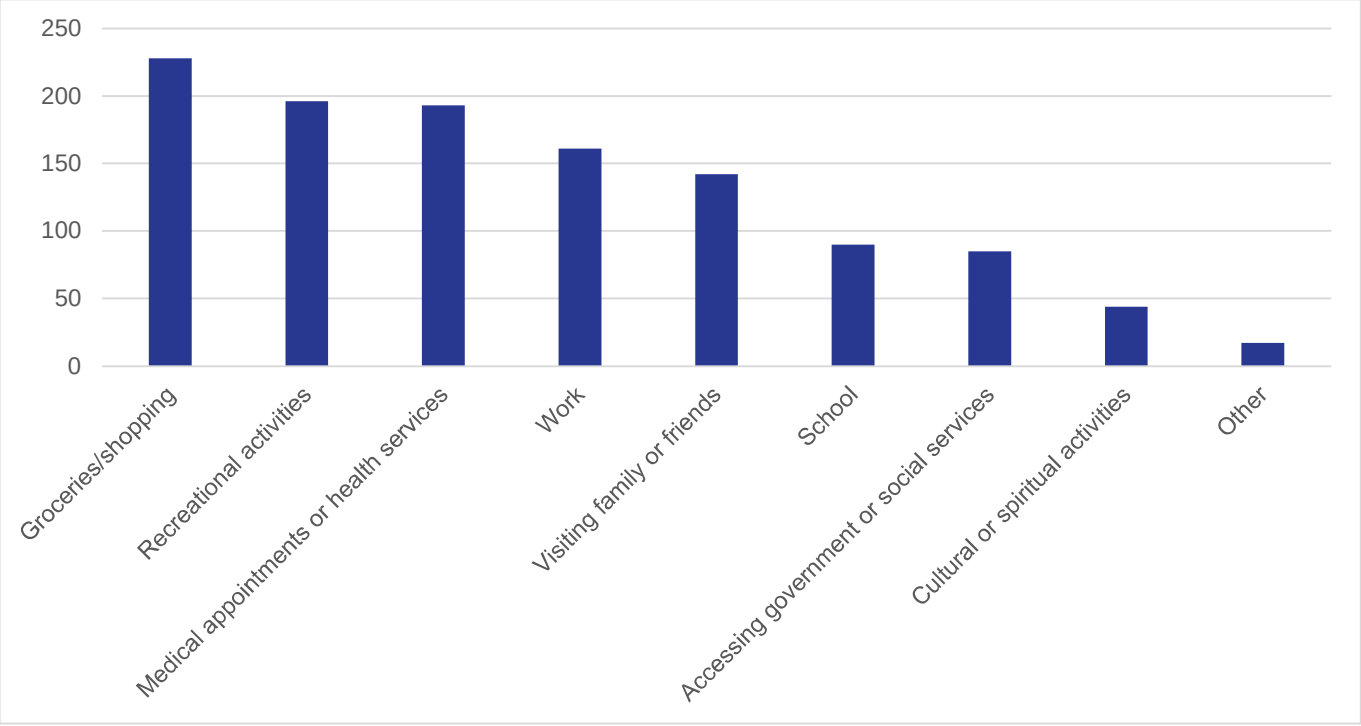
Figure 3-11: Communities Respondents Would Like to Access by Transit



Survey respondents expressed a strong interest in accessing grocery stores, recreational facilities, and medical or health services by transit, among other destinations as shown in

Figure 3-12. Overall, there is a clear desire to use transit for a wide range of activities.

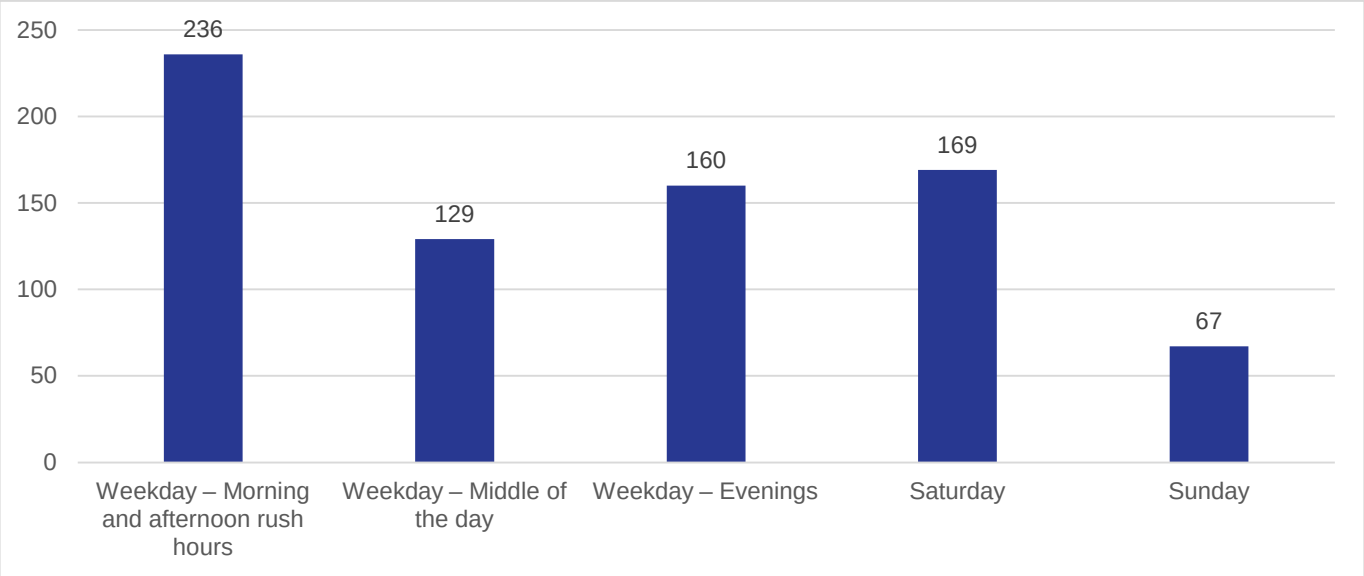
Figure 3-12: Desired Amenities to be Reached by Public Transit



Desired Periods of Operation:

Survey respondents expressed interest in having transit available during various periods of the day with no clear consensus on preferred operating periods, as shown in **Figure 3-13**. However, weekday morning and afternoon rush hours received the highest number of votes overall.

Figure 3-13: Preference on When Public Transit Should Operate



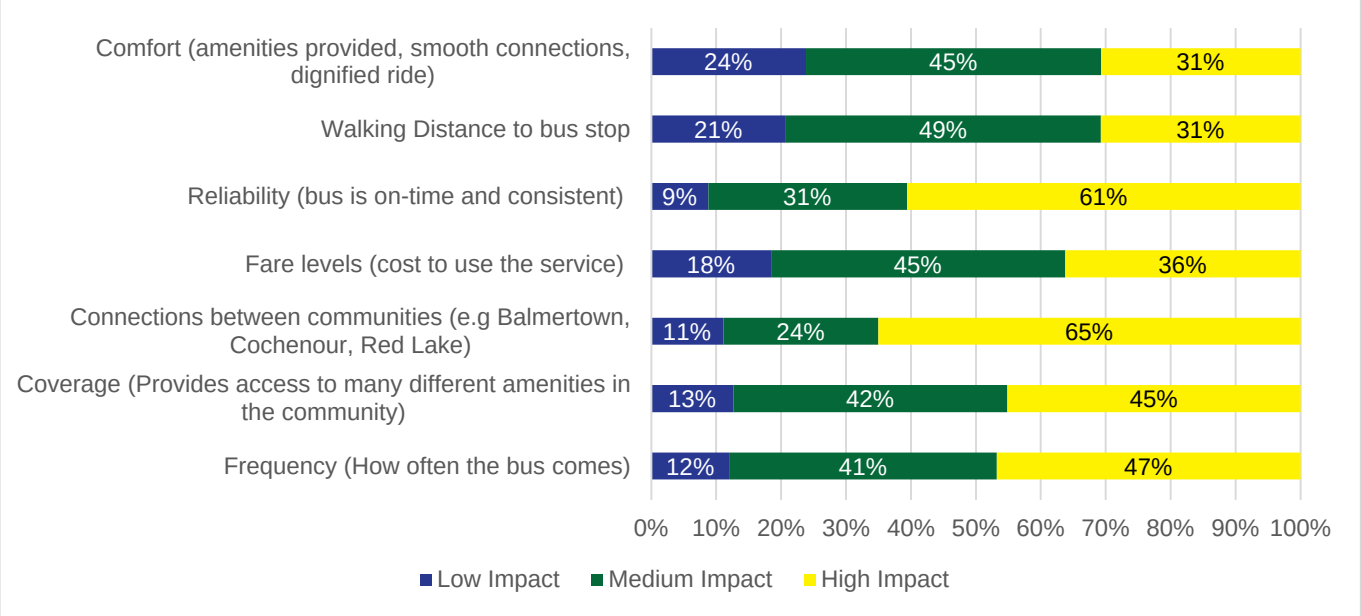
System Design and Service Delivery Preferences:

Respondents were asked to consider how the following factors might influence their decision to use public transit:

- **Comfort:** Availability of amenities, smooth connections to destinations, and an overall dignified travel experience.
- **Walking Distance to Bus Stops:** The time and effort required to reach a bus stop.
- **Reliability:** Consistent, predictable, on-time service delivery.
- **Fare levels:** The cost to passengers of using the transit system.
- **Connections:** Ability to travel between communities such as Red Lake, Balmertown, Cochenour etc.
- **Coverage:** Access to a wide range of amenities within the community.

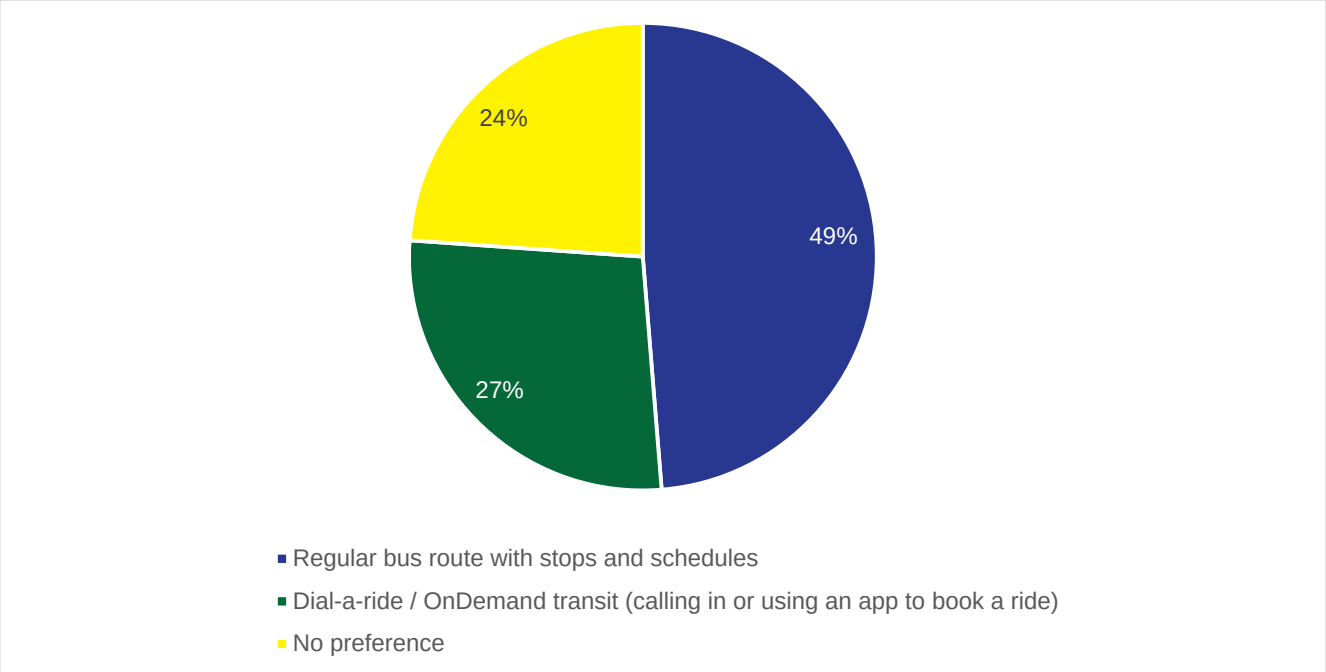
Frequency: How often buses are scheduled to run.Figure 3-14 illustrates the relative influence of each of these factors on transit use. While many elements are important to the community, reliability and connections between community are the dominant key drivers for transit usage.

Figure 3-14: Factors that Influence the Use of Public Transit



As shown in **Figure 3-15**, nearly half of survey respondents expressed a preference for a traditional fixed-route service with scheduled stops.

Figure 3-15: Preferred Transit Service Delivery Model



3.5 Review of Best Practices and Peer Community Systems

This section begins by outlining the range of transit service delivery models available for consideration, including conventional fixed route service, flex route service, OnDemand transit, hybrid approaches and

partnership-based solutions. It then benchmarks the Municipality against comparable rural and northern communities, highlighting best practices that guide the selection and design of transit options. The peer review offers valuable context by illustrating what has been successful elsewhere and how those strategies can be adapted to meet the Municipality's unique needs.

3.5.1 Transit Service Delivery Models

A variety of service delivery models are available to small and rural communities, each offering distinct operational characteristics and suitability depending on the local context. This section provides an overview of the primary models that can be considered for the Municipality.

Conventional Fixed Route Service

Conventional fixed route systems operate on established routes and schedules, with buses stopping at designated locations at set times. Fixed route transit is most effective in areas with concentrated populations and consistent travel demand between key destinations such as town centres, shopping areas and schools. This model offers predictable service and is easy for users to understand and plan around. However, in communities with low population density or widely dispersed settlements, fixed route transit can suffer from an inability to provide adequate coverage, resulting in low ridership and high operating costs per passenger.

Flex Route Service

Flex route transit combines aspects of fixed route and demand responsive service. In this model, a bus operates along a defined route with scheduled timing points and termini at fixed stops, but has the flexibility to deviate to a degree to pick up or drop off passengers closer to their actual origins or destinations typically upon advanced request. Riders can board or alight at a flag or fixed stops along the main route and the bus will only leave the route if a deviation is requested. This service delivery model can improve accessibility for residents living beyond walking distance from the main corridor while maintaining a basic level of scheduled service. However, operational complexity can increase as drivers must balance scheduled stops with deviations and careful management is required to avoid delays or missed connections. Public awareness and understanding of how to request deviations is also important for a successful implementation.

OnDemand Transit

OnDemand Transit allows riders to request trips as needed, typically through a smartphone app or call centre, with vehicles dispatched dynamically within a defined service area. This model provides higher coverage in rural and low-density communities, where fixed routes may not be viable. The On-Demand model can match transit service supply with the actual demand of the community and provide access to residents who may live far away from main corridors. However, it poses challenges as it requires users to adapt to new booking technologies and potential variability in wait times.

OnDemand Microtransit builds on the flexibility of OnDemand service by using smaller, shared vehicles such as standard minivans or shuttles. These vehicles operate without fixed routes or schedules, dynamically adjusting to rider requests within a defined service area. Microtransit connects residents to key destinations and offers more efficient routing and shorter wait times compared to conventional fixed route transit. While it improves accessibility in low density areas, it also requires careful coordination and technology adoption to ensure reliability and user satisfaction.

Hybrid Approach

Hybrid models combine conventional fixed route service during periods or areas of higher demand with OnDemand or flexible service in lower demand contexts. This approach is used in small urban and rural settings to balance the predictability of schedule service with the flexibility of demand responsive options. This delivery model can optimize resource allocation, maintain essential connections during peak times and extend service to less populated areas. However, these systems can be more complex to operate and communicate to the public requiring careful scheduling, coordination and clear information for users to understand when and how each service is available.

Partnership Based Solutions

Partnership based models use existing transportation providers such as local taxi companies, volunteer driver programs, or ride sharing services often supported by municipal subsidies or coordination. This approach assists in meeting the needs of residents without access to private vehicles. These programs can be responsive to individual needs, especially in areas where demand is too low to support dedicated transit vehicles. However, service quality and availability depend on the capacity of local providers and municipalities may have less control over scheduling, pricing, and service standards compared to operating or coordinating their own transit fleet.

The key features, advantages and challenges of each model is summarized in **Table 3-3**.

Table 3-3: Summary of Transit Delivery Models

Service Delivery Model	Key Features	Advantages	Challenges
Fixed Route	Schedule, set route and stops	Predictable and easy to use	Inflexible, costly in low density areas with low ridership
OnDemand	Flexible, rider-initiated trips within a service area	Broad coverage and efficient use of resources	Requires technology adoption, variable wait times and higher per trip costs.
Flex Route	Follows a set route and schedule but can deviate within a defined area upon request	Increase coverage for dispersed populations, maintains some schedule predictability	Operational complexity
Hybrid	Mix of fixed route and On-Demand elements	Balanced, adaptable and can optimize resources	Complex to operate and communicate
Partnership Based	Uses taxis, volunteer drivers, or rideshare	Cost effective for low demand, leverages existing providers,	Limited control over service quality, dependent on provider

Service Delivery Model	Key Features	Advantages	Challenges
	often with municipal subsidy	responsive to individual needs	capacity and may have limited availability

3.5.2 Peer Community Review

For this study, various peer communities were reviewed based on their comparable size, rural context and experience with transit service implementation. Municipalities selected include the following:

- Kenora, ON
- Elliot Lake, ON
- Penetanguishene, ON
- Clearview, ON
- Prince Edward County, ON

Table 3-4 highlights how these municipalities are delivering transit services. Communities like Kenora and Wawa operate OnDemand models using small fleets and limited-service hours. Others such as Elliot Lake and Clearview run fixed route systems with larger buses and broader schedules. These examples offer practical benchmarks for the Municipality as it explores service options tailored to its size and needs.

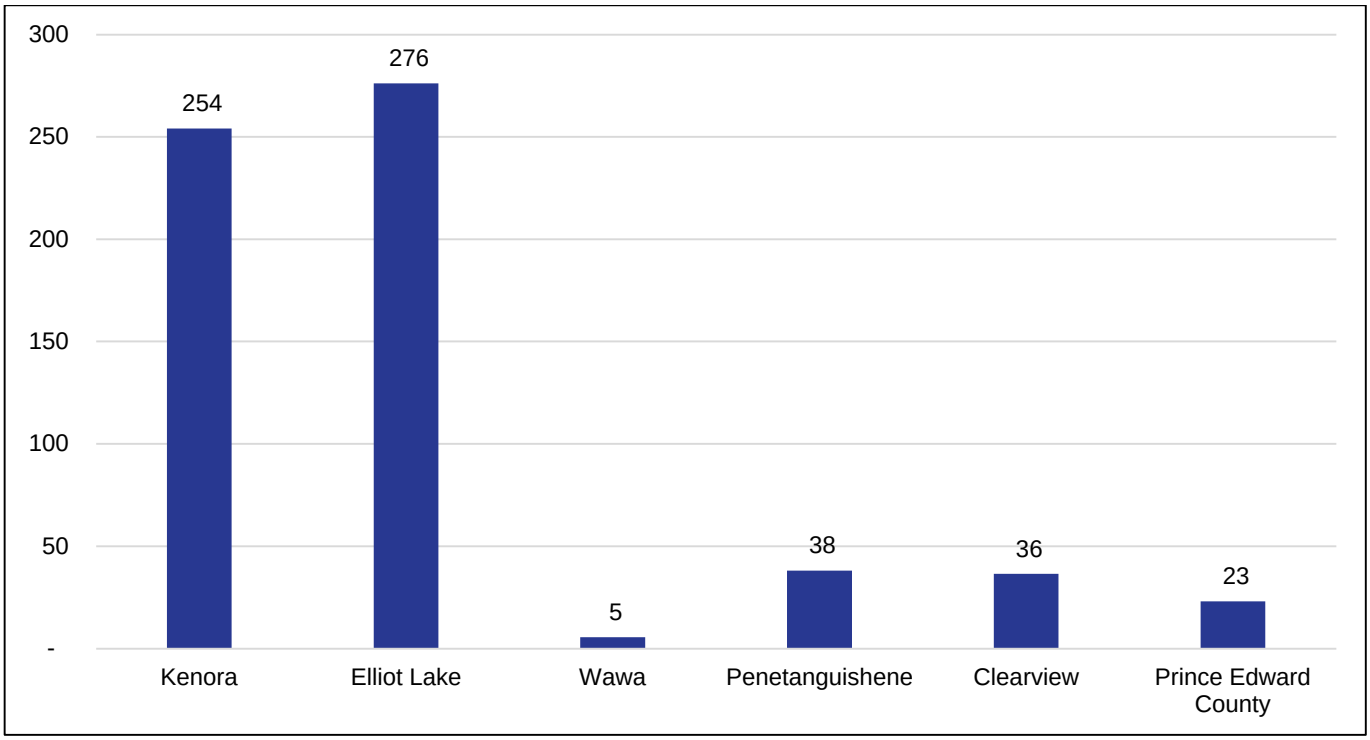
Table 3-4: Summary of Peer Community Transit Delivery Models

Community	Service Area Population	Service Area Size (km2)	Service Type	Service Availability	Time of Operation	Vehicle (# and Type)	Cost per Single Trip
Municipality of Red Lake	**4,100**						
Kenora	14,900	N/A	OnDemand Microtransit	5 days (Monday – Friday)	Daytime	Mixed light-duty vehicle fleet	$2.50
Elliot Lake	11,400	16	Conventional Fixed Route (4 routes)	Everyday	Daytime	6x big buses 2x small buses	$2.75
Wawa	2,700	3.5	OnDemand	5 days (Monday – Friday)	Midday only	1x small bus	$5.00
Penetanguishene	10,000	14	Conventional Fixed Route (1 route)	5 days (Monday – Saturday)	Daytime	1x big bus	$3.25
Clearview	4,500	10	Conventional Fixed Route (1 route)	Everyday	Daytime + Weekday Evening	1x big bus	$2.00
Prince Edward County	7,000	50	Conventional Fixed Route (1 route)	5 days (Monday – Friday)	Daytime	1x big bus	Less than 5km: $3.50 5km-19km: $5.00 20km+: $10

Note: Service Area Population and Service Area Size statistics for Municipalities other than Red Lake were obtained from the 2023 Ontario Urban Transit Factbook and from VIA

The average daily ridership for peer community transit systems as shown in **Figure 3-16**, reveals that Elliot Lake has the highest daily transit usage among peer communities, with 276 rides per day. This corresponds with its larger population of 11,400 and a more extensive service model that includes four fixed routes and a fleet of eight buses. Kenora with a population of 14,900 and OnDemand Microtransit service on weekdays reports 254 daily trips. Communities with smaller populations or more limited service such as Wawa, which operates midday only OnDemand service for 2,700 residents show lower ridership, recording just 5 daily rides.

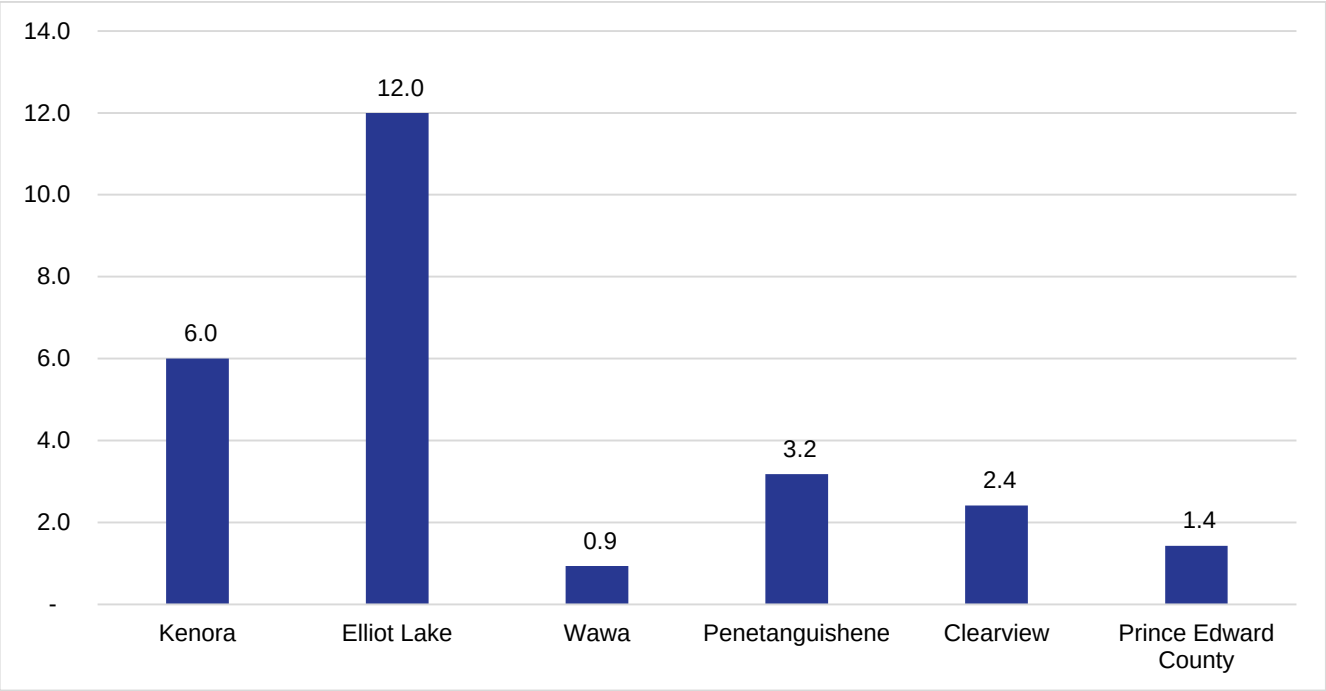
Figure 3-16: Peer Community Transit Systems Average Daily Ridership



Source: 2023 Ontario Urban Transit Factbook and VIA

Figure 3-17 which presents annual riders per service hour highlights system efficiency, which measures how efficiently transit services are used relative to resources invested. Elliot Lake again leads with 12 rides per service hour, reflecting frequent transit service and a well utilized fleet. Kenora follows with 12 rides per hour, while Penetanguishene and Clearview report 3.2 and 2.4 respectively. Prince Edward County and Wawa show the lowest efficiency, with 1.4 and 0.9 rides per hour. System efficiency is a key performance indicator for small transit systems, helping municipalities assess whether their service aligns with demand. Higher efficiency can support cost effectiveness and justify service expansion, while lower figures may indicate a need to adjust service hours, coverage or vehicle types to better match community needs.

Figure 3-17: Peer Community Transit Systems Annual Riders per Service Hour



Source: 2023 Ontario Urban Transit Factbook and VIA

Figure 3-18 presents the functional arrangements for managing transit systems, each reflecting a different level of local government involvement. At the highest level of control, Clearview directly owns and operates its transit service, including vehicle maintenance. A middle tier model, seen in Elliot Lake, Wawa and Penetanguishene, involves municipal ownership of vehicles while contracting out operations and maintenance. At the lowest level of municipal government control, Kenora and Prince Edward County fully outsource both vehicle provision and service operations. These arrangements demonstrate how communities tailor their transit governance based on capacity, resources and strategic priorities, factors that the Municipality may consider when determining its approach.

Figure 3-18: Functional Transit Operation Arrangements

Functional Arrangement	Example Communities
Community OWNS & MAINTAINS rolling stock & OPERATES transit system	Clearview
Community OWNS & MAINTAINS rolling stock BUT contracts-out operations and maintenance	Wawa, Elliot Lake, Penetanguishene
Community fully contracts-out vehicle requirements and maintenance through leases as well as operations	Kenora, Prince Edward County

3.6 Needs and Opportunities Summary

Needs and opportunities for local transit are summarized as follows:

Needs

- **Geographic Dispersion and Access Gaps:** The Municipality of Red Lake is composed of several distinct townsites, with residential, commercial, and institutional uses concentrated in Red Lake and Balmertown. Geographic dispersion creates significant travel distances and access barriers for many residents.
- **Mobility for Vulnerable Populations:** Seniors, youth, people with disabilities, and low-income residents face challenges reaching healthcare, education, recreation, and essential services due to limited transportation options and high taxi costs. Volunteer-based services are constrained by capacity, and not all community members have access to private vehicles.
- **Car Dependency and Limited Alternatives:** Over 80% of trips to work are made by driving private vehicles, with limited alternative means for travel. This reliance on cars highlights the need for alternative, accessible, and affordable transportation options, especially for non-drivers.
- **Policy Alignment:** Municipal and provincial policies consistently identify improved local transportation as a priority for sustainable development, social inclusion, and economic growth. The Municipality's *Sustainable Community Plan*, and *Strategic Plan* explicitly call for enhanced mobility and the introduction of public transit.
- **Community Demand:** Engagement activities and surveys reveal strong community interest in public transit, with a majority of respondents indicating they would use a service at least weekly, and nearly half preferring a fixed-route model.

Opportunities

- **Tailored Service Models:** A range of transit models—including fixed route, flex route, OnDemand, hybrid, and partnership-based solutions—can be adapted to Red Lake's unique geography and travel patterns. Peer communities provide practical benchmarks for implementation.
- **Scalability and Flexibility:** Transit service can be introduced at a modest scale and expanded as demand grows.
- **Policy and Funding Support:** Alignment with municipal and provincial priorities strengthens the case for implementation and opens opportunities to leverage external funding for both capital and operating costs, which will be explored in subsequent sections.
- **Enhanced Community Well-Being:** A transit system can improve access to essential services, reduce social isolation, support economic development, and contribute to environmental goals by reducing car dependency.

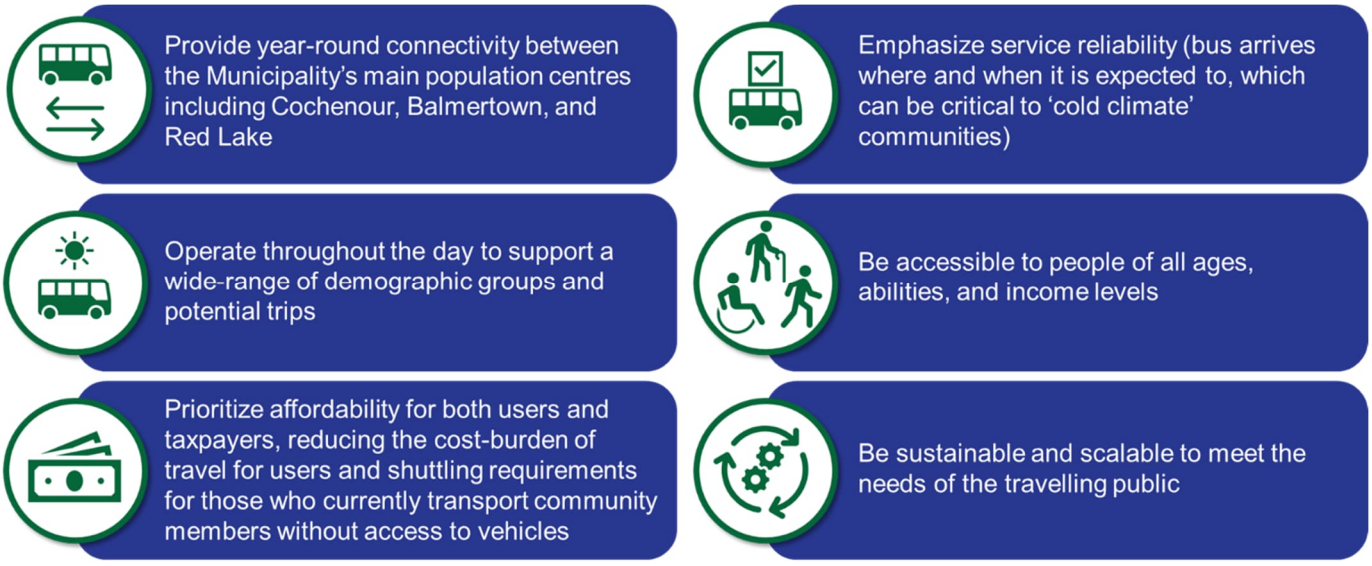
4. Development and Evaluation of Public Transportation Service Options

This section outlines key considerations for public transportation service planning that inform the development of public transportation options and potential service structures. Building on these principles, it introduces the specific service options developed for the Municipality. Each option is then assessed using a Multiple Account Evaluation (MAE) framework to determine its overall suitability and potential effectiveness for the Municipality. The developed options, along with the MAE, were presented to the community during the second Public Open House. Feedback gathered from participants was used to refine the options and inform the final recommendations.

4.1 Transit Vision for Red Lake

Public Transit in Red Lake will provide equitable, reliable, affordable and efficient travel options for the community, supporting access to key amenities for the majority of Red Lake residents.

Transit will be designed to:



4.2 Option Development

4.2.1 Key Considerations

When planning public transportation for a community, several key considerations influence service design and implementation. These include the type of service model, operating periods, vehicle selection and approach to operations and contracting. Each of these factors affect cost, accessibility and overall service quality. For example, service orientation determines whether routes are fixed or flexible, while

operating periods influence convenience for riders. Vehicle type impacts the capacity, and the operations and contracting can affect efficiency, accountability and long-term sustainability. **Table 4-1** below summarizes these considerations and provides examples of options available for each.

Table 4-1: Summary of Considerations for Public Transportation Service Provision

Service Orientation	Periods of Operation	Vehicle Type	Operations and Contracting
• Fixed route • Flex route • OnDemand • Hybrid	• Weekday peak periods only • Weekday midday only • Weekday all day • Weekday evenings • Weekends	• 40 ft “big” bus • Cutaway bus / shuttle • Larger passenger van • Minivan	• Municipal owned and operated • Municipal owned with operations contracted • Vehicles and operations contracted • Full turn-key service

4.2.2 Potential Servicing Options

Based on the principles outlined in **Section 4.2.1**, a variety of service combinations are possible. For the purposes of this study, a set of practical options was developed for the Municipality and evaluated to determine the viability of each. The options developed are summarized in **Table 4-2** and discussed in further detail in this section. For analysis purposes, weekday all-day operations are assumed for all options, except Option 5. Periods of operation are refined in subsequent sections.

Table 4-2: Overview of Potential Public Transportation Options for the Municipality of Red Lake

	Public Transportation Options				
	1: Fixed Route	**2: Traditional OnDemand**	**3: Hybrid**	**4: OnDemand Microtransit**	**5: Community Partnership**
Service Structure	Fixed route between Cochenour and Red Lake	Low tech dial-a-bus and app-based OnDemand available within a defined zone	AM and PM peak fixed-route with midday OnDemand within a defined zone	High tech app-based OnDemand available within a defined zone	Partner with existing community service organizations to leverage existing vehicles in community 1-2 days a week
Period of Operation	**← Weekday All-Day (6am – 7:00pm) →**				Periodic / Based on Availability

4.2.3 Option 1: Fixed Route

Option 1 represents a conventional fixed-route transit system, proposed to operate between Cochenour and Red Lake. The map in

Figure 4-1 illustrates the alignment of the potential route. The service would begin at the Government Docks in Red Lake, travel through Red Lake along Howey Street, then exit the community and travel north along Highway 105 and Highway 125. The route would travel through Balmertown and then proceed along Highway 125 to Cochenour. The route would terminate at the Miss McKenzie II Ferry Dock. This routing alignment provides services to the vast majority of Municipality's population, with most of Red Lake, Balmertown and Cochenour residents and services located within a 5-minute walk (400m radius) of the alignment. Notable exclusions include Madsen, Starratt-Olsen, Kelson's Farm, Rahill Beach, Kinsmen Beach and McMarmac Road. Bus stops along Highway 125 will be available to serve McManus Street, Dellenor and Pickerel Drive.

Figure 4-1: Potential Fixed Route for Option 1

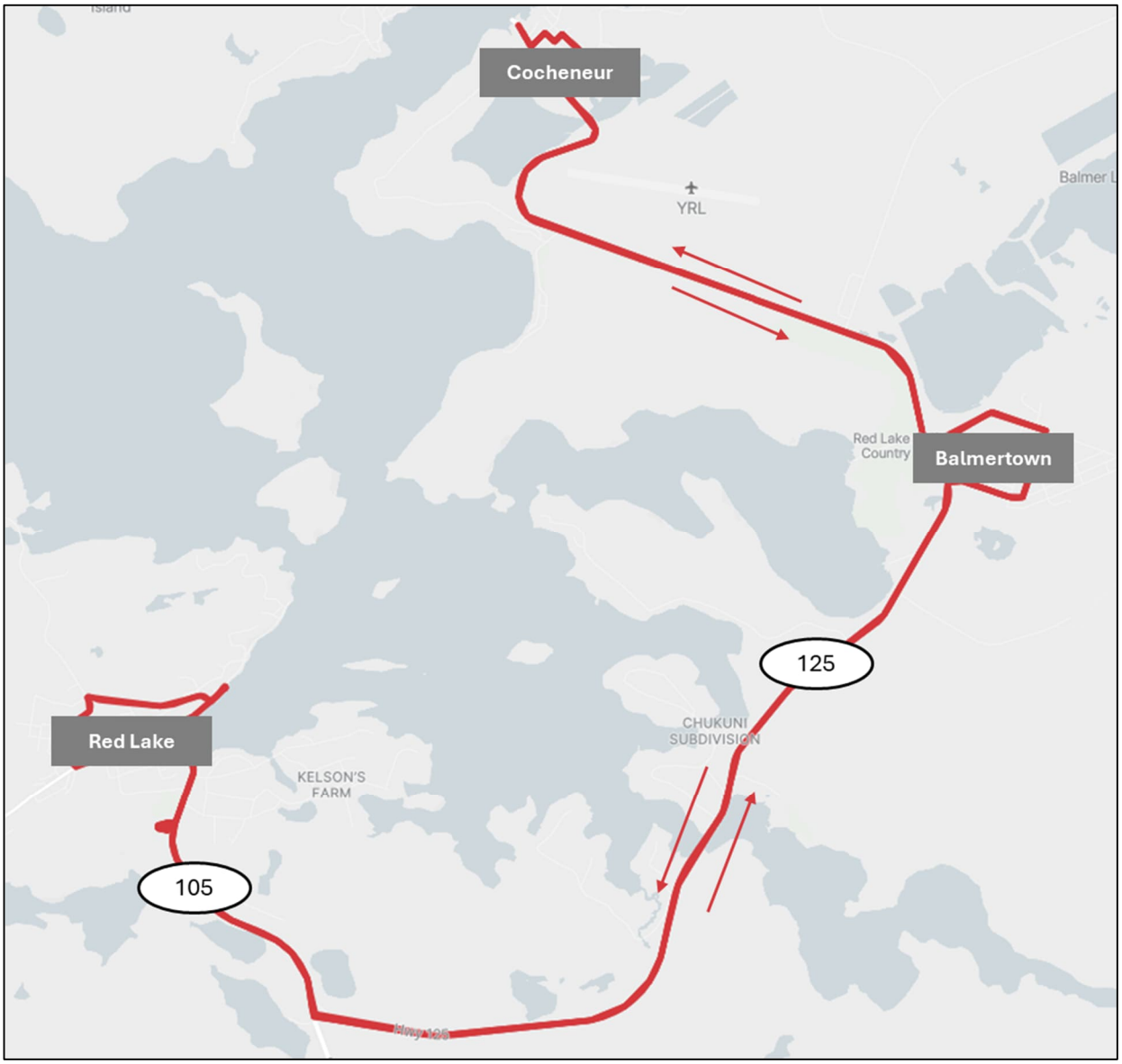


Table 4-3 summarizes the key characteristics for Option 1.

Table 4-3: Summary of Option 1 Characteristics

Vehicle Requirements	Operating Hours	Service Frequency	Key Locations Served
1x active vehicle 1x spare	Weekdays 6:00 AM – 7:00 PM	90 minutes (Estimated 35-minute end to end trip time)	• Ontario Government Building • Red Lake Public Library • Downtown Red Lake

Vehicle Requirements	Operating Hours	Service Frequency	Key Locations Served
			• Centennial Park • Red Lake Highschool • Red Lake Community Centre • Howey Street Corridor • I.G.A • The hospital complex • Downtown Balmertown • The Municipal Office • Cochenour Arena • Miss McKenzie II Ferry Dock

4.2.4 Option 2: Traditional OnDemand

Option 2 introduces a traditional OnDemand service, providing transportation upon request within a designated service area. **Figure 4-2** illustrates the proposed OnDemand zone and its approximate boundaries. Unlike the fixed-route system outlined Option 1, this model offers greater flexibility and coverage, with the potential to serve the entire Municipality, including Madsen, Starratt-Olsen and residential subdivisions located off the main highway.

Routing and travel times will vary based on daily demand. While this model offers a larger coverage area, service reliability is lower because pick-up times may be inconsistent, and some trips may not be able to be accommodated.

Figure 4-2: Option 2 OnDemand Service Zone

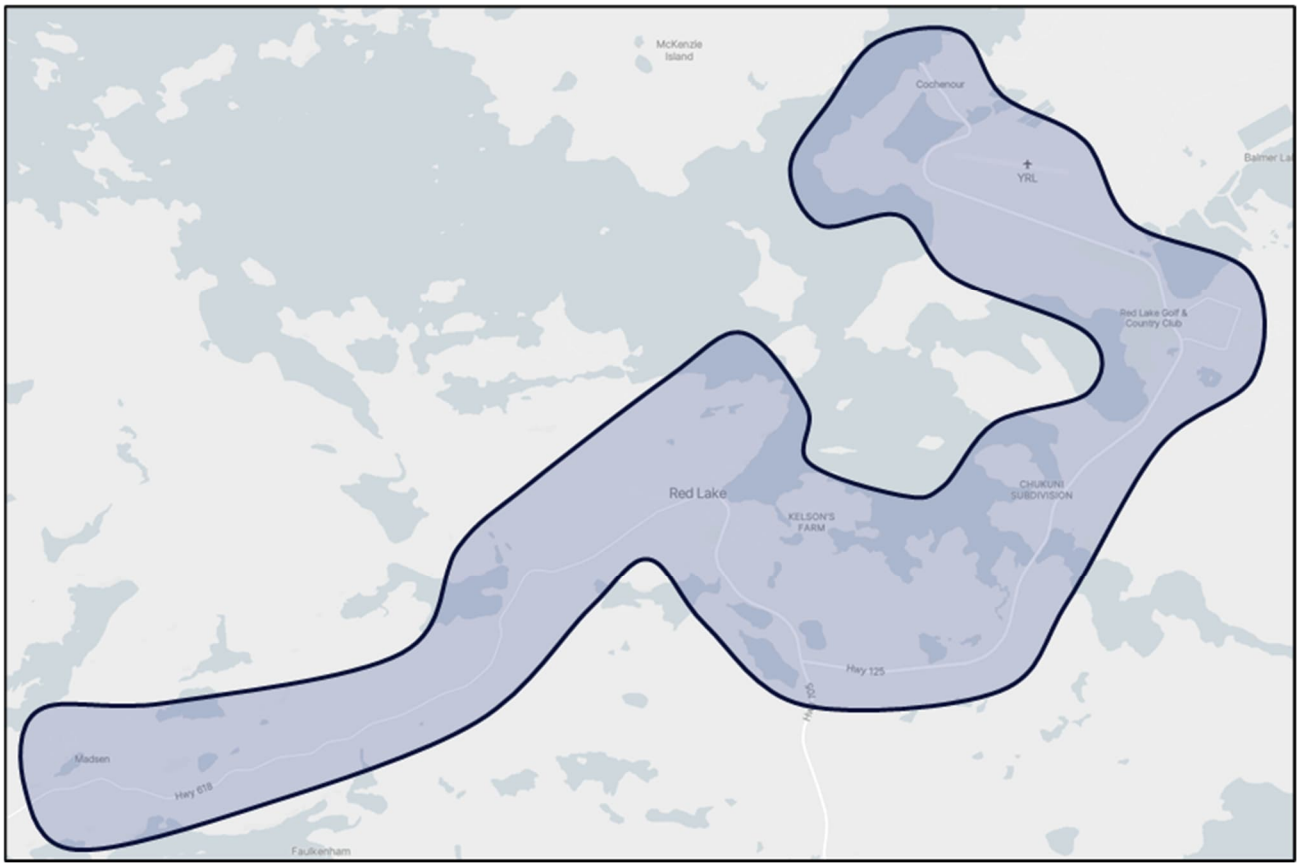


Table 4-4 summarizes the key characteristics for Option 2.

Table 4-4: Summary of Option 2 Characteristics

Vehicle Requirements	Operating Hours	Service Frequency	Key Locations Served
1x active vehicle 1x spare	6:00 AM – 7:00 PM	OnDemand within zone on a first come first serve basis. May require prebooking.	All locations within the OnDemand zone

4.2.5 Option 3: Hybrid

Option 3 is a hybrid approach that combines the strengths of Option 1 and Option 2. It proposes operating the fixed route outlined in **Section 4.2.3** during the morning and afternoon periods. In the morning, this includes two southbound trips spaced 90 minutes apart and one northbound trip. After these morning runs, the service shifts to an OnDemand, first-come, first-served or pre-booking model during the midday. In the afternoon, it reverts back to a fixed route with two northbound trips and one southbound trip. This hybrid model offers the reliability of Option 1 while incorporating the flexibility and broader coverage of the OnDemand service featured in Option 2.

Table 4-5 summarizes the key characteristics for Option 3.

Table 4-5: Summary of Option 3 Characteristics

Vehicle Requirements	Operating Hours	Service Frequency	Key Locations Served
1x active vehicle 1x spare	**Fixed Route:** 6:00 AM – 9:00 AM and 3:45 PM – 7:00 PM **OnDemand:** 10:00 AM – 3:00 PM	**Fixed Route:** 90 minutes **OnDemand:** OnDemand within zone on a first come first serve basis. May require prebooking	**Fixed Route:** • Red Lake • Balmertown • Cochenour **OnDemand:** All locations within the OnDemand zone

4.2.6 Option 4: OnDemand Microtransit

Option 4, OnDemand microtransit provides curb-to-curb service powered by a mobile app, supported by a call centre and advanced routing algorithms designed to minimize the time between service requests and pick-up, giving riders rapid access to transit. The service operates within a broad area, consistent with the coverage presented for Option 2 (**Figure 4-2**).

OnDemand microtransit typically deploys multiple minivans to increase flexibility and reduce wait times. As with traditional OnDemand, routing and travel time vary by time of day. However, the use of modern algorithms and deployment of two vehicles instead of one enhance system responsiveness and further reduce waiting times.

Table 4-6 summarizes the key characteristics for Option 4.

Table 4-6: Summary of Option 4 Characteristics

Vehicle Requirements	Operating Hours	Service Frequency	Key Locations Served
2x active vehicle 1x spare	6:00 AM – 7:00 PM	OnDemand within zone on a first come first serve basis. May require prebooking.	All locations within the OnDemand zone

4.2.7 Option 5: Community Partnership

Option 5 is the community partnership model, where the Municipality partners with a local service organization that has access to a vehicle. The Municipality would cover the cost of a driver, provide

insurance and manage related considerations. The partner organization would supply a vehicle that is currently underutilized.

As this model relies on a shared resource, service delivery would likely be limited to a few days per week rather than daily weekday service, as the vehicle owner likely needs the vehicle for other purposes. Typically, only one vehicle would be available with no backup. If and when the vehicle requires maintenance, the service would need to be temporarily suspended.

Table 4-7 summarizes the key characteristics for option 5.

Table 4-7: Summary of Option 5 Characteristics

Vehicle Requirements	Operating Hours	Service Frequency	Key Locations Served
1x active vehicle	Varies depending on partner organization's availability.	Varies depending on partner organization's availability.	To be determined.

4.3 Option Evaluation

A comprehensive evaluation of the five public transportation options outlined has been completed. This assessment aims to provide an in-depth understanding of each option across core elements:

- Service Performance and Accessibility
- Operational Performance
- Implementation and Scalability
- Cost and Financial Sustainability

To ensure a balanced analysis, a multiple account evaluation (MAE) framework was applied to all options.

Service Performance and Accessibility

This category covers how well the service meets user needs and ensures ease of access. In the MAE we looked at several factors, including:

- Coverage – How much area the service reaches
- Reliability – Consistency and punctuality
- Travel flexibility – Ability to support different trip patterns
- Trip directness – Routes take the most efficient path between origins and destinations minimizing transfer or deviations

Frequency, hours of operation and accessibility were also reviewed as part of the MAE as these factors will affect convenience for all users.

Operational Performance

This category examines how effectively each option can function in practice. In the MAE, we considered estimated annual ridership, which reflects the total number of passengers the system is expected to carry over a year, and vehicles required, which indicates the fleet size needed to deliver the service. Together, these measures provide insight into the resources necessary for operation and help put the potential ridership into context.

Implementation and Scalability

In the MAE, we examined how easily each option can be introduced and expanded overtime. Key considerations included the ease of implementation, which reflects how straightforward it is to launch the service, operating complexity, which indicates the effort required to manage daily operations, and scalability, which measures the ability to grow and adapt the system to meet future demand without major challenges.

Cost and Financial Sustainability

Financial considerations play an important role in evaluating each option. For the MAE, we reviewed capital cost, representing the initial investment required to establish the service, and estimated annual operating cost, which accounts for ongoing expenses to keep the system running. Together, these figures help show whether an option is financially feasible to implement and sustainable overtime.

The MAE which accounts for all categories and criteria as described above is outlined in **Table 4-8.**

Table 4-8: Proposed Option Multiple Account Evaluation

◯ - Very Poor ◔ - Poor ◑ - Moderate ◕ - Good ● – Very good		Option 1: Fixed Route	Option 2: Traditional OnDemand	Option 3: Hybrid (Fixed Route + Traditional OnDemand	Option 4: OnDemand Microtransit	Option 5: Community Partnership
Service Performance & Reliability	**Coverage**	◕	●	●	●	To be determined
	Reliability	●	◔	● / ◔	◕	◯
	Travel Flexibility	◔	●	◔ / ●	●	◯
	Trip Directness	◕	◔	◕ / ◔	●	To be determined
	Frequency	90 minutes	OnDemand	90 minutes / OnDemand	OnDemand	As available
	Periods of Operation	Weekdays 6am – 7pm	Weekdays 6am – 7pm	**Fixed:** Weekdays 6am – 9:30 am **OnDemand:** Weekdays 10am – 3:30pm	Weekdays: 6am – 7pm	1-2 days per week, as available
	Accessibility	●	●	●	●	◯
	Walking Distance to Stop	◕	●	◕ / ●	●	●
Operational Performance	**Estimated Annual Ridership**	10,000	10,000	10,000	30,000	1,000 – 2,000
	Vehicles Required	1 active 1 spare	1 active 1 spare	1 active 1 spare	2 active 1 spare	1 active
Implementation & Scalability	**Ease of Implementation**	◑	◔	◔	●	◕
	Operating Complexity	●	◑	◑	●	◔
	Scalability	●	●	●	●	◯
Cost & Financial Sustainability	**Capital Cost**	$140 – 200k	$140 – 200k	$140 – 200k	$90 – 140k	Negligible
	Estimated Annual Operating Cost	$250 - $300k (Weekday All-Day)	$250 - $300k (Weekday All-Day)	$250 - $300k (Weekday All-Day)	$525 - $575k (Weekday All-Day)	$40 - $80k (1-2 days per week)

The scalability of the options were reviewed in detail. Some options offer greater flexibility for scaling up or down, while other have limited to no scalability. **Table 4-9** summarizes the scalability of each option, including the estimated operating cost impacts.

Table 4-9: Summary of the Scalability for Each Option

	Option 1: Fixed Route	Option 2: Traditional OnDemand	Option 3: Hybrid	Option 4: OnDemand Microtransit	Option 5: Community Partnership
Service Period	**Service Hours (Annual Operating Cost $)**				
1 – 2 Days per Week (8 hours of service)	420 ($40-80k)	420 ($40-80k)	X	X	420 ($40-80k)
Weekday AM and PM Peaks Only	1,900 ($140-170k)	X	X	X	X
Weekday Midday Only	2,000 ($150-175k)	2,000 ($150-175k)	X	X	X
Weekday All-Day	3,400 ($250-300k)	3,400 ($250-300k)	3,400 ($250-300k)	5,200 ($525-575k)	X
Weekday All-Day + Weekend	4,900 ($375-425k)	4,900 ($375-425k)	4,900 ($375-425k)	7,500 ($750-800k)	X

As shown in the table, Option 1 (Fixed Route) offers the greatest scalability. Once vehicles are acquired, service frequency can be adjusted based on available operating resources. Option 2 (Traditional OnDemand) also allows flexibility, but it is less effective for AM and PM peak-only service because short operating windows are not well-suited for travel across a municipality. Option 3 (Hybrid) can only operate either all day on weekdays or all day on weekdays plus weekends, as sufficient time is needed for the system to switch between fixed-route and OnDemand service. For Option 3 (OnDemand Microtransit), providers typically require a minimum level of service. If operations fall below that threshold, deployment is not viable. Finally, Option 5 (Community Partnership) is assumed to involve a single vehicle operating during a limited period. As such, this option does not provide an opportunity to scale-up.

4.4 Round 2 Stakeholder and Community Engagement

The second round of stakeholder and public engagement included one event: the second Public Open House. A total of 18 people attended, with 7 representing stakeholder groups and 11 from the general public. The session focused on presenting findings from the Community Transit Survey conducted during the first round of engagement and introducing the public transportation options that had been developed. Attendees were invited to provide feedback on these options.

4.4.1 Public Open House #2 Findings

Feedback and interest on the five public transportation options presented at the second Public Open House is summarized in **Table 4-10**.

Table 4-10: Summary of Feedback Received on Options Developed

Option	Comments and Feedback
Option 1: Fixed Route	• Three attendees expressed interest for this option • Attendees stated that a morning route would be useful to connect people to employment such as Tim Hortons or places in Balmertown like the Balmertown Food Fair • One attendee asked if there would be a possibility to have a different route in the winter and summer, with summertime stops at beaches • Several attendees noted that many stores and medical services will not open until 8:00-10:00 AM so people are unlikely to take the bus as early as 6:00 AM.
Option 2: Traditional OnDemand	• No responses or comments were received for this option
Option 3: Hybrid (Fixed Route + Traditional OnDemand)	• Two attendees expressed interest in this option • One attendee commented about the desire to include Madsen • Concerns regarding educating the community on how the service works.
Option 4: OnDemand Microtransit	• Three attendees expressed interest for this option
Option 5: Community Partnerships	• No responses or comments were received for this option

Comments were also received by email following the event and are included in this table

5. Recommendations

This chapter presents the recommendations for the implementation of public transportation in the Municipality. These recommendations are based on the option development, evaluation and feedback gathered through stakeholder and community engagement as presented in **Section 4**. The goal is to identify the most practical service model for the context of the Municipality, considering community needs, operational feasibility and financial sustainability. The recommendations are intended to provide a clear direction for initiating public transit services and outline considerations for future expansion as demand grows.

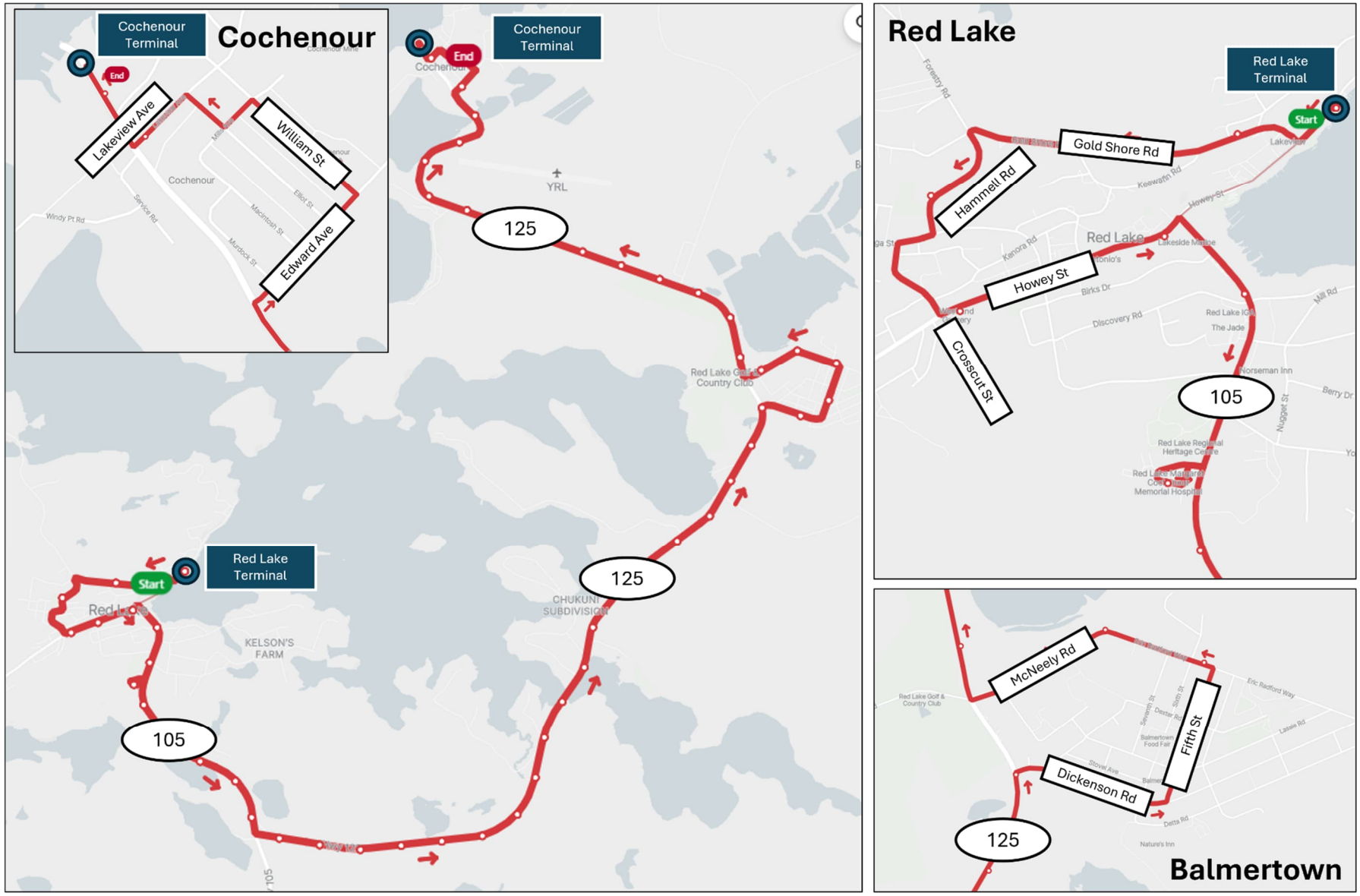
5.1 Recommended Solution

Following a detailed review and incorporating input from the public, **Option 1 – Fixed Route** is selected as the preferred implementation alternative for Red Lake. A fixed route is well oriented toward connecting the Municipality's primary population centres while providing appropriate coverage to the vast majority of residents. It is also most closely aligned with the public's top two priorities for transit: connectivity between communities and reliability. It also best aligns with public preferences: 49% of respondents favoured fixed-route transit while 27% expressed a preference for on-demand (24% noted no preference).

Fixed-route systems are operationally less complex than on-demand or pre-booked alternatives, which require customers to indicate their intention to travel through a smartphone app or by calling for service. Further, fixed-route systems have the greatest potential for scalability, with services being able to be scaled up or down based-on demand requirements and funding availability.

A single fully accessible route operating between Cochenour Ferry terminal and Downtown Red Lake is recommended, as displayed in **Figure 5-1.** The route is designed to travel mainly along the Highway 125 corridor with area deviations within each of the communities.

Figure 5-1: System Map



Within Cochenour, the route will travel along Lakeview Avenue, Mills Avenue, William Street (serving Cochenour Arena), and Edward Avenue. Between Cochenour and Balmertown stops will be provided on the highway at the airport, Rahill Beach Road, Nungasser Road, and McNeely Road.

The route will then continue through Balmertown along McNeely Road, Fifth Street (access to Balmertown Library, Municipal Office, shops and services), and Dickenson Road before returning to Highway 125. Between Balmertown and Red Lake, highway stops will be provided at Pickerel Drive-Bennett Drive, Huston Place, and at the Highway 125/Highway 105 junction.

Within Red Lake, the route will travel along Highway 105 (stops near Hughes Crescent-Tim Hortons, Red Lake Hospital / Regional Heritage Centre, Centennial Park and nearby shops, Seaplane Base) and Howey Street with stops Downtown, ultimately terminating at the existing vehicle turnaround at Government Dock across from the Red Lake Indian Friendship Centre. Return trips will route via Gold Shore Road, Hammell Road, Hasaga Street, Crosscut Street and Howey Street to return to Highway 105.

The route is 42 km in both directions and will require two termini: one at the existing vehicle turnaround at Government Dock in Red Lake and the second at the Cochenour Ferry Dock.

Frequency

Bus frequency (how often bus trips occur) is a function of operating characteristics (route distance, average operating speed, available vehicles), available funding, and ridership. Due to operating characteristics, a maximum trip frequency of 90 minutes is possible with one active vehicle. A 90-minute service frequency is recommended for Red Lake's transit system as it balances demands for all-day service against financial and staffing realities that would be further strained if two or more vehicles were to be operated concurrently. A 90-minute frequency provides scheduling certainty for users (buses either depart Cochenour Ferry terminal at 15 or 45 minutes after the hour), while providing adequate time intervals between trips for errands, services, or appointments.

Functionally, 90-minute frequencies leave customers travelling to Red Lake with approximately 15 minutes in town between inbound and the next outbound trips, or 105 minutes to the following outbound trip, enabling time for shopping and errands prior to return.

Periods of Operation

The community survey indicates demand for service across a range of potential service periods. To address this range in demand for travel, it is recommended that service be operated on weekdays between 7:30 am and 6:00 pm. Weekday evening and weekend service can be evaluated in future phases and would not require any additional vehicles. The recommended periods of operation correspond to the primary stated intentions of survey respondents including access to groceries/shopping, recreational amenities, medical appointments, work and school, visiting family or friends, and accessing social services. Periods of operation align with service provided in peer municipalities including Elliot Lake, Kenora, Penetanguishene, and Prince Edward County.

A draft schedule based on the above characteristics has been prepared and is included in **Figure 5-2.** For seven round trips of 90 minutes, the recommended schedule requires approximately 10.5 revenue service hours per weekday or approximately 2,650 annually.

Figure 5-2: Draft Service Schedule

07:30 – 16:30 · Every 90 min · 14 trips (7 Inbound, 7 Outbound)

Days	Pattern	Runtime	1	13	18	1	2
M - F	A	35 min	07:30	07:31	07:44	08:02	08:03	08:05
M - F	A	35 min	09:00	09:01	09:14	09:32	09:33	09:35
M - F	A	35 min	10:30	10:31	10:44	11:02	11:03	11:05
M - F	A	35 min	12:00	12:01	12:14	12:32	12:33	12:35
M - F	A	35 min	13:30	13:31	13:44	14:02	14:03	14:05
M - F	A	35 min	15:00	15:01	15:14	15:32	15:33	15:35
M - F	A	35 min	16:30	16:31	16:44	17:02	17:03	17:05

+ Window + Trips

Days	Pattern	Runtime	5	1	18	12	1
M - F	A	37 min	08:15	08:20	08:21	08:39	08:51	08:52
M - F	A	37 min	09:45	09:50	09:51	10:09	10:21	10:22
M - F	A	37 min	11:15	11:20	11:21	11:39	11:51	11:52
M - F	A	37 min	12:45	12:50	12:51	13:09	13:21	13:22
M - F	A	37 min	14:15	14:20	14:21	14:39	14:51	14:52
M - F	A	37 min	15:45	15:50	15:51	16:09	16:21	16:22
M - F	A	37 min	17:15	17:20	17:21	17:39	17:51	17:52

5.2 Ridership Projections

Annual ridership projections are estimated based on hourly utilization averages from peer community systems. Projections for Red Lake are provided in **Table 5-1** and represent stable state conditions. Between 11 and 27 rides are anticipated each weekday, resulting in an annual ridership projection of between 2,770 and 6,800. Stable ridership will take time to build as potential clientele become familiar with the new transit offering and adjust their travel behaviours accordingly, which may take a period of up to 1 to 2 years.

Table 5-1: Red Lake Transit Ridership Projections

	Low	High
Rides per Service Hour (average)	1.0	2.5
Rides per Weekday	11	27
Annual Ridership Projection	2,770	6,800

5.3 Vehicle Requirements

1 active vehicle (+1 spare vehicle) is required to provide the service as described. A spare vehicle is essential to the reliable functioning of any transit system. All vehicles require periodic maintenance and servicing and can occasionally break down (or need to be transported to a larger community to address a major repair).

When both vehicles are available, the vehicle in service should be alternated daily or weekly based on a predetermined schedule to spread regular wear-and-tear.

Vehicle Type

Public transit service can be provided using a range of different vehicle options: from 40 and 60-foot “big” buses to minivans. Vehicles must be able to accommodate projected ridership demand and be fully accessible to all clientele.

Assuming a quarter of all daily rides take place on a single trip at the high total ridership projection of 27 rides per day, a vehicle must be able to accommodate – at minimum – 7 passengers at any given time. Given these constraints, a **Ford Transit full-sized van or similarly sized vehicle** is most appropriate for use for Red Lake. Vehicles of this type typically accommodate up to 15 people and can be rendered 100% wheelchair accessible.

Including relevant customization to support full accessibility, vehicles of this type retails for $70 – $100,000. Two vehicles are required.

Diesel or gas vehicles are recommended at this stage (in lieu of fully electric equivalents) due to concerns around vehicle range and Red Lake’s climate. The fully electric Ford E-Transit van, for example, has an effective battery range of ~200 km. Assuming all 7 daily trips take place in the same vehicle, the vehicle would need to travel approximately 290 km daily, exceeding the range of the electric vehicle alternative.

5.4 Supporting Infrastructure

Supporting infrastructure may include bus stops, bus stop amenities, parallel or connecting sidewalks or alternate active transportation facilities, and lighting. Recommended supporting infrastructure includes:

- Upgrades to each terminal (2 in total) to provide the following amenities:
    - Bus shelter
    - Bench
    - Bus stop identification poll
- Operator washroom facility at one of two terminals (or an agreement with an adjacent property allowing operator washroom usage);
- Paved bus stop pads and sidewalk extensions at primary stops for accessibility purposes;
- In addition to terminals, enhanced stop amenities (bus shelter, bench) are assumed at:
    - Cochenour Arena
    - Downtown Balmertown
    - Red Lake Hospital
    - Centennial Park / Howey Bay Road
- A new sidewalk along southwest Highway 105 from Howey Street to the hospital[2]

Stops along Highway 125 are assumed to function on a flag-stop basis.

Intercommunity connectivity and transit usage can additionally be bolstered through the construction of a multi-use path along Highway 125 between Cochenour and Red Lake with the greatest value being the segment between Balmertown and Red Lake. These improvements are not considered core to the transit offering and are not carried forward to costing.

5.5 Staffing

The system as described would require 2 operators at 0.75 FTE and 1 administrator responsible for marketing, issue/complaint resolution, and coordination at 0.5 FTE. According to Provincial legislation, a Commercial Vehicle Operators Registration is required for buses with a seating capacity of 10 or more passengers.

5.6 Service Delivery

It is recommended that the Municipality enter into negotiations with a third-party contractor to operate and manage transit services. The third-party contractor would be responsible for staffing, ongoing vehicle maintenance, and management of daily operations including fare collection, monitoring

[2] A new continuous sidewalk along the southwest side of Highway 105 is proposed to provide access to bus stops. A more localized alternative could be pursued in lieu consisting of a short sidewalk and bus stop pad along the westside of Highway 105 between Discovery Road and Howey Bay Road only (~95 m).

cleanliness and state-of-good-repair of vehicles in operation, as well as responding to issues to support drivers and customers. While the municipality would not be required to operate or maintain fleet vehicles under this model, it is advised that the Municipality assign an employee as a primary point of contact with the contractor to streamline communications and management. This delivery method leverages contractor knowledge and expertise and minimizes Municipal responsibilities for staffing and maintenance.

To leverage available capital grants, it is recommended that the Municipality own the vehicles, thereby lowering ongoing contractor fees. Alternately, if transit is trialled as a pilot project, consideration could be given to additionally contracting vehicle provision to a third-party operator, which reduces upfront costs and risk to the Municipality.

Provision of supporting infrastructure such as sidewalks and shelters would remain the responsibility of the Municipality.

5.7 Phasing Considerations

A fixed-route system can be scaled up or down depending on demand and available resources. To ensure the service is responsive to community needs, a monitoring review should be conducted approximately one year after implementation. The review should include the following:

- A ridership analysis to assess usage and system performance.
- A community and rider survey to gather feedback from riders.
- Adjustments to routing and service hours based on findings to improve convenience and efficiency.

Future phasing could include the addition of weekday evening, Saturday, or Sunday service, which would not require additional fleet. Improving trip frequencies to a trip every 45 – 60 minutes would require either (1) route shortening to exclude Cochenour or (2) additional fleet and concurrent service hours (two buses in operation at the same time).

Over the longer-term, the Municipality could evaluate the feasibility of introducing OnDemand microtransit service, which was examined as Option 4. This delivery model could be explored if there is sufficient demand to justify investment.

6. Financial Considerations

6.1 Fare Structure

Adult base fare is recommended at $5.00 per ride, which is in line with peer communities and reflective of the inter-community nature of the proposed system. Most peer transit systems offer discounts for seniors and/or youth, representing 60-80% of base far cost. Additionally, discounted multi-trip tickets or monthly pass offerings are offered to encourage frequent usage. The Municipality is encouraged to explore these fare discount options when determining its pricing structure.

6.2 Capital and Operating Costs

6.2.1 Capital Costs

Estimated capital costs are included in **Table 6-1**. Capital costs include vehicle acquisition ($170,000) and supporting infrastructure ($460,000), which combined is $630,000.

Table 6-1: Estimated Capital Costs

Item	Units	# Of Units	Unit Cost	Total Per Item ($)
VEHICLES				
Passenger Van (Gasoline or Diesel)	Vehicles	2	$85,000	$170,000
SUPPORTING INFRASTRUCTURE				
Bus Stop Landing Pad		20	$2,000	$40,000
Bus Shelter and Bench		9	$8,000	$72,000
Localized Sidewalk Extension[3]	km	0.8	$435,000	$348,000
TOTAL				**$630,000**

6.2.2 Annual Operating Costs

Annual operating costs include fuel, regular maintenance, and labour and are estimated based on annual service provision and a typical all-inclusive hourly rate, indexed to peer systems. Based on the recommended service level, annual operating costs are estimated at around $238,000 (see **Table 6-2**).

[3] Assumes construction of a full sidewalk along the southwestern side of Highway 105 between Howey Street and the hospital. More limited alternatives could be considered, such as a 90m sidewalk between Discovery Road and Howey Bay Road, if costs are prohibitive.

As costs are directly tied to servicing, operating costs can be lowered by pursuing a more limited service pattern.

Table 6-2: Annual Operating Costs

Annual Service Hours	2,646
Cost per Service Hour	$95
Annual Operating Cost Estimate	$238,000

6.2.3 Financial Performance

Table 6-3 compares key financial metrics under low and high ridership projection scenarios, detailing expected revenue and operating costs for each case. The annual net operating cost of transit, as described, is anticipated as between $180,000 and $200,150, with a resulting cost per capita of between $43.96 and $48.88.

Table 6-3: Financial Performance

	Low	High
Ridership Projection	**2,770**	**6,800**
Total Annual Revenue	$13,850	$34,000
Operating Cost	$214,000	$214,000
Net Operating Cost	$200,150	$180,000
Cost Recovery	**7%**	**19%**
Cost per Capita	$48.88	$43.96

6.3 Funding Opportunities

Securing necessary funding is essential for implementing and sustaining a public transit service. Municipalities have the potential to draw on various funding sources to cover capital and ongoing operation costs. There are potential funding sources provided by federal and provincial programs. Leveraging these resources could aid in supporting both the implementation and long-term viability of public transit in the Municipality.

6.3.1 Canada Public Transit Fund

The Canada Public Transit Fund (CPTF) is a major federal program introduced in 2024 to enhance public transit and active transportation infrastructure nationwide. Starting 2026-2027, the CPTF will deliver $3 billion annually in stable, predictable funding, enabling municipalities to plan and implement

long-term transit projects with confidence. It will address diverse needs of communities across the country including large metropolitan areas, smaller municipalities, and rural, remote, northern and indigenous communities. CPTF funding will be allocated through three different streams as outlined in **Table 6-4**.

Table 6-4: Summary of CPTF Funding Streams

Funding Stream	Purpose of Stream	Process and Eligibility
Metro-Region Agreements (MRAS)	• Targets large urban areas with high transit demand and cross-boundary travel • Promotes integrated regional planning linking transit, housing and land use. • Supports major projects such as subway expansions, dedicated bus lanes and system maintenance	**Process:** 1. Expression of interest (EOI): Metro-regions signal readiness 2. Integrated Regional Plan (IRP): Outlines 10-year investment strategy 3. Metro-Region Agreement: Formal long-term funding commitment 4. Project Funding Applications and Contribution Agreements: For specific projects **Eligibility:** • Must include provincial governments and regional entities responsible for transit, housing and land use
Baseline Funding	• Support communities with existing public transit systems • Provides $500 million annually for communities with existing transit systems • Focuses on routine investments, system expansion, rehabilitation, and planning	**Eligibility:** • Provide three to five years of historical ridership, population served and capital investment data • Existing public transit system includes fixed route service • Have a minimum average historical investment of $100,000 annually • Have a minimum annual ridership of 30,000

Funding Stream	Purpose of Stream	Process and Eligibility
Targeted Funding	• Provides regular opportunities for specific public transit and active transportation projects. • Supports initiatives such as rural transit, school transportation and active travel infrastructure	**Process:** • Different programming offered under this stream with varying requirements. • Current programming includes: Rural Transit Solutions Fund, Zero Emissions Transit Fund and Active Transportation Fund

Communities seeking CPTF funding must implement measures to unlock housing supply near transit, enabling faster and more affordable home construction.

6.3.2 Rural Transit Solutions Fund

The Rural Transit Solutions Fund (RTSF) provides financial support to develop and expand locally driven transit services in rural, remote, indigenous and Northern communities. Its goal is to improve access to essential services, employment, education and social connections.

The RTSF supports a range of transit models including:

- Fixed route services
- OnDemand transit
- Micromobility options (e.g. e-bikes)

Under the Capital Stream, applicants may receive up to $10 million for eligible capital assets such as vehicles and infrastructure. Eligible capital costs include:

- Vehicles (buses, vans, zero-emission vehicles)
- Infrastructure (shelter, signage)
- Accessibility features
- Professional service fees
- Active transportation components (e.g. short walking/bike paths, bike racks, lighting)
- Micromobility (e-bikes, charging stations as part of larger transit projects)
- Start-up costs

To qualify, applicants must complete a feasibility study analysing community characteristics such as geography, population, and economic conditions to ensure the project is realistic and financially sustainable. **The feasibility study you are reading satisfies this objective.** Projects must also meet at least one of the following objectives:

1. Increase transit use relative to car travel
2. Contribute to climate change mitigation and resilience
3. Improve transit options for all, especially equity deserving groups

Additional application requirements are outlined in **Table 6-5**.

Table 6-5: Summary of RTSF Application Requirements

Requirements for Applications	Details Required
Project details	• Project rationale explaining how the project is supporting the objective of the RTSF and why the project is needed • List of the type and quantity of assets that will be purchased • Explanation of if/how the project will include reducing green house gas emissions and/or mitigate impacts of climate change • Estimates on how the project will improve public transit, notably ridership
Project finances	• The federal funding being requested • The organization's financial contribution • Other sources of funding, including in-kind contributions and partner funding
Cost estimates on assets applicants plan to acquire	• Quantity and type of each asset • Cost for acquiring assets • Cost to meet regulatory requirements • Cost of operations and maintenance • Cost relating to consulting or engagement with Indigenous peoples

6.3.3 Ontario Transit Investment Fund

The Ontario Transit Investment Fund (OTIF) provides $5 million annually to support local and intercommunity transportation projects in areas that lack adequate service, with a focus on rural communities. OTIF offers time limited, application-based funding for up to five years, helping municipalities and organizations launch and expand transit services across the province. Through this program the province is aiming to ensure communities have the resources needed to develop safe, reliable and sustainable transit options.

To qualify for the OTIF, projects must address an existing transit service gap within the community. This includes introducing new services that will close a demonstrated transit gap. Funding is available for operating and capital expenses, including items outlined in **Table 6-6**. Any additional costs will require Ministry approval. Expenses already covered by other funding programs are not eligible under this fund.

Table 6-6: Expenditures Eligible for Funding by OTIF

Type	Expenditures included
Operating Costs	• Administration costs (including salaries and benefits) • Consulting and professional services • Driver training/wages/benefits • Marketing • Transportation services including contracted transportation services
Capital Costs	• Vehicle purchase or lease (buses, vans, e-scooters, e-bikes) • Capital expenditures that provide improvements to public transportation security and passenger safety (bus shelters, accessibility modifications

The application form for OTIF will require information and documentation as outlined in **Table 6-7**.

Table 6-7: Required Information for the OTIF Application

Documentation / Information Required	Description
Needs Analysis and Project Details	Outline the proposed project, current transit conditions, community needs assessment and equity considerations.

Documentation / Information Required	Description
Partnerships and Integration	Contact information, roles and responsibilities of all project team members.
Budget and Funding	Present an overview of anticipated expenditures and funding sources for the program duration.
Sustainability	Explanation of how the project team will maintain service beyond OTIF funding.
Risks and Mitigation Tactics	Identify potential project risks and outline strategies the team will use to mitigate them.
Map of Proposed Service Area	Map showing proposed routes and stop locations as well as multimodal connections (e.g. overlapping nearby airport or ferry services), First Nation reserves, hospitals and post-secondary institutions.
Planning Materials	Planning documents such as feasibility studies and surveys that informed the development of the proposed project.
Collaboration Framework	Framework outlining roles and responsibilities of all project team members throughout the project and a Memorandum of Understanding.

6.3.4 Ontario Gas Tax Funding

The Ontario Gas Tax program, launched in 2004, allocates two cents from every litre of gasoline sold to support public transit improvements. This funding helps municipalities expand transit infrastructure, enhance service levels and ultimately increase ridership.

Municipalities must use Gas Tax funds for expenses that directly contribute to ridership growth and are incremental to existing transit spending. This program is particularly beneficial for smaller municipalities looking to establish or improve transit.

Funding distribution is based on a formula: 70% ridership and 30% population, using data from the Canadian Urban Transit Association (CUTA) or Ontario Public Transit Association (OPTA) Fact Books and population estimates from the Canadian Census. Allocation cannot exceed 75% of a municipality's own transit spending, which includes passenger revenues, donations, and municipal contributions to operating capital costs reported to CUTA or OPTA. If a municipality reduces its transit spending, its Gas Tax allocation may be reduced on the following program year.

Municipalities that do not currently provide transit service but plan to start may qualify if they:

- Pass a municipal by-law confirming intent and financial commitment to annual funding support
- Launch a new system or confirm financial support within the program year (allocations may be pro-rated for mid-year entry)

The Gas Tax can support the following eligible expenditures:

- Operating costs
- Capital investments that increase transit ridership
- Replacement of transit vehicles
- Improvements to transit security and passenger safety
- Major refurbishment of fully accessible or soon to be accessible transit vehicles

Municipalities are responsible for initiating inquiries to become Gas Tax recipients.

7. Implementation

Provided Council decides to move forward, a draft implementation schedule is provided in **Table 7-1,** pending Council approval.

Table 7-1: Draft Implementation Schedule

Activities	Q4 2025	Q1 2026	Q2 2026	Q3 2026	Q4 2026	Q1 2027	Q2 2027	Q3 2027
Council Endorsement								
Funding Applications								
Service Procurement								
Contract Award								
Marketing and Education								
Service Launch								

7.1 Marketing, Education and Monitoring

Successful implementation of a new transit system will require strong communication and ongoing evaluation to ensure it is meeting community needs. Marketing and public education helps residents understand how to use the system, the routing and schedule as well as benefits of using public transit.

When first introducing a public transit system to the Municipality, clear communication and outreach are essential to build awareness and encourage ridership. The Municipality should develop a focused marketing and education plan that explains the service, schedule, fare structure and accessibility features in simple terms. Steps may include the creation of a dedicated webpage, posting updates on social media and distributing printed materials such as brochures and posters at key community locations. Additionally, providing pop-ups at community events and festivals can help reach a broader audience.

Public education should include guidance on how to plan trips, pay fares and access the service safely. Outreach efforts should target seniors, students, persons with disabilities and the vulnerable population to ensure equitable access. These activities should begin before the service launch and continue during initial months to support adoption.

7.2 Monitoring

Monitoring is essential to assess the performance of the new transit system and to determine whether adjustments or service changes are needed. The municipality should establish a structured monitoring framework that includes both quantitative and qualitative measures. Key indicators should include:

- **Ridership Levels:** Track daily and weekly passenger counts and boarding locations to understand demand patterns and identify peak activity times.
- **On-Time Performance:** Measure schedule adherence to ensure reliability and identify operational issues.
- **Customer Feedback:** Collect input through surveys to gauge the satisfaction of the community, identify areas for improvement, and evaluate additional prospective periods of operation.
- **Cost and Revenue Analysis:** Monitor operating costs against fare revenue to evaluate financial sustainability.
- **Safety and Accessibility Compliance:** Review safety performance and accessibility standards to ensure all riders can use the service comfortably.

Steps to implement monitoring include installing data collection systems that count boardings and setting up regular reporting. Findings should be used to guide adjustments such as potential route changes, schedule modifications or service expansion. If ridership remains low or costs exceed projections, the Municipality can consider scaling back the service. On the other hand, strong demand may justify adding stops, increasing frequency or expanding the route. Continuous monitoring ensures the service remains responsive to community needs while remaining financially viable.

Monitoring should be conducted after a ramp-up period of at least 1 year to allow time for travel patterns to adjust to the new service.

Appendix A:

Stakeholder and Community Engagement Summary

Municipality of Red Lake
Transit Feasibility Study

Stakeholder and Community Engagement Summary

Table of contents

1. Introduction

This Consultation and Engagement Summary Report provides an overview of the public and stakeholder engagement activities undertaken as part of the Municipality of Red Lake Transit Feasibility Study. The report outlines the objectives of consultation and engagement, describes the process followed, defines the scope of participation and summarizes the feedback collected during each phase.

This section provides details who was consulted and provides an overview of the timelines and activities associated with each stage of the process.

1.1 Who was Consulted

The consultation and engagement plan was designed with the intention of exchanging ideas with the following audiences:

- **Stakeholder Group:** From the outset of the study, a select group of representatives from key organizations were engaged to provide insights for the planning process. This includes Municipal staff and key organizations that provide services in the community.
    - Red Lake Indian Friendship Centre
    - Community Support Services
    - Harmony Centre for Community Living
    - Northwestern Health Unit
    - Age Friendly Program
    - New Starts Women Shelter
    - Red Lake Family Health Team
    - Firefly
    - Community Counselling and Addiction Services
    - Canadian Mental Health Association
    - OPP
    - KDSB
    - Red Lake Taxi Cabs Inc
- **General Public:** Residents and community members of the Municipality of Red Lake helped provide insights on existing travel barriers and ideas of what they would like to see incorporated into a potential public transportation system in the Municipality.

1.2 Overview of Consultation

As part of the engagement and consultation program developed or the Transit Feasibility Study, in person and virtual methods were utilized. These included open houses, workshops and an online survey designed to accommodate diverse needs and preferences. approach enabled the collection of a wide range of perspectives and insights. The engagement process was carried out in two phases as described below.

1.2.1 Description of Phases

Phase 1

The focus of this phase was to develop a deeper understanding of the existing conditions, barriers and opportunities. Key engagement activities during this phase included a Stakeholder Engagement Session, Public Open House #1 and a Community Transit Survey.

Phase 2

The second round of engagement focused on developing and evaluating transit service options that could potentially be implemented to serve the Municipality. Input from stakeholders and the public helped shape the recommended public transit option. The key activity for this phase was virtual Public Open House #2.

1.2.2 Timetable of Consultation

The consultation process held the following meetings and activities outlined in **Table 1-1**.

Table 1-1: Overview of Consultation and Engagement Activities

Meeting	Format	Date
Stakeholder Workshop	In-person	September 25, 2025
Public Open House #1	In-person	September 25, 2025
Community Transit Survey	Virtual and In-person	September 25, 2025 – October 10, 2025
Public Open House #2	Virtual	November 18, 2025

2. Phase 1 – Understanding the Community and Existing Conditions

As part of the first round of stakeholder and community engagement, community organisations, Municipal staff and the public were consulted to gain a deeper understanding of travel behaviour and overall expectations for a public transportation system that will operate within the Municipality of Red Lake. Feedback was gathered through a Community Transit Survey (completed by 312 participants) Stakeholder Workshop (12 attendees) and the first Public Open House (24 attendees). A summary of the key feedback and findings is provided in this section.

2.1.1 What We Heard

The comments and feedback received during both the Stakeholder Workshop and Public Open House #1 were grouped into key themes as and are outlined in **Table 2-1**.

Table 2-1: Summary of Stakeholder and Public Engagement Findings

Theme	Key Comments and Feedback
Existing barriers that limit community members' ability to travel within the Municipality	• Limited operators for services like the taxi • High cost of taxi making the service inaccessible to the vulnerable population • Destinations are spaced out within the community • Large distance between the various communities within the Municipality • Not enough transportation operators and lack of vehicle maintenance • Weather conditions such as heavy snowfall pose challenges for those travelling • Lack of active transportation infrastructure such as sidewalks and bike lanes • No street lighting posing safety concerns at night • No access to personal vehicle

Theme	Key Comments and Feedback
Key locations a public transportation service should serve	• Grocery stores (Balmertown Food Fair, I.G.A etc.) • Cochenour Arena • Red Lake Recreation Centre • Red Lake High School • Red Lake Medical Centre / Pharmacy • The post office • The airport • Banks • Service Ontario • Beaches • The golf course
Who would benefit most from public transportation	• The vulnerable population • Youth • Seniors, especially those who can no longer drive • Persons with disabilities • Foreign workers • Those looking to access healthcare • Businesses and employers
Potential barriers to public transportation usage	• Using public transportation is not as convenient as driving personal vehicles • Cost to use the service • The transit service may not provide access to certain desired destinations • Lack of reliable service • Long wait time for buses • Bus stop locations may be too far from desired destinations • If the service doesn't operate at desirable and useful times

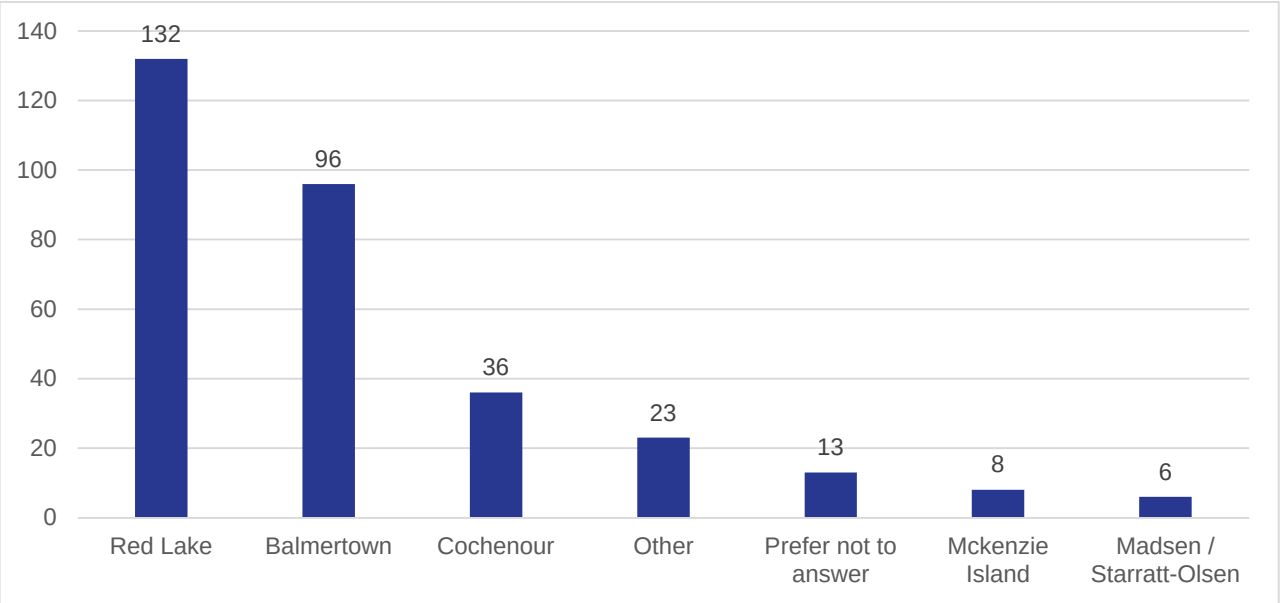
Theme	Key Comments and Feedback
	• Winter conditions such as heavy snow fall that may prohibit walking to bus stops • Lack of cell phones and technology barriers (for booking OnDemand type services) • Mobility challenges that may prohibit use of transit
Vision of a successful public transportation system	• Fully accessible system • A system that serves a diverse population during peak hours, midday and times when there is high levels of activity in the Municipality • Safe, comfortable, consistent, reliable and clean system • Environmentally sustainable

2.1.2 Community Transit Survey Results

A community transit survey consisting of 22 questions was conducted, from September 25 to October 10, 2025. The survey was offered in both hardcopy and online formats to maximize community participation. In total, 312 responses were received, including 39 hardcopy submissions and 273 online. A summary of the key findings is presented below, with full survey results provided in at the end of the document.

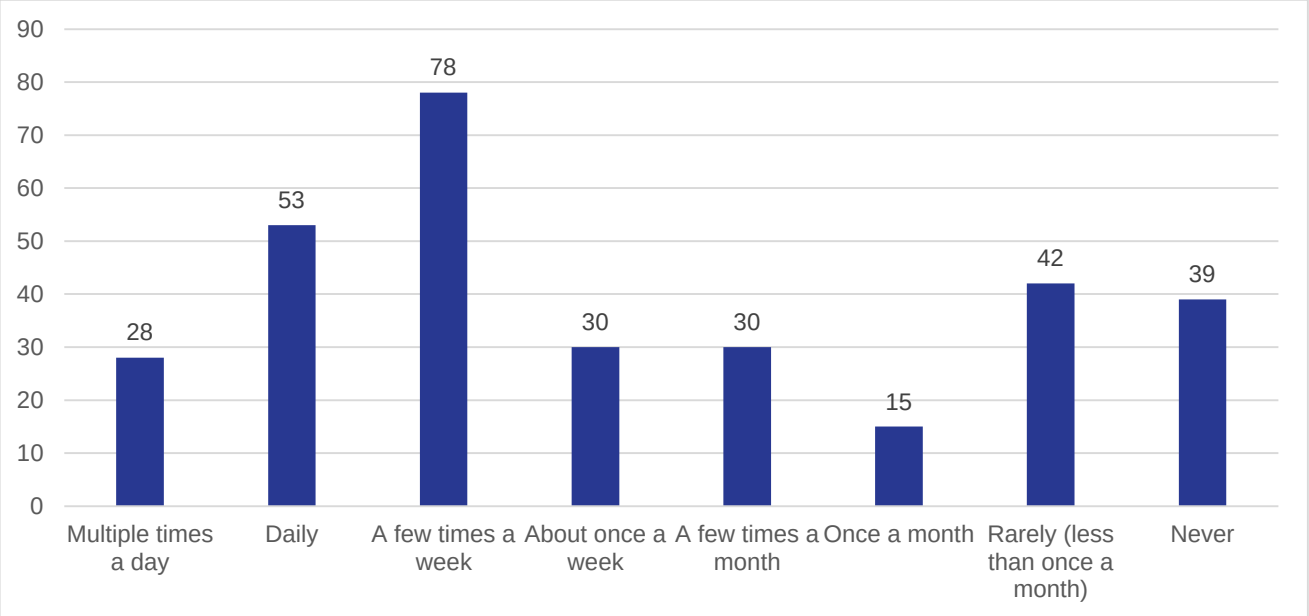
A large majority of survey respondents reside in Red Lake or Balmertown. However, there was also meaningful participation from other parts of the community including Cochenour, McKenzie Island, and Madsen/Staratt Olsen, as illustrated in **Figure 2-1**.

Figure 2-1: What Community Respondents Reside in



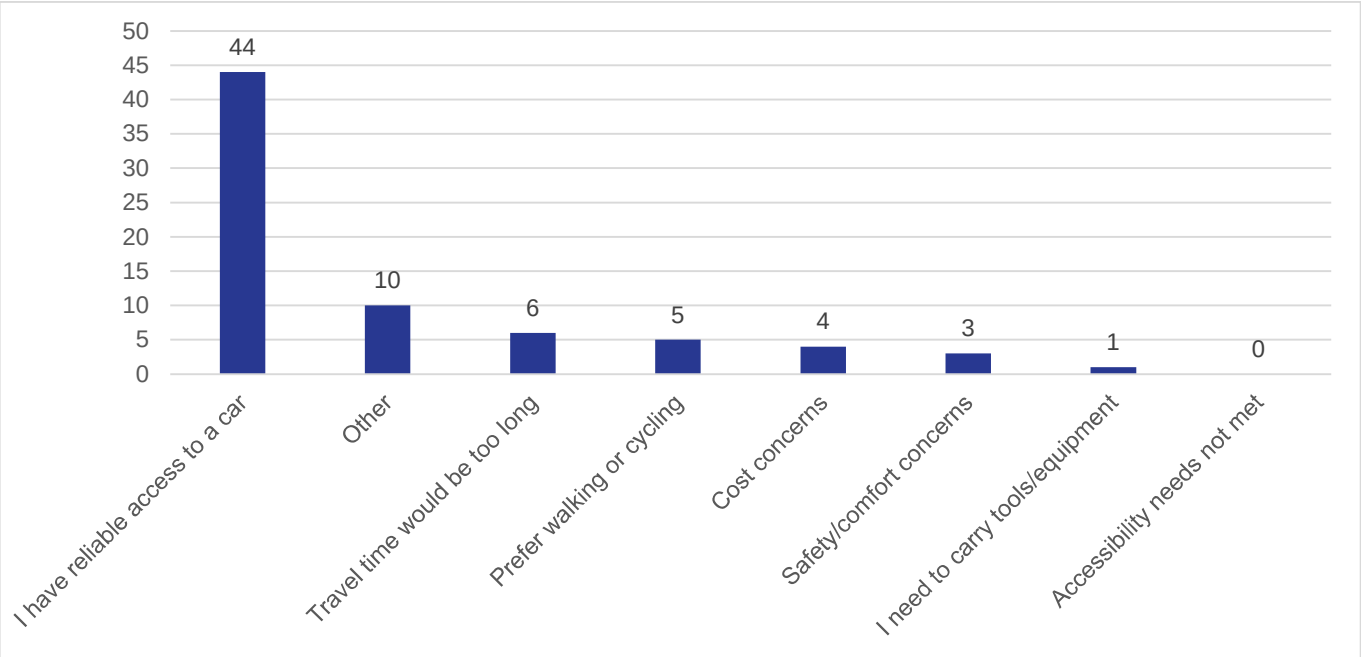
If public transit were available in the municipality, 60% of respondents indicated that they would use it once a week, while approximately 26% stated they would use it daily as shown in **Figure 2-2**.

Figure 2-2: How Often Respondents Would Use Public Transit



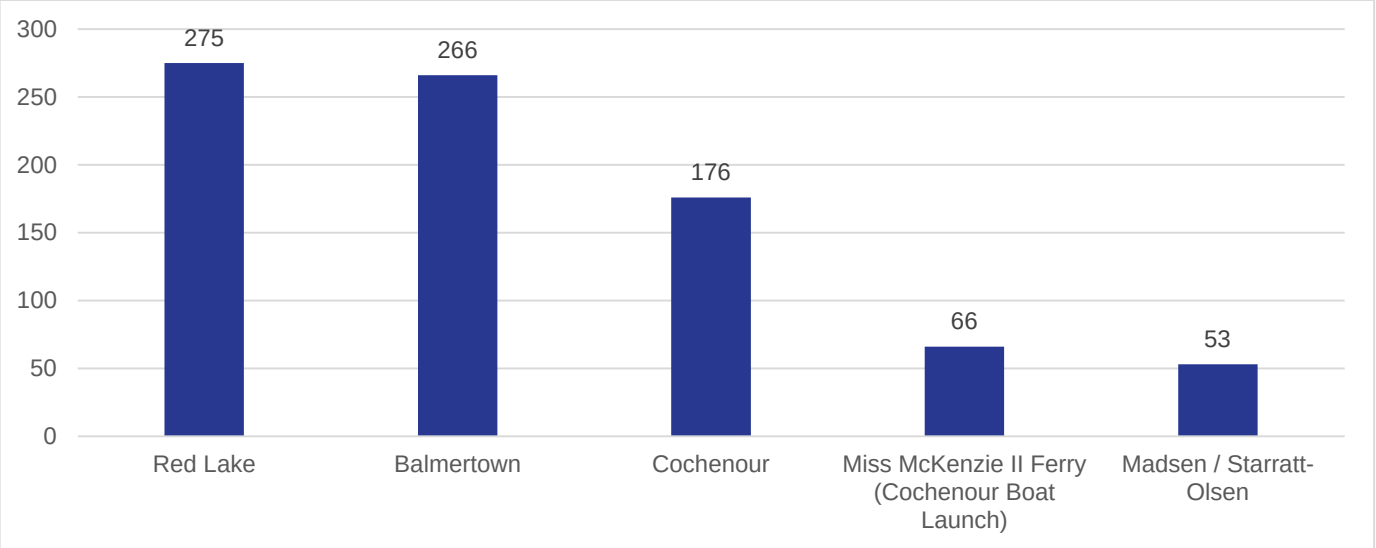
Among respondents who indicated they would not use public transit, a common reason was having reliable access to a personal vehicle as shown in **Figure 2-3**. However, it was noted by respondents that they would value a public transit option if they were no longer able to drive.

Figure 2-3: Reasons Respondents Would not use Public Transit



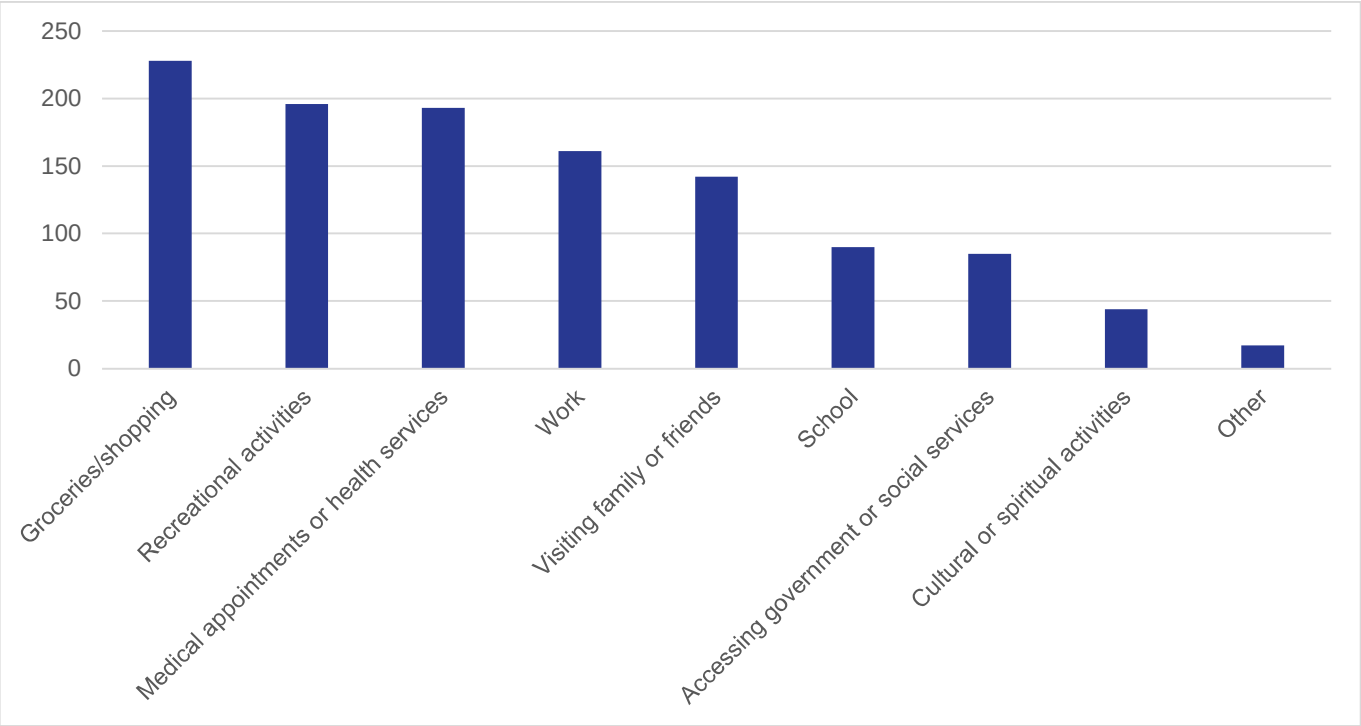
Red Lake, Balmertown and Cochenour are the top three communities' respondents indicated they would like to access by transit, as shown in **Figure 2-4**.

Figure 2-4: Communities Respondents Would Like to Access by Transit



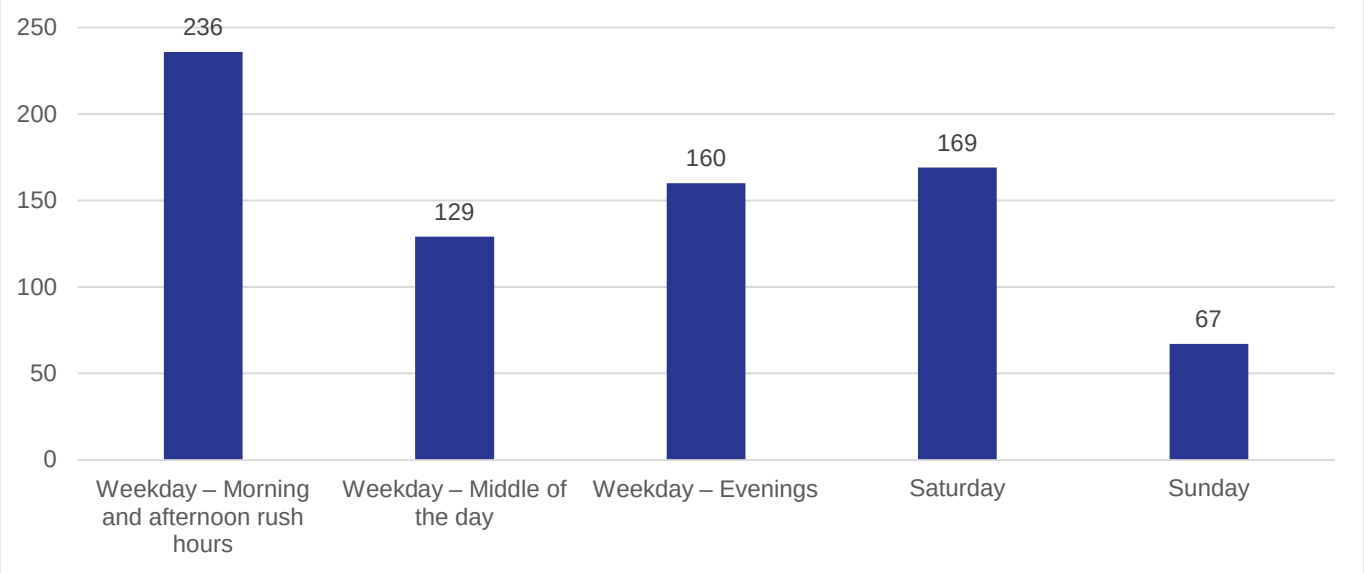
Survey respondents expressed a strong interest in accessing grocery stores, recreational facilities, and medical or health services by transit, among other destinations as shown in **Figure 2-5**. Overall, there is a clear desire to use transit for a wide range of activities.

Figure 2-5: Desired Amenities to be Reached by Public Transit



Survey respondents expressed interest in having transit available during various periods of the day with no clear consensus on preferred schedule, as shown in **Figure 2-6**. However, weekday morning and afternoon rush hours received the highest number of votes overall.

Figure 2-6: Preference on When Public Transit Should Operate

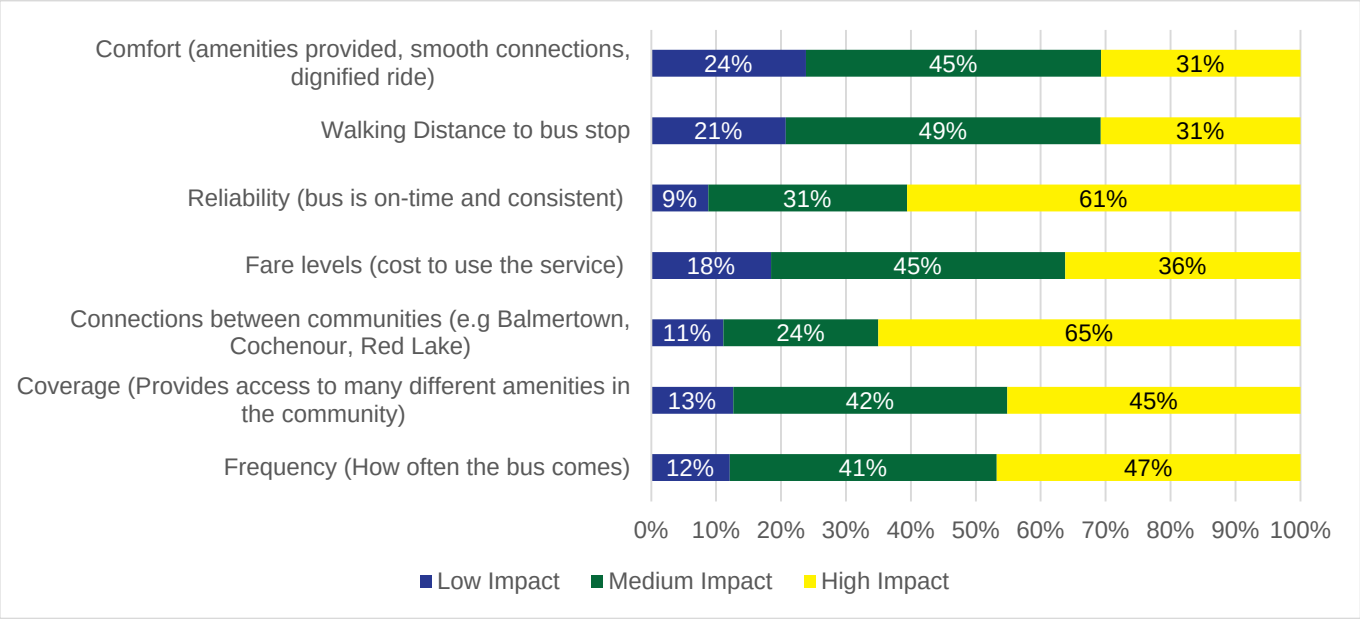


Respondents were asked to evaluate the following factors that influence their decisions to use public transit:

- **Comfort:** Availability of amenities, smooth connections to destinations, and an overall dignified travel experience.
- **Walking Distance to Bus Stops:** The time and effort required to reach a bus stop to access the service.
- **Reliability:** Consistent service and buses arriving on time.
- **Fare levels:** The cost of using the transit system.
- **Connections:** Ability to travel between communities such as Red Lake, Balmertown, Cochenour etc.
- **Coverage:** Access to a wide range of amenities within the community.
- **Frequency:** How often buses are scheduled to run.

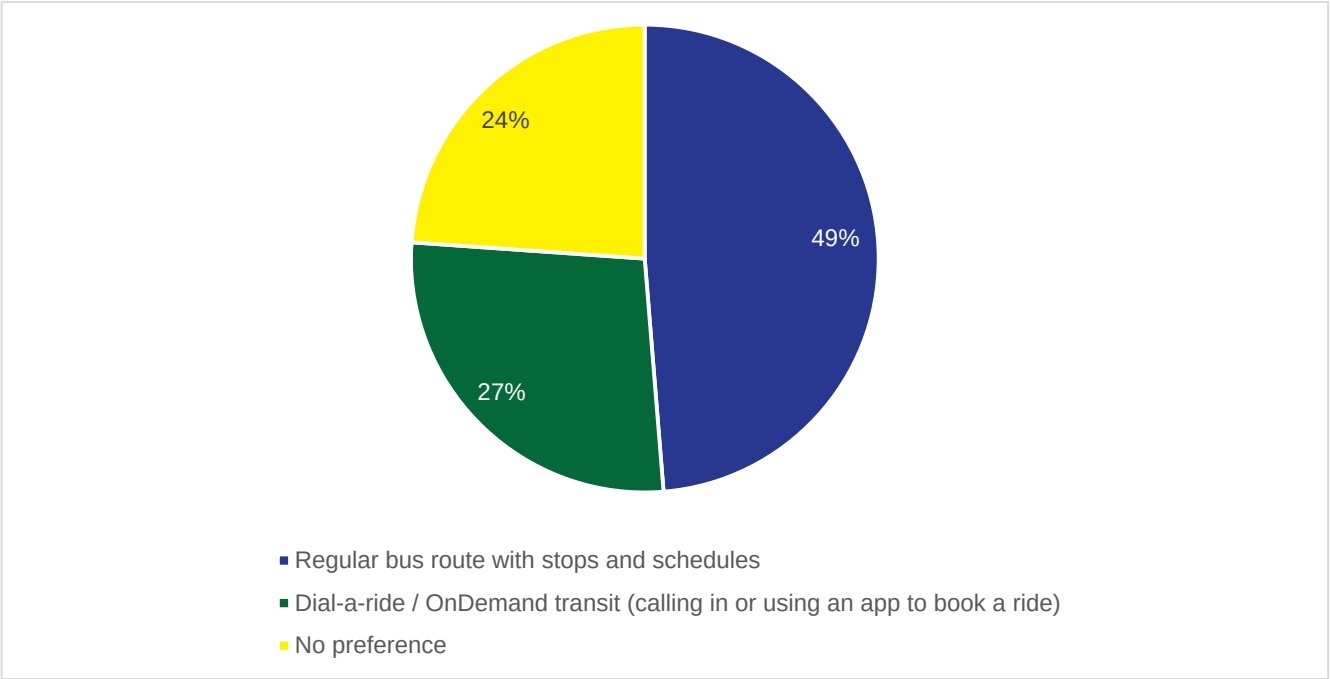
While all these factors influence the community's decision to use public transit frequency also ranked highly, reflecting the importance of a broad service area and regular scheduling. **Figure 2-7** illustrates the relative influence of each of these factors on transit use.

Figure 2-7: Factors that Influence the Use of Public Transit



As shown in **Figure 2-8**, nearly half of survey respondents expressed a preference for a traditional fixed-route service with scheduled stops.

Figure 2-8: Preferred Transit Service Delivery Model



3. Phase 2: Option Evaluation

The second round of stakeholder and public engagement included one event: the second Public Open House. A total of 18 people attended, with 7 representing stakeholder groups and 11 from the general public. The session focused on presenting findings from the Community Transit Survey conducted during the first round of engagement and introducing the public transportation options that had been developed. Attendees were invited to provide feedback on these options.

3.1.1 What We Heard

Feedback and interest on the five public transportation options presented at the second Public Open House is summarized in **Table 3-1**.

Table 3-1: Summary of Feedback Received on Options Developed

Option	Comments and Feedback
Option 1: Fixed Route	• Three attendees expressed interest for this option • One attendee stated that the fixed route presented was a "start" • Question around how the fixed route was developed and if the route will provide coverage to those who need transit. • Questions about how the servicing timeframe was developed. • Attendees stated that a morning route would be useful to connect people to employment such as Tim Hortons or places in Balmertown like the Balmertown Food Fair • One attendee asked if there would be a possibility to have a winter route and a summer route as in the summertime people would like to reach destinations like the beaches. • Question if it's possible to alter the fixed route service to include Madsen. • Comments that many stores and medical services will not open until 8:00-10:00 AM so people are unlikely to take the bus as early as 6:00 AM.
Option 2: Traditional OnDemand	• No responses or comments were received for this option

Option	Comments and Feedback
Option 3: Hybrid (Fixed Route + Traditional OnDemand)	• Two attendees expressed interest in this option • One attendee commented “need access to pharmacy, groceries and medical services” • One attendee commented “include Madsen” • Concerns regarding educating the community on how the service works.
Option 4: OnDemand Microtransit	• Three attendees expressed interest for this option • One attendee commented “in town options or medical”
Option 5: Community Partnerships	• No responses or comments were received for this option

Comments were also received by email following the event and are included in this table

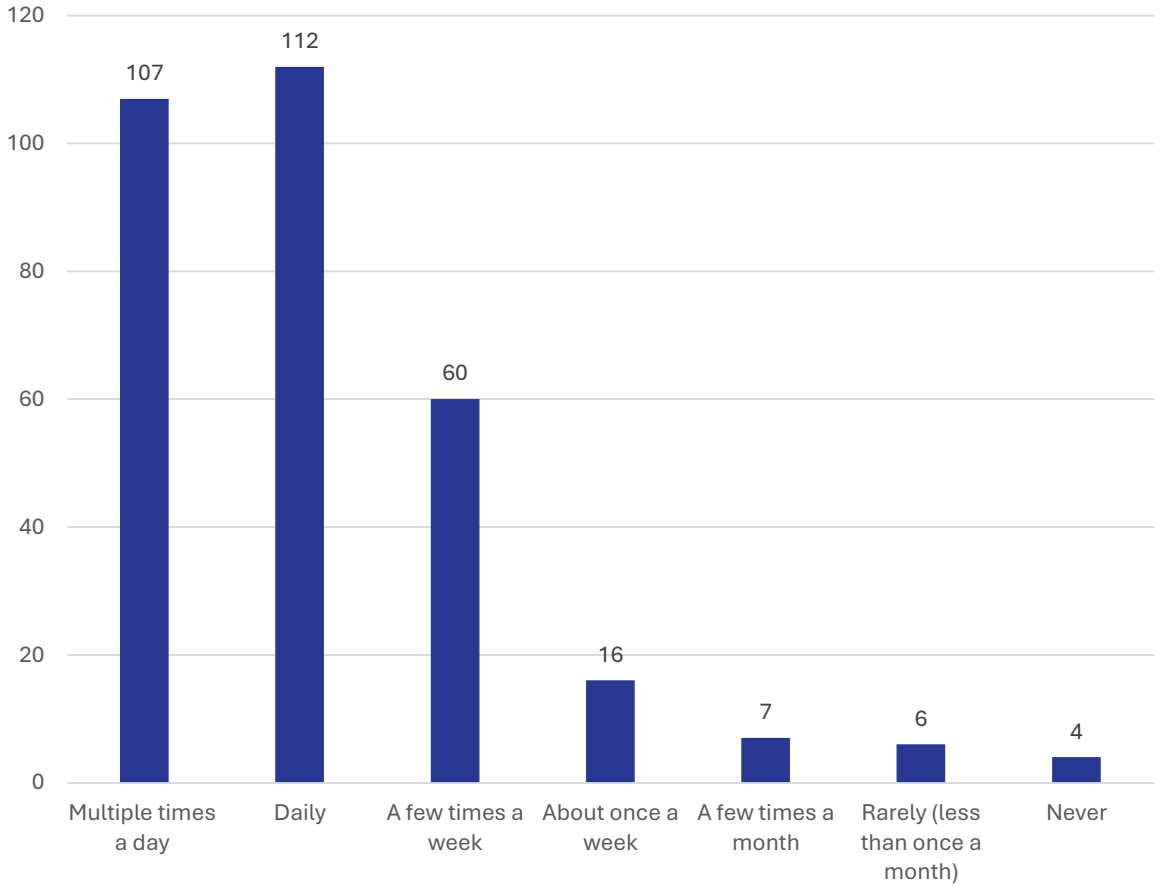
The Municipality of Red Lake Transit Feasibility Study – Survey Results

October 2025

Overview

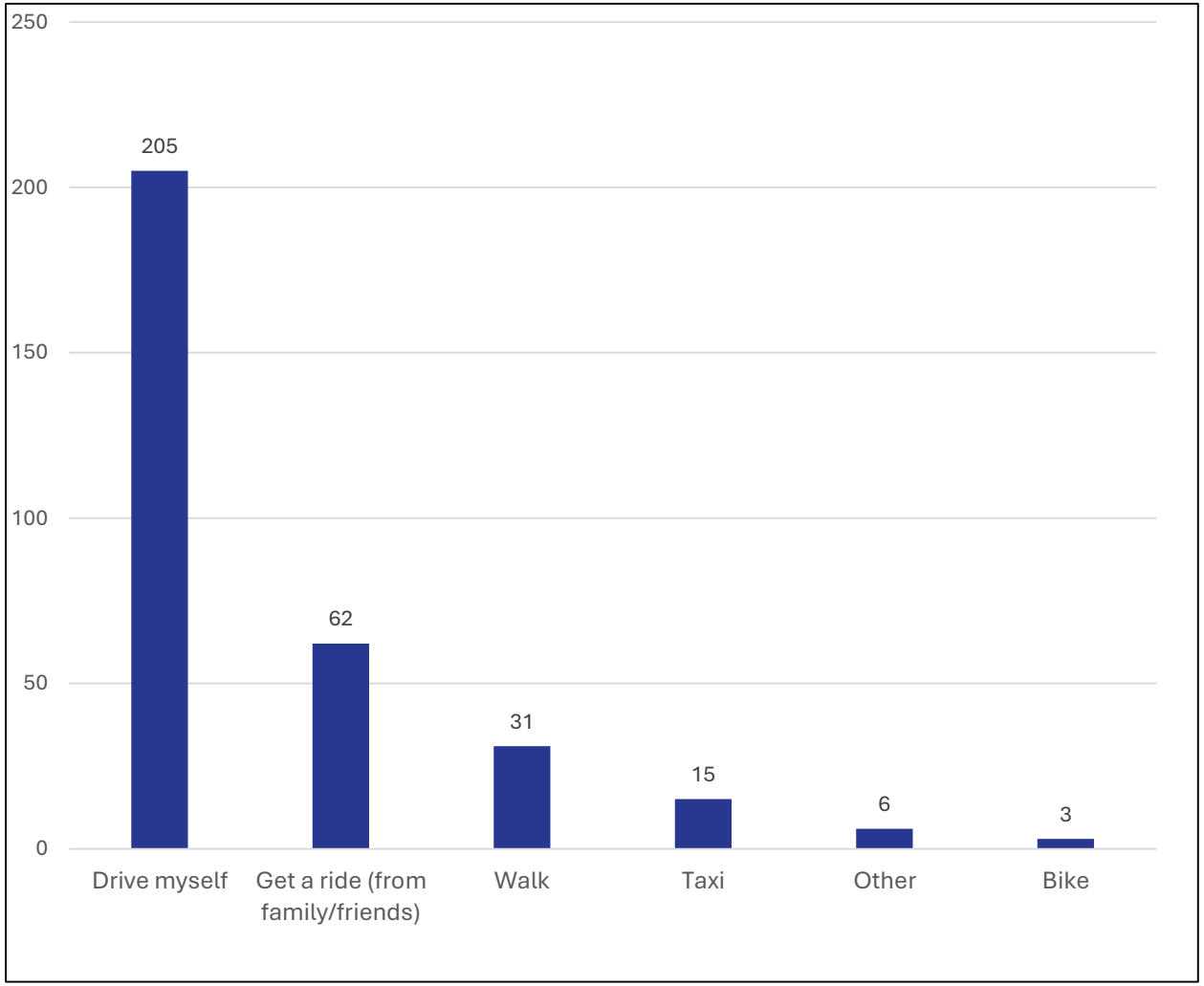
- 312 total responses
  - 39 Hardcopy
  - 273 Virtual
- Following charts demonstrate hardcopy and virtual response results compiled

Q1: How often do you typically travel around the Municipality of Red Lake? *(e.g. between communities, to work, for shopping, or to access services)*



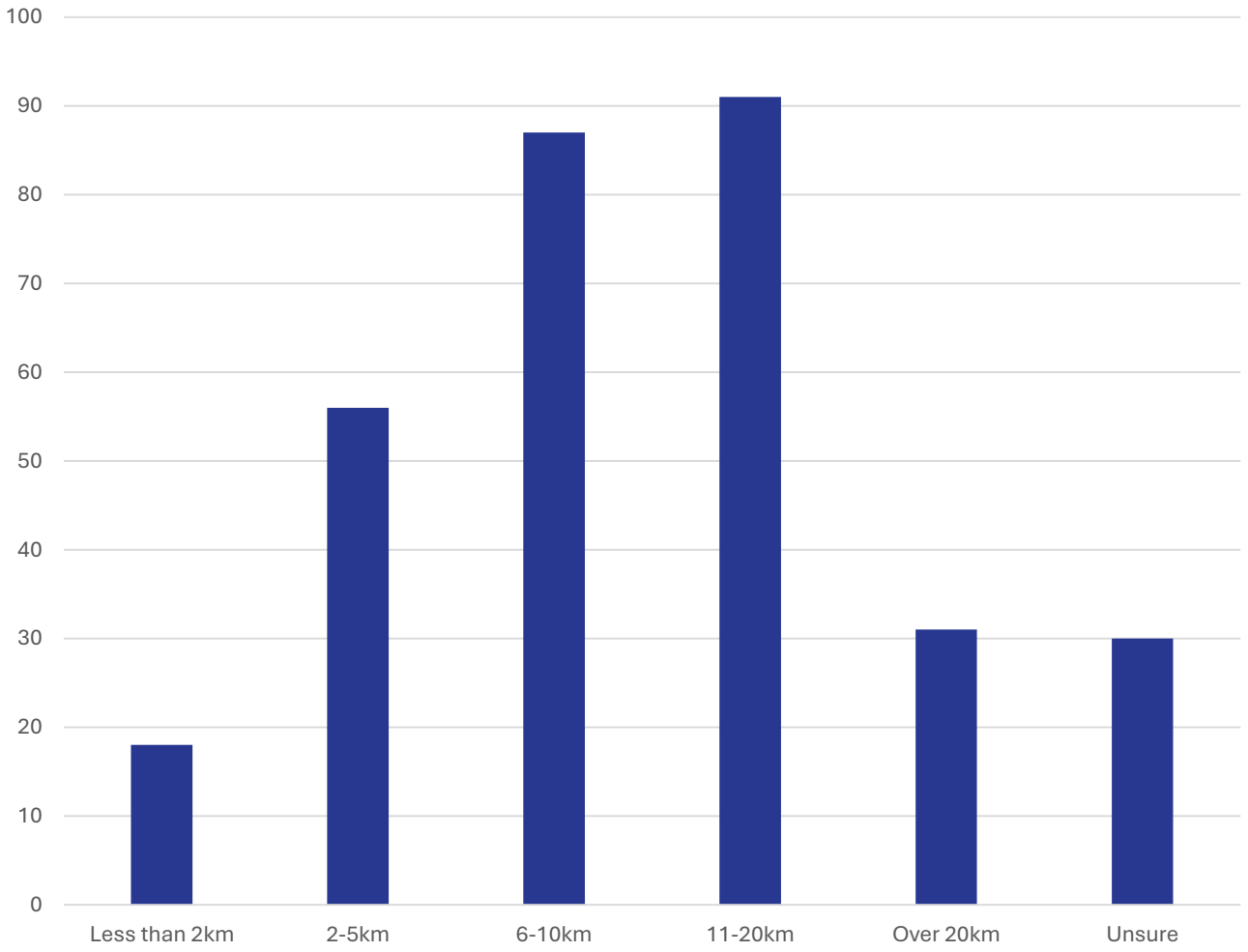
- Apr. **70%** of respondents **travel daily or multiple times a day**
- About **25%** of respondents **travel a few times or once a week**
- Very **few** respondents **travel rarely or never** (about 5%)

Q2: How do you typically travel around the Municipality Red Lake?



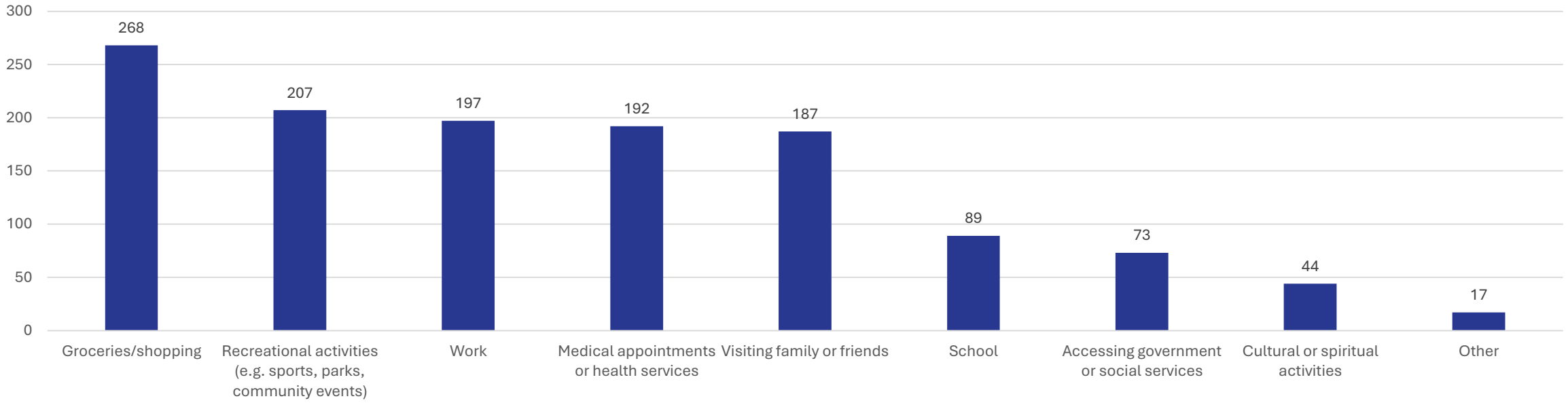
- **Majority** (205 respondents) **drive themselves**
- Other:
  - School bus
  - Ferry
  - Combination of various methods

Q3: On average, how far do you usually travel for a typical trip (one way)?



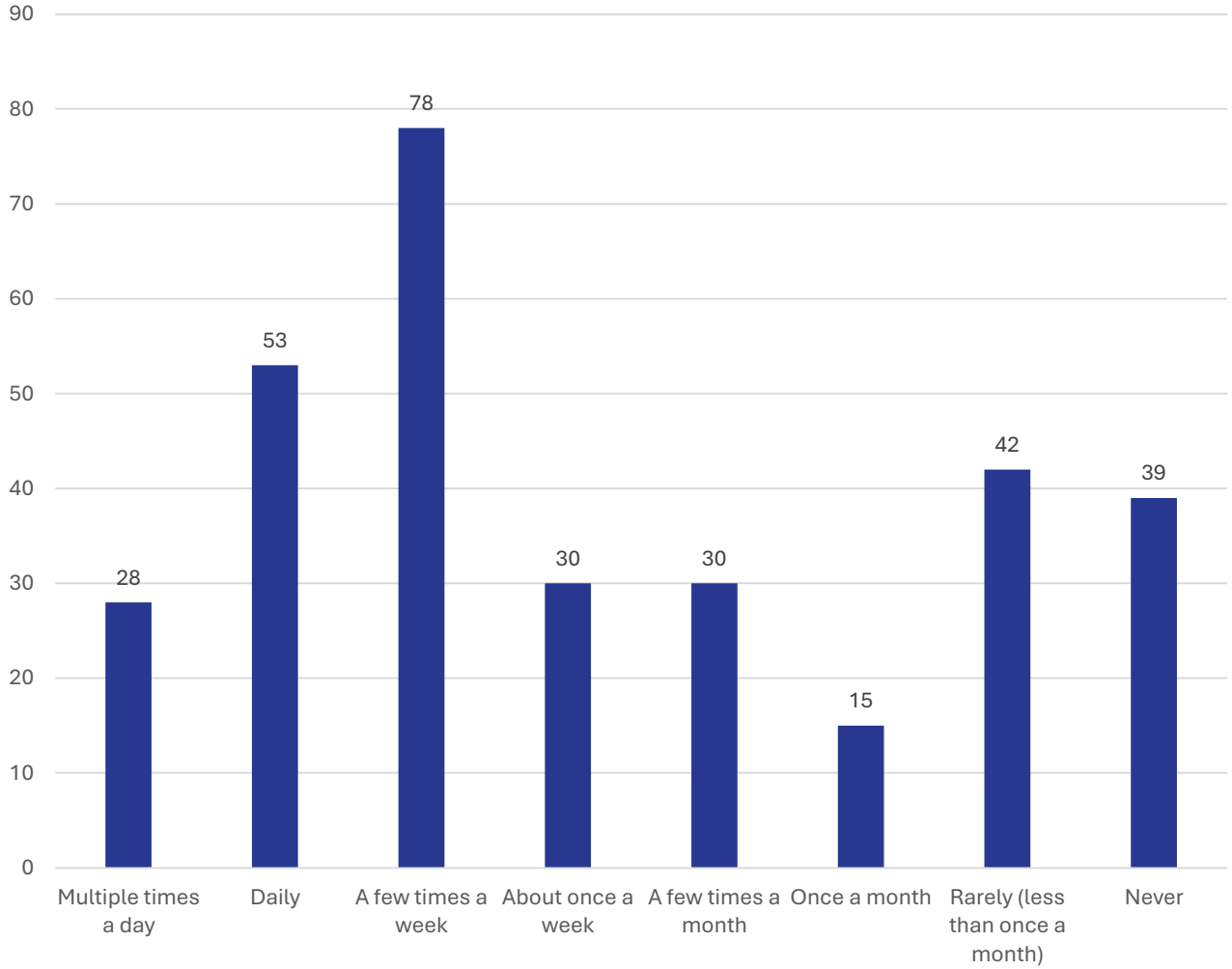
- **Most trips** are either **6-10km or 11-20km**
- **Short trips are less common** with 18 respondents travelling less than 2km
- **Longer trips** over 20km **occur occasionally**

Q4: What are your top 5 reasons for travelling within the Municipality of Red Lake? (Check up to 5)



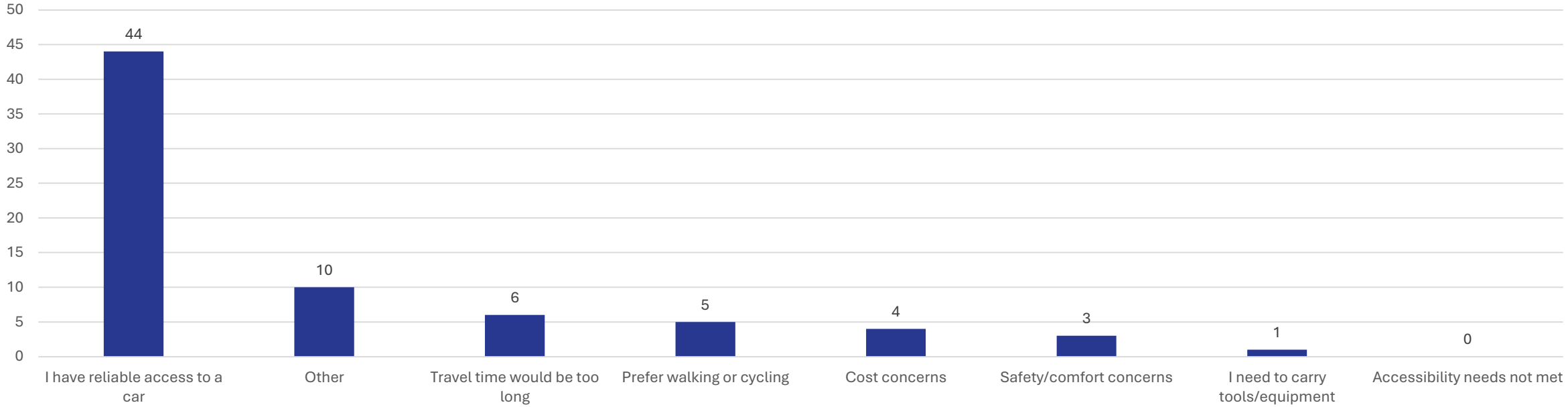
- Top reason for travel is groceries/shopping followed by recreation, work, medical appointments or health services
- **Other:** community events, volunteer work, post office, childcare

Q5: If public transit were available in the Municipality of Red Lake, how often do you think you would use it?



- **Most respondents would use public transit regularly** (78 a few times a week, 53 daily)
- **Moderate Interest in occasional use:**
  - 30 respondents would use it about once a week, and another 30 a few times a month
  - 15 respondents would use it once a month.

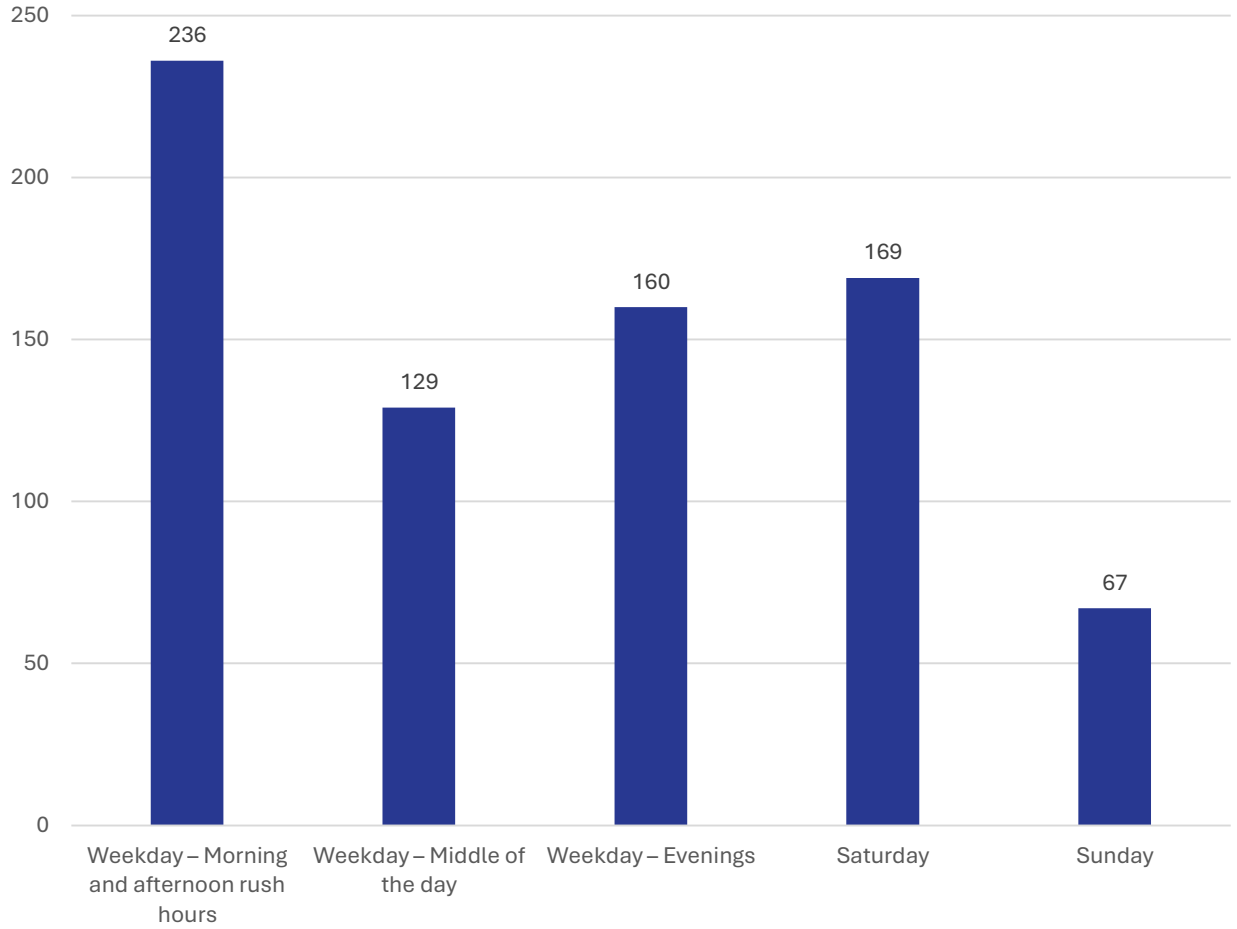
Q6: What are the main reasons you would not use transit?



- Top reason to not use transit is having reliable access to a car

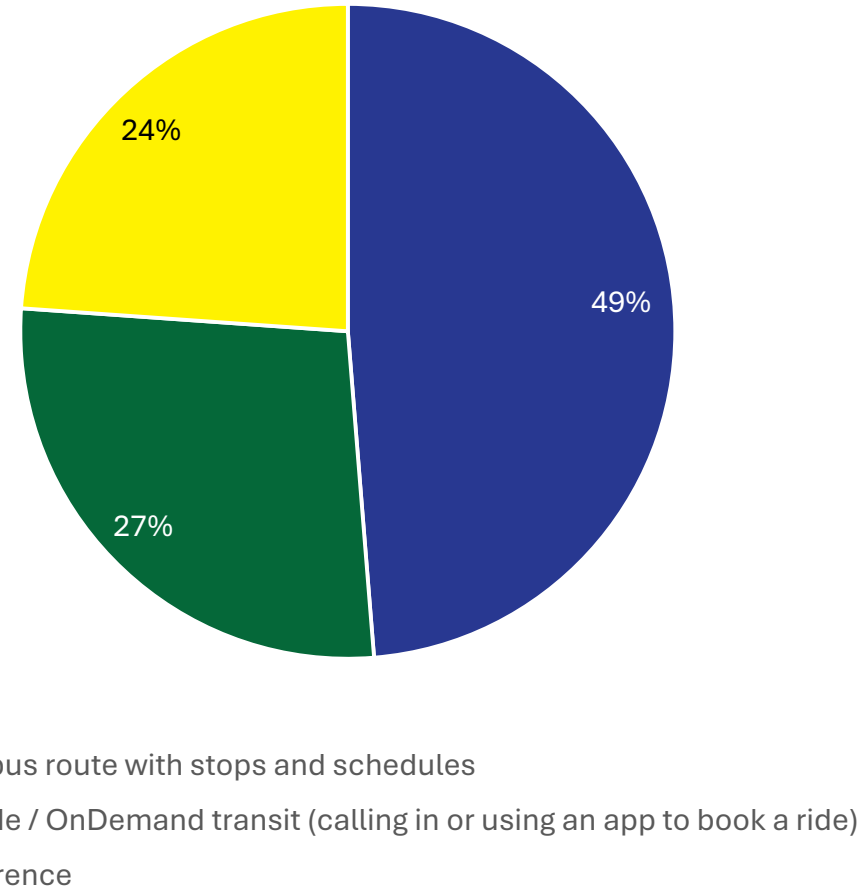
- **Other:** Concerns over cleanliness, currently able to drive themselves but would appreciate transit when they no longer can drive, concerns over funding for transit (tax dollars etc.)

Q7: If public transit were available in the Municipality of Red Lake, when would you want it to operate? Please select up to 3 periods that are best suited for your needs



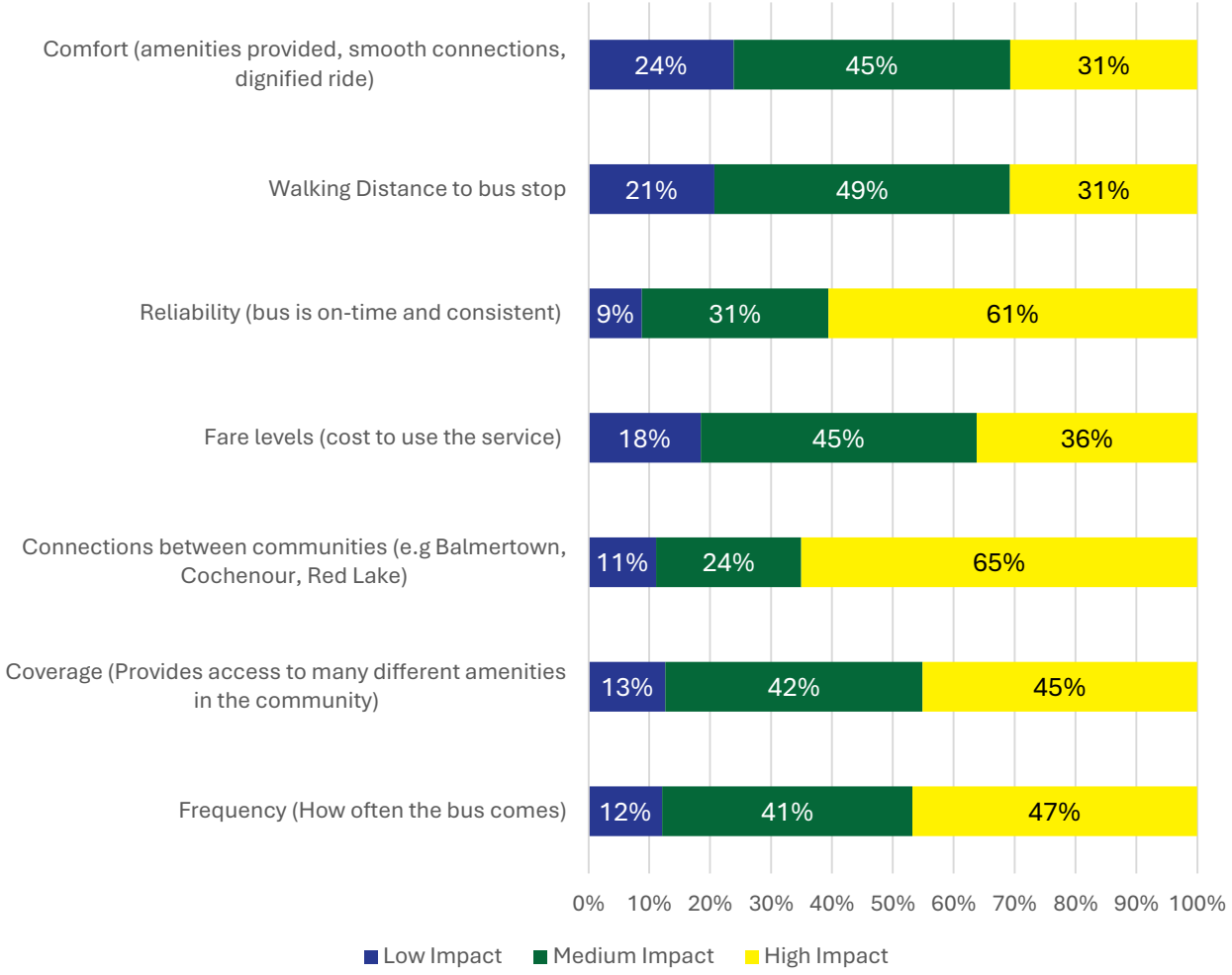
- **Weekday rush hours are the top priority**
  - 236 respondents selected morning and afternoon peak times
- **Weekday evenings** and **Saturdays** also have strong interest

Q8: What type of service would you prefer?



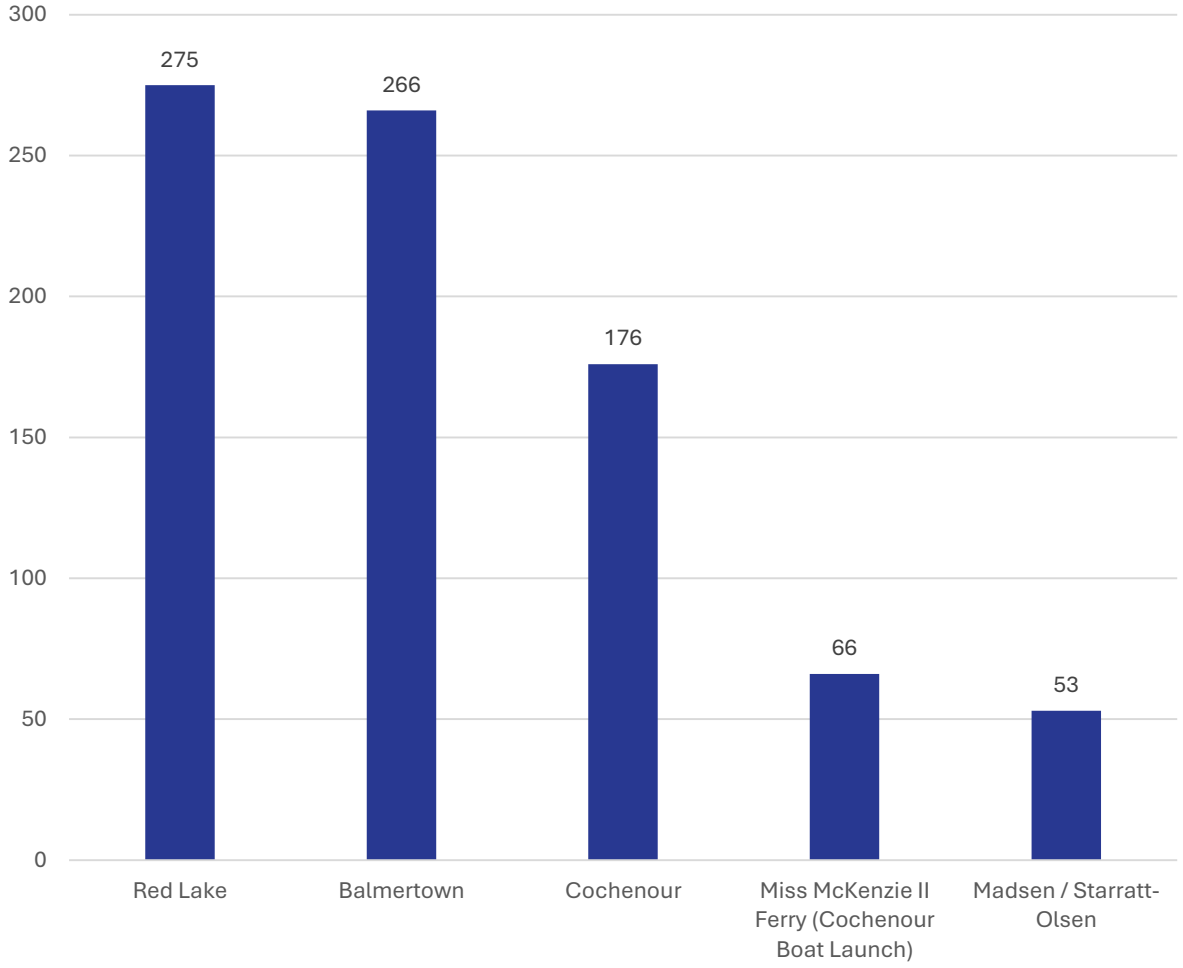
- **Regular bus routes are the most preferred option**
  - Chosen by 49% of respondents
- Dial-a-ride/OnDemand transit is the second choice at 27%
- 24% have no preference

Q9: If public transit were available in the Municipality of Red Lake, how much would each of the following factors influence your decision to use it?



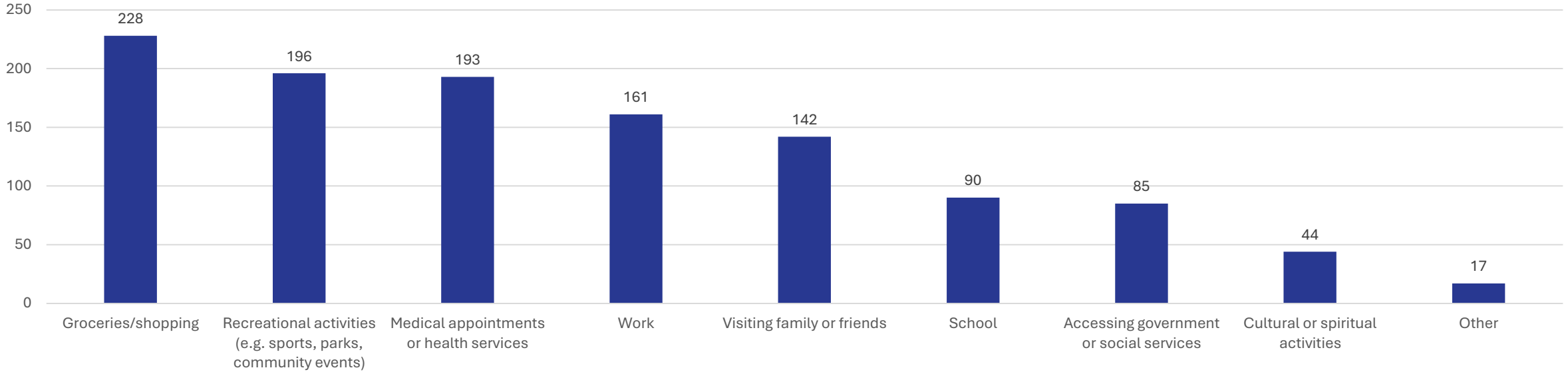
- **Reliability and connections matter most:**
  - 61% rated bus reliability as high impact, and 65% rated connections between communities as high impact.
- **Coverage and frequency are also key**
  - 45% said coverage (access to amenities) has high impact, and 47% said frequency of service is highly influential.

Q10: Which communities would you most want to reach by transit? (Check all that apply)



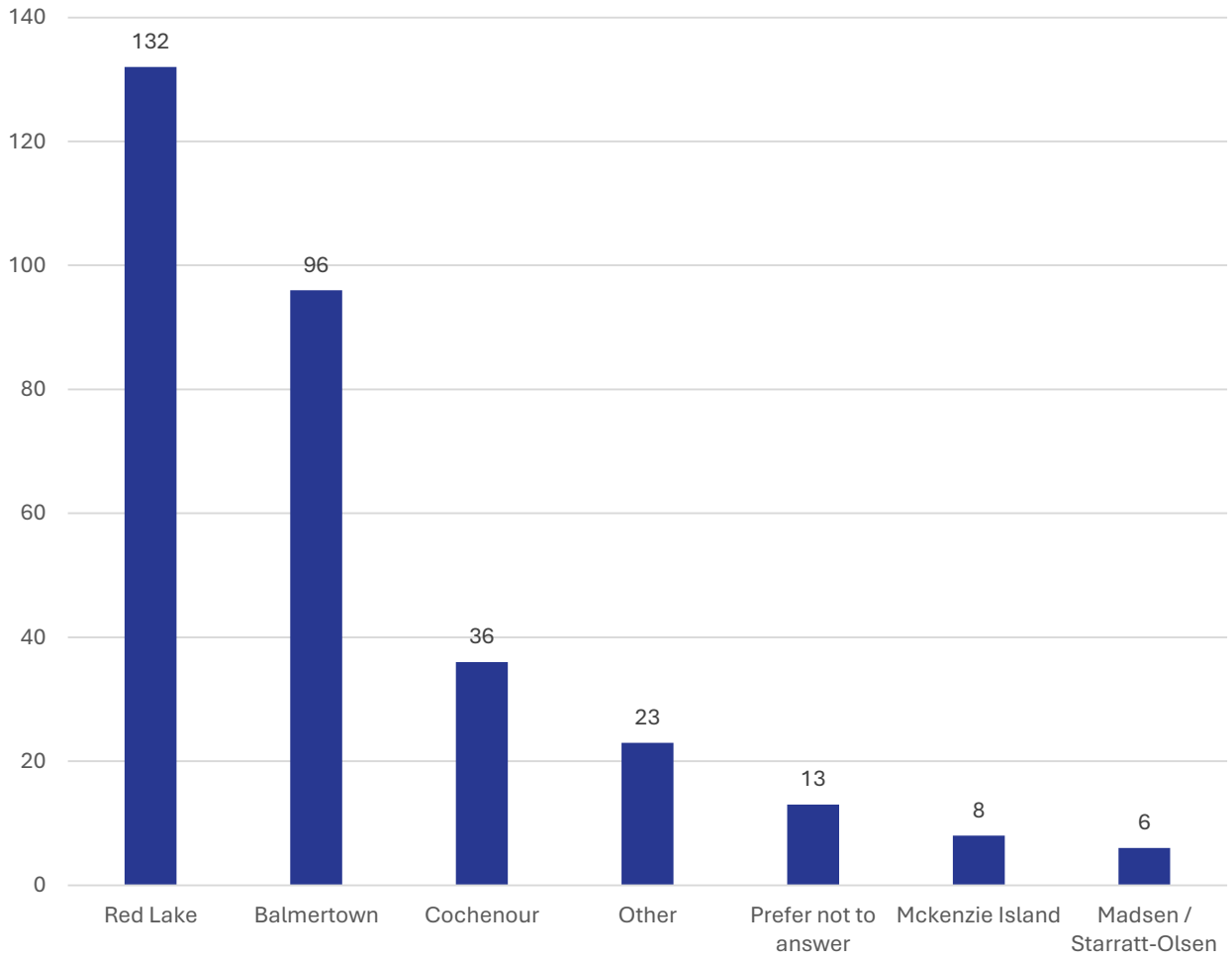
- **Red Lake and Balmertown are the top destinations**, with 275 and 266 respondents wanting transit access to these communities
- **Cochenour ranks third** with 176 respondents indicating interest
- **Lower demand for other locations:**
  - Miss McKenzie II Ferry (66 respondents)
  - Madsen / Starratt-Olsen (53 respondents)

Q11: Which amenities within communities would you most want to reach by transit? (Check up to 5)



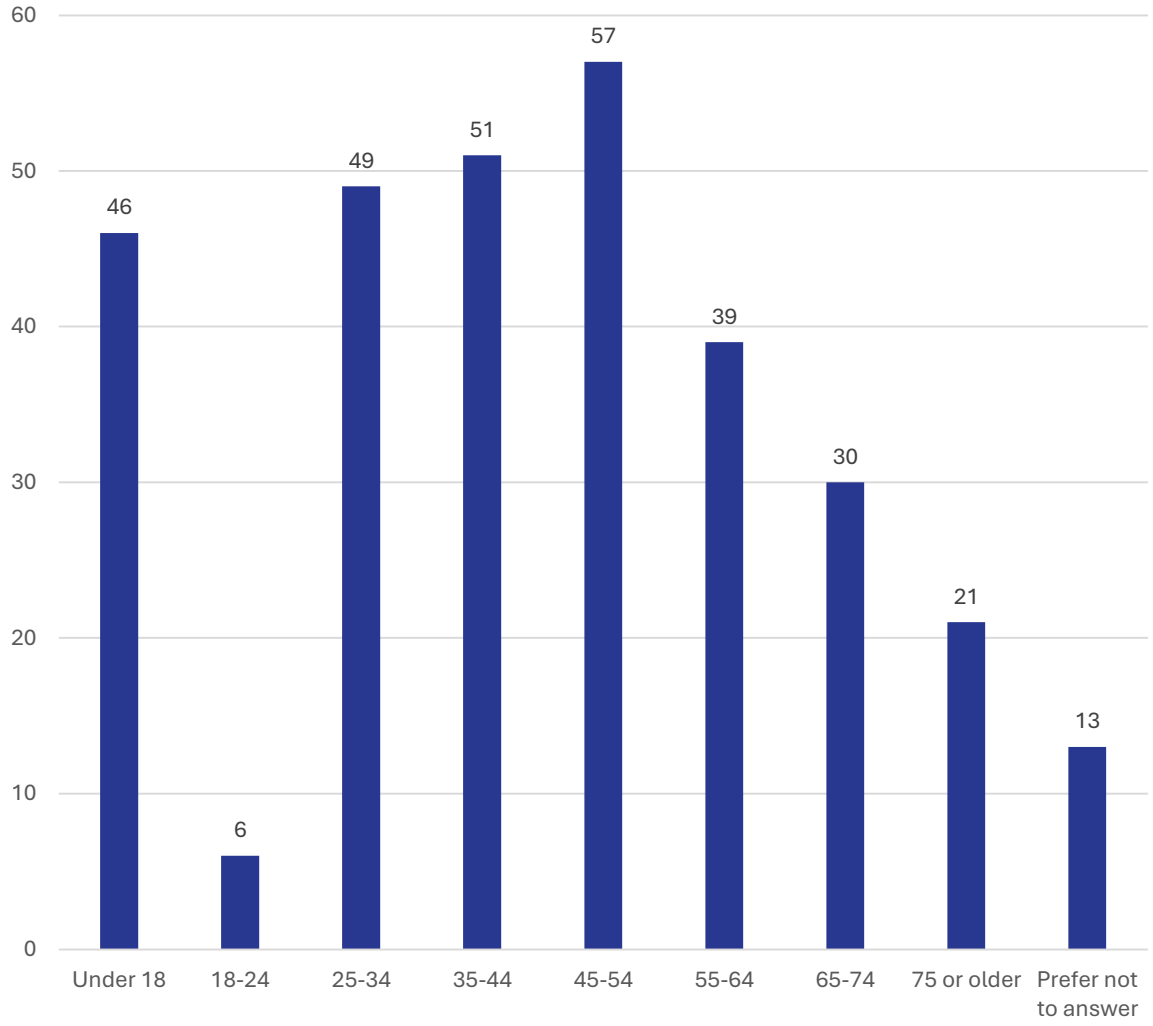
- Groceries/shopping is a top amenity followed by recreational activities and medical appointments
- Other: Community events, volunteer work, Chukini / McManus, Subway / Tim Hortons

Q12: What community do you reside in?



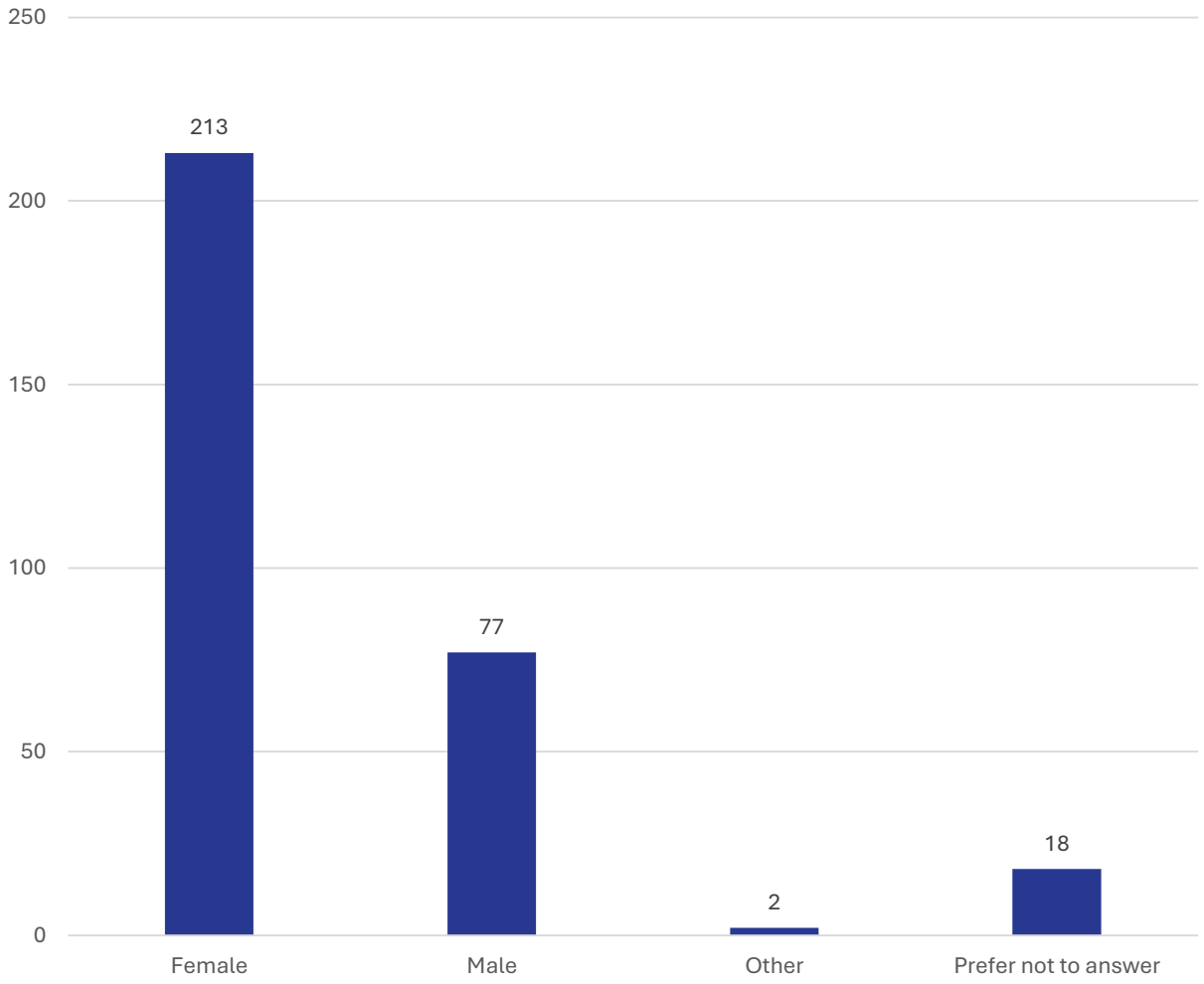
- **Red Lake is the largest community represented**, with **132 respondents**
- **Balmertown follows with 96 respondents**, making it the second most common residence
- **Cochenour** accounts for **36 respondents**
- Other: Harry's corner, Chukuni subdivision, McMarmac, Ear Falls, Bug River

Q13: What is your age group?



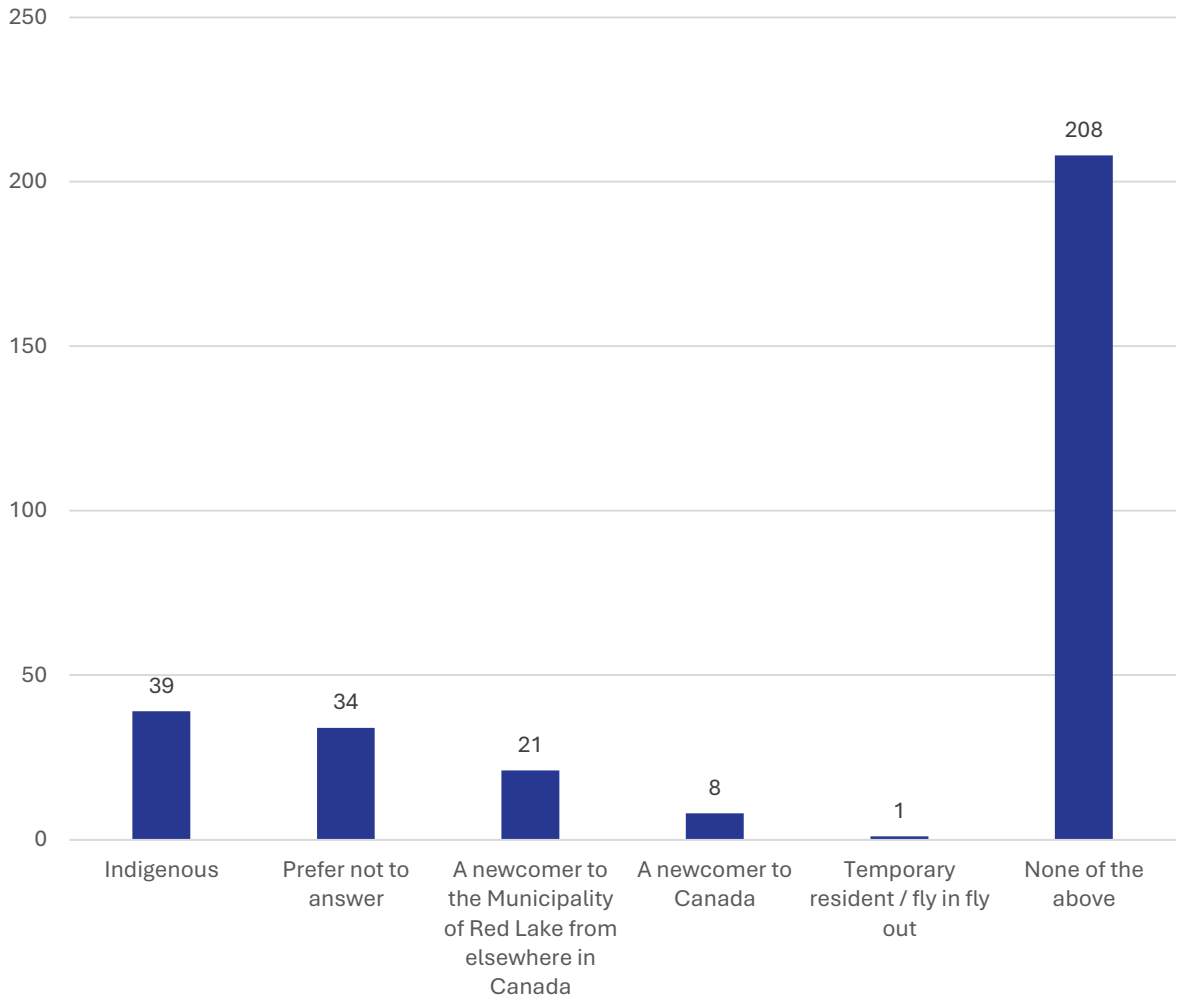
- **Largest age group:** 45–54 years (57 respondents)
- **Other major groups:** 35–44 (51 respondents) and 25–34 (49 respondents)
- **Smaller segments:** 75+ (21 respondents) and 18–24 (6 respondents)

Q14: What is your gender?



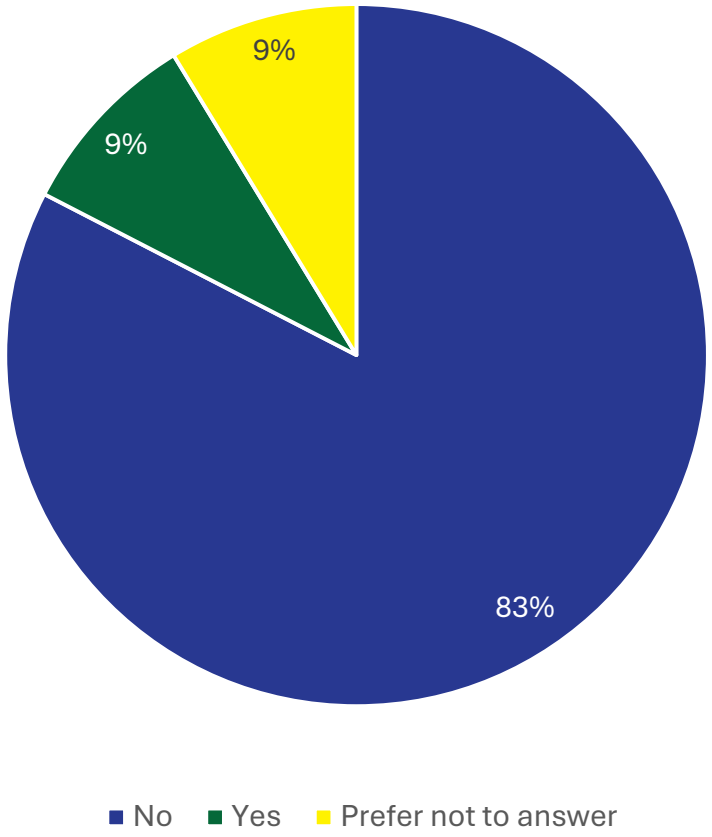
- **Majority of respondents are female**, with 213 identifying as female compared to 77 male

Q15: Do you identify as any of the following



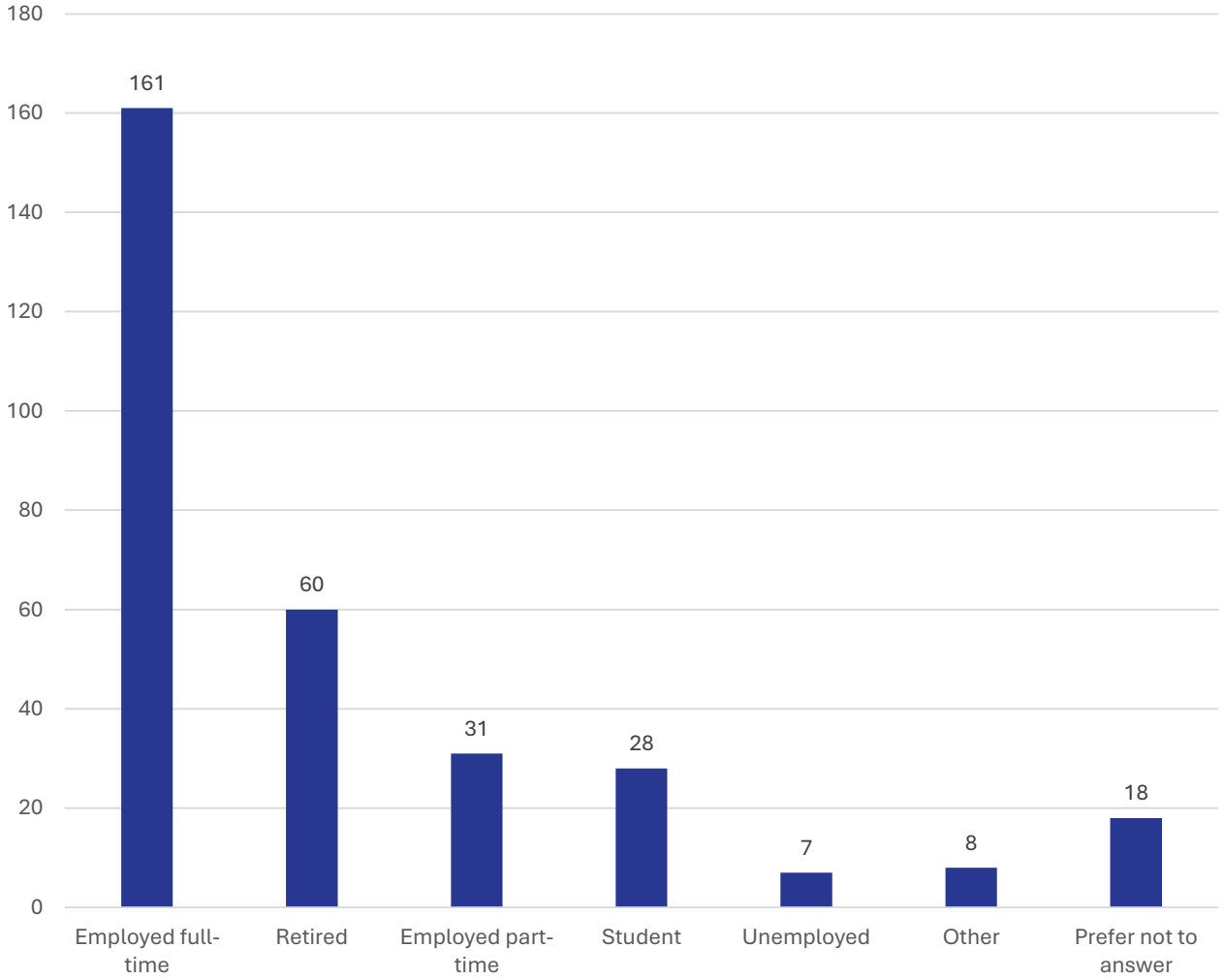
- **Most respondents** (208) selected **"None of the above,"**
- **Indigenous identity was noted by 39 respondents,**
- **Smaller groups include newcomers** (21 to Red Lake, 8 to Canada)

Q16: Do you identify as a person with a disability or mobility challenge that affects your ability to travel?



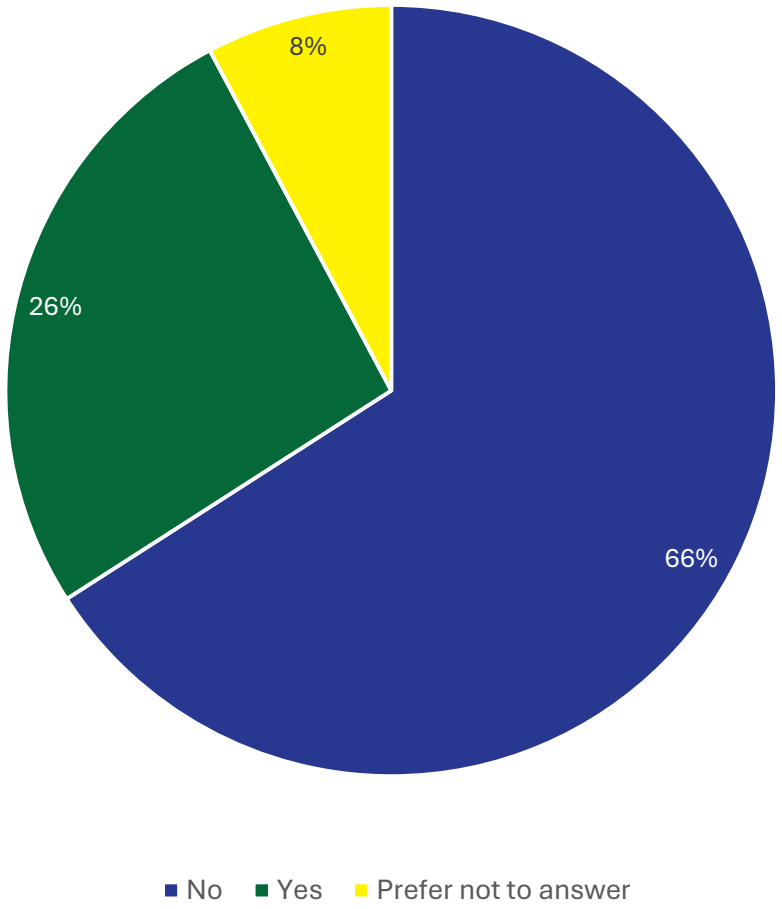
- **Majority (83%) do not identify as having a disability** or mobility challenge affecting travel
- **9% identify as having a disability**

Q17: What is your employment status?



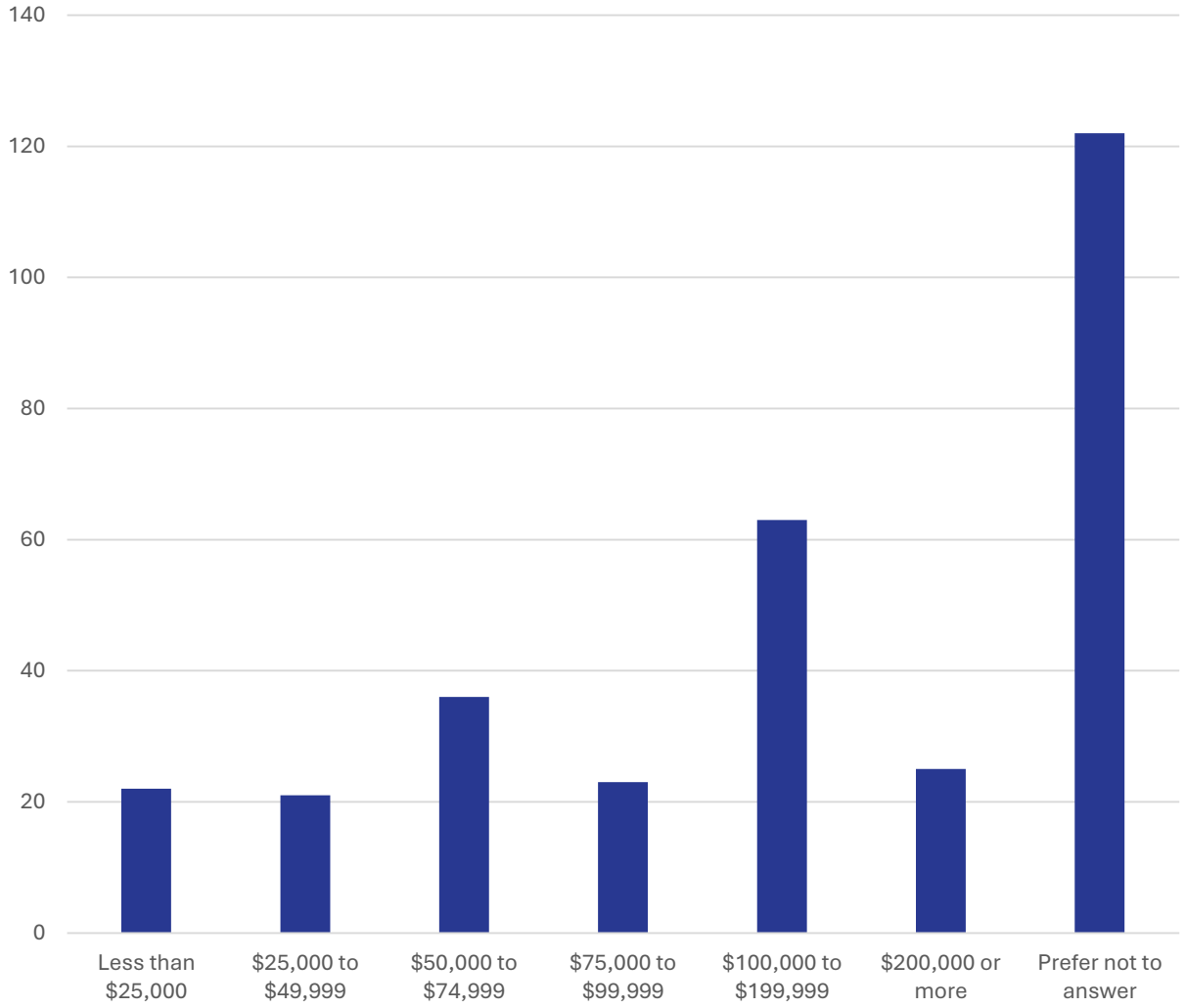
- **Most respondents** are **employed full-time (161), followed by retired** individuals (60)
- **Smaller groups include**
  - Part-time workers (31)
  - Students (28)
- **Very few unemployed (7)**

Q18: While living in Municipality of Red Lake, have you ever had to pass up a job opportunity because of the lack of transportation options including transit?



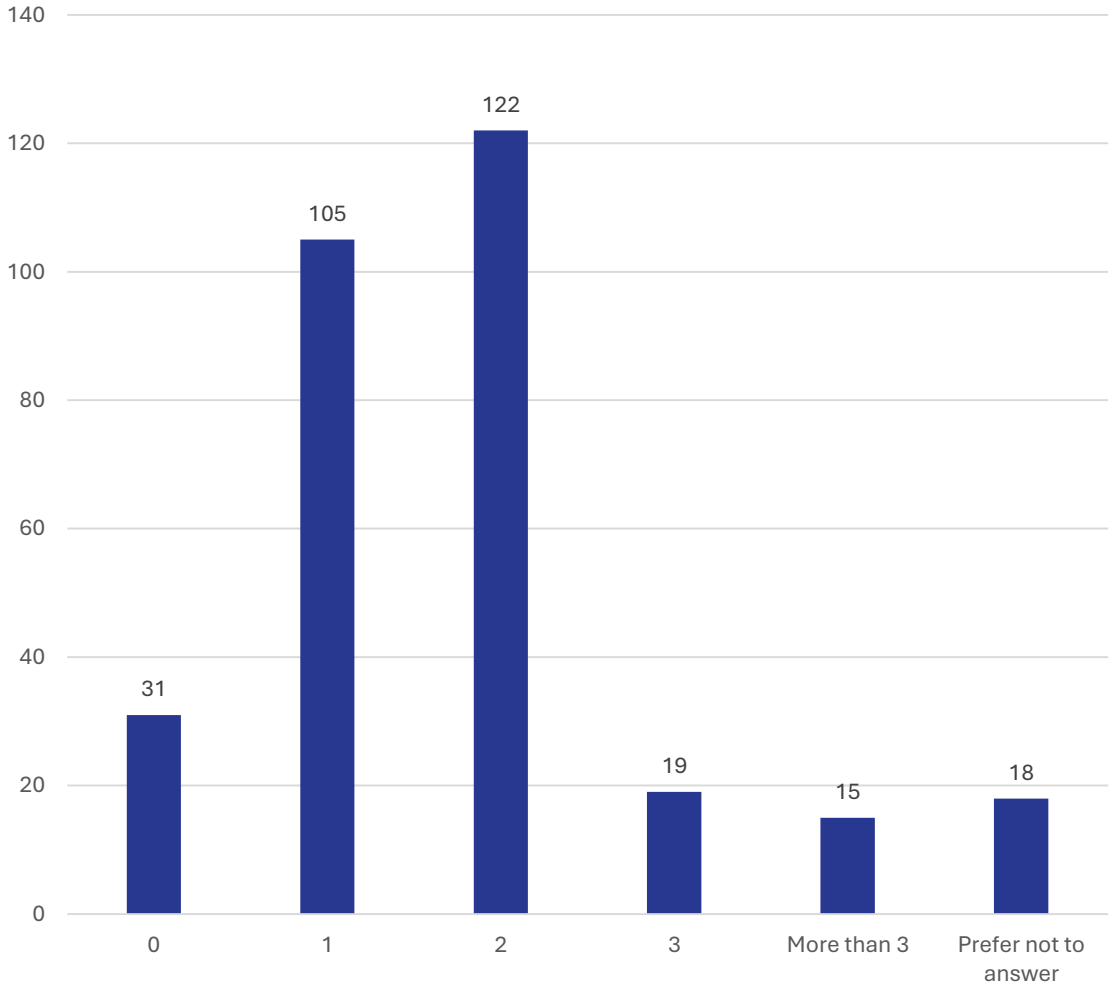
- Most respondents (66%) have not missed a job opportunity due to lack of transportation options
- However, **26% said yes** indicating a significant impact on employment for some residents

Q19: What is your household income before taxes?



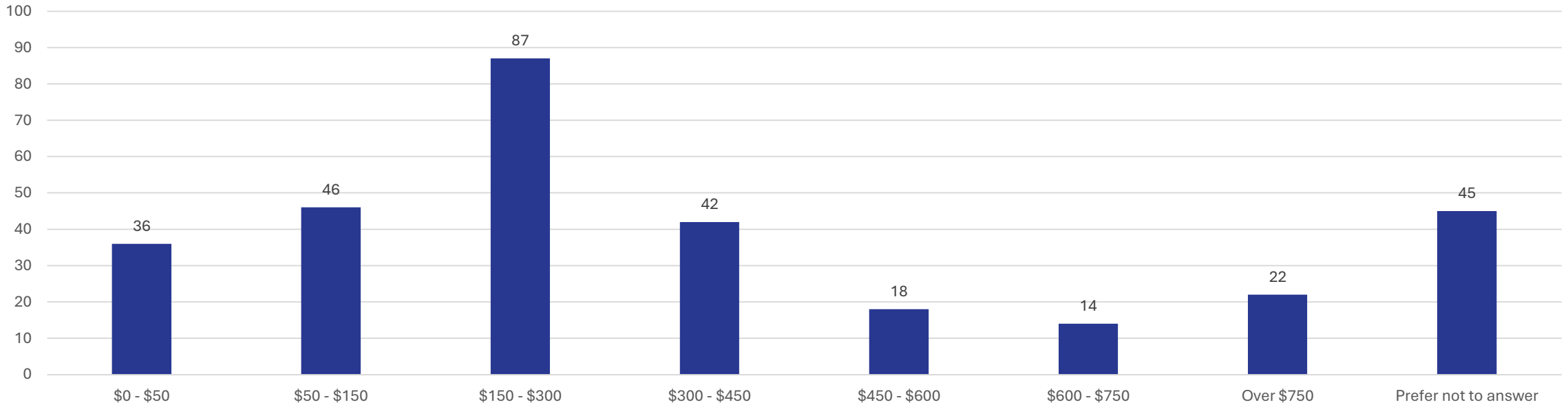
- Among those who answered:
  - **$100,000–$199,999 is most common** (63)
  - Followed by $50,000–$74,999 (36)
  - Smaller segments fall below $50,000 or above $200,000.

Q20: How many vehicles does your household have access to?



- **Most households have 1–2 vehicles,** with 122 reporting two vehicles and 105 reporting one

Q21: How much do you spend on transportation a month?



- Most respondents spend $150–$300 per month on transportation

Q22: Do you have any additional comments, suggestions, or concerns about introducing transit in the Municipality of Red Lake?

Summary of Responses:

- Many respondents believe **public transit is essential** for:
  - **Newcomers without licenses** to avoid isolation and depression.
  - **Teens and youth** for school, jobs, and extracurricular activities.
  - **Seniors and people with limited mobility** to access services and social events.
  - **Low-income families** who currently spend heavily on taxis.

- Suggestions include:
  - **On-demand booking systems** for small communities.
  - **Consistent schedules** for key locations (schools, grocery stores, hospital, mine).
  - **Accessibility features** (wheelchair lifts, heated shelters, clear sidewalks).
  - **Safety measures** (driver background checks).
  - **Connections to other towns** (Kenora, Dryden, Winnipeg, Vermilion Bay).

Q22: Do you have any additional comments, suggestions, or concerns about introducing transit in the Municipality of Red Lake?

Summary of Responses:

- Additional Ideas
  - **Walking/cycling trails are highly requested** for safety and recreation.
  - **E-bikes or shared mobility options suggested as complementary solutions**.
  - **Medical travel:** Strong demand for transit to access dental, orthodontic, and specialist care in Kenora, Winnipeg, Thunder Bay
  - **Community events:** Transit would help people attend Norseman Days, pow wows, hockey games, and other gatherings.
- Concerns
  - **Cost and tax impact:**
    - Some residents fear higher property taxes without proportional benefit.
    - Skepticism about low usage and sustainability based on past failures
  - Suggestions for Uber-style systems or subsidized taxi vouchers instead.
  - **Operational challenges:**
    - Staffing, insurance, and overhead costs may outweigh revenue.
    - Need to ensure cleanliness and safety (avoid issues seen in big cities).