Town of Amherst

Amherst Transit System Feasibility Study

Final Report

2026-02-18

CA0057519.4020

Document distribution

Town of Amherst

Amherst Transit System Feasibility Study

Final Report

2026-01-26

Prepared for

Town of Amherst

98 East Victoria Street
Amherst, NS B4H 1X6

Prepared by

WSP Canada Inc.
1 Spectacle Lake Drive
Dartmouth, NS B3B 1X7
T 902-835-9955

Quality control	Name	Date	Signature
Prepared by:	D. McCusker J. Finkleman	2026-02-18	
Reviewed by:	C. Pyne	2026-02-18	

Revisions

Rev	Date	Details
1	2026-01-26	Incorporated comments received from Town Staff (2026-01-13)
2	2026-02-05	Incorporated comments received from Town Staff (2026-01-30)
3	2026-02-18	Modifications to operating cost tables. Issued as Final Report

Table of contents

Abbreviations and glossary

Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Description
CCTS	Cumberland County Transportation Service (demand-responsive transit)
CPTF	Canada Public Transit Fund
JRTA	Joint Regional Transportation Agency
MAE	Multiple Account Evaluation
PTAP	Public Transportation Assistance Program
RTSF	Rural Transit Solutions Fund

Executive summary

Purpose and Context

The Town of Amherst commissioned this feasibility study to assess the need, viability, and implementation strategy for introducing a fixed-route public transit service, while considering coordination with existing demand-responsive transportation provided by Cumberland County Transportation Service (CCTS). The study responds directly to Council priorities, community feedback, and long-term goals related to equity, sustainability, economic development, and quality of life. The role public transit plays in improving inclusivity, social equity, and the environment are highlighted.

Key Findings

Strong Community Need and Support

- Over 1,000 survey responses and extensive stakeholder engagement demonstrate strong public interest in transit, particularly among seniors, youth, individuals without access to vehicles, and those with mobility challenges.
- 68% of respondents indicated they would consider using public transit if available, and 74% said they would be more likely to use it if routes and schedules align with daily needs (work, shopping, healthcare).
- Affordability, safety, accessibility, and reliability emerged as core expectations.

A Single Fixed Route Can Serve Most of Amherst Effectively

- A 60-minute loop route is recommended as the preferred service plan (see Figure ES-1).
- Approximately 80% of Amherst residents (≈7,600 people) and nearly all key destinations (downtown, hospital, major retail, community facilities) would be within a 5-minute walk of a bus stop.
- The route design balances coverage, simplicity, and operational feasibility, while excluding expected low-ridership areas such as the industrial park.

Service Design Must Prioritize Simplicity and Reliability

- Comparative evaluation showed that while multi-loop options increase frequency on some corridors, they introduce schedule complexity and reduce coverage.
- A single, predictable route operating every 60 minutes was found to be more legible for users and better aligned with Amherst's scale and ridership expectations.

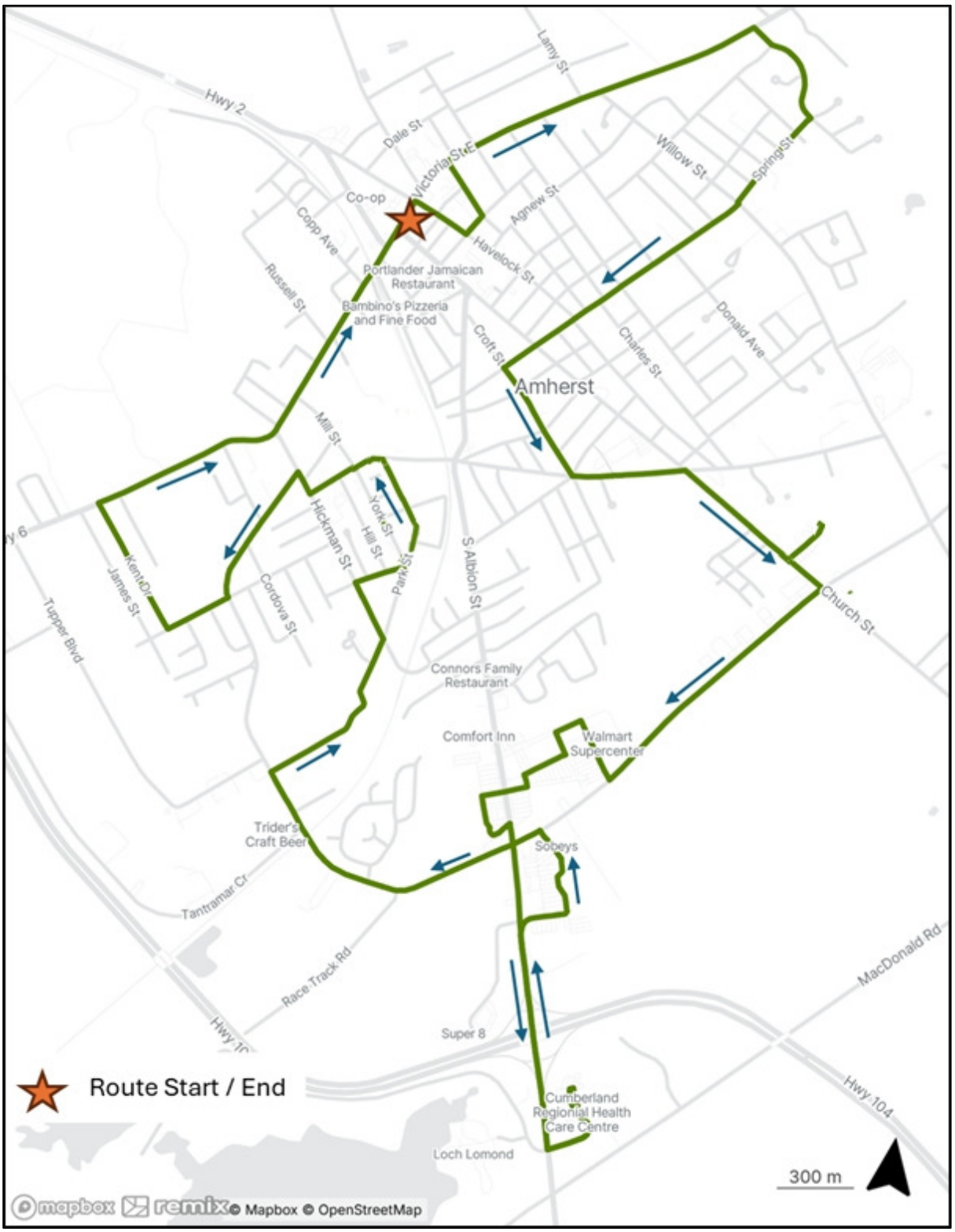


Figure ES-1: Preferred Route

Ridership Will Be Modest but Meaningful

- Projected weekday ridership ranges from 55–88 trips per day, with annual ridership of 13,900–22,200 once the system stabilizes.
- Ridership is expected to build gradually over 1–2 years, underscoring the importance of marketing, education, and patience during startup.

Operating a Municipal Transit System Independently Is Challenging

- Operating a single-route transit system in-house presents staffing, maintenance, and redundancy risks.
- Leveraging an experienced third-party operator significantly reduces startup risk and improves reliability

Capital and Operating Costs Are Significant but Comparable to Peer Communities

- Capital costs: ~$1.4M in Year 1 (two buses + initial stop infrastructure).
- Annual operating costs: ~$295K in Year 1, ~$305K in Year 2.
- Fare revenue will offset only a portion of costs, consistent with public transit norms in small communities.

Key Recommendations

1. Proceed with Implementation of a Fixed-Route Transit Service

- Adopt the recommended single, 60-minute loop route operating weekdays from 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.
- Defer evening and weekend service until ridership and funding can be reassessed.

2. Engage a Third-Party Operator

- Pursue negotiations with Cumberland County Transportation Service (CCTS) or another experienced operator rather than operating the service directly.
- This approach minimizes operational risk, leverages existing expertise, and supports future integration with demand-responsive services.

3. Select a 35-Foot Urban Transit Bus

- Use fully accessible, low-floor urban buses to accommodate projected demand and future growth (see Figure ES-2).

Figure ES-2: Urban Transit Bus

- Begin with diesel vehicles to reduce startup costs, while remaining open to battery-electric buses depending on funding requirements and lifecycle analysis.
- Consider acquiring new or used 27-foot mini-buses as an option for a quick start-up or pilot service.

4. Adopt an Affordable, Accessible Fare Strategy

- Target fares in the $3 range, reflecting community willingness to pay while maintaining inclusivity.
- Offer multiple payment options (cash, passes, electronic) to reduce barriers to use.

5. Invest in Visible, High-Quality Stop Infrastructure and Rider Information

- Prioritize shelters, lighting, benches, and clear wayfinding at key stops.
- Implement real-time tracking or schedule apps to improve user confidence and perception of reliability.

6. Phase, Monitor, and Adapt

- Treat the service as a scalable foundation, not a final product.
- Monitor ridership, costs, and customer feedback closely, with annual reporting to Council.
- Explore future enhancements such as extended hours, weekend service, or regional and demand-responsive expansions in co-operation with the Municipality of Cumberland County as conditions allow.

Cost Summary

The recommended approach of purchasing urban transit buses to provide needed capacity and longer service life will result in a significant up-front cost ($1,540,000 over the first two years). A more cautious approach, particularly if external capital funding support cannot be secured, would be to purchase mini-buses to begin with. The total capital cost ($580,000 over the first two years) would be significantly reduced. Start-up costs could be reduced even further with the acquisition of used buses instead of new.

The net annual operating cost (total cost minus fare revenue) is projected to be $257,000 in the first year. This estimate is for the low end of projected ridership – ridership closer to the higher end of the projection will reduce that cost. Operating costs are also slightly reduced if the option of using mini-buses is exercised.

A summary of capital and operating costs is provided in Table ES-1.

Table ES-0-1: Cost Summary

	Urban Transit Buses		Mini-Buses	
	Year One	Year Two	Year One	Year Two
CAPITAL COSTS				
Vehicles	$1,360,000		$400,000	
Stop Infrastructure	$8,000	$132,000	$8,000	$132,000
Start-up (procurement, promotion, engineering, etc.)	$40,000		$40,000	
TOTAL	**$1,408,000**	**$132,000**	**$448,000**	**$132,000**
OPERATING COSTS				
Fuel	$31,000	$32,200	$24,000	$25,000
Maintenance	$20,000	$20,800	$20,000	$20,800
Vehicle Replacement Reserve	$43,000	$43,000	$25,000	$38,000
Salaries (drivers and administration)	$178,000	$185,100	$178,000	$185,100
Miscellaneous (insurance, marketing, etc)	$23,000	$23,900	$23,000	$23,900
TOTAL	**$295,000**	**$305,000**	**$270,000**	**$292,800**
NET OPERATING COSTS				
Revenue*	$38,000	$38,000	$38,000	$38,000
TOTAL	**$257,000**	**$267,000**	**$232,000**	**$254,800**

* Revenue shown is the low end of a projected revenue range
Figures do not include tax. Annual inflation rate of 4% assumed.

Overall Conclusion

While the introduction of a fixed-route transit service represents a significant financial commitment, the study concludes that it would deliver substantial social, economic, and quality-of-life benefits to Amherst residents. Community support is strong, the proposed service is appropriately scaled, and implementation risks can be managed through phased delivery and third-party operations. The recommended transit system provides Amherst with a realistic and flexible starting point for building a more inclusive and connected transportation network locally and, over time, regionally.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The Town of Amherst is located in Cumberland County, Nova Scotia, near the Nova Scotia/New Brunswick border. The Town has a defined downtown core and an uptown commercial area with Albion/South Albion Street acting as the spine of the Town. The industrial park is home to several large employers. Virtually all of the urbanized area is contained within the Town boundaries. Several planned low- to medium-density residential projects are in the approval phases, suggesting continued growth can be expected.

Fixed-route public transportation for Towns within Nova Scotia has been gaining momentum in recent years. Ten years ago, only Halifax Regional Municipality, Cape Breton Regional Municipality, and Kings Transit offered fixed-route service. Since that time, new fixed-route services have been implemented in six additional communities and planning is underway in several others. Community-run demand responsive services have also seen expanded growth in that time.

1.2 Project Objective

The Town of Amherst recognizes that public transit can be transformative for the community and can achieve many important goals such as:

Improving inclusivity and social equity

Not every resident has access to a vehicle whether due to age, economics, or physical limitations. Public transit provides affordable opportunities for travel without reliance on a private vehicle. This increased mobility can help reduce isolation and increase opportunities for social interaction.

Improving the environment

Traffic noise and exhaust can be noticeably reduced when trip-making is attracted to transit and away from vehicles. Road congestion and parking space requirements can also be reduced. People who take public transportation feel a sense of satisfaction knowing that they are doing their part to reduce air pollution and help the environment.

Contributing to the economic well-being of the community

Public transit helps reduce the cost of travel for individuals, as well as businesses. Businesses can attract employees from a broader pool when greater travel flexibility is provided. Public transportation can also reduce the amount of money spent on parking fees and gasoline. The amount of lost time and productivity associated with traffic congestion can also be decreased.

Adding to the quality of life

Public transportation can also improve the overall quality of life. It can reduce stress levels and lead to a healthier and more enjoyable lifestyle. It can provide access to areas that would otherwise be

inaccessible, providing greater opportunities for education, employment, and leisure activities. The convenience of having reliable transportation options can also provide greater freedom and flexibility, allowing individuals to plan their days more effectively. All these factors can contribute to an improved sense of well-being and a better quality of life.

Adding to the value and attractiveness of residential and commercial properties

Residents and businesses looking to locate in a community often consider the value of public transit and make it an important component of their decision-making. Younger residents, in particular, value the environmental and economic value of public transit and seek to make that a lifestyle choice. Studies have found that youth are more attracted to public transit than previous generations.

> Car dependency is reducing among young people in high-income countries. Young people use multimodal transport more than other age groups, and policy makers can leverage this. Delaying car-based lifestyles by providing alternatives is essential to behavioural change. Ensuring affordability, accessibility and safety in transport systems should be the priority for policy makers, as these still do not exist in many places.[1]

The stated objective of the feasibility study is to assess the need, viability, and implementation strategies for introducing a fixed-route transportation system into the Town of Amherst. The Town has indicated an interest in exploring a variety of transit service models and coordination with Cumberland County Transportation Service (CCTS), the existing demand-responsive service.

[1] ITF (2024) Youth on the Move: Young People and Transport in the 21st Century", International Transport Forum Policy Papers, No. 128, OECD Publishing, Paris.

2. Existing Conditions

2.1 Study Area

The focus of this study is the jurisdictional extent of the Town of Amherst. The study area will be extended to include the Cumberland Regional Health Centre, which is a regional health facility integral to providing for the health care needs of the community, but located just to the south of the municipal boundary. Consideration will also be given to extension of service to nearby communities such as Springhill, Oxford, Wallace, Pugwash, Parrsboro, and Sackville, NB in the longer term.

2.2 Street Network

Streets are normally classified by the function they provide. In an urban area like Amherst, it is typical to have arterial, collector, and local streets. Arterials are intended to facilitate traffic flow over land access and local streets are designed more for land access than they are for traffic flow. Collectors are the “middle ground” between the two.

For the development of transit routing, it is important to focus on arterial and collector streets where the movement of larger vehicles like buses is better accommodated. A proposed classification for streets in Amherst is provided in Map A-1 in Appendix A.

2.3 Population

Population is what generates transit trips. Areas with higher population density can generate more transit trips within shorter travel distances. The distribution of population for the study area, as provided in 2021 census data, is shown in Figure 2-1. This data will be used to determine where transit service can most effectively reach residents.

To conduct a more fine-tuned assessment of how well populations are being reached by various servicing plans, several transit nodes and collection areas within the study area were established. These nodes approximate potential bus stop locations. Surrounding each node, an area within a 400m walking distance was established. These nodes and areas are shown in Figure 2-2. 400m represents a five-minute walk at a normal pace, which is typically viewed as an acceptable walking time to get to a bus stop.

For this analysis, both single-family homes and apartment units are considered dwelling units. More importantly, every resident room within a multi-unit seniors’ facility is considered a dwelling unit in recognition of the significance of seniors to transit trip generation. A summary of the total dwelling units by zone is provided in Table 2-1.

In addition to existing population, consideration will be given to where future growth is expected to occur. Potential growth nodes are shown at a conceptual level in Figure 2-3. These growth areas will not be considered as potential markets for transit trips for the evaluation of initial service. A final review of preferred routing will, however, consider the opportunity for minor route deviations to provide future service to these growth nodes.

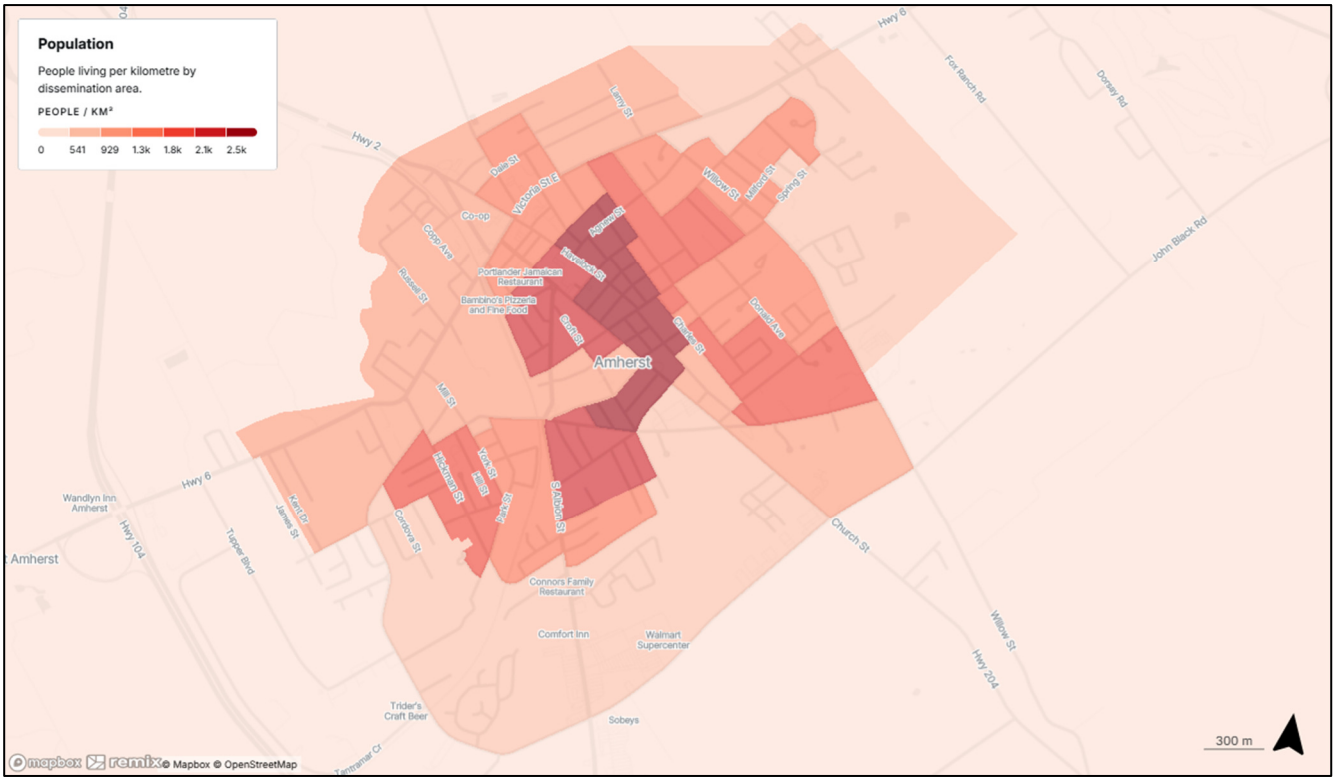


Figure 2-1: Population Density in the Study Area

Table 2-1: Dwelling Units by Zone

Zone	Dwelling Units	Zone	Dwelling Units	Zone	Dwelling Units
1	20	13	152	25	122
2	82	14	174	26	107
3	129	15	152	27	83
4	77	16	174	28	170
5	40	17	101	29	0
6	117	18	24	30	0
7	101	19	21	31	0
8	125	20	42	32	0
9	46	21	0	33	0
10	163	22	0	34	117
11	0	23	75	35	0
12	153	24	148		

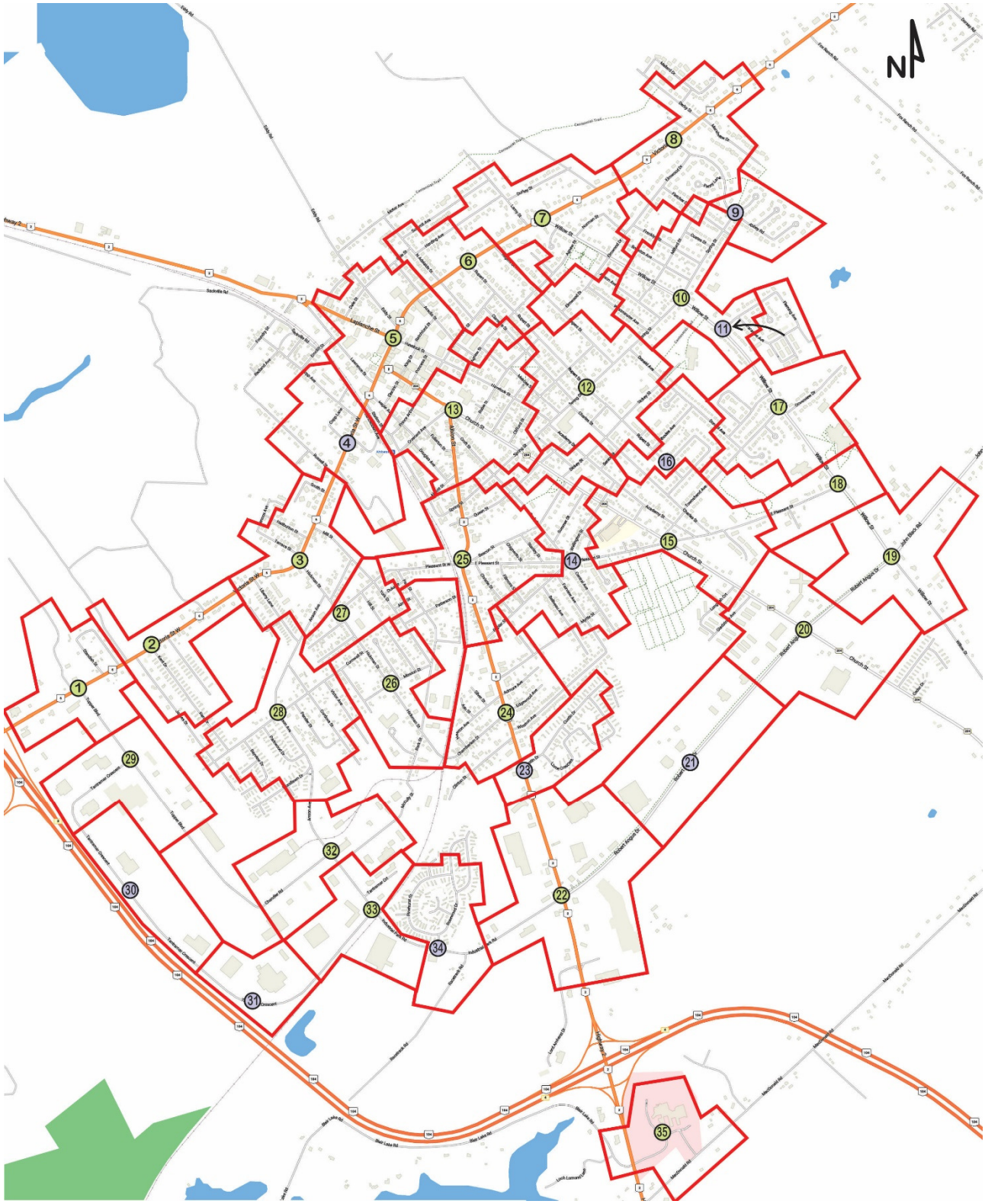


Figure 2-2: Potential Transit Nodes and Collection Areas (Zones)

Figure 2-3: Potential Growth Nodes in the Study Area

2.4 Destinations

While population generates transit trips, it is destinations that attract them. To determine how key destinations within the study area are distributed, a visual inventory was conducted. The locations of individual destinations within the study area collection zones were identified and a score was assigned to that zone to reflect the relative attractiveness of that zone for transit trips. This destination score was based on the following inputs:

- Four months of drop-off and pick-up data provided by CCTS
- Key destination points identified by Northern Zone, NS Public Health from their transportation data
- Our study team's knowledge of small transit services within Nova Scotia

There is no "value" to the destination points or formula used to calculate them. They are simply a relative ranking of their importance in attracting potential transit trips. A summary of destination points by zone is provided in Table 2-2. This data will be used in the evaluation of route concepts to identify which options best connect to the key destinations within the study area.

Based on experience with similar services elsewhere in Nova Scotia, we have not assigned a significant number of destination points to the Amherst Industrial Park. We have found that hourly transit service has little attraction for workplace commuting as the transit schedule is unlikely to provide good coordination with the workday schedule and workers will either arrive by bus well before their workday begins or wait for the bus well after their workday ends. Consideration may be given to servicing areas like this with route diversions timed to align with shift changes or other service delivery models like vanpooling (see Section 7.3).

Table 2-2: Destination Points by Zone

Zone	Destination	NS Health	CCTS Trips	Points
1	Maritime Bus (Esso Station)			1
4	Autumn House (Russell Street)	✓		1
5	Downtown Amherst			20
	Bridge Adult Service Centre (Station Street)		1118	
	Lawton's (Lawrence Street)	✓		
	Mental Health and Addictions Services (Prince Arthur Street)	✓	10	
	Cumberland Mental Health Services (Havelock Street)	✓		
	Amherst Collaborative Family Practice (Prince Arthur Street)	✓		
	VON (Havelock Street)	✓	130	
	Amherst Family Dental		10	
	VIA Rail			
7	Maggie's Place (Elmwood Drive)	✓		1
12	Spring Street Academy			1
13	YMCA of Cumberland (Church Street)	✓		1
15	Amherst Stadium			1
17	Amherst Regional High School			1
20	Medical Clinics & Pharmasave (Robert Angus Drive and Church St.)			2
21	Amherst Eye Clinic (Robert Angus Drive)	✓		1
22	Commercial Area			12
	Amherst Centre			
	Walmart	✓		
	SuperStore			
	Sobey's			
	Canadian Tire			
	Kent			
	NSLC			
	NSCC			
	Cumberland Eye Care		18	
	FYI Eye Doctors		20	
24	South Albion Storefront Businesses			1
25	South Albion Storefront Businesses			1
30	Industrial Park - Tantramar Crescent			2
	IMP Aerospace			
	Wonderbrands			
	LED Roadway Lighting			
	Waldale Manufacturing			
32	Industrial Park - Tupper Blvd			1
	Dowe Concrete			
	Novapet			
	NS Transportation			
35	Regional Health Centre		398	6

2.5 Relevant Municipal Plans

Three recent policy documents produced by the Town make reference to developing public transportation within the town which are, Council Strategic Priorities (2024), Municipal Planning Strategy (Draft) and Integrated Community Sustainability Plan (2019).

2.5.1 Council Strategic Priorities (2024)

The newest addition to Amherst's list of Strategic Priorities is the development of a Mobility Strategy. This strategy will examine how people move around the community and identifies the need for a transit study. The description of the priority states "The aim of the transit study is to identify our community's transportation challenges and present a potential solution in the form of a bus service." It goes on to say that "It will be determined if the provision of a similar service in Amherst will help to serve a segment of our population currently experiencing transportation difficulties – and others who desire an alternate mode of transportation – and whether such a service will help our town to continue to grow into the future."

2.5.2 Municipal Planning Strategy (Draft)

The Municipal Planning Strategy is currently under review. As part of the public engagement conducted to support the plan review, a lack of transportation options and the desire for public transit service was identified. The Plan recognizes that a move towards higher density development along potential transit corridors can contribute to the success of public transit.

2.5.3 Integrated Community Sustainability Plan (2019)

This plan summarizes the interconnected environmental, social, cultural, and economic development objectives and policies contained within the Town of Amherst Municipal Planning Strategy and other relevant policy documents. One of the goals resulting from public consultation is "To provide a safe, efficient and diversified transportation system."

2.6 Jurisdictional Scan

A scan of one- or two-bus systems within Nova Scotia was conducted for comparative purposes. The data is provided in Table 2-3. The purpose of this exercise is not to mimic other systems but to understand what characteristics have made other systems successful. From this data we see how common one-hour loop systems have become in towns like Amherst. We can also get a sense of the types of fares offered and their cost.

	ANTIGONISH	PICTOU COUNTY		BRIDGEWATER	YARMOUTH
		EXPANSION	N.G./STELARTON		
Municipality coverage	Town of Antigonish Antigonish County	Pictou County	Town of New Glasgow Town of Stellarton	Town of Bridgewater	Town of Yarmouth
Service operator	Community NFP (ACTS)	Community NFP (PCT)	Community NFP (PCT)	Municipality	Municipality
Primary bus	Mini-Bus	Mini-Bus	Mini-Bus	Gas cutaway	Mini-Bus
Passenger seats (w/o wheelchairs)	19	18	18	19	16
Accessibility	Lift		Low-floor	Low-floor	Low-Floor
Bike racks	No		No	Yes	Yes
Backup bus	Mini-Bus	Van	Van	Gas cutaway	Mini-Bus
Routing scheme	Loop	Bi-directional Linear	Loop	Loop	Loop
Service frequency	60 min	4 hr (some 2 hr)	60 min (some 30 min)	60 min	60 min
Weekday operating hours	7:00 - 19:00	6:30 - 20:30	7:00 - 21:00	06:00 - 21:00	7:00 - 19:00
Saturday operating hours	8:00 - 16:00	6:30 - 20:30	7:00 - 21:00	08:00 - 19:00	8:00 - 18:00
Sunday operating hours	none	no service	9:00 - 17:00	09:00 - 17:00	no service
Total weekly hours	92 hr	84 hr	94 hr	94 hr	70 hr
Route length	20.0 km	94.2 km	22.6 km	16.9 km	13.2 km
Percentage of route flag stopping	100%	60%	70%	70%	90%
Annual operating cost	$137,000		$270,000	$200,000	$195,000
Annual fare revenue	$13,000		$90,000	$45,000	$33,000
Annual ridership	7,200		50,000	36,000	14,300
Administration staff				1 (part-time)	
Single adult cash fare	$2.00	$5.00	$3.00	$2.00	$0.00
Single student cash fare	$2.00	$5.00	$3.00	$1.50	$0.00
Single senior cash fare	$2.00	$5.00	$3.00	$2.00	$0.00
Monthly adult pass			$70	$45	
Monthly senior pass			$60	$45	
Monthly student pass			$60	$30	
Monthly youth pass			$40	$30	
Other fares	Day pass $5.00 20-day pass $55.00	Day pass $5.00	Day pass $7.50	10-ride adult $18.00 10-ride student $13.50 Family rate $4.00	
On-board fare collection	cash ,debit, credit	cash, debit, credit	cash, debit, credit	cash, hotspot app	no fares

NOTES: Community NFP are not-for-profit groups that operate local on-demand transit service

Table 2-3: Jurisdictional Scan of Smaller Fixed-Route Transit Systems in Nova Scotia

2.7 Public Engagement

To understand the needs and expectations of the community relative to public transit, the project team carried out a comprehensive public engagement program designed to gather meaningful input from residents and stakeholders. To promote the engagement opportunities, the Town used both digital and direct outreach methods. Event and online survey information was shared across municipal social media channels.

A detailed description of the engagement strategy and summary of our findings is documented in a What We Heard report included in Appendix C.

Engagement mechanisms included:

- Interviews with key stakeholders (Cumberland County Transportation Society, Nova Scotia Public Health – Northern Zone, and Municipality of Cumberland County Planning)
- Interviews with Municipal Staff (Operations, Planning & Economic Development, Community Living, and Finance)
- A two-hour drop-in style public open house session held at the Community Credit Union Business Innovation Centre (see Photo 2-1)
- An online survey

Photo 2-1: Public Open House Session

The findings from the stakeholder and community engagement activities conducted have been summarized into a series of “Key Themes”. The input collected through internal and external stakeholder interviews, the community survey, and an open house provide valuable insight into the barriers, opportunities, and aspirations to help inform the development of the Transit Feasibility Study.

While the feedback received varies, several key themes were identified, which will support the development of the Study’s recommendations. This section provides an overview of key themes heard throughout these engagement efforts, which have been categorized into four (4) “Key Themes” which are outlined below:

1) Safe and Equitable Transportation
2) Shifting from Car Culture to Choice
3) Design a Service that Fits Daily Life
4) Building a Sustainable and Scalable Service

SAFE AND EQUITABLE TRANSPORTATION

The engagement feedback emphasized that equity, safety, and affordability are central to developing a successful transit system in Amherst. Respondents consistently noted that a successful transit system must be inclusive and accessible for all, particularly seniors, youth, newcomers, and individuals with mobility challenges. Participants highlighted that public transit could play a vital role in promoting independence, reducing social isolation and enhancing overall quality of life, especially for those who rely on it as their primary mode of travel.

Feedback also highlighted that safety and comfort at both bus stops and on board are key to encouraging usage. Investments in shelters, lighting, benches, and accessible design were viewed as essential to ensuring all users feel confident and secure when using transit services.

The Study should consider:

Accessible Vehicles and Barrier-Free Stops

- Design all vehicles and stops with universal accessibility in mind, ensuring safe, comfortable, and convenient use by people of all ages and abilities.
- Consider vehicles with lifts, rather than low floor/ramp buses to promote ridership for all users.

Investment in Supportive Infrastructure

- Prioritize infrastructure improvements that promote safety, comfort, and convenience, including lighting, shelters, benches and clear wayfinding signage at transit stops.
- Ensure that new infrastructure aligns with accessibility standards and supports equitable access to public spaces and transportation services.

Affordable Fare Structures and Flexible Payment Options

- Explore opportunities to provide affordable fare options that maintain long-term financial sustainability while ensuring accessibility for all users.
- Consider multi-faceted payment methods, including electronic payment (e.g., app or tap cards), prepaid tickets or passes, and cash options to accommodate diverse user preferences and needs.
- Engagement results indicated that 42% of survey respondents indicated they would be willing to pay a maximum of $2.01-$3.00 for a one-way trip, while 19% would be willing to pay $3.01-$4.00 and 5% would be willing to pay more than $4.00.

How do riders want to pay? Survey results show that 73% of respondents prefer to pay for bus tickets electronically (such as through an app or tap card), 54% would like to buy tickets online, and 43% still want the option to purchase tickets in person.

Social and Community Benefits of Transit

- Recognize the broader social value of transit in promoting independence and inclusion, particularly for individuals who do not drive.
- Strengthen connections between transit planning and community well-being by reducing social isolation and enhancing access to daily needs, services, and employment opportunities.

SHIFTING FROM CAR CULTURE TO CHOICE

Engagement feedback revealed that most Amherst residents rely heavily on private vehicles for transportation, indicating that a meaningful shift toward public transit will require both cultural and infrastructural change. Participants emphasized the need for improved pedestrian infrastructure, such as sidewalks, to enable residents to safely and conveniently choose alternatives to driving.

Respondents also acknowledged that transitioning to a transit-supportive community will take time and should focus on increasing awareness, improving connectivity, and demonstrating the convenience and reliability of transit as a viable travel option.

The Study should consider:

Encourage Mode Shift From Private Vehicle Use

- Introduce awareness campaigns and pilot initiatives to showcase the benefits of transit use, such as cost savings, environmental impacts, and improved accessibility.
- Partner with schools, major employers, and community groups to build ridership and reduce single-occupancy vehicle trips. Of survey respondents, 68% indicated they would consider using a public transit system if it were available to them.

67% of survey respondents use a personal vehicle as their primary means of transportation

Supporting Behavioural Change

- Provide early demonstration projects or temporary routes to build familiarity and trust in new services.
- Use consistent branding and clear communication to reinforce the reliability and value of the system.

Addressing Infrastructure Barriers

- Integrate pedestrian and cycling connections within transit planning to create a truly multi-modal network.

DESIGNING A SERVICE THAT FITS DAILY LIFE

Participants expressed a strong desire for a transit system that reflects how and where residents travel in their daily routines. Convenience, reliability, and accessibility of routes and schedules were identified as critical factors that would influence ridership. Survey results indicated that 74% of respondents would be more likely to use public transportation if routes and schedules aligned with their work, school, and shopping patterns.

The Study should consider:

68% of survey respondents indicated they would consider using a public transit system if it were available

Convenient Routes and Schedules

- Design transit routes and service frequencies that align with residents' daily travel needs and common destinations. Key destinations identified by survey respondents included the Hospital, Amherst Centre Mall/Town Square, and the Downtown Core.
- Ensure schedules are predictable, reliable, and easy to understand, allowing users to plan trips with confidence.

Strategic Stop Placement

- Prioritize transit stops near high-demand areas such as employment centres, healthcare facilities, retail hubs, and schools.
- Explore opportunities to enhance comfort and accessibility at stops, such as lighting, benches, and shelters.

Optimizing Access to Transit

- Recognize that 57% of survey respondents are willing to walk up to five minutes to reach a bus stop and plan routes to reflect that comfort range.
- Implement pedestrian-friendly design and wayfinding to make access routes to stops clear and safe.

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE AND SCALABLE SERVICE

Participants emphasized that a future transit system should be both adaptable and scalable to respond to the community's changing needs. The system should not only meet current travel demands but be capable of evolving alongside population growth, employment shifts, and regional development.

There was a strong interest in partnerships, with employers, educational institutions, and surrounding municipalities, to increase transit efficiency, ridership, and reach. Several respondents expressed a desire for potential regional routes connecting Amherst with neighbouring communities such as Oxford, Springhill, and Parrsboro.

The Study should consider:

Flexible and Responsive Service Design

- Build flexibility into service design to accommodate changes in population, ridership, and travel patterns.
- Explore phased implementation to test, refine, and expand service over time.
- Incorporate pilot programs or phased implementation to test and refine service options.

74% of survey respondents indicated they would be more likely to use a transit service if schedules and routes worked with their schedule

Partnerships for Success

- Collaborate with local employers, schools, and institutions to explore transit partnerships that support employee and student transportation.
- Pursue funding and resource-sharing partnerships that support long-term operational sustainability.

Regional Connectivity

- Evaluate options for expanding transit beyond Amherst's boundaries to strengthen regional access to jobs, education and services.
- Assess opportunities to expand service to nearby communities such as Oxford, Springhill, and Parrsboro to support regional mobility and economic ties.

3. Evaluating Fixed-Route Service Concepts

The first step in developing a fixed-route service plan is to develop a suite of routing concepts for evaluation and review. It is expected that the ideas contained in these concepts will lead to the development of new concepts, modified concepts, or combined concepts. The objective of this exercise is to use a comparative evaluation to focus on two concepts that best meet the needs of the community. From that point, a more extensive analysis and modeling process can be applied. Ultimately, a single preferred service plan will be identified. The full process is summarized in Figure 3-1.

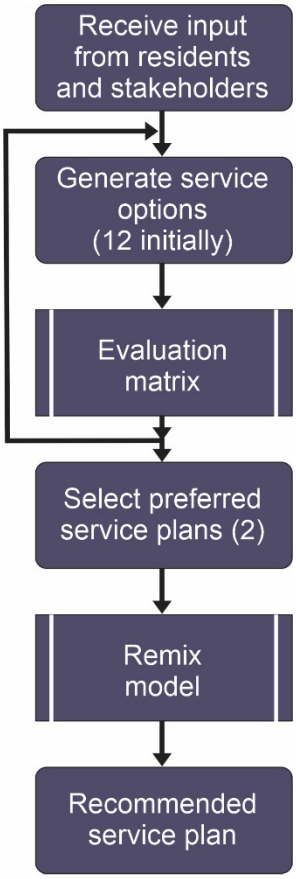


Figure 3-1: Process Chart

3.1 Service Concepts

We initially produced a set of twelve concepts which are provided in Appendix B. The concepts were illustrated on a coarse map of the Town's arterial and collector street network. The concepts provide only minimal operating detail, allow those details to be developed in subsequent stages of the process. Along with each concept sketch, we provide some basic evaluation criteria described below.

Route cycle time

This is the time that the bus takes to complete the full route, inclusive of stops and dwelling time. A one-hour cycle is typical and results in an easily memorized schedule. Reducing the cycle length will improve the frequency of bus arrivals, however results in a more complex arrival schedule. Our concepts provide a range of cycle lengths.

Route in-service time

This is the time that the bus will be operating on the route, including normal stops for loading. The difference between the cycle time and the in-service time is called "dwell time". Dwell time is built into one, or possibly two, locations along the route (i.e. the route "starting point") to allow the driver a periodic break. The dwell time also helps to keep alignment with the route schedule if delays occur. Dwell time is also valuable for battery topping-up, if a battery-electric bus is selected. A dwell period of two to ten minutes is desirable.

Number of dwelling units in service area

For each of the routing concepts, we have determined which nodes (see Map A-2) will be serviced and therefore how many dwelling units will be within 400 metres walking distance from the candidate route.

Destination points in service area

Similar to the dwelling unit assessment, we have determined how many "destination points" are within 400m of each route. It should be noted that some of the options extend service well beyond the Town boundary. As the original objective of the study was to develop solutions that essentially stay within the

Town boundary, these concepts will not be selected for detailed evaluation. We will, however, discuss the potential to develop such services in the longer term later in the report.

3.2 Routing Approaches

There are two general approaches to developing a route: loop and out-and-back. Nearly every Nova Scotia Town with a single-route transit service (Pictou County, Antigonish County, Yarmouth, Bridgewater, and planned for Lunenburg County) uses a one-hour loop model. The transit route planned for East Hants, however, is a one-hour out-and-back. Recently introduced routes to supplement the core Pictou County route are also out-and-back in their layout.

The benefit of a loop model is that it provides coverage of a broad geographic area. The downside of a one-hour loop is that the sum of an A-to-B and a return B-to-A trip is always going to be one hour, even if A and B are close in proximity. Also, if there is a large amount of dwelling time built into the route plan, there will be some passengers who are enroute to their destination who will have to sit through that dwell time. With an out-and-back route, the A-to-B and B-to-A trip times will be essentially identical and correspond to the distance between the two points. Dwelling time will be built into the terminus points where the bus should be empty of passengers.

Our concepts primarily reflect the loop model, but some are out-and-back routing combined with smaller loops.

3.3 Evaluation Results

The ability of each of the routing concepts to reach dwelling units and destination points within its service area (a 400-metre walking distance of the route) is a critical measure of potential ridership. Figure 3-3 shows, for each of the concepts evaluated, how many dwelling units and destination points are within walking distance of the route.

Along with the concept sketches, we produced a comparative evaluation matrix. The matrix and the criteria used in it are shown in Figure 3-2.

An evaluation matrix is a tool that allows important success criteria for a transit service to be measured and compared for a range of service concept options. Our intent with this matrix is not to use its scoring as the sole indicator of success. The matrix is intended to be supportive of using subjective judgement supported by objective measurement in determining what will work best for the Town.

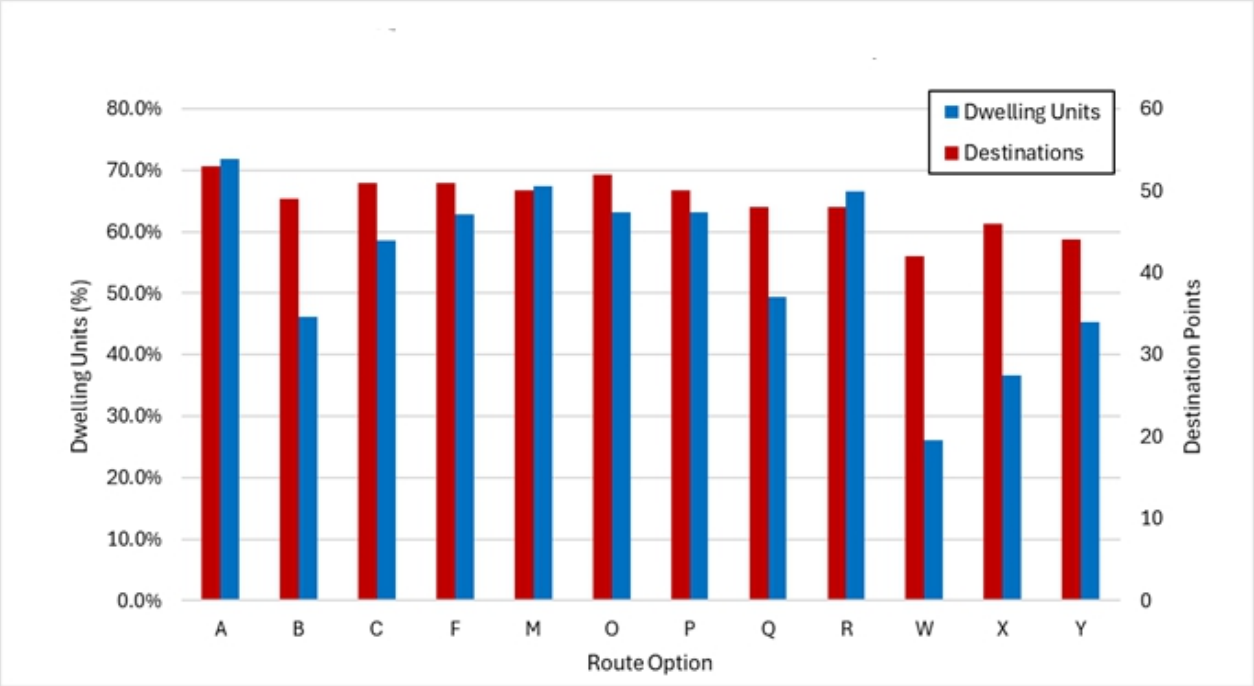


Figure 3-3: Dwelling Units and Destination Points by Route Option

Criteria	Rationale	Route Concept											
		A	B	C	F	M	O	P	Q	R	W	X	Y
Dwelling Units in Service Area	The more dwelling units that are captured, the greater the number of potential transit users.												
Destination Targets in Service Area	Servicing more destinations provides more destination choices for transit users.												
Proximity to Works Garage	Having a route in close proximity to the Town of Amherst's garage reduces deadheading at the beginning and end of the service day.												
Dwelling Time	Dwell time is important to maintain schedule adherence and to give the driver a rest break. It is also valuable for battery top-ups if a battery-electric bus is selected.												
Service Frequency	A more frequent service provides more opportunity for transit users to use the bus.												
Clarity for Customers	A clear schedule makes it easier for users to understand. A complicated route that passes by the same spot multiple times or a route where the time the bus arrives is inconsistent can lead to customer confusion which may be a deterent to using transit.												
	Total Points	26	21	24	24	26	24	27	23	22	16	16	17

Meets the criteria well

Mostly meets the criteria

Partially meets the criteria

Mostly misses meeting the criteria

Fails to meet the criteria

Figure 3-2: Evaluation Matrix

3.4 Selection of Preferred Concepts

Following a review with Municipal staff it was determined that the preferred routing concepts to move forward to detailed analysis were Concept A and Concept C with some modifications. The modifications to the routing layouts are described below:

Concept A

- Use Croft between Spring and E. Pleasant instead of Albion to avoid turning onto Albion from Spring and dealing with tight turning and limited sight distance issues
- Use E. Pleasant instead of Townsend between Charles and Willow to avoid turning at Charles (a tight turn) and for better access to Dickey Park
- Use Park instead of Hickman to maintain proximity to Anchor Centre
- Provide service to the Exit 3 Esso Station only when it aligns with Maritime Bus arrivals and departures

Concept C

- Reverse the second half of the route so that there is service in both directions on Albion and South Albion
- Show the service as two routes for better clarity
- Provide service to the Exit 3 Esso Station only when it aligns with Maritime Bus arrivals and departures

Additional modifications may be made when developing the detailed service plans in the next step.

For simplicity Concept A will now be referred to as Plan 1 and Concept C will be referred to as Plan 2 (consisting of Routes 2A and 2B).

Plan 1, with added routing details, is shown in Figure 3-4. This plan covers a large portion of the town and is planned to operate on a 60-minute cycle. Within these 60 minutes there will be, on average, 4-5 minutes of time that the bus will dwell downtown, allowing time for a driver to break and helping to ensure the bus can absorb enroute delays staying on schedule.

Plan 2, with added routing details, is shown in Figure 3-5. The two routes in Plan 2 each are planned to have a cycle length of 30 minutes and will run alternatively. This will mean that the Albion/South Albion corridor (which is common to both routes) will have service every thirty minutes while areas on only one of the two routes will see a sixty-minute frequency. There will be, on average, 4-5 minutes of time following the completion of Route 2A for dwelling downtown. While this Plan does not cover as wide an area as Plan 1, the “spine” of the town sees a high service frequency and overall user trip times will be reduced.

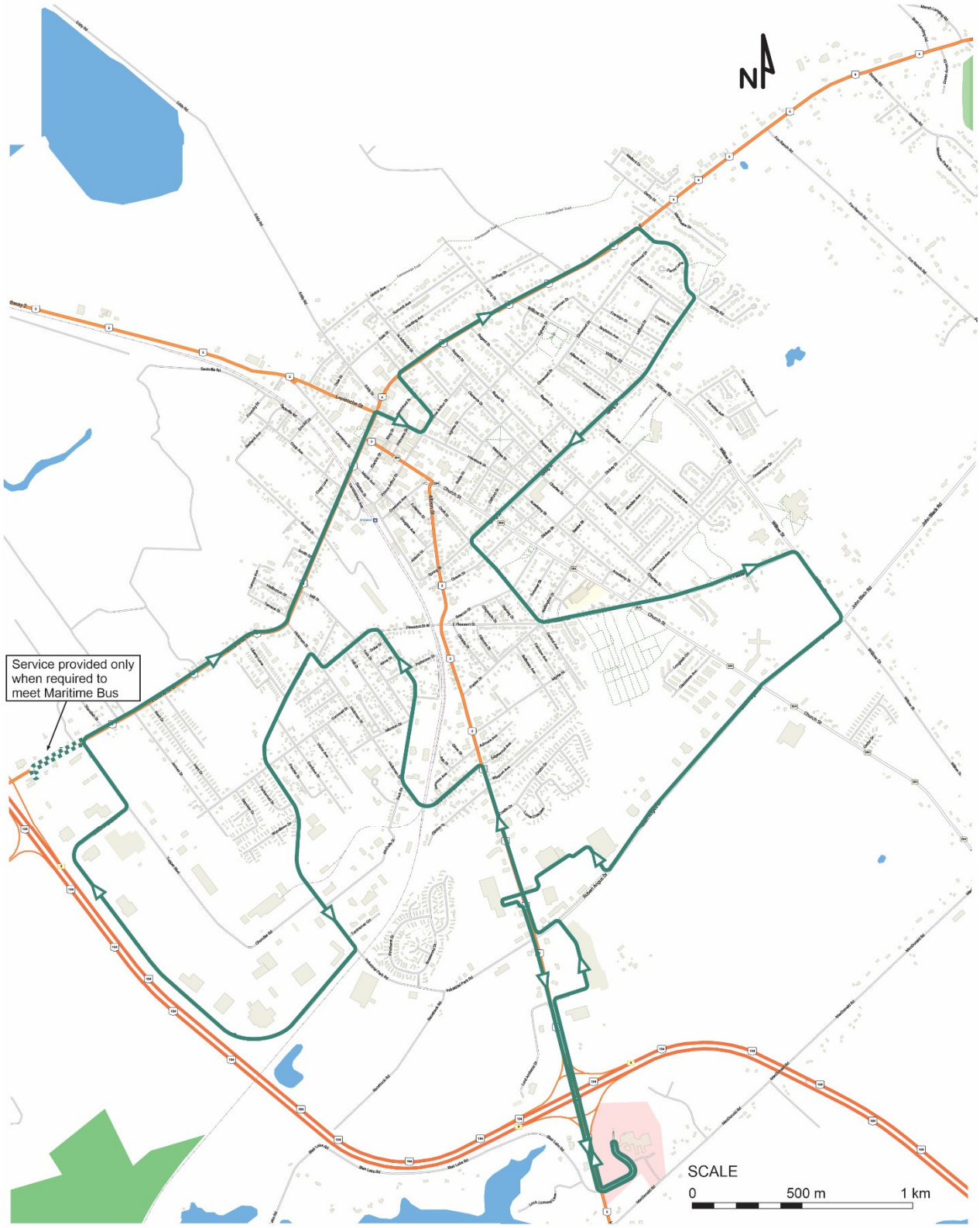


Figure 3-4: Route Plan 1

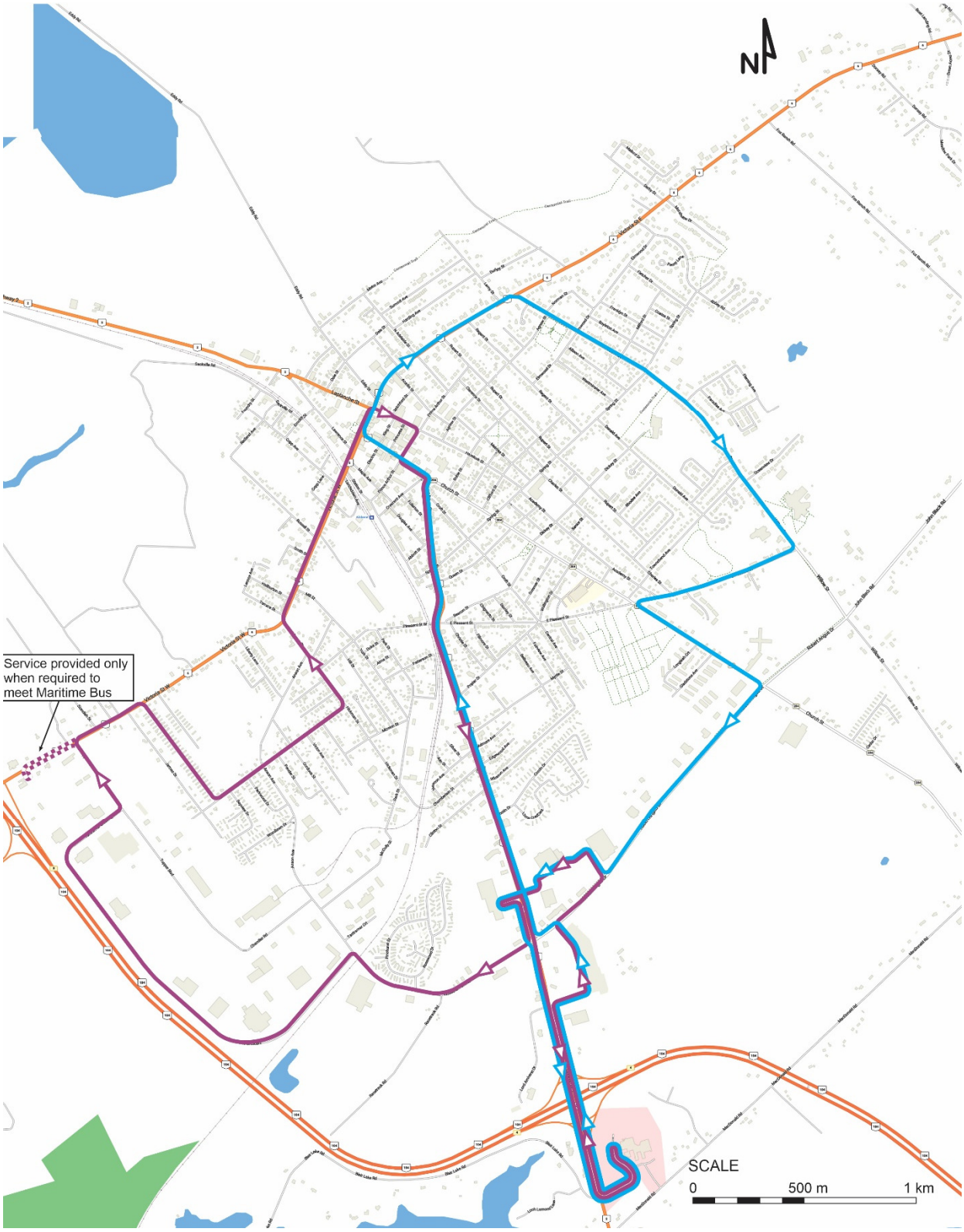


Figure 3-5: Route Plan 2 (Routes 2A and 2B)

4. Fixed-Route Service Plan

4.1 Evaluation Process

The two preferred concepts selected in the previous step of the process were modelled using Remix, one of the world's most comprehensive transportation planning and scheduling software packages.

Route modelling was based on typical average speeds for small Canadian systems of 20.7 km/h (which excludes recovery time).

Revised Vehicle and Servicing Requirements:

Revised route in-service time and cycle times for the shortlisted routing plans are displayed in Table 4-1.

Table 4-1: Route Plan In-Service and Comprehensive Cycle Times

Route Plan	Distance (km)	In-Service Travel Time (minutes)	Recovery Time (minutes)	Cycle Time (minutes)
Route Plan 1	21.2 km	61.4	10	71.4
Route Plan 2	27.2 km	78.7	10	88.7
Loop A	*12.7 km*	*36.8*	*5*	*41.8*
Loop B	*14.5 km*	*41.9*	*5*	*46.9*

Route Plan 1 requires 61.4 minutes of in-service time to complete the route displayed, while Route Plan 2 requires 36.8 minutes of in-service time to complete Loop 2A and a further 41.9 minutes to complete Loop 2B, resulting in a combined 78.7 minutes of in-service time. Assuming a further 10 minutes are required for recovery, Route Plan 1 has a resultant comprehensive cycle time of 71.4 minutes while Route Plan 2 has a comprehensive cycle time of 88.7 minutes.

As such, it will not be feasible to complete either Route Plan 1 or Route Plan 2 with a single vehicle with 60-minute frequencies. Either two vehicles will be required to operate at the same time to maintain 60-minute frequencies or frequencies will need to be adjusted to every 90 minutes.

Multiple Account Evaluation

A multiple account evaluation (MAE) framework was applied to assess both shortlisted options based on the following criteria:

- Route Frequency – how often trips operate (assumes 1 vehicle in operation)
- Coverage – how much area and population the service reaches
- Trip Directness – ability to travel between primary destinations without significant route deviations
- Frequency between Primary Destinations – how often travel between primary destinations is offered

- Schedule Predictability – customer ease of understanding the bus schedule and grasping the route design.

The MAE which accounts for all categories and criteria is outlined in Table 4-2**.** Coverage for Route Plan 1 and 2 is summarized graphically in Figure 4-1 and Figure 4-2.

Table 4-2: Comparative Evaluation of Route Plans 1 and 2

	Route Plan 1	Route Plan 2	Notes
Route Frequency	90 minutes	90 minutes	Assumes 1 vehicle. Minimum based on cycle-time requirements.
Coverage (400m radius)	~8,400 people	~7,400 people	Large coverage gaps noted for Route Plan 2 in north-central Amherst
Trip Directness		Preferred	Route Plan 2 provides a less circuitous option to/from neighbourhoods and primary retail destinations though notable reduced directness between industrial park and residential zones in northeast.
Frequency between Primary Destinations	90 minutes	45 minutes	Route Plan 2 provides connectivity between Downtown and South Albion St commercial zone and hospital as these connections are provided in both Loops A and B.
Schedule Predictability	Preferred		Route Plan 1 provides consistent predictable service every 90 minutes, while Route Plan 2 alternates each 45 minutes, resulting in a complex schedule for customers.

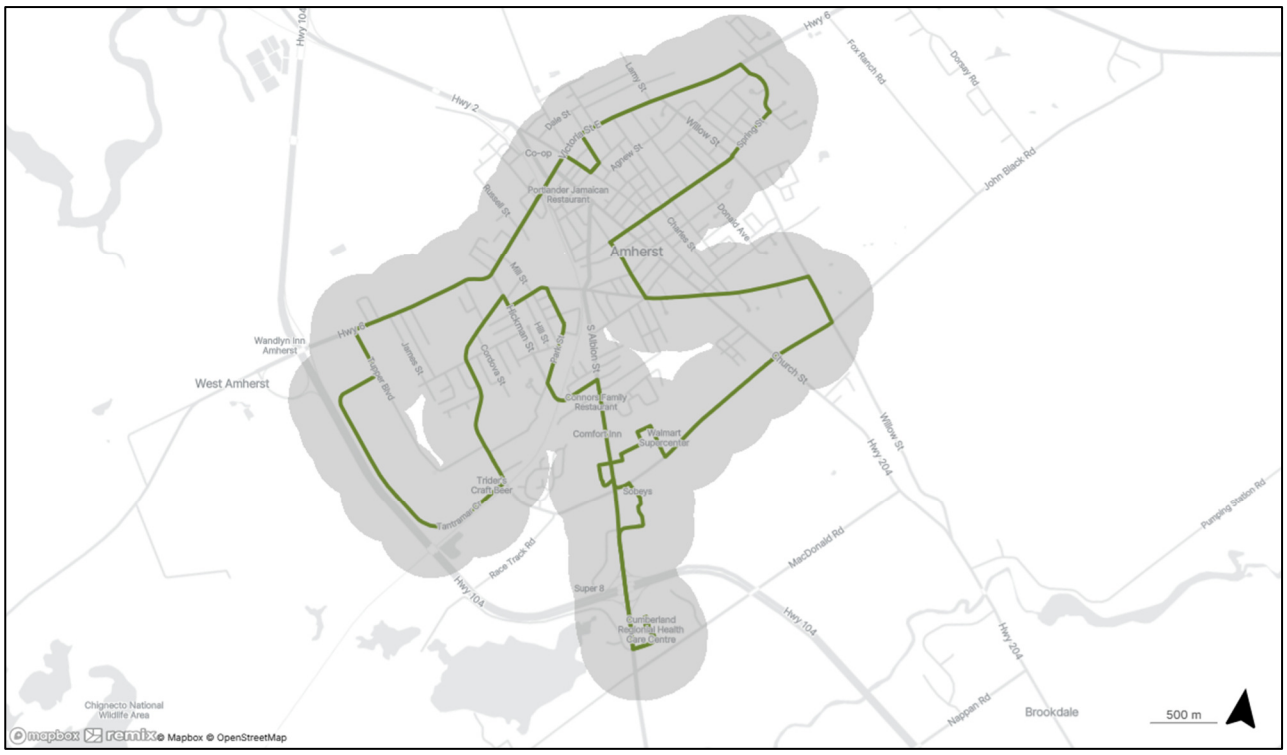


Figure 4-1: Route Plan 1 - 400m (5-minute walk) Radius

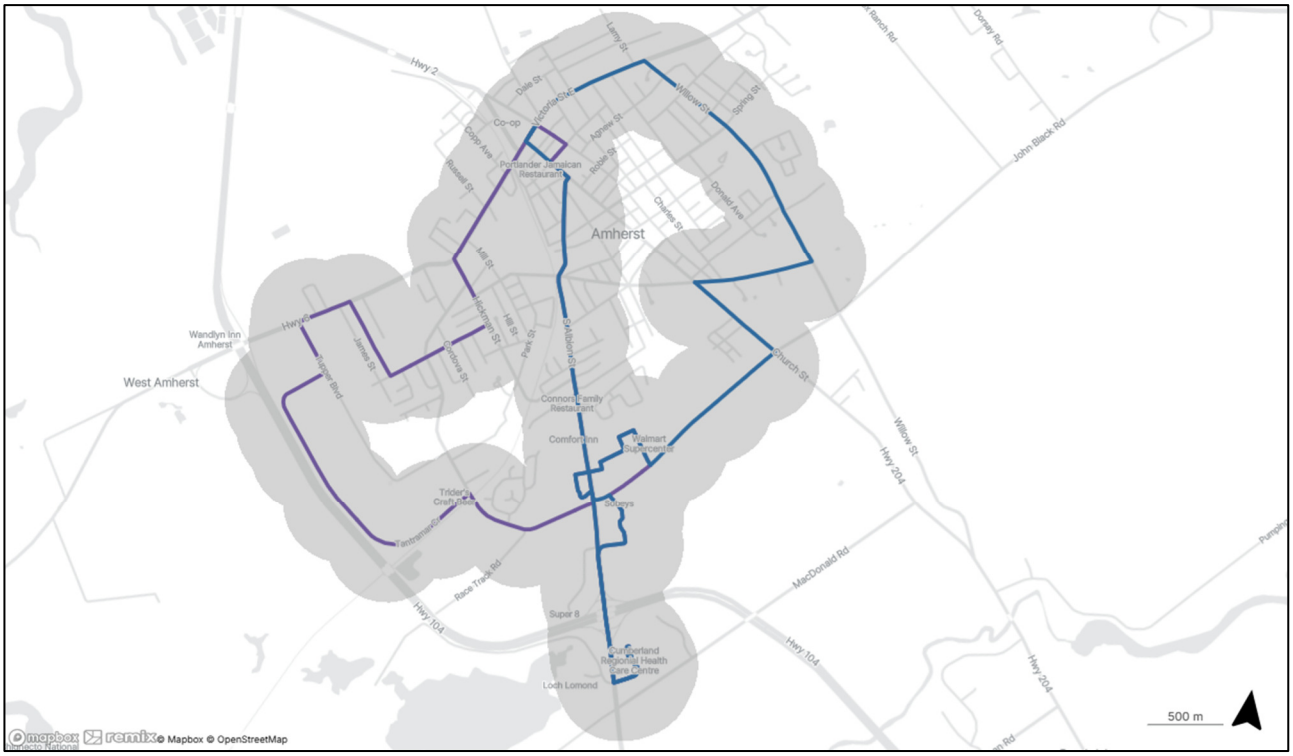


Figure 4-2: Route Plan 2 - 400m (5-minute walk) Radius

4.2 Selection of Preferred Service Plan

Following review and discussion with Municipal staff it was decided that a modified Plan 1 would be the route recommended for implementation. While there was agreement that frequency of service along the Albion/South Albion corridor was an attractive feature offered by Plan 2, the ultimate decision was based on the more extensive coverage offered by Plan 1.

During the service plan review, the interactive nature of the model allows for minor modifications to the routing to be suggested and tested. The result was that the following changes were made to the recommended routing to allow for a **60 minute service frequency**:

- Rerouting along Church Street between E Pleasant St and Robert Angus Dr in lieu of Willow St;
- Alterations to routing in western Amherst including the elimination of service through portions of the industrial park along Tantramar Crescent and Tupper Boulevard. Industrial parks typically produce very limited transit ridership in small communities.

Route modifications result in a revised total route length of 17.8 km, with a resulting in-service travel time of 51.5 minutes and a 60-minute cycle time (with 8.5 minutes of recovery time). The recommended route is displayed in Figure 4-3.

The route is suggested to function as clockwise loop beginning and terminating Downtown Amherst on Victoria Street West, immediately west of Havelock Street. An on-street terminal and supporting amenities including a bus shelter and bench is recommended along either Victoria Street between Church Street and Havelock Street or along Havelock Street between Victoria Street and King Street. The route will then proceed along Havelock St -> Prince Arthur Street -> Acadia Street to provide proximate service to the YMCA, Curling Club, and Public Library, before returning to Victoria Street.

Routing then continues along Victoria Street -> Abbey Road -> Spring Street, providing access to E.B. Chandler Junior High School, before proceeding along Croft Street -> E Pleasant Street -> Church Street to connect with McDonald's Rotary Park, Amherst Stadium and Skate Park. The route enters the driveway of the Gables Lodge and returns to Church Street. Routing continues along Robert Angus Drive then travels through the Walmart and Atlantic Superstore shopping plaza, crosses Albion Street and access Amherst Town Square then continues south along Albion Street across Highway 104 to Cumberland Regional Health Care Centre. Returning north along Albion Street, the route deviates via Canadian Tire, Amherst Shopping Centre, and Sobeys turning left onto Robert Angus Drive and crossing Albion Street to then proceed onto Industrial Park Drive. The route then turns onto McCully Street -> Park Street -> Mission Street -> Park Street -> West Pleasant -> Hickman -> Anson Avenue -> Cornwall Street -> Kent Drive and Victoria Street W to return to the terminus.

As displayed in Figure 4-4 the preferred service plan provides coverage to 7,600 people within a five-minute walking distance (400m radius) of the bus route, or approximately 80% of Amherst's population. This includes the vast majority of Amherst residential and commercial zones, though notably excludes much of the industrial park along Tantramar Crescent and Tupper Boulevard as well as Amherst Regional High School.

Figure 4-3: System Plan

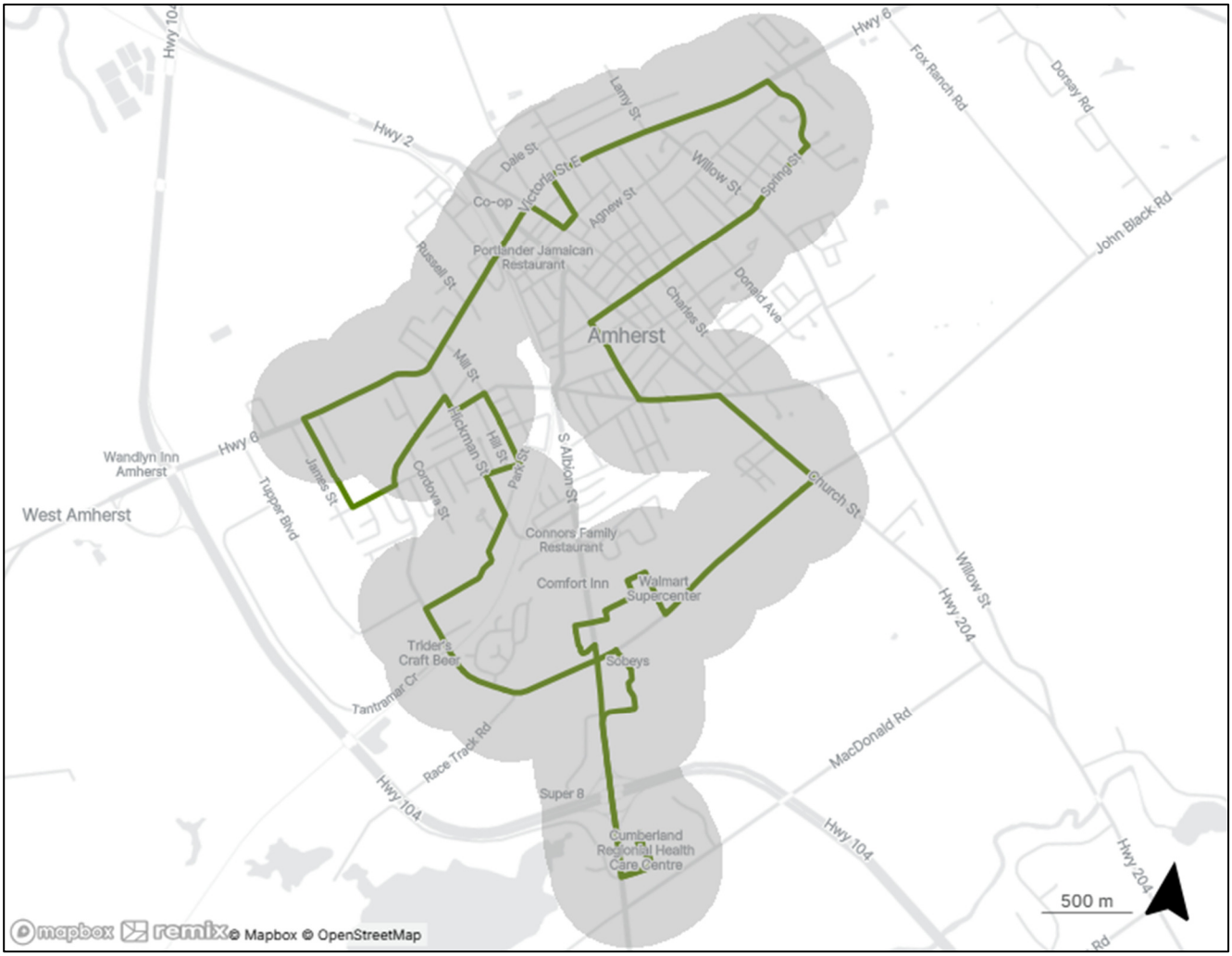


Figure 4-4: System Coverage

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 8:00 am and 7:00 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.

A draft schedule based on the above characteristics has been prepared and is included in Table 4-3**.** For eleven loop trips of 60 minutes, the recommended schedule requires approximately 11 revenue service hours per weekday or approximately 2,860 hours annually.

Table 4-3: Draft Service Schedule

Downtown Terminal	Walmart	Hospital	Amherst Shopping Centre	Hickman / Anson	Downtown Terminal
8:00a	8:19a	8:27a	8:31a	8:41a	8:51a
9:00a	9:19a	9:27a	9:31a	9:41a	9:51a
10:00a	10:19a	10:27a	10:31a	10:41a	10:51a
11:00a	11:19a	11:27a	11:31a	11:41a	11:51a
12:00p	**12:19p**	**12:27p**	**12:31p**	**12:41p**	**12:51p**
1:00p	**1:19p**	**1:27p**	**1:31p**	**1:41p**	**1:51p**
2:00p	**2:19p**	**2:27p**	**2:31p**	**2:41p**	**2:51p**
3:00p	**3:19p**	**3:27p**	**3:31p**	**3:41p**	**3:51p**
4:00p	**4:19p**	**4:27p**	**4:31p**	**4:41p**	**4:51p**
5:00p	**5:19p**	**5:27p**	**5:31p**	**5:41p**	**5:51p**
6:00p	**6:19p**	**6:27p**	**6:31p**	**6:41p**	**6:51p**

4.3 Ridership Projections

Annual ridership projections are estimated based on hourly utilization averages from peer community systems. This data comes from the Canadian Urban Transit Fact Book, last published in 2023. Projections for Amherst are provided in Table 4-4 and represent stable state conditions.

Between 55 and 88 rides are anticipated each weekday, resulting in an annual ridership projection of between 13,900 and 22,200. 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 4-4: Transit Ridership Projections

	Low	High
Rides per Service Hour (average)	5.0	8.0
Rides per Weekday	55	88
Annual Ridership Projection	13,900	22,200

5. Operating Options

There are a number of ways for a Municipality to approach the operation of its fixed-route public transit system. The most obvious way is for the Municipality to take on the operation itself. This can be a daunting undertaking, however, as even the smallest transit systems must deal with issues such as maintaining back-up vehicles and back-up drivers. This is much more efficiently handled in a multi-route system than it is in a single-route system.

Options to a municipally-operated transit service are present and working effectively in the Atlantic Provinces. Table 4.3 provides a summary of operational options and examples of each that we are aware of.

Table 4.3: Transit Operating Models in Atlantic Canada

Operator	Description	Examples
Community Not-for-Profit	CCTS would operate the service with funding from the Municipality as well as other sources.	Antigonish Transit CHAD Transit (Pictou County)
Municipality	The Town of Amherst would operate the service itself, hiring staff and creating a Transit division within the organization.	Halifax Transit, Transit Cape Breton, Bridgewater Transit, and Yarmouth Transit
Multi-System Operator	Although we are aware of few examples, we believe Nova Scotia would benefit from having a single operator for its multiple smaller non-contiguous transit systems. Kings Transit Authority might be positioned to take on a role like this.	BC Transit[2]
Private Sector Operator	There are some private sector bus charter companies within Nova Scotia who could be procured through a tendering process to operate a fix route.	Charlottetown Transit

Any of these models could be a good fit for Amherst, although as we discuss further in Section 10.2 it will be challenging for the Municipality to operate a single-route service. CCTS (community not-for-profit), Kings Transit (multi-system operator) and Coach Atlantic (private sector operator) could all be engaged in discussion related to service provision.

[2] BC Transit, which began as the Urban Transit Authority in 1979 is a provincial crown agency charged with providing transit service throughout BC outside of the Greater Vancouver Area. Victoria Transit is the only service operated directly by BC Transit, while regional services in over fifty other communities are operated either by the Municipality or by a private contractor. In addition to funding, the individual regional services receive high-level planning and operational support from BC Transit.

6. Selecting a Vehicle

6.1 Vehicle Types

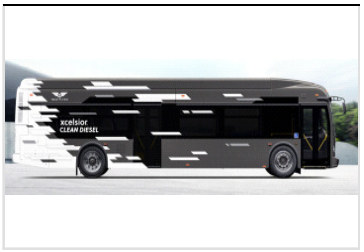
There are three basic types of design that can be selected for an urban public transit bus. Each is listed and described below. Although a life-cycle costing analysis specific to the Amherst service was not part of this project, we provide some general observations to compare cost and performance of each bus type.

Highway Coach

A highway coach is designed mostly for charters and inter-city travel. Seating is typically high quality, individual seats and loading is normally done only through a front door. These buses have compartments for luggage and may be equipped with a washroom. They are often not designed to be accessible. Highway coaches are not well suited to the constant boarding and deboarding characteristics of urban transit routes.

Urban Transit Bus

An urban transit bus is purpose-built for operating in urban areas. The structure of the vehicle is extremely sound and buses can often achieve one million kilometers during their service life. Most urban transit buses today are built with a low-floor design. The bus is able to “kneel” as it stops at the curb and deploy a boarding ramp if needed for accessible access. These vehicles are available in standard lengths of 35 feet, 40 feet, and 60 feet (accordion-style). Halifax Transit uses both 40-foot and 60-foot buses. A 35-foot bus, which is most suited to ridership expectations for Amherst, will seat about 32 and can handle standing loads in addition to that.



Mini-Bus

A mini-bus starts with a standard truck chassis and is typically referred to as a “cutaway”. The seating and shell of the bus is then built onto the truck chassis. There are a number of configurations and lengths to how these buses are designed. Some mini-buses have low-floor accessible access, while some have a wheelchair lift at the rear of the vehicle. The seating capacity is typically 16-20, fewer when wheelchairs are being accommodated. A mini-bus is not designed for standing loads and provides a lower quality ride (noise, space, passenger maneuverability) than an urban transit bus or a highway coach.

Either a 35-foot urban transit bus or a mini-bus could be appropriate for service in Amherst. In general terms, the trade-off between the two is that an urban transit bus will cost more to purchase than a mini-bus, but provide more than double the service life.

Assuming a quarter of all daily rides take place on a single trip at the high total ridership projection of 88 rides per day, a vehicle would need to be able to accommodate 22 passengers at any given time. While it is recognized that these assumptions are conservative, they would not be able to be reliably supported in a mini-bus. As such a **35-foot urban transit bus** is most appropriate for use in Amherst. Vehicles of this type typically accommodate up to 32 people in seats (plus an additional 35 standees) and can be rendered 100% wheelchair accessible. A 35-foot urban transit bus additionally allows for opportunities to grow ridership without fear of capacity constraints. Having adequate passenger capacity at all times is critical for the success of a transit system. Although a full load may be a rarity, when a bus has to pass by a stop where passengers are waiting because there is no room on the bus for them, perception of the service is severely harmed. Vehicles of this type retail for approximately $680,000 for a diesel vehicle.

While the increased seating capacity and the extended service life of the urban transit bus justify the significant investment, we recognize that the high up-front cost can be an impediment to a quick-start or pilot implementation of the service. An alternative would be to purchase new or used mini-buses (see Section 6.3). A 27-foot mini-bus would provide capacity for only 18 passengers (fewer if wheelchairs are included). While this capacity may be adequate initially, it will be more likely to be exceeded as the service matures. Ensuring that the capacity of the vehicles is not exceeded is critical to the success of the service, as riders left waiting at the stop as a full bus passes by is a major deterrent to continued use of the service. This type of vehicle retails for approximately $200,000.

One active vehicle plus one 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.

6.2 Propulsion

There is also a choice to be made in propulsion type. Although a range of propulsion options is available for urban transit buses including overhead-electric (trolleys) and hydrogen cell, the popular propulsion options for both urban transit and mini-buses are gas/diesel, hybrid, and battery-electric. As a general rule, a battery-electric bus will cost double that of a diesel/gas bus to purchase but result in half of the operating costs (including both powering and maintenance). Normally, a life-cycle analysis will demonstrate a reduced overall cost for battery-electric over diesel/gas. Hybrid buses normally fall between those two options. One issue that arises from the selection of battery-electric vehicles is that they currently do not have sufficient battery capacity to do a full day of service without recharge. A strategic approach to managing this may include midday recharging or swapping buses in and out of service to be recharged.

6.3 Used Buses

In addition to acquiring a new vehicle, purchasing a used bus is an option. In the past, Halifax Transit has made decommissioned urban transit buses and mini-buses (Access-A-Bus and MetroX buses)

available to transit systems in Nova Scotia at no cost. Halifax Stanfield Airport retires vehicles in their Park-and-Fly service well before the end of their typical service life and those vehicles become available for purchase from time to time. A variety of used buses are always available through brokers. Most notably, Scotiashare Bus Sales in Moncton carries an extensive inventory of used mini-buses suitable for service in Amherst.

7. Other Transit Service Models

7.1 Enhancement of Dial-a-Ride (Cumberland County Transportation Service)

CCTS was established in 2009 and operates a door-to-door, pre-booked transportation service to all residents of Cumberland County. The fleet currently consists of six vehicles, five of which are accessible. Rides must be booked at least 24 hours in advance, but requests may not always be accommodated if the vehicles are fully booked.

Although the existing service is available to any resident of Cumberland County (including the Town of Amherst) it is typically only used by seniors and those with accessibility barriers. Data showing a breakdown of all clients provided by CCTS (Figure 7-1) shows that nearly all identify with some type of disability. The availability of this service may not be broadly known to all, and there has been no effort to market it to the general public. The reason for this is that CCTS has only enough capacity to handle the current demand for trips. Broadening the customer base would harm the availability of the service for those who currently use and require it.

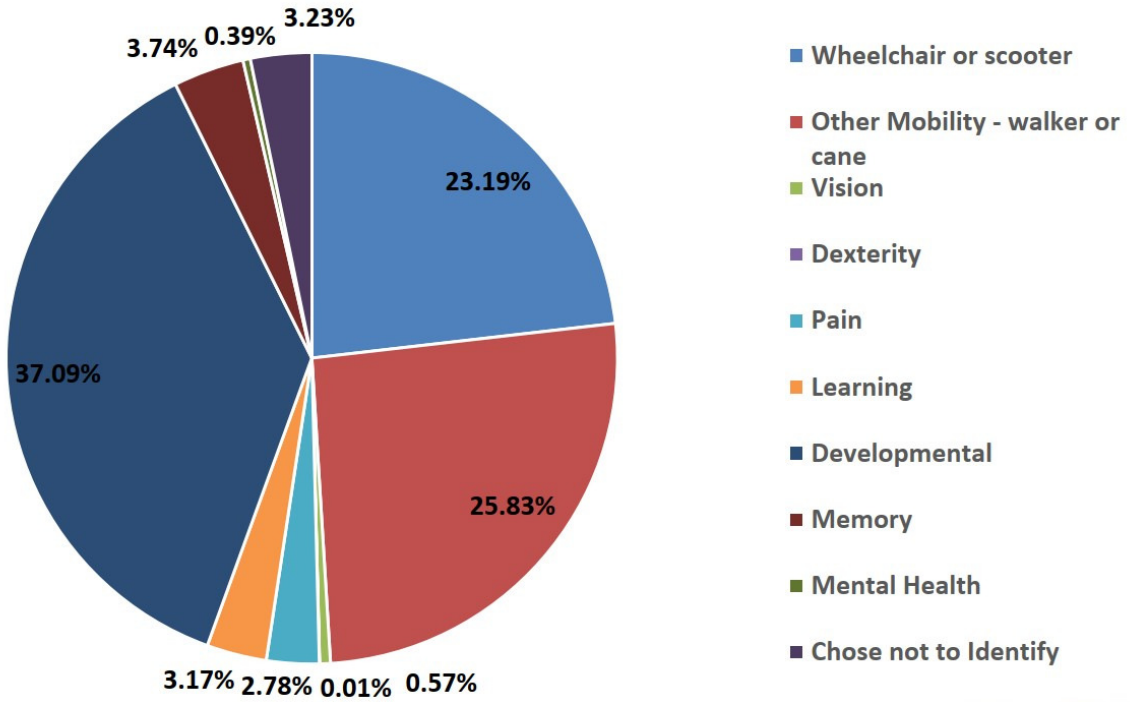


Figure 7-1: CCTS Client By Disability (2024)

A better-funded service could see capacity increased, allowing for the customer base to be expanded, the reliability of the service to accept trips improved, and possibly the price charged to clients reduced. The Municipality of Cumberland County provides annual funding which increased to $25,000 in 2024-25, while the Town of Amherst provides funding only on a piecemeal basis through its grants program.

A viable alternative to funding a fixed-route service is to budget annually to fund the operation of CCTS. If both Cumberland County and the Town of Amherst were to each budget $40,000 per year, the service could be marketed to all residents of Cumberland County and provide more effective and reliable service.

For the Town of Amherst, this would be a significant cost saving compared to operating a fixed-route transit service. Projecting comparative ridership and perceived value, however, is beyond the scope of this study.

7.2 Flex-Route Services

Flex route transit combines aspects of fixed-route and demands responsive service. In this model, a bus operates along a defined route with scheduled timing points and fixed stops, but it has the flexibility to deviate to pick up or drop off passengers closer to their origins or destinations typically upon advance request. Riders can board or get off the bus 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 and coverage for users beyond walking distance from main corridors 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 are also important for successful implementation.

Table 7-1: Fixed-Route vs Flex-Route Transit Models Comparison

Service Delivery Model	Key Features	Advantages	Challenges
Fixed-Route	Schedule, set route and stops	Predictable, reliable and easy to use	Inflexible, costly in low density areas with low ridership
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

7.3 Other Demand-Responsive Services

Other alternatives to delivering transit service have been explored elsewhere with mixed success. A summary of some of these service options is provided below.

Vanpooling can be used with a large employer or a “campus” of workplace locations in close proximity. A multi-passenger van will pick up employees in a single location or at their door within a specific neighbourhood and drop them off at a single workplace location. One workplace may have multiple vans that service several communities, but all make only one destination stop. The reverse is done at the end of the day and only one trip in and one trip out is made per day. Typically, the driver of the van is also an employee at the workplace. If vanpooling makes sense for an employer, or a campus of employers, they will implement it. A Municipality, however, may choose to subsidize the operation to get it started with the justification of better managing transportation.

Third-party demand-responsive services provide the same type of service as the existing not-for-profit community operators in Cumberland County and elsewhere in Nova Scotia, but typically employ more technology in the management of trip reservations. VIA is one such provider, demonstrating how technology-enabled demand-responsive systems can support mobility needs in both rural and urban settings. The company operates on-demand transit services in several Canadian communities by supplying the platform used for real-time trip requests, vehicle routing, and shared-ride coordination. In York Region, VIA powers York Region Transit’s on-demand service across suburban and rural areas, expanding transit coverage where fixed-routes are less effective. VIA also supports smaller municipalities, including Kenora, Ontario, where it provides the operational platform for Kenora Transit, and Alma, Québec, where it enables Transport adapté d’Alma’s on-demand operations. Across Canada, VIA reports partnerships with 35 agencies, reflecting a broad operational presence and demonstrating how third-party demand-responsive systems are being used to enhance local mobility options.

Several Ontario municipalities have introduced or expanded on-demand transit services to address gaps in conventional public transportation. In Pembroke, a three-year pilot project was launched to restore local transit after a 12-year absence, offering six-day-a-week service using two eight-seat vehicles that riders can book through an app, web portal, or phone line at a fixed fare of five dollars per trip. In Ottawa’s Blackburn Hamlet, OC Transpo tested an on-demand service using spare Para Transpo minibuses on Sundays and select holidays, allowing same-day and next-day bookings between designated stops and Blair Station. As the pilot concluded, the City of Ottawa reported increased ridership and positive user feedback. In North Grenville, the Municipality introduced NGtransit, an on-demand bus service that can be booked between 30 minutes and one month in advance and operates daily within municipal limits, providing a new transportation option where taxis and ride-hailing are not available. In North Durham, Durham Region Transit continues to operate on-demand service in Uxbridge, Brock, and Scugog, with ridership increasing notably in Uxbridge and Brock and declining slightly in Scugog.

Ride-sharing services like Uber and Lyft (if available locally), or taxi services, can be positioned in rural areas to provide demand-responsive service. The Municipality would have to subsidize each trip to make the service attractive to the service providers and to keep it affordable for the users. A taxi subsidy model

removes the need for the municipality to purchase vehicles, eliminating associated capital costs. Although taxi trips may have higher operating costs, the municipality does not assume responsibility for service operations. Based on the projected ridership (see Section 4.3), subsidizing the same number of trips through a taxi program would cost the municipality between $97,300 to $155,400 annually, assuming an average taxi fare of $10 per trip and a user ‘fare’ price of $3 (i.e. $7 municipal subsidy). It is recommended that subisides ONLY be extended to trips that begin and end within municipal boundaries and be extended to residents only. This approach offers cost avoidance related to vehicle ownership; however, it also presents challenges, including limited scalability and reduced ability to manage or coordinate service delivery. As service provision relies entirely on a private third party, servicing cannot be guaranteed for users, resulting in an option that would provide very good coverage – as taxis can travel anywhere – but very low guaranteed reliability.

8. Elements of Operation

In this section, we discuss various elements of operating the fixed-route transit service described in Plan 1 including high level cost estimates. We will describe these elements as though the Municipality were operating the service within its organizational structure. Should the Municipality choose to work towards one of the other operating models described in Chapter 5, these figures can be used as a basis for negotiation of a funding agreement.

8.1 Route

The recommended routing was chosen from a range of options and assessed and fine-tuned through the process described in Chapter 4. The final route, along with recommended bus stop locations, is shown in Map A-3 in Appendix A.

8.2 Fare Structure

Adult base fare is recommended at $3.00 per ride, which is in line with peer Atlantic Canadian communities. Most peer transit systems offer discounts for seniors and/or youth, representing 60-80% of base fare 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. Antigonish Transit provides free transfers for passengers on their demand-responsive service who transfer to the fixed-route service and this should be considered for the Amherst service with transfers from CCTS.

8.3 Operating Cost

Based on the recommended service level, annual operating costs are estimated at $295,000 (Table 8-1). As costs are directly tied to servicing, operating costs can be lowered by pursuing a more limited-service pattern. Using a typical all-inclusive hourly rate, indexed to peer systems, fuel, maintenance and labour are estimated at $257,000 which confirms our estimate of $244,000 for those direct cost items.

In addition to a Direct Operating Cost, we have included additional operating costs that are not typically attributed to the transit service operation. These additional costs are stop maintenance, vehicle tracking, and a reserve fund for vehicle replacement. All of the cost elements together make up a Total Operating Cost. Of course, the Town will be responsible for budgeting for the Total Operating Cost. We use the Direct Operating Cost in our calculations for revenue recovery and cost per trip to provide a better “apples-to-apples” comparison with other peer services.

Table 8-1: Annual Operating Costs

Item	Annual Cost (Urban Transit Bus)	Annual Cost (Minibus)	Assumptions/Notes
Fuel#	$31,000	$24,000	200km/day; 255 service days per year; $1.70/L 36L/100km urban transit; 28L/100km minibus
Maintenance#	$20,000	$20,000	
Vehicle Replacement Reserve	$43,000	$25,000	50% of replacement value recovered from government grants; 16 year service life urban transit; 8 year service life minibus
Drivers#	$107,000	$107,000	$35/hr (incl. benefits); 0.75 FTE per driver, 2 shifts per day
Administration Salaries#	$71,000	$71,000	$65/hr (incl. benefits) for 0.5 and 0.1 FTE (see Section 8.7)
Administration Costs#	$8,000	$8,000	Marketing, printing, monthly pass and ticket sales
Insurance#	$7,000	$7,000	
Bus Stop Maintenance	$6,000	$6,000	Primary cost is snow clearing
Vehicle Tracking	$2,000	$2,000	See section 8.9
TOTAL OPERATING COST	**$295,000**	**$270,000**	
TOTAL DIRECT OPERATING COST **# indicates elements included in direct operating cost**	**$244,000**	**$237,000**	

8.4 Revenue and Financial Performance

Table 8-2 compares key financial metrics under low and high ridership projection scenarios, detailing expected revenue and operating costs for each case. The total annual net operating cost of transit, as described, is anticipated at between $235,000 and $257,000 (see Table 8-3), with a resulting cost per capita of between $24.70 and $27.05.

Table 8-2: Financial Performance (Direct Costs)

	Urban Transit Bus		Mini-bus	
	Low	High	Low	High
Ridership Projection	**13,900**	**22,200**	**13,900**	**22,200**
Total Annual Revenue*	$38,000	$60,000	$38,000	$60,000
Direct Operating Cost	$244,000	$244,000	$237,000	$237,000
Net Operating Cost (Direct)	$206,000	$184,000	$199,000	$177,000
Cost Recovery	**16%**	**25%**	**16%**	**25%**
Cost per Trip	**$14.82**	**$8.29**	**$14.31**	**$7.97**

* Although a cash fare of $3.00 is recommended, an average fare of $2.70 is assumed to account for potential discounts for seniors, youth, and monthly passes

Table 8-3: Financial Performance (Total Costs)

	Urban Transit Bus		Mini-bus	
	Low	High	Low	High
Total Annual Revenue	$38,000	$60,000	$38,000	$66,000
Total Operating Cost	$295,000	$295,000	$270,000	$270,000
Net Operating Cost (Total)	$257,000	$235,000	$232,000	$204,000
Cost Per Capita	**$27.05**	**$24.70**	**$24.40**	**$21.47**

8.5 Capital Cost

Estimated capital costs are included in Table 8-4. Capital costs include vehicle acquisition ($1,360,000) and supporting infrastructure ($140,000), which assumes 24 new bus stop pads (required for wheelchair deployment in situations where sidewalks are absent or too narrow), and 4 bus shelters and benches at the following locations: the Downtown on-street terminal, Walmart, Cumberland Regional Health Care Centre, and Amherst Centre. Together this results in a combined capital cost estimate of $1,540,000. Unless external capital funding support is available, we recommend that the infrastructure work (bus stops and shelters) be delayed to year two of implementation.

The capital cost for the alternative of purchasing mini-buses has also been provided.

Note that all capital costs are exclusive of taxes.

Table 8-4: Estimated Capital Costs

Item	Units	# Of Units	Unit Cost	Total Per Item ($)
VEHICLES				
Recommended: New 35-Foot Urban Transit Bus (Gas or Diesel)	Vehicles	2	$680,000	$1,360,000
Alternative: New 27-Foot Mini-bus (Gas)	Vehicles	2	$200,000	$400,000
SUPPORTING INFRASTRUCTURE				
Bus Stop Signs		40	$200	$8,000
Bus Stop Pad		18	$2,000	$36,000
Bus Shelter and Bench		4	$10,000	$40,000
Localized Sidewalk Extension	m	140	$400	$56,000
Start-up (Engineering, procurement, etc.)				$40,000
TOTAL (Urban Transit Buses)				**$1,540,000**
TOTAL (Mini-buses)				**$580,000**

8.6 Fare Collection

For many years, dropping coins in a fare box has been the basis for transit fare collection. The sale of tickets and monthly passes is one way to avoid the nuisance of the single fare cash payment. More and more, people are expecting the ability to make transactions through digital means (such as a smart card or a smart phone).

Equipping buses with a secure fare box and arranging for the sale of tickets and passes with be the starting point for the Amherst service. Opportunities should be explored, however, to supplement this with newer technologies for fare collection including:

- Using the HotSpot app which is currently in use by Bridgewater Transit as a fare collection option
- Negotiating with Halifax Transit to use their HFXGo app
- Pushing the Province of Nova Scotia to adopt Action Strategy 1.3.6 from its Regional Transportation Plan (2026) which proposes “a common user interface to manage fares”

8.7 Staffing and Administration

The system, as described, would require two operators at approximately 0.75 FTE and 1 administrator responsible for marketing, issue/complaint resolution, and coordination at 0.5 FTE. Each operator would

work five days a week with a short shift of about six hours (including vehicle preparation time). An additional position (1.0 FTE) within the Municipality (regardless of whether the service is operated by the Municipality or not) would be required for coordination and oversight. Provision would need to be made to have a back-up driver ready to cover for illness or time off.

8.8 Bus Stops

Bus stops are normally located every 350-450 metres along the route in urban areas. Spacing the stops too far apart adds to walking distance, but stops too closely spaced add stopping time to the route. Map A-3 in Appendix A shows recommended locations for bus stop on the preferred route plan.

When considering a new fixed-route service as a trial implementation, investment in vehicles can be partially recovered if the service is discontinued. Investment in transit stop infrastructure can not. For this reason, we recommend minimizing the design of bus stop until confidence is gained in the longer-term viability of the service.

At a minimum, every bus stop must have a sign. For consistency with other services in Nova Scotia, the sign should be predominantly white with a bus logo on it. Some service-specific branding can also be added. The bus stop signs used by Yarmouth Transit provides a good example to follow.

Figure 8-1: Bus Stop Sign (Yarmouth Transit)

It is beneficial to have a sidewalk on the side of the street that the bus travels. When the sidewalk is separated from the street, a concrete pad (with tactile walking surface indicators) should be constructed between the sidewalk and the back of the curb (see Figure 8-2). Some portions of the route in Amherst have no sidewalk or the sidewalk is on the opposite side of the street that the bus travels (as is the case on Church Street). Over time, consideration should be given to building new sidewalk connecting to the bus stop.

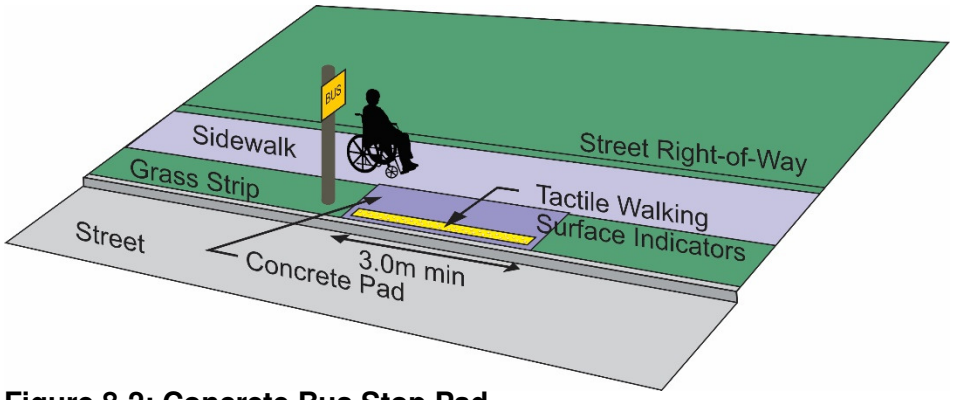


Figure 8-2: Concrete Bus Stop Pad

Transit shelters provide protection from weather for clients waiting for the bus. At a cost of approximately $10,000 per installation, transit shelters should be used sparingly at first. It would be prudent to approach commercial properties and institutions to encourage them to fund the installation and maintenance of transit shelters on their property. Bus shelters and benches should be prioritized at the Downtown on-street terminal, near Walmart, at the hospital, and at Amherst Shopping Centre.

The majority of streets on which the bus will travel will require the bus to block a traffic lane when pulled to the curb or the edge of pavement. This is normal practice in urban areas and results in only momentary delay. When the bus stops at its terminal point, however, it may dwell there for several minutes waiting for its next scheduled start time to arrive. The bus must wait outside of active traffic flow in this case. The recommended terminal point is on Victoria Street East in northbound direction just before Havelock Street. This location benefits from being a high traffic area and has nearby public facilities for the bus driver. To provide a 15 metre-long dwelling spot for the bus, a shortening of an existing right turn lane, a repurposing of an existing parking space(s), or a combination of the two will need to be undertaken. Shortening the right turn lane will have minimal operational impact as it will be occupied by the bus for only for a small portion of the day.

8.9 Bus Tracking Apps

Apps that track and display the real-time location of transit vehicles on their routes have been a welcome addition to customer support. Transit users gain confidence in using the service when they know where the bus is at all times, even when its running behind schedule. There are several third-party apps on the market that do a good job of providing tracking data, but they typically only provide service for larger systems.

A more simple approach is the ‘home-grown’ one used by Bridgewater Transit. Using a local company (Digital Fusion) they are able to display the location of their bus in real time on their municipal website. The cost of doing this would be approximately $8,000 for inital setup and $2,000 per year in licensing fees.

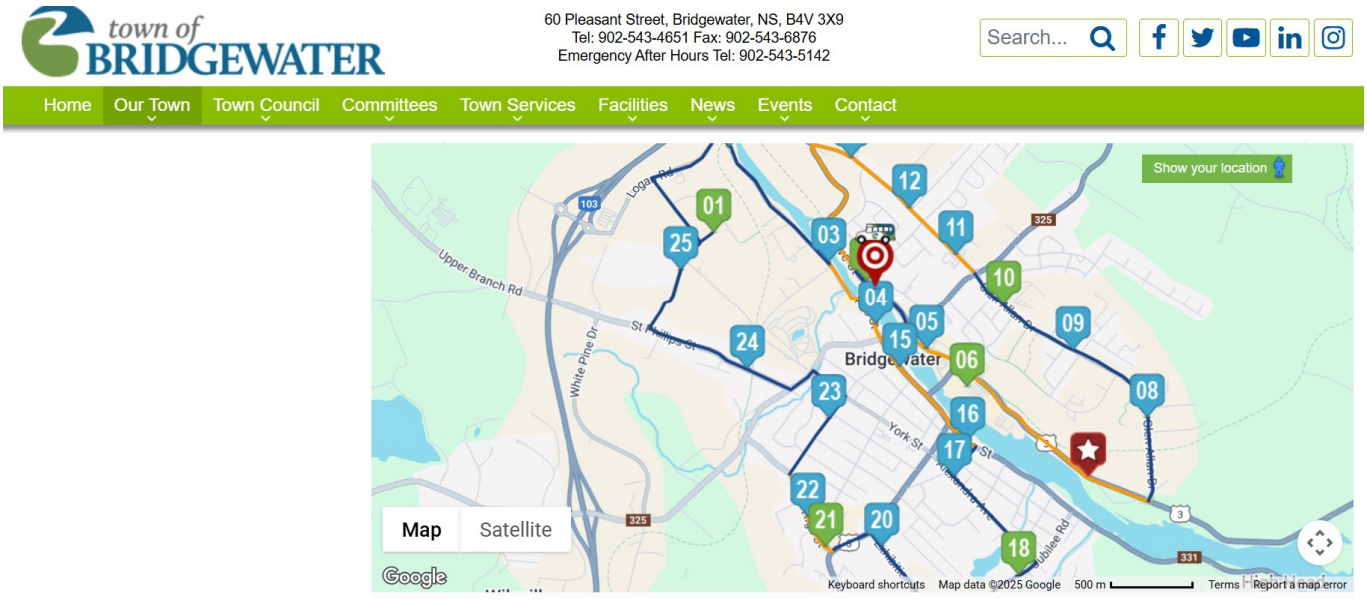


Figure 8-3: Simple Bus Tracking App (Bridgewater Transit)

8.10 Linkage to Active Transportation

Multi-modal trip-making can be an important element of good mobility within the Town of Amherst and can be greatly supported by the integration of public transit and active transportation. One challenge that fixed-route public transit faces is that not everyone is going to be picked up or dropped off right at their door. While we note in our analysis that a 400 meter walking distance from a transit stop is an acknowledged service area for fixed-route transit, well-maintained sidewalks or walking paths are an important element of that assumption. Bicycling can extend that 400 meter service distance for some if measures are taken to support bicycling (multi-mode paths, wide shoulders, bike lanes, etc,). Locating bus stops at locations where the Town's active transportation network intersects with the fixed transit route is important. Including a bike rack on the bus help accommodate those who combine a bicycling trip with transit.

8.11 Strategic Route Variations

While some destinations within the service area merit service throughout the day, others do not. We have shown, for example, route variation in Map A-3 where the bus will go outside of its normal route to service the Esso station on Victoria Road West only when it aligns with arrival and departure of Maritime Bus (which picks up and drops off passengers there). While the Industrial Park may also merit consideration for route variation to align with shift changes, we have not included it in the service plan due to the length of the route diversion required. Consideration may be given running a trial of this route variation once confidence is gained in the ability of the bus to meet its schedule.

9. 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.

9.1 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 9-1

Table 9-1: 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

Funding Stream	Purpose of Stream	Process and Eligibility
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 (likely below what Amherst could produce)
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.

9.2 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 9-2.

Table 9-2: 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

Table 9-3: Examples of Approved RTSF Applications

Program Name	Municipality	Federal Contribution ($)	Program Contribution (% of Est. Total Project Cost)
Purchase of vehicles and charging stations for the on-demand service in Tecumseh, Ontario.	Tecumseh	1,050,550	80%
Installation of transit infrastructure to support T:GO transit system for the Town of Tillsonburg, Ontario	Tillsonburg	153,436	71%

Program Name	Municipality	Federal Contribution ($)	Program Contribution (% of Est. Total Project Cost)
Purchase of an accessible vehicle to provide on demand transit services in Red Rock, Ontario	Red Rock	60,480	80%
Purchase of hybrid vehicles to support an existing transit service for rural regions surrounding City of Ottawa, Ontario	Russell	92,000	80%

9.3 Provincial Funding

In 2023, the Government of Nova Scotia announced an investment of $5.1 million "to help municipalities and community organizations purchase vehicles, support operations and planning and make transportation more accessible." With the recent adoption of the JRTA's Regional Transportation Plan, there is optimism that further investment will be made in municipal public transit in support of the Plan's objectives.

Currently, the Public Transportation Assistance Program (PTAP) provides funding to municipalities and community organizations operating a fixed-route service for capital assets like vehicles, bus terminals and shelters. Funding is for capital purchases that support the long-term sustainability of the fixed-route transit service. Alternatively, the funds can be placed in a capital reserve until they're required. The funding is not for offsetting the cost of operating the transit service.

10. Summary and Recommendations

10.1 Summary

This study has used public engagement and interaction with Municipal staff to examine a variety of approaches to introducing fixed-route transit service within the Town of Amherst. From this examination, a routing pattern was selected that provides service every hour during weekdays with coverage that reaches nearly every town resident. Using a robust modeling process that examines a wide range of service frequencies and geographic coverage helps us to ensure that the recommended service plan has been optimized to best meet the key needs and expressed desires of the community.

The bulk of transit stop infrastructure has been delayed until Year Two to allow for time for the system to prove its longer-term value. A summary of costs for the first two years of service is provided for the recommended urban transit buses (Table 10-1) as well as the alternative of mini-buses (Table 10-2). Data in these tables is taken from the more detailed breakdown provided in Chapter 8. These figures are based on Municipal operation of the service, but may serve as a starting point for negotiation of service with a third party.

Table 10-1: Cost Summary for Years One and Two (Urban Transit Bus)

	Year One	Year Two
CAPITAL COSTS		
Vehicles	$1,360,000	
Stop Infrastructure	$8,000	$132,000
Start-up (procurement, promotion, engineering, etc.)	$40,000	
TOTAL	**$1,408,000**	**$132,000**
OPERATING COSTS		
Fuel	$31,000	$32,200
Maintenance	$20,000	$20,800
Vehicle Replacement Reserve	$43,000	$43,000
Salaries (drivers and administration)	$178,000	$185,100
Miscellaneous (insurance, marketing, etc)	$23,000	$23,900
TOTAL	**$295,000**	**$305,000**

Note: Assumes an increase of four percent per year for operating costs

Table 10-2: Cost Summary for Years One and Two (Mini-buses)

	Year One	Year Two
CAPITAL COSTS		
Vehicles	$400,000	
Stop Infrastructure	$8,000	$132,000
Start-up (procurement, promotion, engineering, etc.)	$40,000	
TOTAL	**$448,000**	**$132,000**
OPERATING COSTS		
Fuel	$24,000	$25,000
Maintenance	$20,000	$20,800
Vehicle Replacement Reserve	$25,000	$38,000
Salaries (drivers and administration)	$178,000	$185,100
Miscellaneous (insurance, marketing, etc)	$23,000	$23,900
TOTAL	**$270,000**	**$292,800**

Note: Assumes an increase of four percent per year for operating costs

10.2 Operating Agreement

There are significant 'economies of scale' in transit service delivery. Operating a single-vehicle service brings significant challenges in providing back-up vehicles and drivers and in keeping abreast of best practices and emerging technologies. Essentially, adding transit vehicles to an existing transit service operation will have less impact than adding new transit vehicles to an existing municipal fleet without transit vehicles.

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 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. CCTS might be considered as a potential third-party contractor.

To leverage available capital grants, it is recommended that the Municipality own the vehicles, thereby lowering ongoing contractor fees. Alternately, if transit is trialed 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.

10.3 Implementation Considerations

Provided Council decides to move forward, a draft implementation schedule is provided in Table 10-3, pending Council approval.

Table 10-3: Draft Implementation Schedule

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

10.4 Marketing and Education

Successful implementation of a new transit system will require strong communication and ongoing evaluation to ensure it meets 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 to the service safely. Outreach efforts should target seniors, students, people 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.

10.5 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 gathered feedback from riders.
- Adjustments to routing and service hours are 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. An additional day of 12-hour service would add incrementally to the cost of fuel, salaries and maintenance (approximately $52,000 per year). Improving trip frequencies to a trip every 30 minutes would require either (1) substantial route shortening 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 demand-responsive microtransit service. This delivery model could be explored if there is sufficient demand to justify investment. Longer-term considerations may include introducing a second route and restructuring the network.

Further long-term consideration could be given to working with the Municipality of Cumberland County to extend routing to destinations like Springhill, Oxford and/or Pugwash.

10.6 Ongoing 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.

10.7 Alternatives to Fixed-Route Service

Chapter 7 of this report discusses alternatives to fixed-route service. Of these, we believe the most viable to be approving an annual operating grant of $40,000 to CCTS and marketing the on-demand service to all residents of the town. This would be a fraction of the cost of operating a municipal fixed-route service, although it is beyond the scope of this study to project the comparative value of this service in terms of ridership.

APPENDIX A

Maps

MAP A-1

Road Classification (DRAFT)

SCHEDULE

—

LAST UPDATED

2025-01-09

DATA SOURCE

Prov. of NS

NORTH + SCALE

N

0 25 50 100 m

PROJ.

NAD83 CSRS
UTM 20 N

LEGEND

- Trans-Canada Highway
- Local Arterial
- Local Collector
- Local

Town of Amherst - Transit Feasibility Study

MAP A-2

TRANSIT NODES AND COLLECTION AREAS

SCALE

0 500 m 1 km

Service provided only when required to meet Maritime Bus

Town of Amherst - Transit Feasibility Study

MAP A-3

RECOMMENDED FIXED ROUTE

KEY TO STOPS

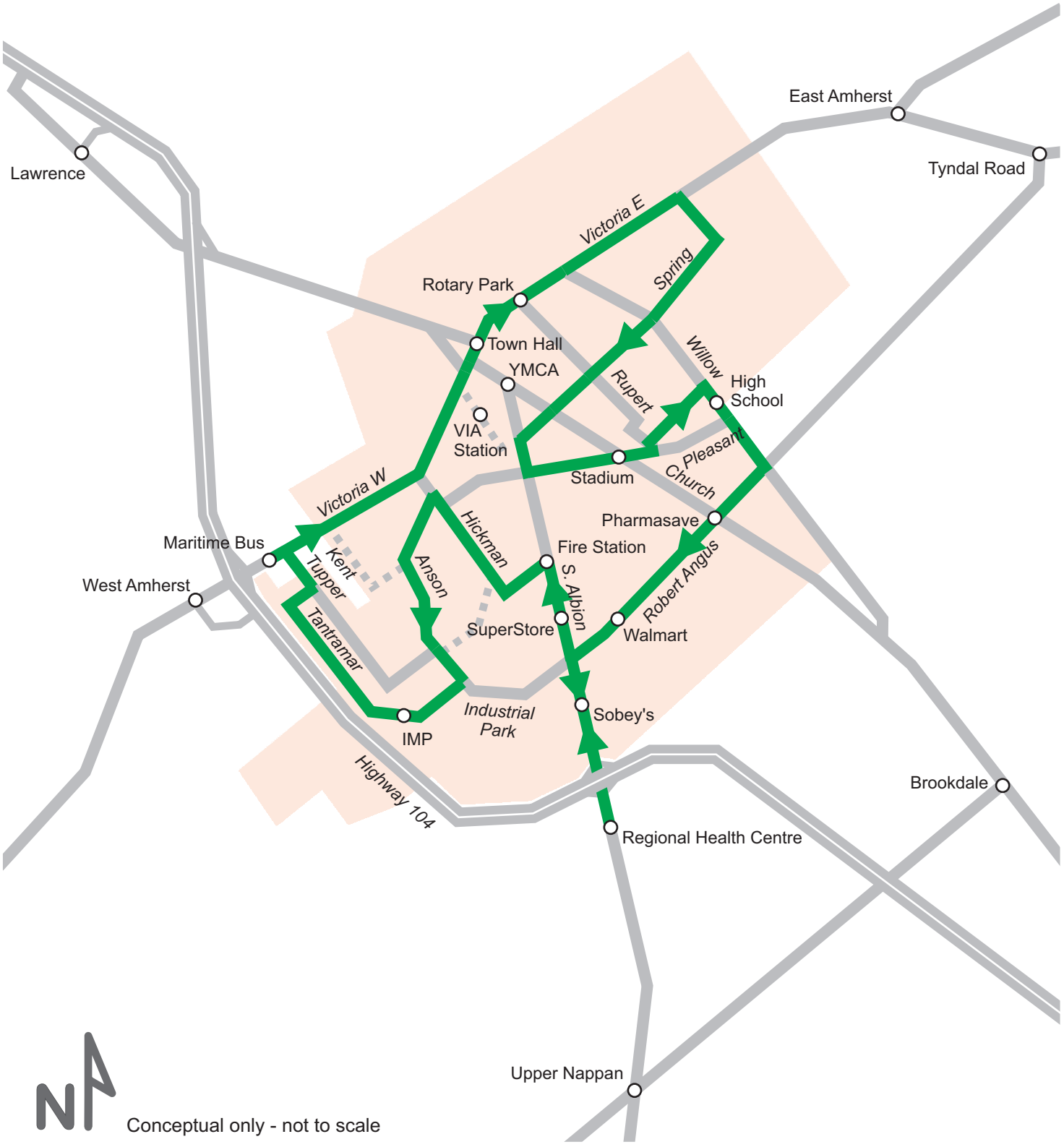
- Sidewalk at curb
- Sidewalk separated from curb by grass strip
- No sidewalk

SCALE

0 500 m 1 km

APPENDIX B

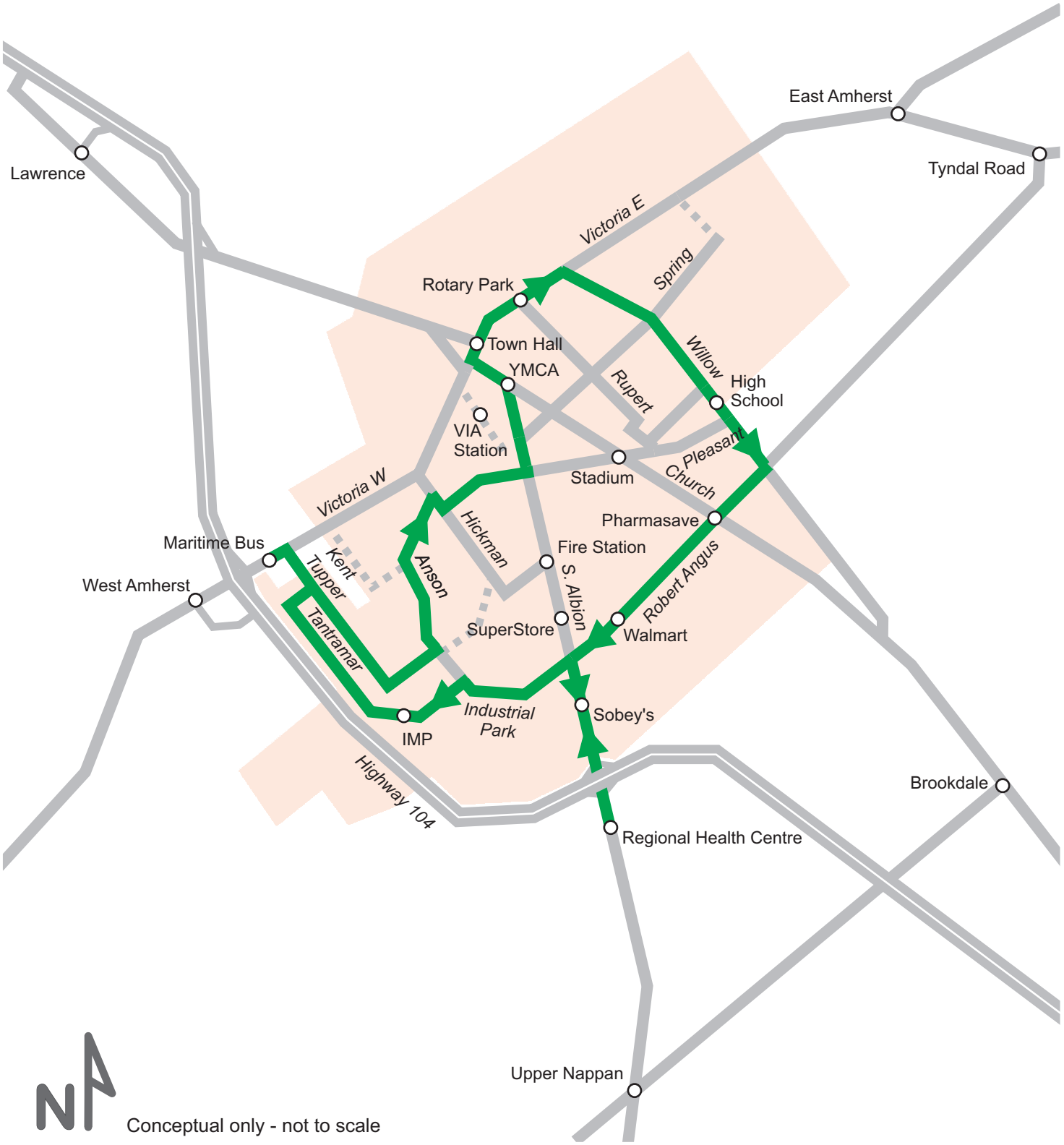
Concept Sketches



Town of Amherst - Transit Feasibility Study

ROUTE OPTION **A**

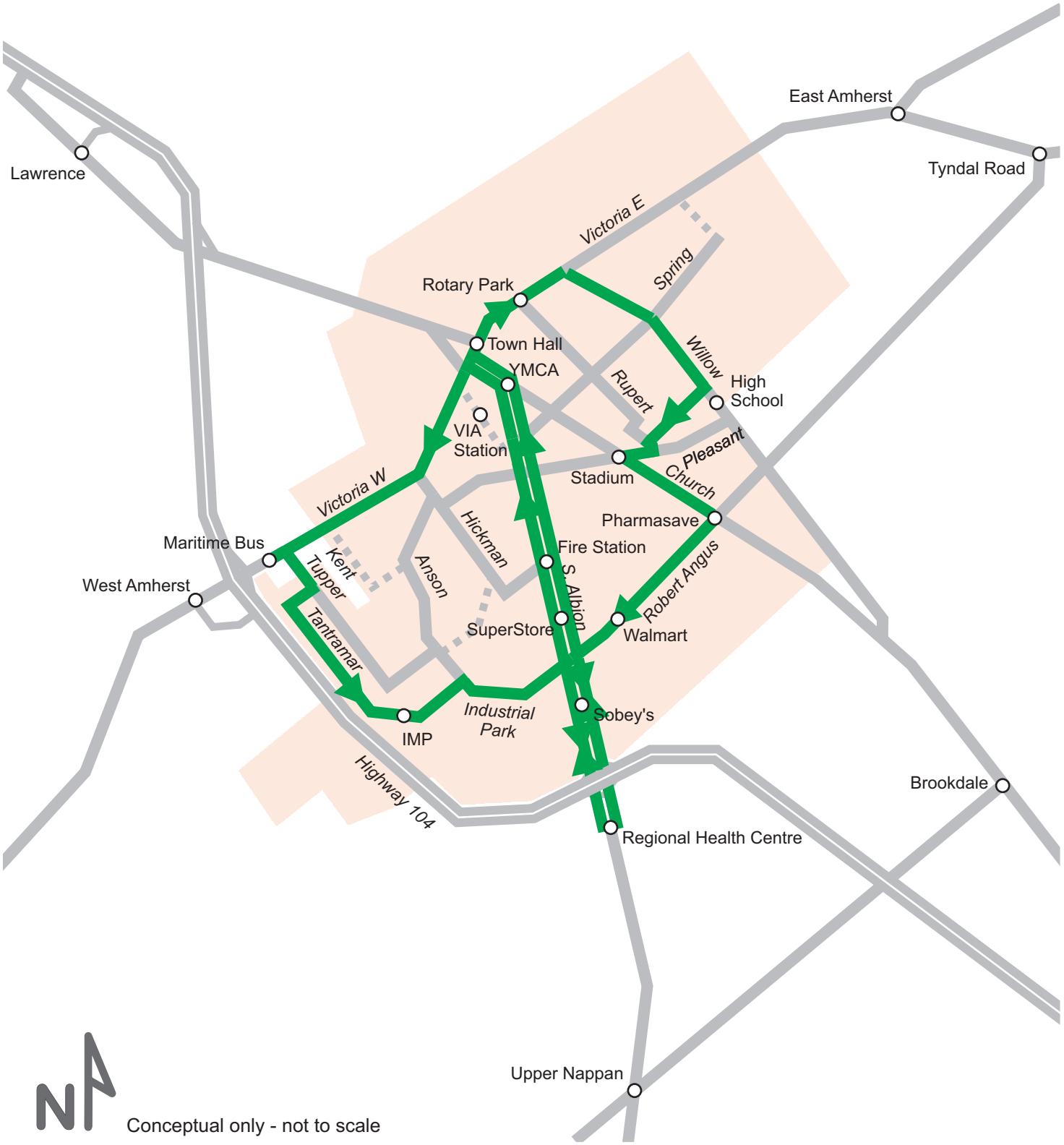
ROUTE STATISTICS	
Cycle Time	60 min
In-Route Time	47 min
Pct. of Dwelling Units in Service Area	71.9%
Destination Points in Service Area	53



Town of Amherst - Transit Feasibility Study

ROUTE OPTION **B**

ROUTE STATISTICS	
Cycle Time	40 min
In-Route Time	38 min
Pct. of Dwelling Units in Service Area	46.1%
Destination Points in Service Area	49



Conceptual only - not to scale

Town of Amherst - Transit Feasibility Study

ROUTE OPTION **C**

ROUTE STATISTICS	
Cycle Time	60 min
In-Route Time	46 min
Pct. of Dwelling Units in Service Area	58.5%
Destination Points in Service Area	51

Town of Amherst - Transit Feasibility Study

ROUTE OPTION **F**

ROUTE STATISTICS	
Cycle Time	60 min
In-Route Time	49 min
Pct. of Dwelling Units in Service Area	62.9%
Destination Points in Service Area	51

Town of Amherst - Transit Feasibility Study

ROUTE OPTION **M**

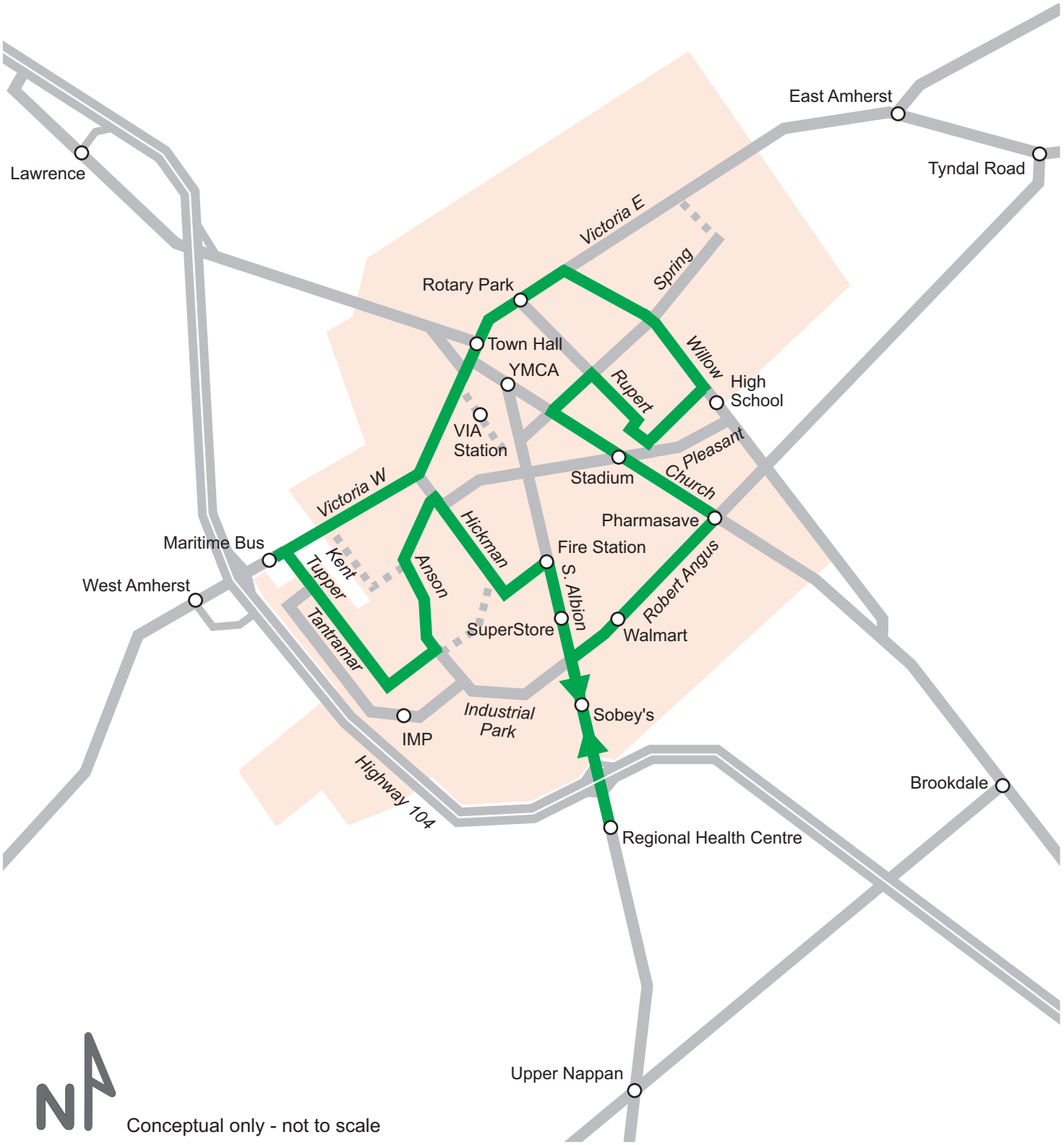
ROUTE STATISTICS	
Cycle Time	60 min
In-Route Time	47 min
Pct. of Dwelling Units in Service Area	67.4%
Destination Points in Service Area	50

Conceptual only - not to scale

Town of Amherst - Transit Feasibility Study

ROUTE OPTION O

ROUTE STATISTICS	
Cycle Time	60 min
In-Route Time	51 min
Pct. of Dwelling Units in Service Area	63.2%
Destination Points in Service Area	52



Town of Amherst - Transit Feasibility Study

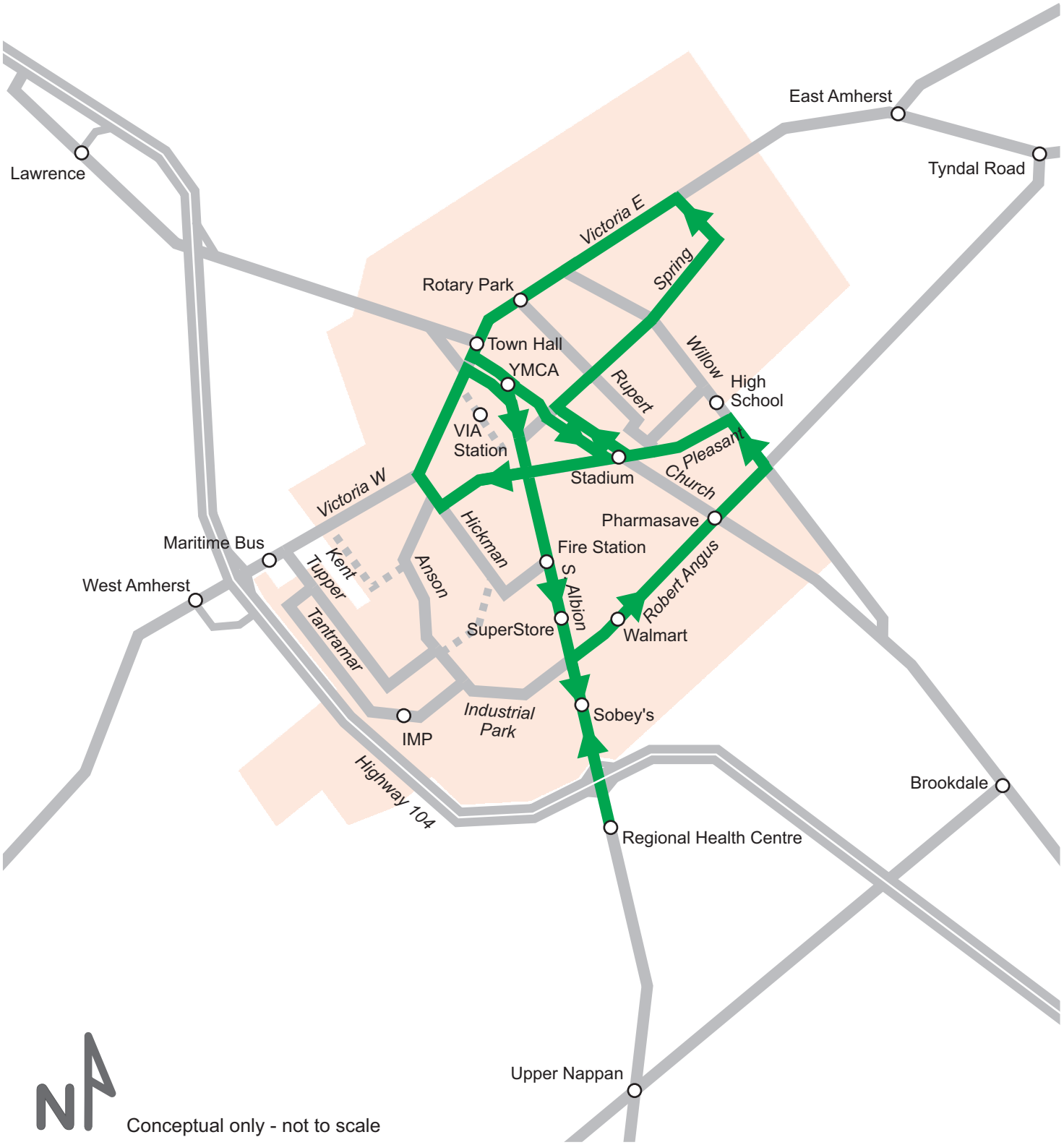
ROUTE OPTION P

ROUTE STATISTICS	
Cycle Time	45 min
In-Route Time	44 min
Pct. of Dwelling Units in Service Area	63.2%
Destination Points in Service Area	50

Town of Amherst - Transit Feasibility Study

ROUTE OPTION **Q**

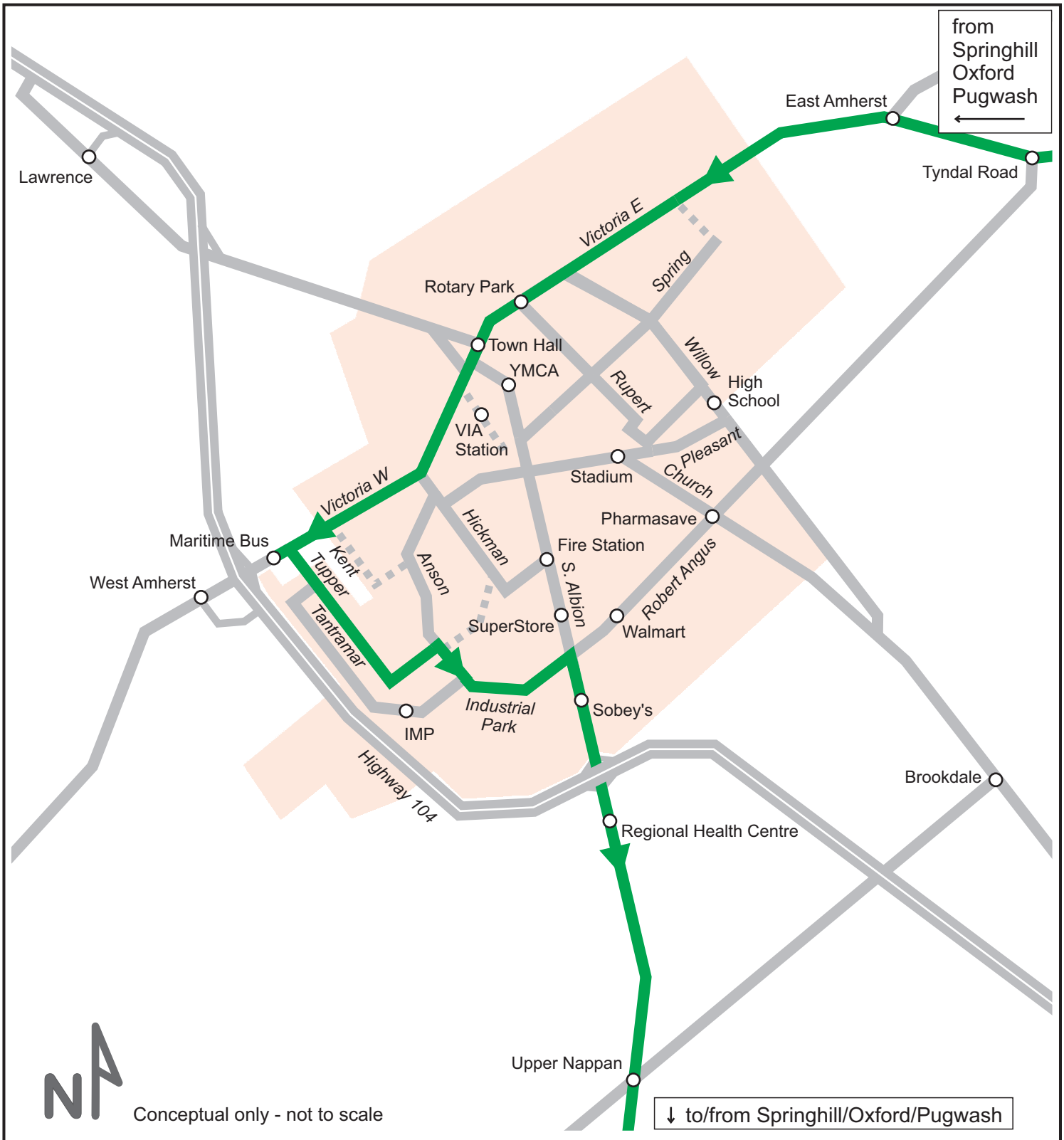
ROUTE STATISTICS	
Cycle Time	45 min
In-Route Time	40 min
Pct. of Dwelling Units in Service Area	49.4%
Destination Points in Service Area	48



Town of Amherst - Transit Feasibility Study

ROUTE OPTION **R**

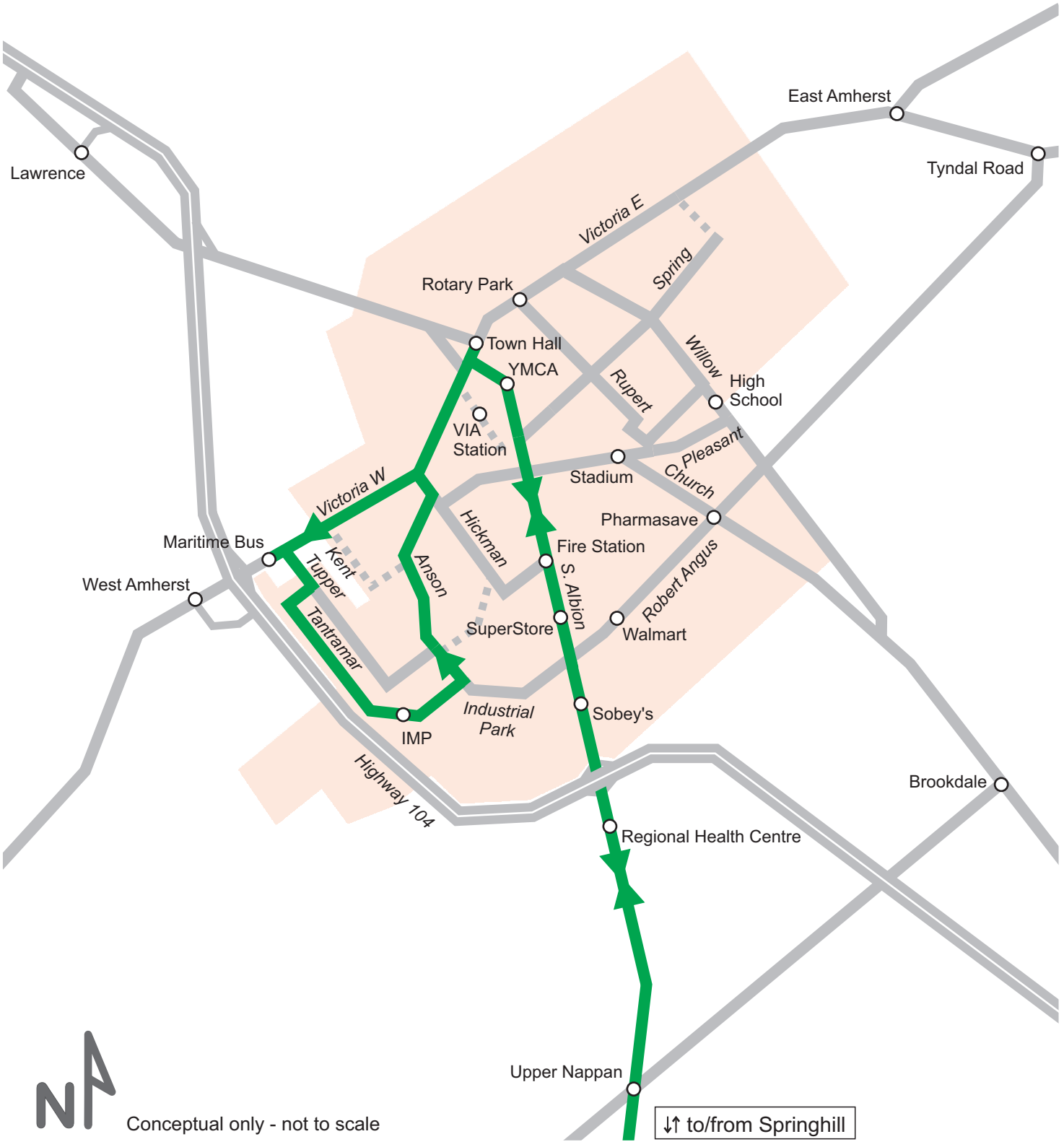
ROUTE STATISTICS	
Cycle Time	60 min
In-Route Time	49 min
Pct. of Dwelling Units in Service Area	66.5%
Destination Points in Service Area	48



Town of Amherst - Transit Feasibility Study

ROUTE OPTION **W**

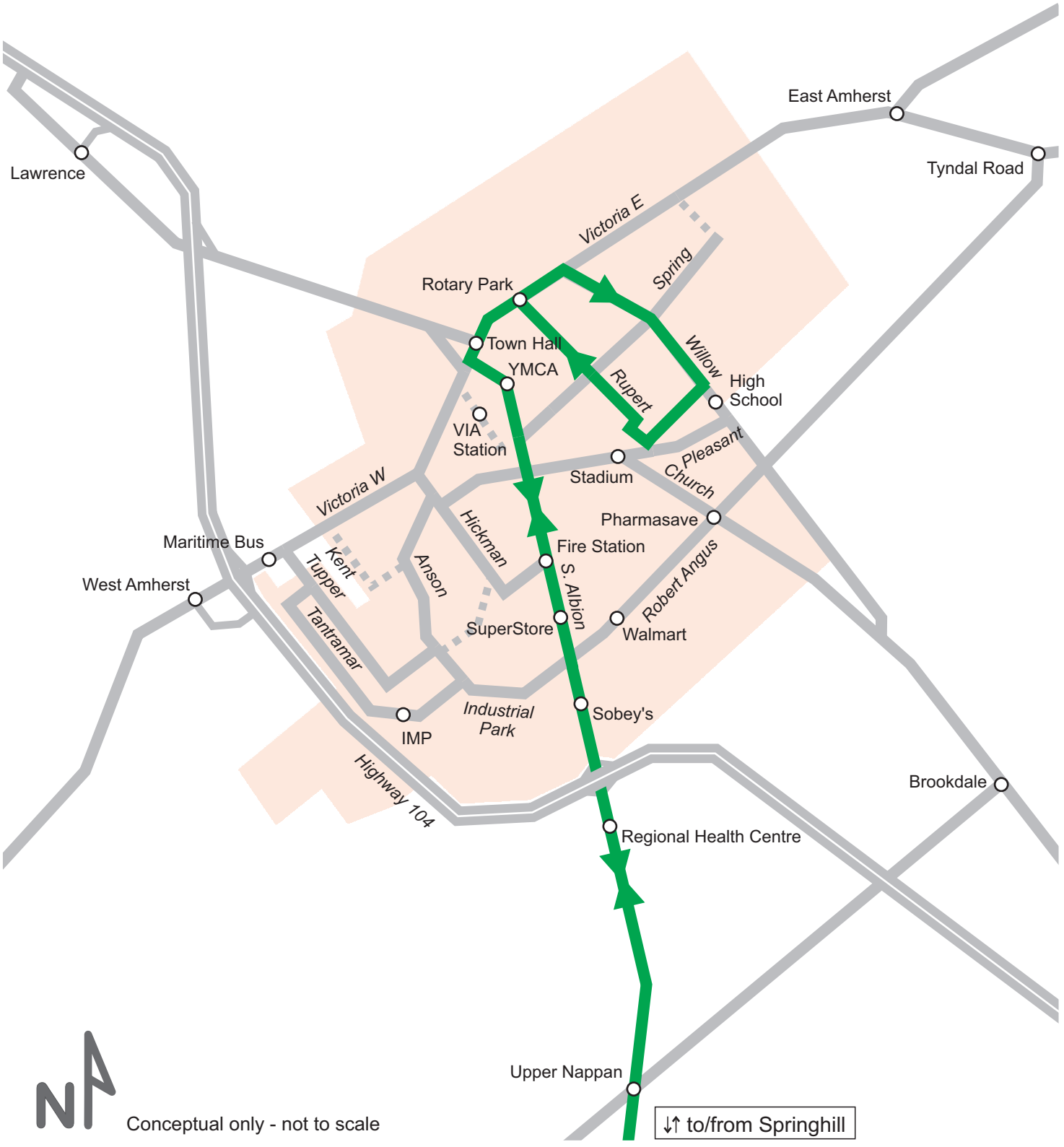
ROUTE STATISTICS	
Cycle Time	120 min
In-Route Time	119 min
Pct. of Dwelling Units in Service Area	26.1%
Destination Points in Service Area	42



Town of Amherst - Transit Feasibility Study

ROUTE OPTION X

ROUTE STATISTICS	
Cycle Time	90 min
In-Route Time	82 min
Pct. of Dwelling Units in Service Area	36.6%
Destination Points in Service Area	46



Town of Amherst - Transit Feasibility Study

ROUTE OPTION Y

ROUTE STATISTICS	
Cycle Time	90 min
In-Route Time	76 min
Pct. of Dwelling Units in Service Area	45.3%
Destination Points in Service Area	44

APPENDIX C

What We Heard Report

wsp.com

Amherst
NOVA SCOTIA

What We Heard Report

Transit System Feasibility Study

Town of Amherst
November 2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPENDICES

1 INTRODUCTION

The Town of Amherst, in collaboration with WSP Canada Inc., is undertaking a Transit System Feasibility Study (the "Study") to assess the potential for implementing a local transit service within the Town. As part of this process, the project team carried out a comprehensive public engagement program designed to gather meaningful input from residents and stakeholders.

To promote the engagement opportunities, the Town used both digital and direct outreach methods. Event and online survey information was shared across municipal social media channels. These posts generated approximately 22,891 views, 9,762 reaches, 222 responses to the Open House event, and 17 interactions with the online survey. In addition, 6,347 postcards (Appendix A) were mailed to households within Amherst and beyond to notify residents of upcoming opportunities to get involved.

A variety of engagement events was offered throughout the process, including:

- Five (5) Stakeholder Interviews;
- Four (4) Staff Interviews;
- One (1) Public Open House; and
- One (1) Online Community Survey.

Together, the communication efforts and engagement events helped ensure broad participation and provided valuable insight into the community's existing challenges, opportunities and aspirations of a transit service within the Town. The sections that follow summarize the engagement events completed and what we heard.

2 PUBLIC STAKEHOLDER & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

This section provides an overview of the stakeholder and community engagement activities conducted to inform the development of the Study.

2.1 TOWN STAFF INTERVIEWS

One-on-one interviews were conducted with four (4) key municipal staff members. The purpose of these interviews was to identify potential opportunities or constraints for the operation of public transit service within the Town, as well as establish a vision for how transit might be positioned with other municipal services. Staff interviewed represented the following Departments:

1. Operations
2. Planning & Economic Development
3. Community Living
4. Finance

An overview of the **key insights** from the interviews include:

- A few concerns were raised around the ability of transit vehicles to navigate the width of streets and overall street layout.
- Preference by Town staff to limit the number of transit shelters used to minimize additional burden on street maintenance.
- No concerns with flag stopping or buses stopping in traffic lanes to do loading.
- Recent polling, completed by the Town, of larger businesses suggests public transit is necessary for growth.
- In the past, there has been a shuttle service between Amherst and Springhill.
- Many individuals who work in Amherst, live outside the Town limits.
- The Town has a growing population of newcomers.
- Pharmasave and Lawton's (downtown) both have large clinics that will be an important destination for transit users.
- Lower income residential is mostly disbursed throughout the Town and not concentrated in any one neighbourhood.
- Cumberland County Transportation Society (CCTS) does not receive annual funding from the Town but applies from time to time for community support grants.

2.2 STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Businesses and institutions that will most likely hold an important role or interest in the implementation of public transit were identified and interviewed. The interviews were conducted virtually and in some cases, follow-up information was exchanged through e-mail. A total of **three (3)** interviews were conducted and summarized below. Interview requests were also extended to Amherst and Area Chamber of Commerce, Nova Scotia Community College, Amherst Regional High School and IMP Aerospace, but no response was received, as of October 17, 2025.

1 Cumberland County Transportation Society (CCTS)

- Established in 2009 and provides a pre-booked door-to-door transportation service.
- Funding is provided by the Province, the County (annually), and the Town (from time to time).
- Fleet consists of six (6) vans (five of which are accessible) and have a new bus coming.
- NSCC, Pharmasave and the Hospital are the key destinations.
- Immigrants make up a large portion of their clients.
- Would consider the idea of taking on a fixed route service on behalf of the Town with proper funding.

Following the interview, CCTS shared helpful data on ride origins and destinations over a five (5) month period that will be referenced in the Study. Recent financial statements and a presentation made to Town Council in March 2025 were also provided.

2 Nova Scotia Public Health – Northern Zone

- The Transportation Support Program (Northern Zone) provides free transportation to residents for medical and wellness trips through CCTS.
- The program was initiated in 2023, and has had 37,000 trips booked within the first two (2) years.
- Buses with lifts are preferable than those with low-floor and ramp.
- Public transit can help with food insecurity issues.
- Cumberland County has a higher percentage of lower income residents than elsewhere in the Province.

Following the interview, NS Public Health provided additional information on trips provided through the Transportation Support Program which will be referenced in the Study.

3 Cumberland County

- As there are no sidewalks in Amherst to the Hospital, it makes driving a private vehicle the only choice for many.
- Future growth within the County is expected, especially in Parrsboro and Springhill. 100 residential units are coming to Springhill.
- Important destinations to consider providing transit services to include NSCC (Springhill) and Oxford Frozen Foods.

- Pugwash is an attraction for tourism, recreation (beaches), and has a manufacturing plant, and seniors residential complex.
- Part of annexation agreement with the Town has provided 400 units of sewer capacity for development along John Black Road and Willow Street.

2.3 PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE

On September 17, 2025, the Project Team held a 2-hour long Community Open House in a "drop-in" style format at the Community Credit Union Business Innovation Centre. The intent of the open house was to provide an opportunity for the public to provide input on the vision, aspirations, opportunities and challenges with transit in Amherst. The questions asked at the Open House were similar to many of those in the online survey, providing both in-person and virtual opportunities for the community to share feedback. The Community Open House used interactive displays to gather feedback.

The Community Open House was promoted on the Town's webpage (https://www.amherst.ca/transit) and social media platforms. A total of 40 participants attended the Community Open House. A copy of the Open House display boards can be found in **Appendix B**.

2.4 COMMUNITY SURVEY SUMMARY

A Community Survey was available on SurveyMonkey from August 25, 2025 to September 26, 2025. The survey included multiple choice, ranking questions, open-ended questions, as well as a general comments section, to gather information and feedback on a proposed transit system in the Town of Amherst. The information received will be used to inform the development of the Study.

The survey was promoted on the Town's webpage (Transit - Town of Amherst) and social media channels. **The survey received an exceptional response rate receiving a total of 1049 responses, accounting for approximately 10.7% of the Town's population**. A detailed summary of the survey feedback is presented in **Appendix C**.

3 WHAT WE HEARD

The findings from the stakeholder and community engagement activities conducted have been summarized into a series of “Key Themes”. The input collected through internal and external stakeholder interviews, the community survey, and an open house provide valuable insight into the barriers, opportunities, and aspirations to help inform the development of the Transit Feasibility Study.

While the feedback received varies, several key themes were identified, which will support the development of the Study’s recommendations. This section provides an overview of key themes heard throughout these engagement efforts, which have been categorized into four (4) “Key Themes” which are outlined below:

1. Safe and Equitable Transportation
2. Shifting from Car Culture to Choice
3. Design a Service that Fits Daily Life
4. Building a Sustainable and Scalable Service

3.1 KEY THEMES

1 SAFE AND EQUITABLE TRANSPORTATION

The engagement feedback emphasized that equity, safety, and affordability are central to developing a successful transit system in Amherst. Respondents consistently noted that a successful transit system must be inclusive and accessible for all, particularly seniors, youth, newcomers, and individuals with mobility challenges. Participants highlighted that public transit can play a vital role in promoting independence, reducing social isolation and enhancing overall quality of life, especially for those who rely on it as their primary mode of travel.

Feedback also highlighted that safety and comfort at both bus stops and on board are key to encouraging usage. Investments in shelters, lighting, benches, and accessible design were viewed as essential to ensuring all users feel confident and secure when using transit services.

The Study should consider:

- **Accessible Vehicles and Barrier-Free Stops**
    - Design all vehicles and stops with universal accessibility in mind, ensuring safe, comfortable, and convenient use by people of all ages and abilities.
    - Consider vehicles with lifts, rather than low-floor/ramp buses to promote ridership for all users.
- **Investment in Supportive Infrastructure**
    - Prioritize infrastructure improvements that promote safety, comfort, and convenience, including lighting, shelters, benches and clear wayfinding signage at transit stops.
    - Ensure that new infrastructure aligns with accessibility standards and supports equitable access to public spaces and transportation services.

- **Affordable Fare Structures and Flexible Payment Options**
    - Explore opportunities to provide affordable fare options that maintain long-term financial sustainability while ensuring accessibility for all users.
    - Consider multi-faceted payment methods, including electronic payment (e.g., app or tap cards), prepaid tickets or passes, and cash options to accommodate diver user preferences and needs.
    - Engagement results indicated that 42% of survey respondents indicated they would be willing to pay a maximum of $2.01-$3.00 for a one-way trip, while 19% would be willing to pay $3.01-$4.00 and 5% would be willing to pay more than $4.00.

How do riders want to pay?
Survey results show that 73% of respondents prefer to pay for bus tickets electronically (such as through an app or tap card), 54% would like to buy tickets online, and 43% still want the option to purchase tickets in person.

- **Social and Community Benefits of Transit**
    - Recognize the broader social value of transit in promoting independence and inclusion, particularly for individuals who do not drive.
    - Strengthen connections between transit planning and community well-being by reducing social isolation and enhancing access to daily needs, services, and employment opportunities.

2 SHIFTING FROM CAR CULTURE TO CHOICE

Engagement feedback revealed that most Amherst residents rely heavily on private vehicles for transportation, indicating that a meaningful shift toward public transit will require both cultural and infrastructural change. Participants emphasized the need for improved pedestrian infrastructure, such as sidewalks, to enable residents to safely and conveniently choose alternatives to driving.

Respondents also acknowledged that transitioning to a transit-supportive community will take time and should focus on increasing awareness, improving connectivity, and demonstrating the convenience and reliability of transit as a viable travel option.

The Study should consider:

- **Encourage Mode Shift From Private Vehicle Use**
    - Introduce awareness campaigns and pilot initiatives to showcase the benefits of transit use, such as cost savings, environmental impacts, and improved accessibility.
    - Partner with schools, major employers, and community groups to build ridership and reduce single-occupancy vehicle trips. Of survey respondents, 68% indicated they would consider using a public transit system if it were available to them.

67% of survey respondents use a personal vehicle as their primary means of transportation

- **Supporting Behavioural Change**
    - Provide early demonstration projects or temporary routes to build familiarity and trust in new services.
    - Use consistent branding and clear communication to reinforce the reliability and value of the system.
- **Addressing Infrastructure Barriers**
    - Integrate pedestrian and cycling connections within transit planning to create a truly multi-modal network.

3 DESIGING A SERVICE THAT FITS DAILY LIFE

Participants expressed a strong desire for a transit system that reflects how and where residents travel in their daily routines. Convenience, reliability, and accessibility of routes and schedules were identified as critical factors that would influence ridership. Survey results indicated that 74% of respondents would be more likely to use public transportation if routes and schedules aligned with their work, school, and shopping patterns.

The Study should consider:

- **Convenient Routes and Schedules**
    - Design transit routes and service frequencies that align with residents' daily travel needs and common destinations. Key destinations identified by survey respondents included, the Hospital, Amherst Centre Mall/Town Square, and the Downtown Core.
    - Ensure schedules are predictable, reliable, and easy to understand, allowing users to plan trips with confidence.

> 68% of survey respondents indicated they would consider using a public transit system if it were available

- **Strategic Stop Placement**
    - Prioritize transit stops near high-demand areas such as employment centres, healthcare facilities, retail hubs, and schools.
    - Explore opportunities to enhance comfort and accessibility at stops, such as lighting, benches, and shelters.
- **Optimizing Access to Transit**
    - Recognize that 57% of survey respondents are willing to walk up to five minutes to reach a bus stop and plan routes to reflect that comfort range.
    - Implement pedestrian-friendly design and wayfinding to make access routes to stops clear and safe.

4 BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE AND SCALABLE SERVICE

Participants emphasized that a future transit system should be both adaptable and scalable to respond to the community's changing needs. The system should not only meet current travel demands but be capable of evolving alongside population growth, employment shifts, and regional development.

There was a strong interest in partnerships, with employers, educational institutions, and surrounding municipalities, to increase transit efficiency, ridership, and reach. Several respondents expressed a desire for potential regional routes connecting Amherst with neighbouring communities such as Oxford, Springhill, and Parrsboro.

The Study should consider:

- **Flexible and Responsive Service Design**
    - Build flexibility into service design to accommodate changes in population, ridership, and travel patterns.
    - Explore phased implementation to test, refine, and expand service over time.
    - Incorporate pilot programs or phased implementation to test and refine service options.
- **Partnerships for Success**
    - Collaborate with local employers, schools, and institutions to explore transit partnerships that support employee and student transportation.
    - Pursue funding and resource-sharing partnerships that support long-term operational sustainability.
- **Regional Connectivity**
    - Evaluate options for expanding transit beyond Amherst's boundaries to strengthen regional access to jobs, education and services.
    - Assess opportunities to expand service to nearby communities such as Oxford, Springhill, and Parrsboro to support regional mobility and economic ties.

74% of survey respondents indicated they would be more likely to use a transit service if schedules and routes worked with their schedule

4 NEXT STEPS

The Town of Amherst and the Project Team will use the feedback presented in this report as inputs to support the development and evaluation in the Transit System Feasibility Study.

Thank you to all that have provided input throughout this process, so far. It is invaluable for the Project Team to develop a better understanding of the transit needs, wants, and challenges throughout the community. Your continued input and participation is crucial in the success of the project overall. For more information and to stay up to date on the project, please visit: https://www.amherst.ca/transit.

APPENDIX A – POSTCARD

Postcard – Front

Postcard – Back

APPENDIX B – OPEN HOUSE DISPLAY BOARDS

WELCOME!

Town of Amherst
Transit System Study

Public Open House
September 17, 2025
6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

Please sign-in and feel free to speak with a member of Amherst Staff and/or WSP to share your comments or ask questions.

Amherst NOVA SCOTIA

wsp

About the Project

The Town of Amherst has initiated a **Transit System Study** to assess the potential for a fixed-route public transit service within the Town.

The study will evaluate **route options, how the system would operate, public needs, vehicle requirements**, and **integration with existing services**.

Project Timeline

August

Project Initiation
- Prepare community engagement plan

Review Existing Conditions
- Complete background review & jurisdictional scan

September

Public & Stakeholder Engagement
- Complete interviews, public open house, online survey & engagement summary memo

Concept Development
- Develop population/employment distribution map, service concept portfolio & feasibility screening

October

Service Plan Development
- Develop design guidelines, coarse travel demand model & service delivery elements

Financial & Impact Analysis
- Determine Operating/capital costs, explore funding partnerships

November

Implementation Plan
- Identify staging strategy opportunities and develop a cost-sharing model

Final Report & Presentation

Amherst NOVA SCOTIA wsp

Why Public Transit?

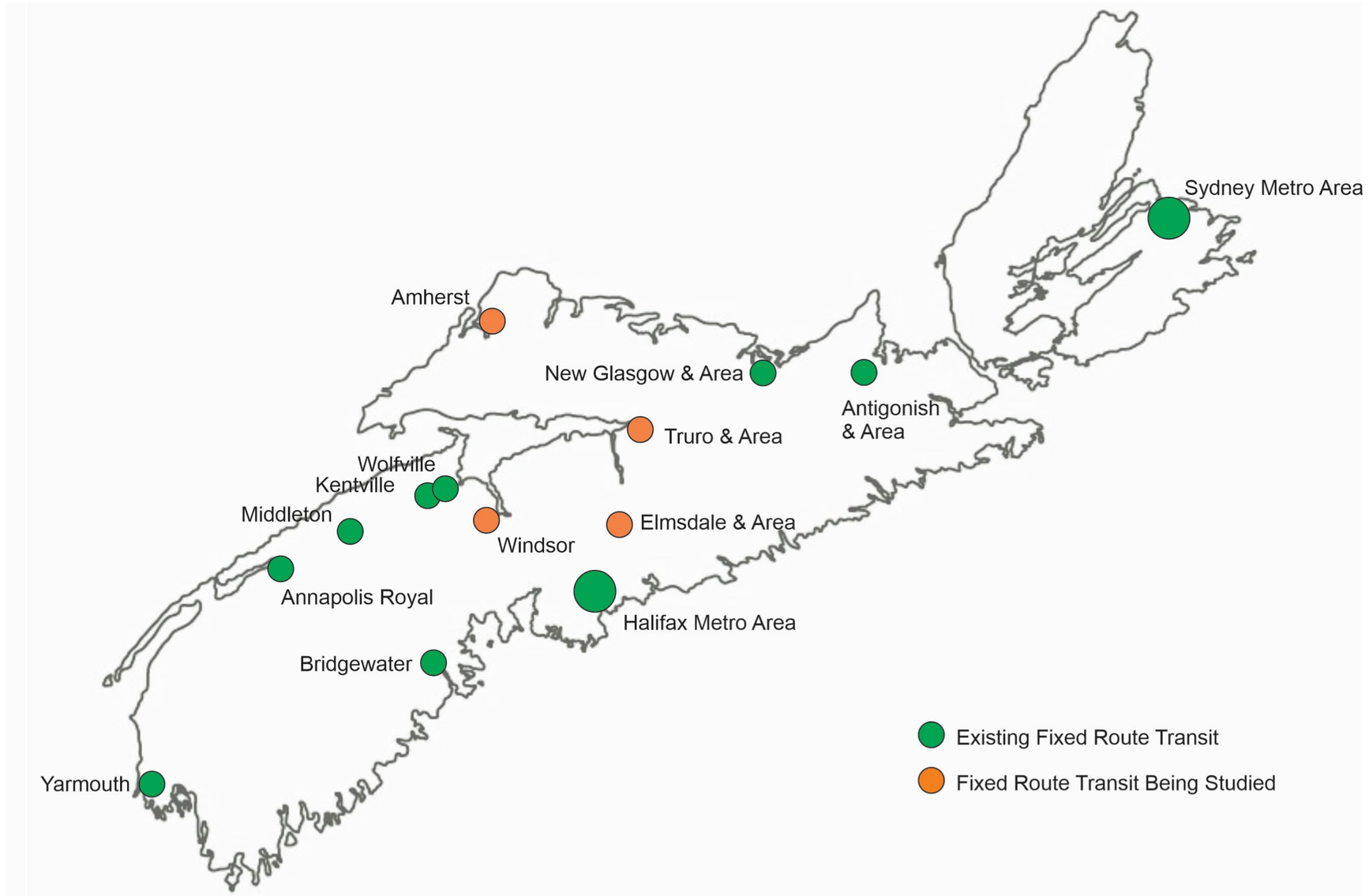
Social Equity: Providing more employment and social opportunities for low income and mobility-challenged residents.

Economic: Opening up a larger potential worker pool for employers.

Transportation Demand Management: Reducing parking space requirements and congestion impacts of private vehicles.

Environmental: Reducing emissions and noise impacts of private vehicles, creating greater efficiency by attracting trips away from private vehicle travel, and creating opportunities to employ electric vehicle technology.

Public Transit in Nova Scotia



The map illustrates Regions and Towns throughout Nova Scotia with existing fixed-route transit services, and those currently developing plans/evaluating feasibility.

Transit Service Needs

Different ways Public Transit Service can be delivered

DEMAND-RESPONSIVE ROUTING

A van or bus will come to my door to pick me up if I call in advance to book a trip. I will get dropped off at my destination or at a bus stop on the fixed route. Other riders may be picked up or dropped off along the way. The cost depends on the length of my trip, but may be more than the normal fixed route fare.

TEMPORAL ROUTING

A van or bus will come to a location(s) in my community several times a day, one day a week. I plan my shopping, medical and social trips to be on that day.

FIXED ROUTING

My bus arrives on a regular schedule and travels along a consistent route.

DYNAMIC ROUTING

The bus will divert from its route to come to the bus stop(s) in my community only if I call in advance (or use the transit app on my phone) to indicate that I want to be picked up. When I'm returning on the bus, I tell the driver I'd like to get off at the bus stop in my community.

Transit Service Needs

What is your current primary means of transportation?

Place a **dot** next to your answer!

Personal Vehicle (Driver)	**Taxi**
Personal Vehicle (Passenger)	**Carpool**
Walking/Cycling	**Other (Please Specify)**

Exploring the Future

What would make you more likely to use a fixed-route transit service?

Place a dot underneath your top 3 choices!

Schedules & routes that work with my schedule	**Stops** close to where I work/travel	Ability to **track** buses in real time	**Reliability** & **Accessibility**	**Other** (please specify)

What time of day would you be most likely to use a fixed-route transit service?

Place a dot underneath all choices that apply!

Early Morning (Before 7 am)	**Morning** (7 am to 10 am)	**Midday** (10am to 4 pm)
Late Afternoon (4 pm to 6pm)	**Evenings** (6 pm to 9 pm)	**Late Evenings** (9 pm to 11 pm)

Sharing your Vision

Use a sticky note to share your thoughts below, or add to the Maps on the tables!

Where would you be most likely to take transit to/from?

Example Locations:

- Downtown Core (Victoria St., Church St., Albion St.)
- Amherst Centre Mall / Amherst Town Square Mall
- Amherst Train Station / Via Rail Station
- Cumberland Regional Health Care Centre (Hospital)
- Amherst Industrial Park
- Maritime Bus Stop (Esso)

Thank you for Participating!

Next Steps

- Service Plan Development - **October 2025**
- Financial & Impact Analysis - **October 2025**
- Implementation Plan - **November 2025**
- Final Report & Presentation - **November 2025**

How to Stay Involved

Stay informed on future project milestones:

Project Webpage: **amherst.ca/transit**

Contact Information:

If you have comments or questions: **transit@amherst.ca**.

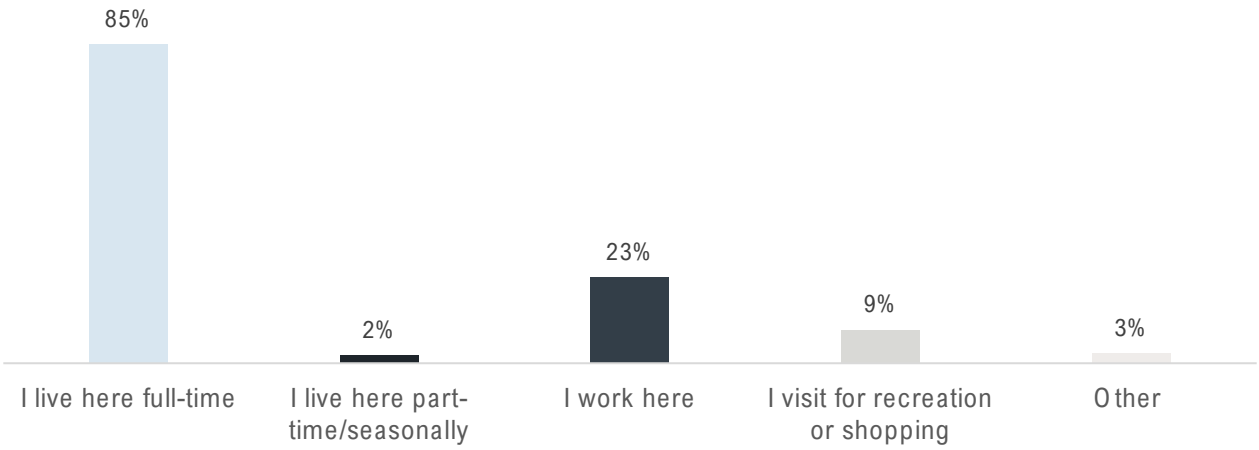
We Want to Hear From You!

Please take the community survey at https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/amherst-transit or scan the QR code below!

The survey closes September 26, 2025.

APPENDIX C – COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS

Question: Select which best describes you? Select all that apply.



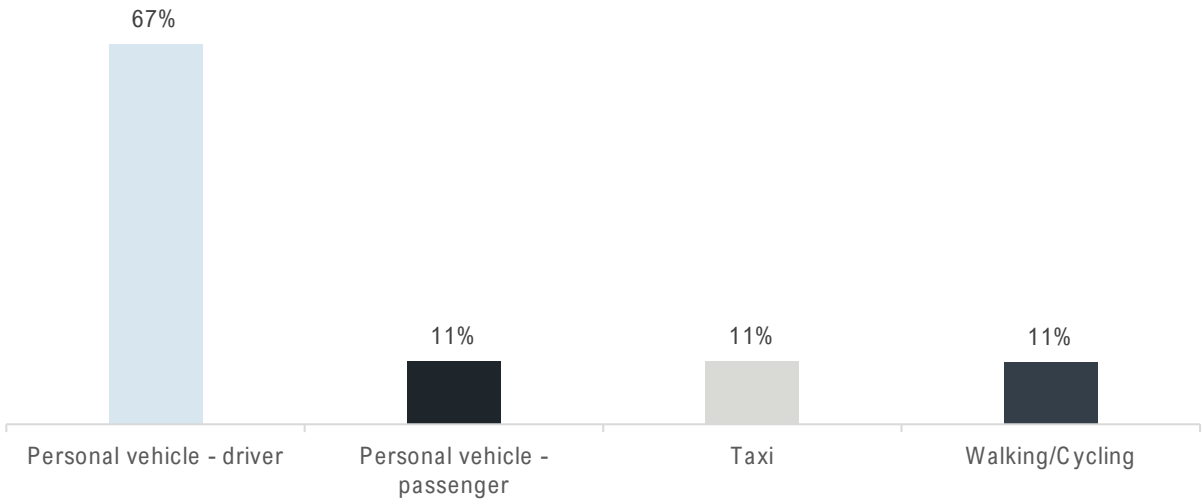
Survey respondents were asked to identify which best describes their connection to Amherst. Based on responses provided, over three-quarters (85%) live in Amherst full-time. Just under one-quarter (23%) work in Amherst, while 9% visit for recreation or shopping, and 2% live in Amherst part-time/seasonally. Approximately, 3% of survey respondents indicated "other". Common 'other' responses included:

- Visiting family who live in Amherst
- Previously lived in Amherst
- Visit Amherst for medical appointments
- Live outside the Town limits

Question: What is your age?

Participants were asked to identify their age to better understand survey demographics. The responses indicate a broad range of survey respondents. Among the age categories shown, the most common age groups of participants were 40-64 years old (46%), 20-39 years old (34%), and 65+ (18%). Participants within the 19 or under category only accounted for 2% of respondents.

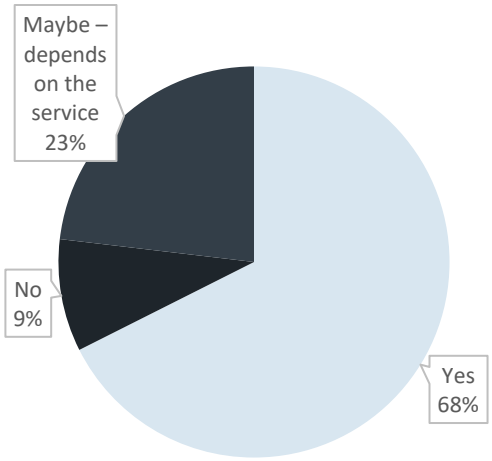
Question: What is your current primary means of transportation?



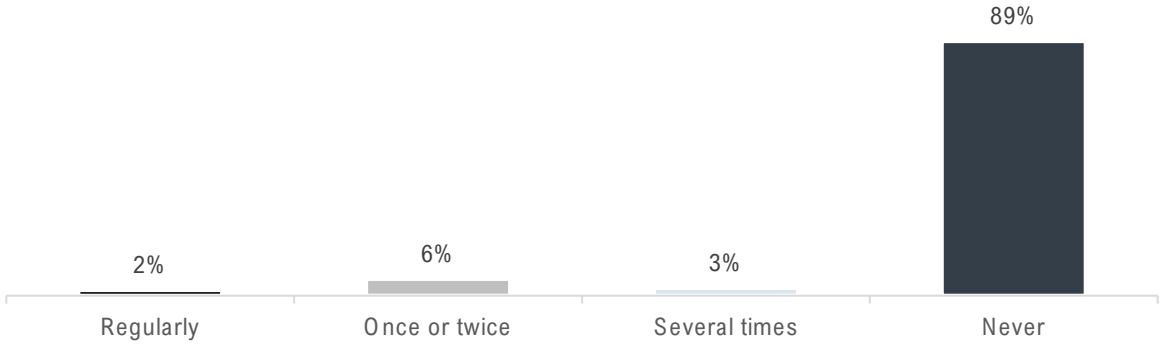
Survey respondents were asked to identify their primary means of transportation. Over two-thirds (67%) indicated they primarily drive a personal vehicle. A small portion of respondents reported being passengers in person vehicles (11%), using taxis (11%), or walking/cycling (11%) as their main mode of travel, each representing just over one-tenth of responses.

Question: Would you consider using a public transit system if it were available?

Survey respondents were asked whether they would consider using a public transit system if one was available. Over two-thirds (68%) indicated they would use public transit, while just under one-quarter (23%) said they might, depending on the service. A small portion of respondents (9%) indicated they would not consider using it.

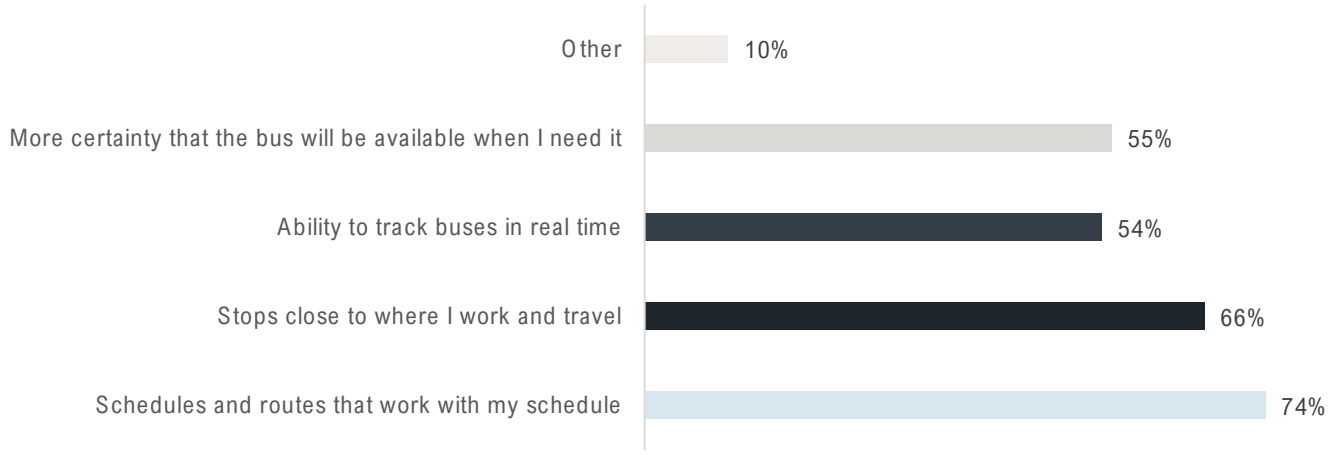


Question: In the past year, have you used the transit service provided by Cumberland County Transportation Service (CCTS)? Please explain why.



Participants were asked to identify if they have used Cumberland County Transportation Service (CCTS) within the last year. Over three-quarters (89%) indicated they have never used CCTS, and when asked to explain why the most common reasons included not aware of the service or assumed the service is only for those with mobility challenges, prefer to use a personal vehicle, or haven't needed the service. 6% of survey respondents indicated they've used their service once or twice most commonly for medical appointments/hospital appointments, use the service on a as-needed basis, or for occasional events. 3% of survey respondents indicated they have used CCTS's service several times, primarily for medical appointments/hospital appointments, commuting for work, or when an accessible transport is required. 2% of the respondents indicated they use CCTS on a regular basis and when asked to explain why the most common reason for using the service included medical appointments/hospital appointments.

Question: What would make you more likely to use a fixed-route transit service in Amherst? (Select your top three)

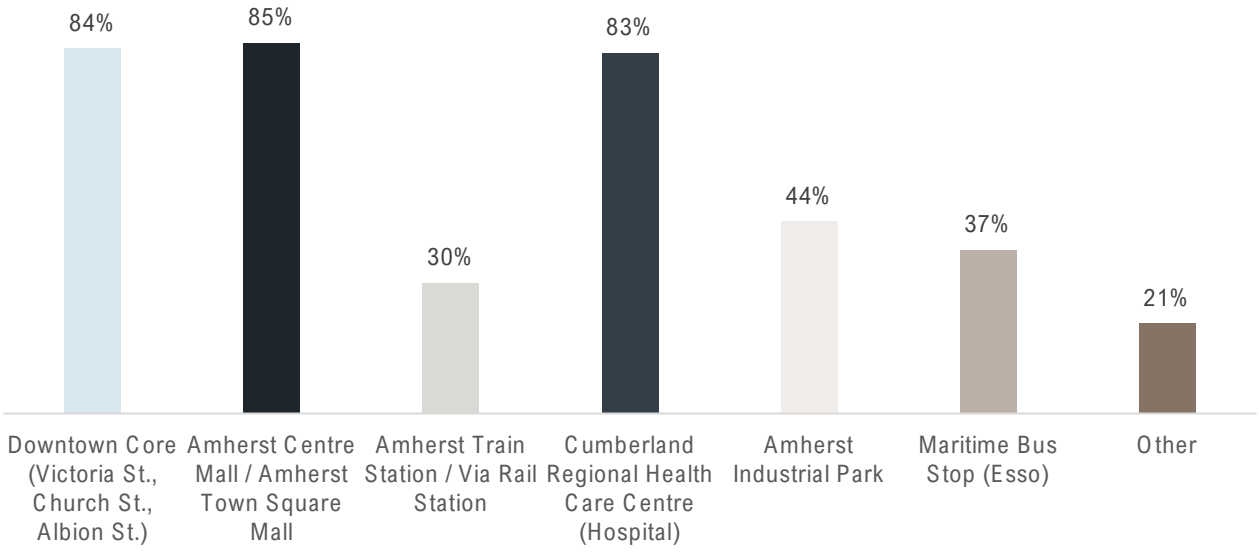


Participants were asked to identify what factors would make them more likely to use a fixed-route transit service in Amherst. The most common response, with just under three-quarters (74%), was having schedules and routes that align with their personal schedules, followed by having stops close to where they work or travel (66%). Over half of the respondents also indicated the importance of being able to

track buses in real time (54%) and having greater certainty that a bus would be available when needed (55%). Approximately, 10% of survey respondents indicated "other". Common 'other' responses included:

- Affordable transit for all
- Needs to be easily accessible that travels to common locations (e.g. grocery stores, business areas, downtown, etc.)
- Transit service needs to be frequent and reliable
- Not interested in using public transit

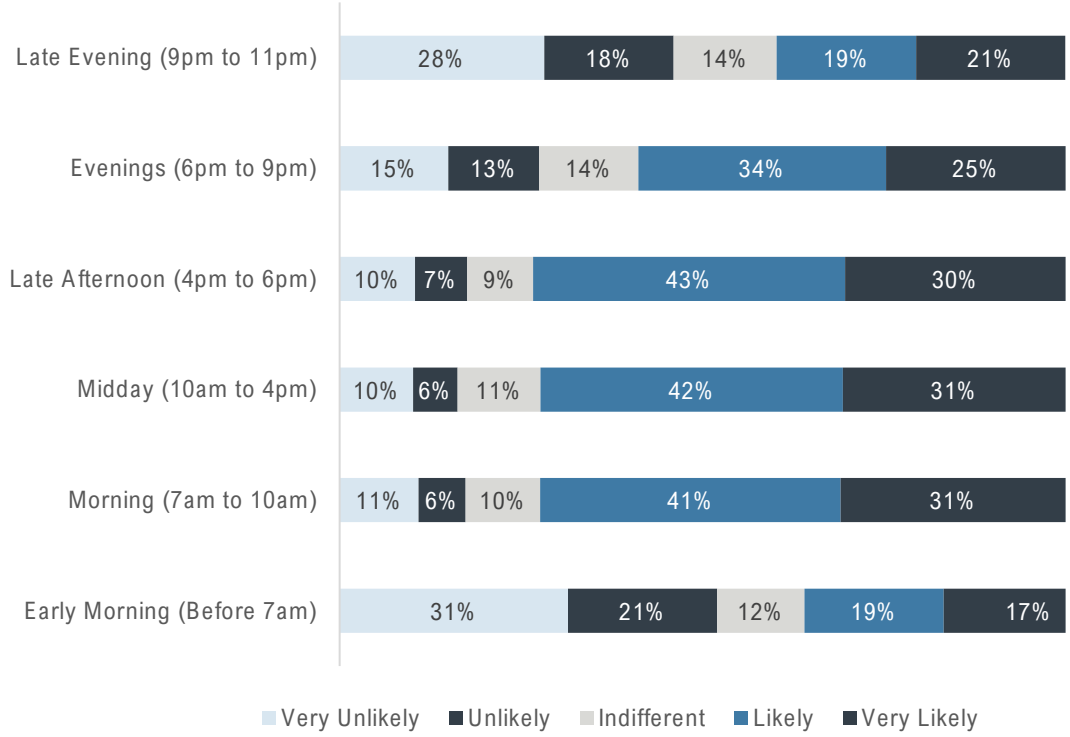
Question: Thinking about where you travel in Amherst, where would you like to see a fixed-route transit service provided to/from? Select all that apply.



Respondents were asked to identify where they would like to see a fixed-route transit service provided to and from within Amherst. The most predominant responses with more than three-quarters of respondents included the Amherst Centre Mall/Town Square Mall (85%), the Downtown Core (84%), and the Cumberland Regional Health Care Centre (83%). Just under half (44%) respondents indicated the Amherst Industrial Park (44%), followed by the Maritime Bus Stop (Esso) (37%) as preferred destinations, while about one-third (30%) selected the Amherst Train Station/VIA Rail Station. Of the respondents who indicated other (21%), the most common responses included:

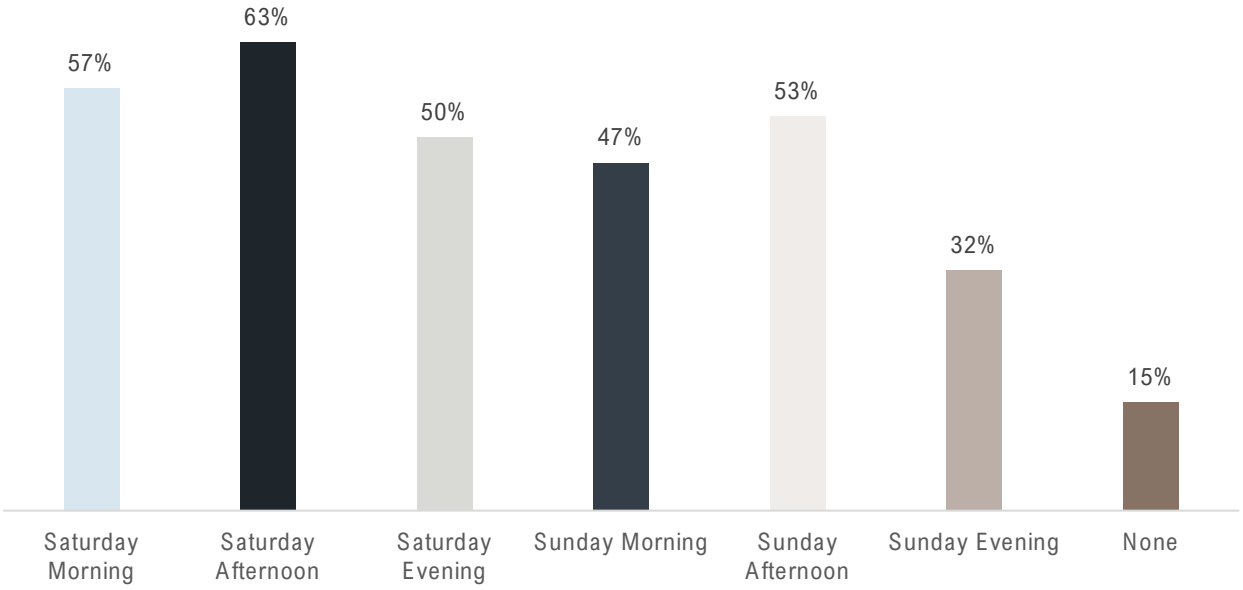
- Commercial areas (e.g., Walmart, grocery stores, Pharmasave)
- Amherst Stadium
- Locations beyond Town limits (e.g., Springhill, Oxford, Sackville, Moncton)
- Not interested in using public transit

Question: From "Very Unlikely" to "Very Likely" select when you would be most likely to use a fixed-route transit service. (Weekdays only)



Survey respondents were asked to identify what time they would be most likely to use a fixed-route transit service on weekdays. Responses show that the highest interest in using transit would be in the late afternoon (4-6pm), midday (10am-4pm), and morning (7-10am) periods, with 41-43% of respondents indicating that they would be "likely" and 30-31% indicating they would be "very likely" to use transit at these times. Evening (6-9pm) and late evening (9-11pm) service received moderate interest, while early morning (before 7am) had the lowest likelihood of use. Overall, week day transit demand appears to be strongest during traditional commuting and daytime hours.

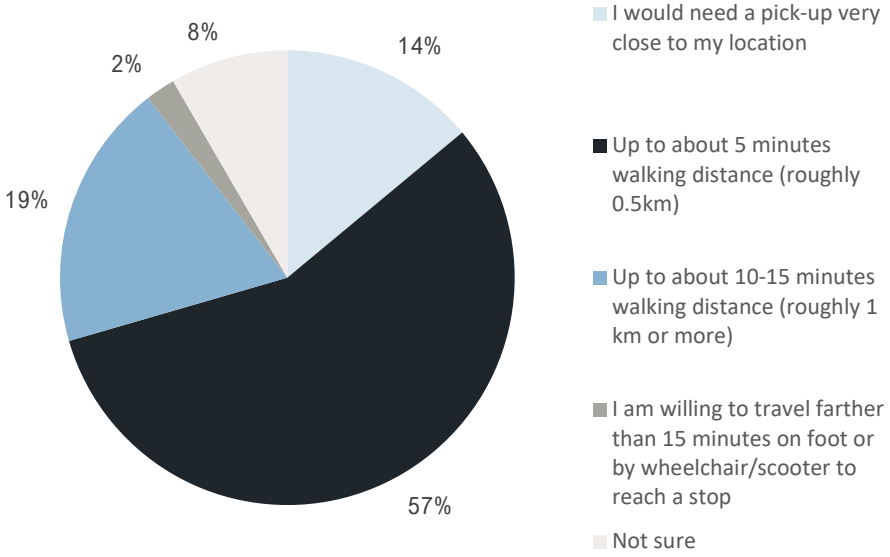
Question: If a fixed-route transit service was available on weekends, during which times of the day would you be most likely to use it? Select all that apply.



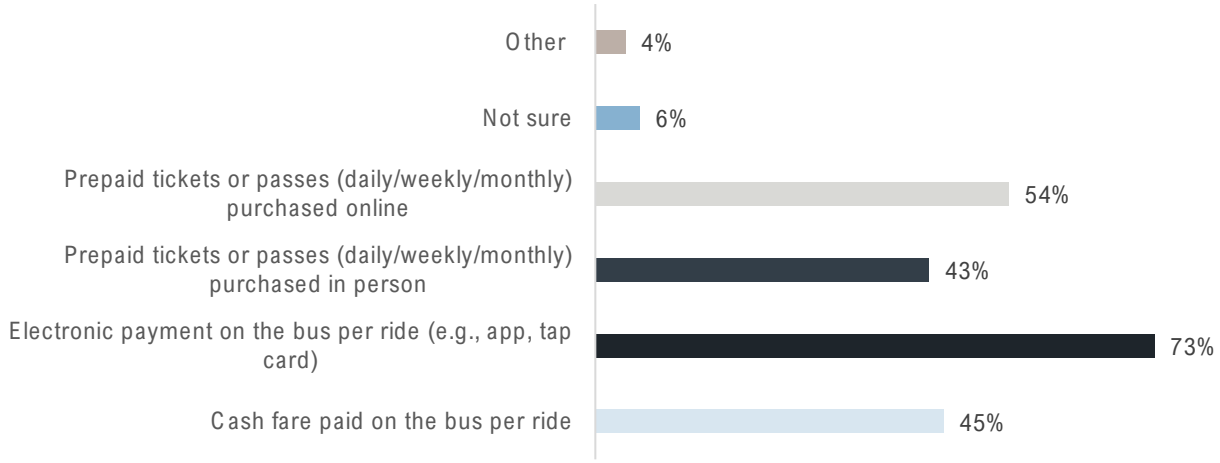
Respondents were asked to identify when they would be most likely to use a fixed-route transit service on weekends. The highest service interest was shown on Saturday, particularly in the afternoon (63%) and morning (57%). Just over half of the respondents (53%) also indicated interest in Sunday afternoon and morning service (47%), while fewer identified Sunday evening (32%) as a preferred time. A small portion (15%) of respondents indicated they would not use weekend transit service.

Question: How far would you be willing to walk from your location to reach a bus stop?

Participants were asked how far they would be willing to walk to reach a bus stop. The majority (57%) indicated they would walk up to about five minutes, or roughly 0.5 km. Just under one-fifth of respondents (19%) indicated they would walk up to 10-15 minutes, while very few (2%) were willing to travel farther than that. Some respondents (14%) noted they would need a pickup very close to their location, and a small number (8%) were unsure.



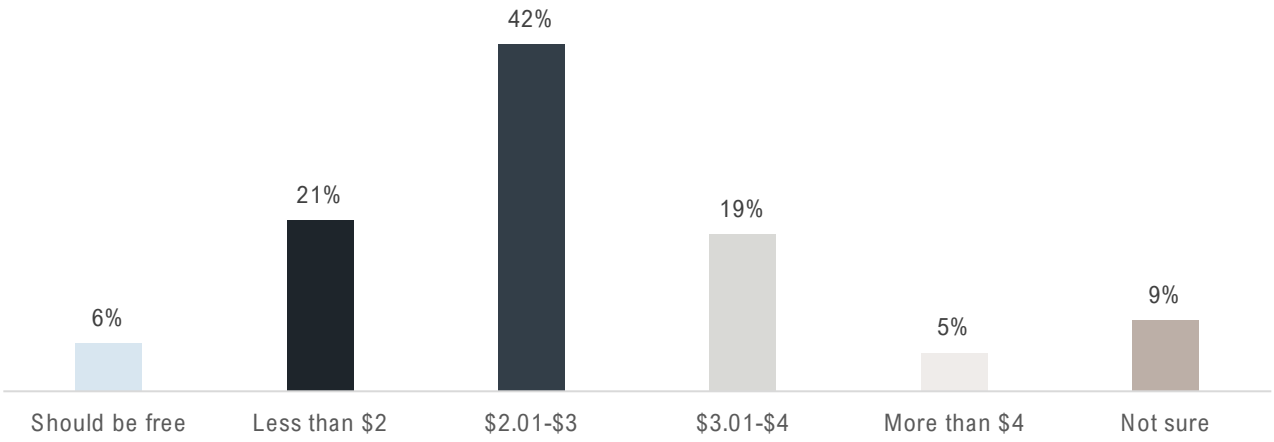
Question: How would you prefer to pay for your transit trips? Select all that apply.



Survey respondents were asked how they would prefer to pay for their transit trips. The most common preference was for electronic payment on the bus using an app or tap card (73%), followed by over half (54%) respondents identifying purchasing prepaid tickets or passes online. Nearly half of the respondents (45%) also indicated interest in paying cash fares on the bus or buying prepaid passes in person (43%). A small portion (10%) of respondents were unsure or selected “other”. Of the respondents who indicated other, common responses included:

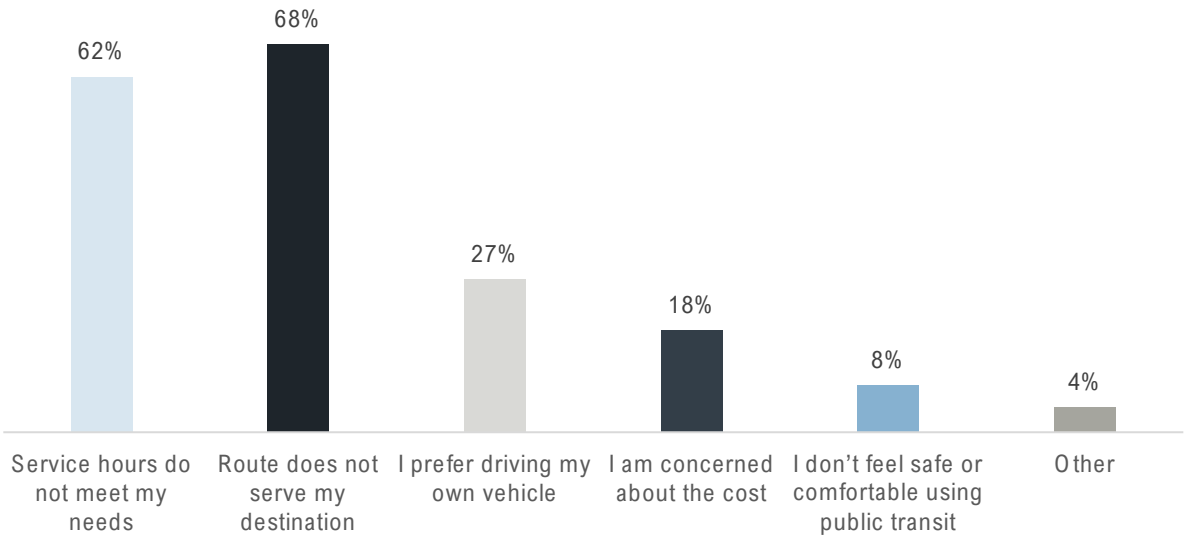
- Variety of options to purchase tickets (paper tickets, on an app, etc.) to meet the needs of all users
- Transit should be free
- Not interested in public transit

Question: What is the maximum one-way fare you would consider paying for a trip?



Participants asked what the maximum amount for a one-way fare they would consider paying for a trip would be. The largest share (42%) indicated a preferred fare between $2.01 and $3, while just over one-fifth (21%) were willing to pay less than $2, and 19% were willing to pay between $3.01 and $4. A few respondents (6%) felt transit should be free, while a very small number (5%) were willing to pay more than $4. 9% of respondents were unsure the maximum amount they would be willing to spend for a trip.

Question: What are the main reasons you might not use a fixed-route service? Select all that apply.

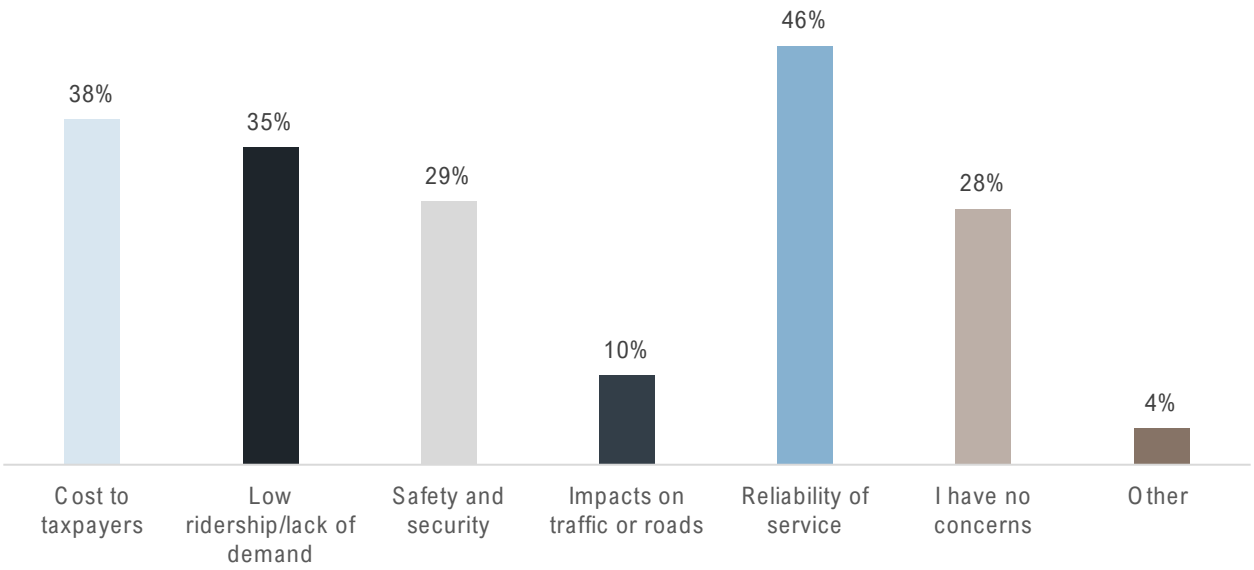


Survey respondents were asked to identify the main reasons they might not use a fixed-route transit service. The most common responses were that the route does not serve their destination (68%) and that service hours do not meet their needs (62%). Smaller portions of respondents indicated they prefer to drive their own vehicle (27%) or were concerned about cost (18%). A few respondents (8%) mentioned safety or comfort concerns, while a small number (4%) selected "other". Common 'other' responses included:

- Prefer to walk

- Accessibility to and from bus stop locations
- Concerns with travelling with children by public transit
- No reason/are not supportive of a fixed-route service

Question: What concerns do you have about introducing public transit in your area? Select all that apply.



Repondents were asked what concerns they have about introducing public transit in their area. The most common concern identified by just under half respondents (46%) was the reliability of service, followed by cost to taxpayers (38%) and low ridership or lack of demand (35%). Over a quarter of respondents (28%) also identified safety and security, with another 28% identifying they have no concerns. Only 10% identified concern with potential impacts on traffic and roads. Of the respondents who indicated "other" (4%), common responses included:

- Concern with the impacts to existing transit providers (CCTS, taxi, etc.)
- Concerns with maintained ridership following implementation
- Time of operations could limit ridership
- Not realistic for the size of Amherst

ADDITIONAL SURVEY COMMENTS

Question: Are there any additional comments or suggestions you would like to share with the project team regarding future transit in Amherst?

All participants were given the opportunity to provide additional comments to the Project Team. 361 survey respondents chose to add their own input. The comments provided have been summarized into key themes in **Table 2** below:

Table 1: Summary of Additional Survey Feedback

Topic	Feedback Received
Transit Service & Route Design	• Desire for routes that cover key destinations and neighbourhoods • Requests for convenient and frequent service • Suggestions for clear and reliable scheduling • Ensure information about the service is well publicized
Transit Affordability and Financial Sustainability	• Importance of keeping fares affordable for all users • Concerns about the long-term financial viability of the system • Suggestions for funding models that minimize taxpayer burden
Community Engagement and Preferences	• Should the project move forward to implementation, ensure the Town is adaptable to changing community needs • Requests to consider diverse community needs and feedback • Emphasis on transparent communication about transit plans
Accessibility and Support for Mobility-Challenged/Senior/Underserved Populations	• Need for accessible vehicles and stops • Importance of services tailored to seniors and those with mobility challenges • Ensure equitable access for underserved groups
Regional Connectivity and Infrastructure	• Interest in connecting Amherst with neighbouring towns and municipalities • Requests for infrastructure such as dedicated bus stops and shelters • Include stops in front of businesses and services, not just along the street
Flexible and On-Demand Transit Options	• Support for on-demand or flexible transit services • Requests for services that adapt to varying schedules and needs • Suggestions for pilot programs or technology-driven solutions

wsp.com