

Overview

Nelson\Nygaard, working in conjunction with staff from the Ontario County Planning and Transportation Departments, conducted an internet based survey with county residents who do not usually use CATS fixed-route and dial-a-ride (DAR) bus service. The purpose of this survey was to understand non-riders' knowledge and perception of CATS services and ask them to tell us their ideas for changes that would make the service more useful. As we evaluate and consider recommendations to the services, therefore, we will be able to include non-riders awareness levels, perceptions and needs into our analysis. Survey findings are documented in this technical memo. Key findings gleaned from the results include:

- Survey responses show the survey reached the intended audience. Responses include individuals living throughout Ontario County, with 75% saying they had never ridden CATS and the vast majority (90%) having access to a private automobile.
- There were a lot of positive comments about the CATS service, including several comments underscoring the importance of the service to the community and tales about how the bus service has helped specific individuals.
- 14% of the respondents said they would like to use CATS more often. This finding was also supported for an appreciation of the service, recognizing it is challenging to provide public transportation services in rural areas.
- At least 38% of the respondents live within a 10 minute walk of a bus stop. This suggests excellent service coverage, especially considering 28% of respondents did not know if they lived near a bus stop or not.
- Improving awareness of and information about the CATS system is important for increased development of the system. As mentioned, just over a quarter of the respondents were not sure if a bus stop was located near their home. Open ended questions also demonstrated a desire for more and better information about the service.
- Ideas to improve the service included extending the service longer into the evening, operating more service on weekend days, and more frequent service.
- There may be opportunities to improve the public's perception about the CATS service, especially with regards to drivers' driving behavior, idling buses in front of the County Courthouse and customer service generally.

Survey Administration and Design

Nelson\Nygaard, working in conjunction with staff from the Ontario County Planning and Transportation Departments, developed a survey for county residents who do not usually use CATS fixed-route and/or dial-a-ride (DAR) bus service. The purpose of this survey was to understand non-riders' knowledge and perception of CATS services and their ideas for how to improve the service.

The survey was formatted into an internet-based survey program so the survey could be distributed by email and people could access the survey via links on select web-sites, including the Ontario County general web-site, the planning department and CATS websites. The survey was also distributed by email to names and email addresses collected through various outreach

activities conducted both as part of this study and other planning department activities. Recognizing that not all county residents have access to the internet, printed paper copies of the survey were made available at key locations. These paper surveys were distributed by the Lakeview Mental Health Association. In total 295 individuals responded to the survey.

The survey was designed to be very brief with a total of seven questions; five discreet and two open-ended. The five discreet questions included:

1. Which of the following best describes the location of the nearest bus service to your home?
2. How many times have you used Ontario County Transit (CATS) in the past month?
3. Which statement best describes your feelings about Ontario County Transit?
4. Where do you live?
5. Do you have access to an automobile?

The two-open ended questions were:

- Please tell us what specific changes to CATS service might encourage you to start riding the bus or ride it more often.
- Is there anything else you would like to tell us about public transportation in Ontario County?

Survey Results

Location of Nearest Bus Stop

Respondents were asked to note the location of the nearest bus stop to their home. About one quarter said a bus stop was within a 5 minute walking distance and another 12% said a bus stop was within a 10 minute walk from their home. 7% said a bus stop was too far to walk to and 27% said they did not have a bus stop near their home. Nearly 28% were unsure. (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Location of Nearest Bus Stop

	Response Percent	Response Count
I can walk to a bus route in 5 minutes or less.	25.7%	75
I can walk to a bus route, but it takes around 10 minutes.	12.3%	36
There is a bus route near to my home, but it is too far to walk to.	7.2%	21
I don't have a bus route near my house.	27.1%	79
Not sure	27.7%	81
<i>answered question</i>		292
<i>skipped question</i>		3

Source: Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates

Past Use of CATS Bus Service

When asked how many times they had used CATS in the past month, three quarters said they had never used the bus and another 9% said they had not used the bus in the past month (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Past Use of CATS Bus Service

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Once	2.4%	7
1 or 2 times	3.8%	11
More than 3 times	9.7%	28
Not in the past month	9.0%	26
Never/None	75.0%	216
<i>answered question</i>		288
<i>skipped question</i>		7

Source: Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates

Feelings about CATS Bus Service

Respondents were shown a series of five statements and asked which statement best describes their feelings about CATS service. The majority (69%) of the respondents had no opinion. The next most popular statement was selected by 14% of respondents who said they would like to ride the bus more often (see Figure 4). About 12% said they either prefer not to use the bus (6%) or don't like using CATS buses (6%). 5% of respondents said they ride the bus and it meets their needs.

Figure 3: Feelings about CATS Bus Service

	Response Percent	Response Count
I would like to ride the bus more often.	14.2%	41
I ride the bus, and it meets my needs.	4.9%	14
I prefer not to use CATS but sometimes I have to.	5.9%	17
I don't like using CATS buses.	5.9%	17
No opinion\never used the service.	69.1%	199
<i>answered question</i>		288
<i>skipped question</i>		7

Source: Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates

Town of Residence

To understand the distribution of survey responses, the survey asked respondents to note where they live. As shown in Figure 4, results roughly reflect county demographics. 34% of respondents live in Canandaigua and 15% live in Geneva. Other communities with larger proportions of respondents include Farmington (8%), Phelps (8%) and Manchester (6%).

Figure 4: Town of Residence

	Response Percent	Response Count
Bristol	3.0%	8
Canadice	1.5%	4
Canandaigua	33.5%	90
East Bloomfield	1.1%	3
Farmington	8.2%	22
Geneva	14.5%	39
Gorham	4.1%	11
Hopewell	4.8%	13
Manchester	6.3%	17
Naples	3.0%	8
Phelps	7.8%	21
Richmond	1.5%	4
Seneca	4.1%	11
South Bristol	1.5%	4
Victor	4.5%	12
West Bloomfield	0.7%	2
<i>answered question</i>		269
<i>skipped question</i>		26

Source: Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates

Car Ownership

Most respondents (90%) said they have access to an automobile (see Figure 1). These results are also consistent with county-wide demographic data.

Figure 5: Car Ownership

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	89.5%	246
No	10.5%	29
<i>answered question</i>		275
<i>skipped question</i>		20

Encourage Use of CATS

Respondents were asked to respond to an open-ended question about what would make them more likely to use CATS bus service. Results from this poll varied considerably, but clustered around a few main findings:

- Increased service received the most 'votes' with 51 responses calling for some increase to the level of service. This includes recommendations for more frequent service, longer service hours, including evening and weekend/Sunday services as well as service to more destinations.
- The second largest recommendation with 40 votes was for better and more information about the service and system. Suggestions includes more information on-

line, clearer schedules, posting schedules at stops and offering travel training for new riders.

- Approximately 22 answers referenced service quality, saying they don't like to use the bus because they perceive drivers to be rude or drive too fast, the bus is late or doesn't adhere to the published schedule, buses are dirty and/or the bus takes too long to get from point A to point B. Other comments included complaints about paying for transfers and difficulties associated with physically boarding on the bus.
- Related to increased service, 15 respondents suggested more or different stop locations would encourage them to use the bus.
- About 21 respondents said they were never going to take the bus with some saying they wouldn't take it until they were too old to drive alone.
- Other ideas for service improvements that were mentioned several times included increased coordination with RGRTA service and more express and direct service.
- Individuals also noted that increased fuel prices would encourage them to use the bus.

Other Comments

The final question on the survey was an open-ended question which asked respondents if they had "anything else to tell us". 246 individuals provided comments, although 17 people gave "no" or "none" as their comment. These comments generally fell into one of six categories:

- **Negative comments about service quality:** 34% of the comments tallied involved dissatisfaction with the quality of CATS service. Several comments referred to the bus being on time, vehicle cleanliness and general customer service. The largest single category of comments, however, involved negative comments about CATS drivers, including complaints about safety, driving too fast and customer interaction.
- **Positive comments about the service in general:** 32% of comments received were positive praise for the CATS service, including an appreciation of the service generally and recognition of the importance of the service to the county. Several comments also referenced their own positive personal experience, or the experience of a client or family member using the service.
- **Requests to increase service:** Some 21% of the comments involved requests for service expansions, including requests for longer service hours, especially evening service, service to more destinations and increased service frequency.
- **Wastefulness of public resources:** Another 9% of the comments related to a perception of wastefulness. Several survey respondents expressed concerns that the buses spent too much time idling in from the county courthouse and the service is under-utilized.
- **Lack of information:** A handful (4%) comments pertained to a lack of information about the system overall and/or concern that key organizations or groups did not know how the service worked.

- **Fares:** The smallest group of comments pertained to fares, specifically that dial-a-ride fares are high for some portions of the population and an interest in smart card or more modern fare collection technology.

Opportunities for Service Improvements

The results of the non-user survey will be incorporated into the recommendations for improvement. In particular, there are opportunities to strengthen the base of support for the system and, at the same time, correct negative perceptions about public transportation services.

Opportunities include “soft” improvements, such as providing more and better information about the system through both print and electronic media. The presence of clean, easily understandable schedules, bus system “branding” symbols, and easily accessible web sites may help non-users feel more comfortable about using the system. If no travel training programs are available in Ontario County, such programs may be worth developing. In addition, there may be opportunities to re-focus front line staff (drivers and dispatchers) on customer satisfaction and demonstrate follow-up with logged complaints, even if such complaints are associated with misperceptions.

Another finding from the non-user survey is that people who use the system or know someone who does are very appreciative of the service. Individuals with no connection to the service, however, don't have as many opportunities to see the positive attributes of the service. News articles or other public relations media that focuses on how CATS helps specific individuals (or groups of individuals) may help strengthen public perception of the service. Ideally, this type of campaign would include a diversity of riders, including college students and commuters as well as older adults and persons with disabilities.

Infrastructure and service planning can also help improve public perception. These opportunities include using scheduling software to improve on-time performance. Scheduling software will also increase vehicle utilization and help address the sense that dial-a-ride buses are more often waiting as moving. CATS may also consider moving the primary transfer point buses off of Main Street in Canandaigua. Some survey respondents suggested that the buses spend a lot of time idling and waiting at this location.

The non-user survey also suggested that improvement priorities should concentrate on providing later evening service and more service on weekend days. In addition, service improvements should also look for opportunities to make services more direct, and travel opportunities between the most important destinations, even if there are no service hours added to the schedule.