Getting Around to Age in Place
Meeting Older Canadians' Mobility Needs via Public Transportation

Greater Victoria
Summary Report

Territorial Acknowledgment

We would like to acknowledge that McGill University is located on unceded Indigenous lands. Tiohtià:ke/Montréal has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Kanien'kehá:ka of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, Huron/Wendat, Abenaki, and Anishinaabeg, among others. TRAM recognizes and respects these nations as the traditional stewards of the lands and waters. We respect the continued relationship these diverse Indigenous peoples have with the territory upon which we now gather.

Research Acknowledgment

Summary

Older adults represent a rapidly-growing age group in Canada, and many rely on private vehicles as their main mode of transportation for their daily travel. Despite the risk of having to give up driving as they age, the impact of driving cessation on older adults' mobility and wellbeing is still poorly understood. The Getting Around to Age in Place project, conducted by the Transportation Research at McGill (TRAM) research lab and funded by the National Research Council of Canada (NRC), centers on older adults' perceptions of their travel patterns and how daily mobility affects their lives. The Aging in Place survey (N= 3,551) was conducted in six metropolitan regions across Canada in 2023. This report presents a summary of the survey findings from Greater Victoria (N= 294). For further details about the project, and comparative data for all six regions please see the Aging in Place Final Report 2022-2025.

Key Findings

A majority of older adults in Greater Victoria believed that daily travel contributes positively to their **quality of life**, and stated that continuing to travel **independently** is very important to them. However, many older adults were concerned about whether they will be able to remain in their current neighbourhood due to changing mobility needs as they age.

While driving remained the main mode of transport for many older adults, just over half of Victoria respondents believed the public transit system allows them to satisfy their **daily needs**. Around one-fifth of respondents were **frequent transit users**, taking transit at least once a week.

Older adults in Victoria commonly considered **30 minutes** as the most reasonable travel time for a public-transit trip.

The most common **destinations for public-transit trips** were shopping, medical appointments, recreation, and visiting friends and family.

Among transit users, overall **satisfaction** with the service was generally high, however there were some **concerns** about the comfort, convenience, reliability, and safety of public transit.

More than one-third of older adults reported having some type of **disability or health condition** which limits their mobility. Over half of respondents who identified as having a disability felt that the transit system does not meet their needs.

About half of non-transit users in Victoria lacked **knowledge about how the public-transit system works**, and knowledge about paratransit services was particularly lacking.

In open-ended questions, many Victoria residents **expressed dissatisfaction** with frequency and efficiency of transit services and were **concerned** about accessibility to and from bus stops, safety both at bus stops and on board, as well as the user-friendliness of transit and paratransit services.

INTRODUCTION

One in six people around the world will be 60 years or older by 2030 (World Health Organization, 2021). In Canada, older adults rely mostly on private vehicles as their main mean of transport (Newbold et al., 2005). However, not all older adults have access to a car, and, as they age, many have to regulate their driving or even stop driving altogether (Musselwhite & Shergold, 2013). Public-transit can play a crucial role in facilitating the ongoing mobility of older adults. However, research on older adults' public-transit use is limited, especially in the Canadian context (Ravensbergen et al., 2022).

The Getting Around to Age in Place project conducted by the Transportation Research at McGill (TRAM) research lab and funded by the National Research Council of Canada (NRC) seeks to better understand older adults' perceptions of their travel patterns and how daily mobility affects their lives. This project examines how well public-transit services across Canada are supporting the needs of older adults and their ability to age in place.

In order to capture variations in regional contexts and differing transit service levels, the NRC, alongside key stakeholders, selected six Census Metropolitan areas (CMAs) as focus areas for the study: Toronto, Montréal, Vancouver, Halifax, Victoria, and Saskatoon.

This report presents a summary of the key findings for the Greater Victoria region. For a more comprehensive outline of the project, the methods used, and comparisons across regions we invite you to read the .

Greater Victoria

Greater Victoria is the second-largest metropolitan area in British Columbia, with a population of 397,237 residents. Almost one quarter (23.4%) of the population were aged 65 or over in 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2023) and is forecast to increase (BC Stats, 2024).

The majority of Victoria residents commute by private vehicle (74%), while 8% use public transit, 10% walk, and 5% cycle (Statistics Canada, 2023).

As of May 2024, BC Transit's fleet consisted of 345 buses servicing the Victoria region (BC Transit, 2024). Seniors aged 65 years and over are eligible for discounted monthly passes on BC Transit services (BC Transit, 2025), and some low-income seniors may be eligible for the provincial BC Bus Pass Program which entitles them to a $45 yearly pass (Government of British Colombia, 2023). Older adults with disabilities may also be eligible for the HandyDart paratransit service.
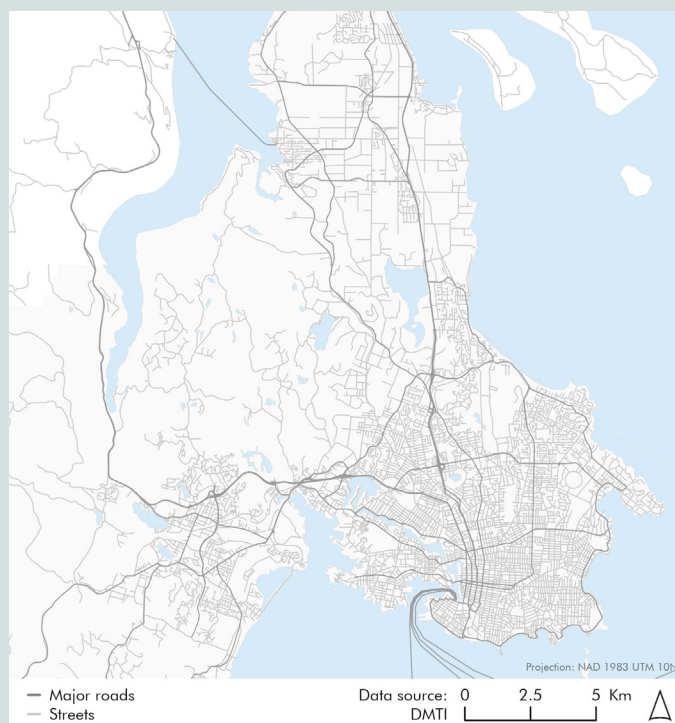

Figure 1 Study area: Greater Victoria CMA, with major roads and ferry routes

SURVEY AND SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Survey Design and Recruitment

A survey was conducted to collect first-hand accounts of older Canadians' perceptions and experiences of public-transit in their region, as well as to better understand the impact of their daily travel on their wellbeing. The survey design process included the TRAM team, NRC project managers, the project advisory committee members, and the appointed Experts by Experience. It was estimated the survey would take respondents 20 to 25 minutes to complete, and was circulated in French and English.

Recruitment methods included a paid advertisement campaign on Facebook which targeted users aged 65 years and over. Leger, a Canadian firm specializing in public opinion and surveys, was also hired to recruit respondents.

The survey was launched in early February 2023 and remained open until mid-March 2023. This report covers the results of the first wave of the survey. Further details about the survey design, recruitment, the second wave, and data cleaning processes can be found in the Aging in Place Final Report 2022-2025.
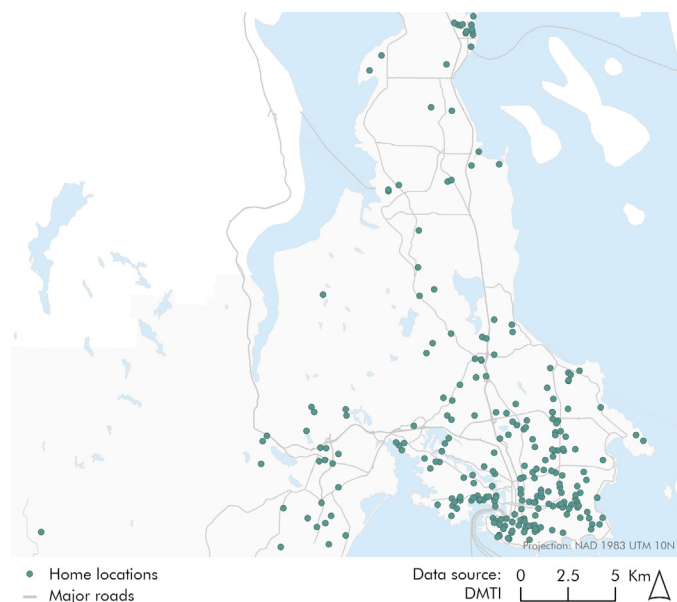

Figure 2 Home locations of survey respondents within the Greater Victoria CMA

Sample Characteristics

A total of 294 responses were collected from Greater Victoria in the first wave of the survey. Respondents' home locations are well distributed across residential areas, with notable concentrations near the downtown area and near major roads (Figure 2).

Sample characteristics were compared with data from the 2021 census (Statistics Canada, 2023) in order to gauge how representative the survey respondents are of the older population of the entire CMA (Table 1). Women were well represented in the sample of respondents compared to the CMA, and the sample is well distributed across incomes. Respondents tended to be younger, mostly aged 65 to 74, compared to the CMA. Just over 80% of respondents were retired or not in the workforce.

Table 1 Demographic characteristics compared with the older population in CMA

		Survey Respondents		Greater Victoria	
Total N		294	100.0%	92,910	23.4%*
Gender	**Man**	123	41.8%	41,755	44.9%
	Woman	167	56.8%	51,160	55.1%
	Other	4	1.4%	-	
Age	**65 to 74**	183	62.2%	52,715	56.7%
	75 to 84	101	34.4%	27,730	29.8%
	85+	10	3.4%	12,465	13.4%
House-hold Income (CAD)	**< 30k**	47	18.6%	-	
	30k - 60k	78	30.8%	-	
	60k - 90k	53	20.9%	-	
	90k - 150k	57	22.5%	-	
	> 150k	18	7.1%	-	
Work Status	**Employed**	51	17.3%	-	
	Not in WkF	243	82.7%	-	

* Represents the proportion of the older population (65+) of the total CMA population (2021 Census)

SURVEY RESULTS

Older Adults Travel Behaviour

Older adults in Victoria used private vehicles in large numbers. 91% of respondents held a valid driver's licence and 83% felt confident driving. Most respondents (63%) had driven a car in the last two days. Still, public-transit remained an attractive option for older residents, with 32% of respondents having made their last trip by public transit. About one-fifth (20%) of respondents were frequent transit users, taking public transit at least once a week in the previous year. 44% of respondents had not taken public transit at all in the previous 12 months. Frequency of public-transit use is seen to decline for adults over 85 (Figure 3).
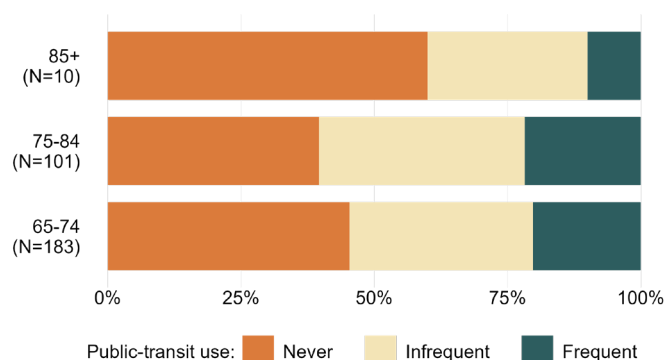

Figure 3 Frequency of public-transit use in previous 12 months by age

Independent Travel and Wellbeing

The results highlighted the importance of daily travel to older adults' wellbeing and continued independence. Almost all Victoria respondents (94%) agreed to the statement "as I get older, it is important for me to continue to travel independently", reinforcing the need to provide transport options that aid older adults to keep traveling independently. 72% of older adults in Victoria agreed that "daily travel contributes positively to [their] quality of life." However, those who used public transit more frequently were less likely to agree with this statement, reflecting potential service concerns.

Ability to Age in Place

Older adults expressed a desire to be able to age in place. Three-quarters of respondents (76%) agreed that "as I get older, it is important for me to continue to live in my current neighbourhood." Despite this strong desire to age in place, around one-third (32%) agreed with the statement "I am concerned about whether I will be able to remain in my neighbourhood because of my changing transport needs and capabilities as I get older." Non-transit users were more likely to be concerned (see Figure 4). Of those who had driven recently, 41% agreed that there would be "no adequate travel alternatives" around their home if they had to stop driving.
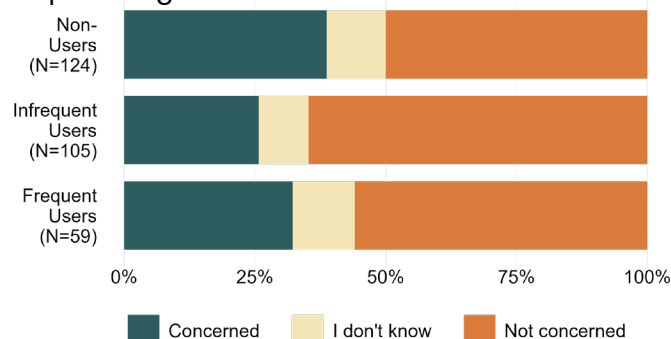

Figure 4 Concerned about ability to remain in current neighbourhood as they get older?

Intention to move

Around 27% of older adults indicated that they were considering moving in the next five years. Affordability was identified as the main factor in this consideration, chosen by 53% of respondents who are considering moving. Mobility and access to destinations were also key considerations for many respondents. Living in a region with better public transit was chosen as an important factor for 26% of those who are considering moving. Desires (or needs) for a more walkable environment (40%) and closer proximity family and friends (31%) and grocery stores and services (31%) were also important.

Public Transit Modes

Among older adults who had used public transit in the previous 12 months, the most common mode was the bus (93%). The ferry service was used by 55% of transit users. 5% of older adults who used public transit used paratransit services.
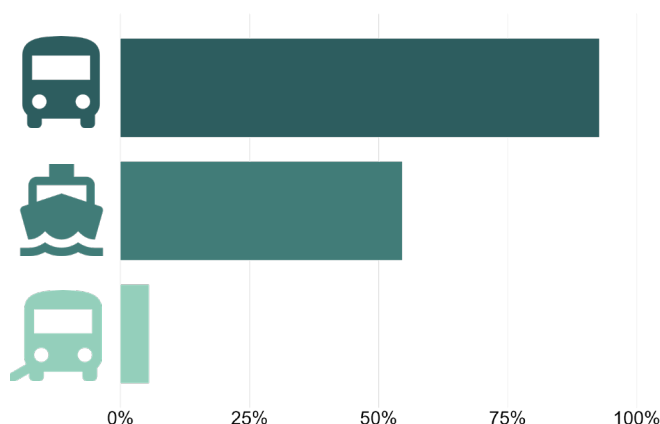

Figure 5 Transit modes used at least once in the past year in Victoria (transit users only)

Destinations Reached using Transit

The most common destinations older adults in Victoria visited using public transit were shopping (48%) and medical appointments (47%), followed by recreation (45%) and visits to friends and family (40%).
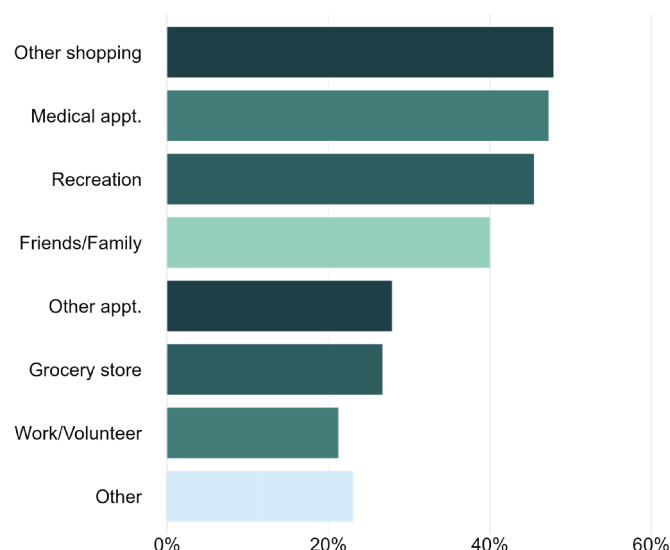

Figure 6 Destinations reached using transit in the past year in Victoria (% of transit users)

Travel Times

The survey data reveals that older adults in Victoria primarily used public transit during off-peak times (Figure 7). This could directly impact older adults' experience, as transit services are often less frequent at off-peak times, and fewer connection and opportunities are possible.
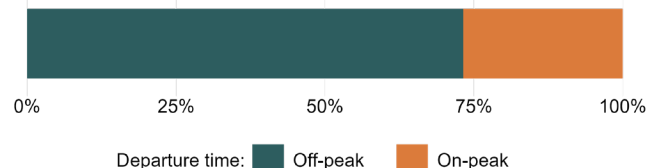

Figure 7 Time of most recent public transit trip

Reasonable Transit Travel Times

When planning public transit for older Canadians, it is important to consider their specific daily travel needs, behaviours and expectations. Respondents were asked what they consider to be a reasonable time to reach their desired destinations by public transit. 30 minutes stands out as the most frequently chosen reasonable travel time, selected by around one-third (32%) of respondents (Figure 8).

Figure 8 Reasonable public-transit travel time for older adults in Victoria

To ensure more older travelers can reach their destinations within 30 minutes, public-transit service frequency should be increased, especially during the day, outside of peak commuting hours. Increasing the number and variety of destinations available to older adults by public transit could also reduce their travel time as well as increase their travel satisfaction.

Satisfaction with Public Transit

The majority of older adults expressed their satisfaction with the public transit system in Victoria. More than half of older adults (55%) agreed that public transit in the region meets their needs, and most respondents (69%) were willing to recommend public transit to a friend or family member. Of those using the public transit system (N= 165), 67% agreed that public transit positively impacts their quality of life.

Respondents who recently used transit were asked about their satisfaction with the main mode of their last transit trip. The results for the bus, as the most frequently used transit service in Victoria, are presented below in Figure 9.
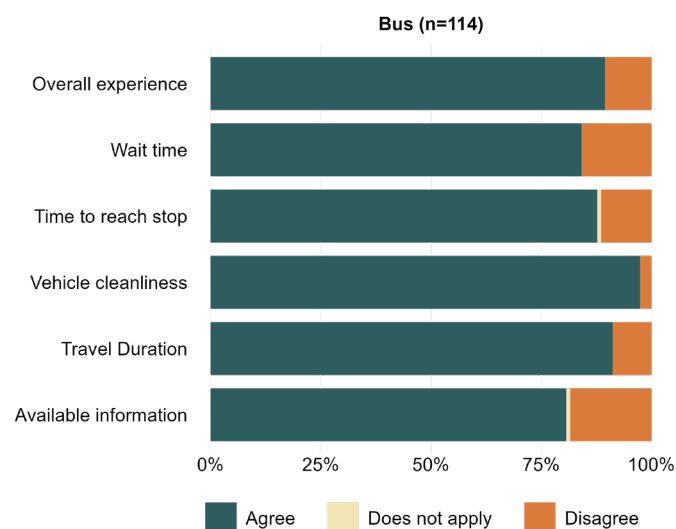

Figure 9 Satisfaction with last public-transit trip by bus

Older adults who took the bus on their last transit trip were highly satisfied with their overall experience (89%). Bus users were most satisfied with vehicle cleanliness (97% agree). They also reported high levels of satisfaction with the duration of their travel (91%) and the time it took them to reach the stop (88%). They were slightly less satisfied with the wait time (84%). Among older adults that took the bus, many respondents indicated that information about transit schedules, announcements etc., was not easy to understand, or was lacking (18%).

Accessibility to Destinations by Public Transit in Victoria

Using respondents' suggestion of 30 minutes as a reasonable travel time by public transit to reach destinations, an accessibility analysis was conducted to compare access to destinations across Greater Victoria. The total number of jobs was used as a proxy for the number of destinations that can be reached from someone's home (Census tract). Further details can be found in Rodrigue et al. (2023).

Accessibility by public transit was found to be higher for those living in the downtown core of Victoria, where the number of activities tends to be the highest (Figure10).

Figure 10 Accessibility of jobs by public transit (30-minute travel time, departing at 10am)

Accessibility and Perceived Convenience of Public Transit

The results suggests that the more accessible an older adult's neighbourhood is, the more convenient they find public transport. For residents living in the most accessible census tracts, 67% agreed to the statement "Public transit in my region is a convenient way of traveling." On the other hand, for those living in census tracts with low accessibility, agreeance was 47%.

Challenges for Public–Transit Use

A perceived lack of convenience (36%) and poor comfort (27%) were the largest causes of concern for older adults regarding the public-transit system in Greater Victoria. 26% of adult adults surveyed thought the service was unreliable. Among existing public-transit users (N= 165), safety was also a key concern, with 18% of respondents stating that they do not feel safe "from crime and unwanted attention" on public transit in Victoria. In comparison, only 14% of respondents believed public transit to be unaffordable in Victoria.

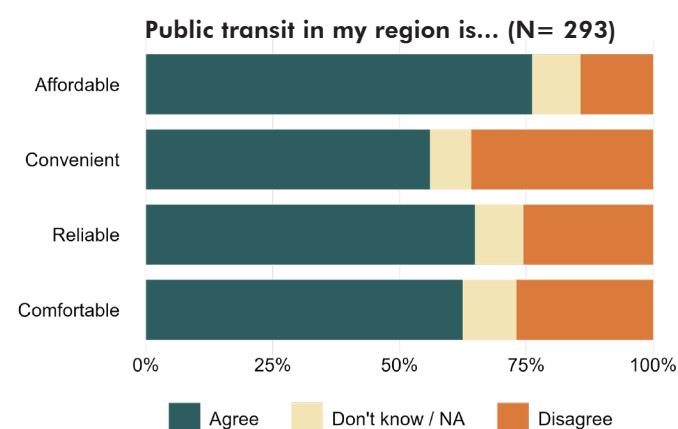**Public transit in my region is... (N= 293)**

Figure 11 Older adults perceptions of the public-transit system in Victoria

Among those who were not currently using transit (N= 129), there was a prevailing opinion that transit is not capable of transporting them to their required destinations. Only 20% agreed that they would be able to get to all the destinations they need using public transit.

Who Does not use Transit?

Non-transit users do not necessarily have a negative view of the mode. Indeed, respondents who do not use transit vary greatly in their perceptions towards transit, and their intentions to use it in the future. A cluster analysis of survey responses revealed several distinct profiles of non-users, from those who have a generally positive view of transit, but just feel that it is not for now, to those who are staunchly transit-averse and have no intention of ever using the service. Respondents shared their main barriers to transit use, including concerns about the access to and from transit stops and stations and perceptions of transit being infrequent, unreliable and slow. Many stated that driving was simply a more convenient option for them.

Given the heterogeneity of non-users, a range of strategies must be implemented with different timescales to facilitate and encourage transit adoption. For more information please refer to Alousi-Jones et al. (2025b) and the Aging in Place Final Report 2022-2025.

Knowledge of Public–Transit Offer

A lack of knowledge about the public-transit services on offer to older adults was apparent. Nearly 1 in 3 (31%) older adults in Victoria either disagreed with the statement "I know how my local public transit system works" or responded neutral. Of those who had not used transit in the previous year, just over half (52%) agreed they knew how the public transit system works, this lack of knowledge representing a significant barrier for mode shift. Awareness of paratransit services and their eligibility criteria was also lacking for many residents. 35% of respondents reported not knowing whether they were eligible to use paratransit.

Despite seniors aged 65 or over being eligible for discounted monthly transit fares in Victoria, only 36% of transit users in the survey sample reported receiving a reduced fare. Targeted information campaigns could therefore yield important benefits to older adults in Victoria.

Disability and Mobility Challenges

Some older adults face added mobility challenges which may impact their ability to perform desired or necessary everyday tasks. In our survey, over one-third of respondents (39%) reported having a disability or health condition that limits their mobility. Among those, 69% reported their disability to be permanent while 17% stated their condition to be recurring. The most reported forms of disability are presented in Figure 12.
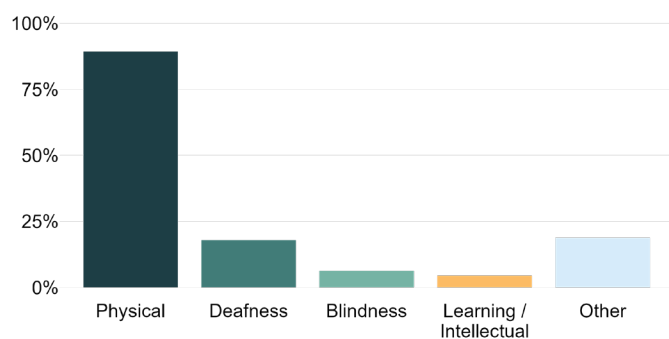

Figure 12 Most common forms of disability (as % of respondents reporting a disability, N= 112)

Nearly 1 in 5 (18%) respondents reported requiring a mobility aid device such as a cane or a wheelchair, to assist them in their daily activities. Mobility challenges associated with public-transit use were raised by many respondents:

"Buses are difficult to access to people using mobility walkers, especially during bad weather."

"The infrastructure for mobility scooters and power chairs is very poor [...] due to poor condition of sidewalk, curb cuts..."

Transit Use and Disability

Older adults in Victoria who stated having a disability or mobility-limiting health condition were more likely to be frequent transit users (25%) compared to other respondents (18%).
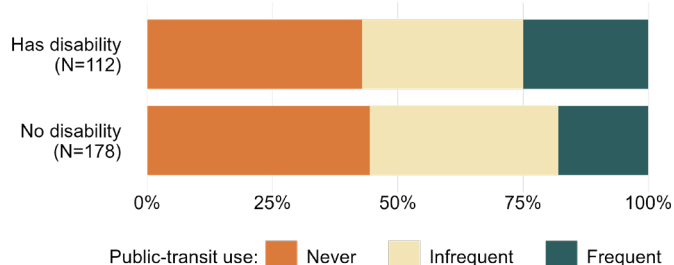

Figure 13 Transit-use frequency by disability status

Public–transit's ability to meet the needs of older adults with disabilities

People with disabilities were more likely to feel that their public-transit needs are not met compared to people without disabilities. As seen in Figure 14, 48% of Victoria respondents who reported having a disability stated that the public-transit services in their region met their daily travel needs, compared to 60% for those who reported no disabilities. This disparity indicates a need to better grasp the transit needs of older adults with disabilities.
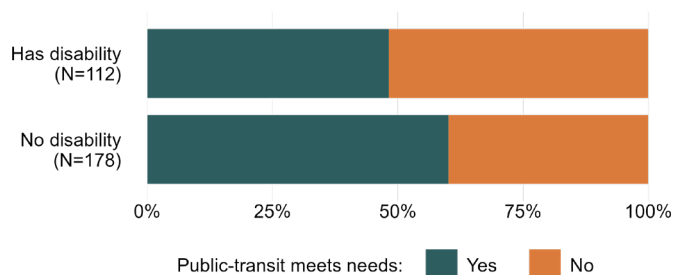

Figure 14 Perception that public transit meets older adults' needs by disability status

Older Adults' Recommendations on how Public Transit can be Improved in Victoria

How do Older Adults in Victoria Think Transit can be Improved?

The survey results suggest that older adults are generally satisfied with the transit system in Greater Victoria. Nevertheless, it was important to ask older adults directly about their experiences and how they thought the service could be improved. Respondents were given the opportunity to provide additional comments and suggestions via open questions. A wide range of comments were provided, with some of the main themes summarized here:

An essential service

Public transit is an important service that many older adults in Victoria rely on to meet their transportation needs, especially as they become less comfortable driving.

> **"I value Victoria's bus system. I know I will come to rely on it more when it becomes not feasible for me to drive."**

More frequent and direct service

Many respondents were dissatisfied with the frequency of service, which becomes particularly frustrating when transfers are required. The lack of direct routes also creates inefficiencies for riders and makes it hard to arrive at appointments on time using transit.

> **"Buses have limited schedules, making it extremely difficult to transfer buses which I almost always have to do."**

> **"More public transit across town, currently have to go downtown first then transfer to get to destination. Not timely nor convenient!"**

> **"I often use a taxi to get to a medical appointment in order to arrive closer to the actual time, then take the bus home."**

Better accessibility to transit stops

A common complaint was the lack of accessibility to and from transit stops which prevents some from using transit altogether.

> **"I often have to walk 4 blocks from the bus stop to my destination or vice versa. I have mobility issues and having to walk 4 blocks or more creates a barrier for me."**

> **"I need transport to get to the public transport stops […]"**

A safer experience

Respondents expressed safety concerns due to lack of safe infrastructure at stops and fears of injury from the boarding process. Some were also concerned about COVID-19 and unmasked passengers or harassment and violence.

> **"No sidewalks to bus stop […] Dangerous to walk and no street lights either."**

> **"More than once the bus driver […] has not waited until I'm seated before driving off, and I have come dangerously close to falling […]"**

More user-friendly options

Some respondents felt that schedule and route information was lacking at stops. Many also expressed frustration with the booking process for paratransit services.

> **"[HandyDart] needs to be booked weeks in advance and is very unreliable."**

Improving the service for older adults will benefit all users

While these comments arise from the mobility concerns of older adults and their specific travel needs, it is evident that any intervention which seeks to improve the transit experience of older adults, will ultimately benefit all transit users.

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A complete list of the publications from the Getting around to Age in Place project can be found on the [TRAM website](#). The full questionnaire is available for consultation [here.](#)

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