



# Fort Smith Transit

Ridership Satisfaction

Survey Summary Report



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## Summary

In early spring of 2018, Fort Smith Transit (FST) conducted an on-board fixed route and on-demand ridership satisfaction survey. Data on routes, trip purpose, demographics, and customer satisfaction is presented in further detail within this report. The survey findings for FST are summarized below and the report offers insight into FST transit rider needs and the sufficiency of the FST system.

## Survey Purpose

The on-board and on-demand survey captured transit service customer satisfaction and builds on previous survey efforts conducted in 2017. The on-board survey supports Fort Smith Transit and Frontier MPOs ongoing efforts to identify needs and determine potential enhancements in the delivery of transit service.

## Major Findings

Key findings from the survey are highlighted below. More detailed findings from the survey are displayed in the report.

## Bus Transit in Fort Smith

Fort Smith Transit riders use transit to get to major destinations like their homes, job, and medical institutions. Access to transit is also vital, with more than 80% of riders indicating they have no working vehicle available to their household.

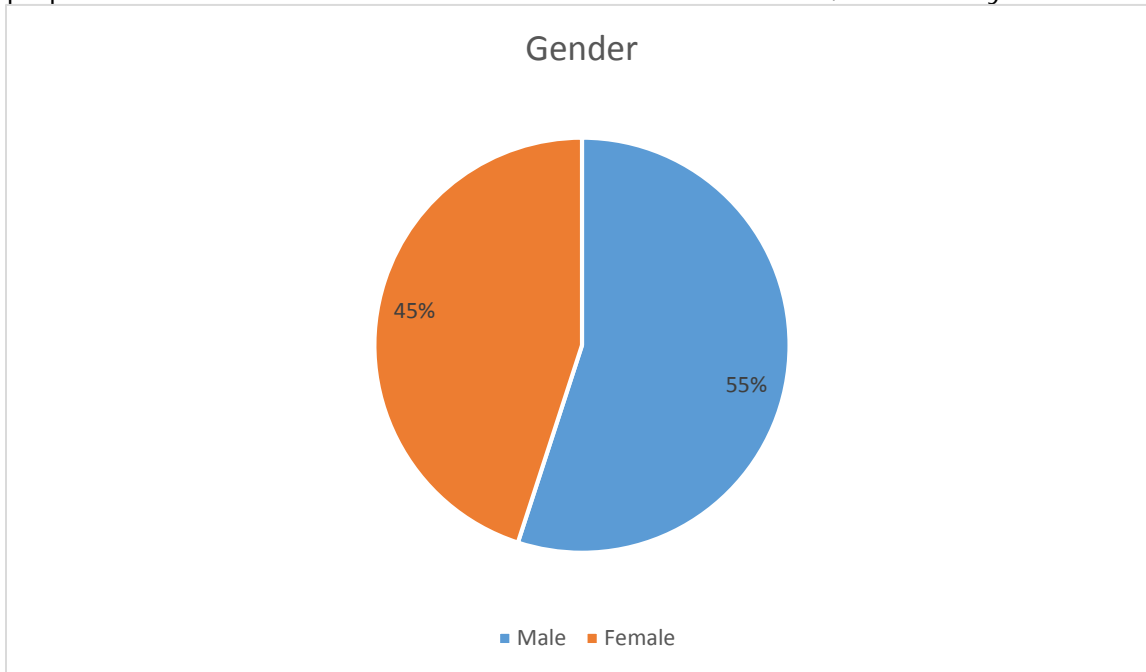
## Ridership Characteristics

FST transit serves a diverse ridership. Race and ethnicity data from the 2016 Statistical Atlas indicates that the two primary multicultural populations in Fort Smith that have access to transit are African American/Black, and Hispanic/Latino groups. With the Hispanic/Latino population reaching nearly 17% and the African American/Black percentage at almost 10% of the total population, each of these dynamic populations are continuing to grow in the area. More importantly, individuals between the ages of 0 to 34 are far more diverse with up to 32% being from African American/Black, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, or another group (<https://statisticalatlas.com/place/Arkansas/Fort-Smith/Race-and-Ethnicity>). No questions regarding race or ethnicity are included on the survey.

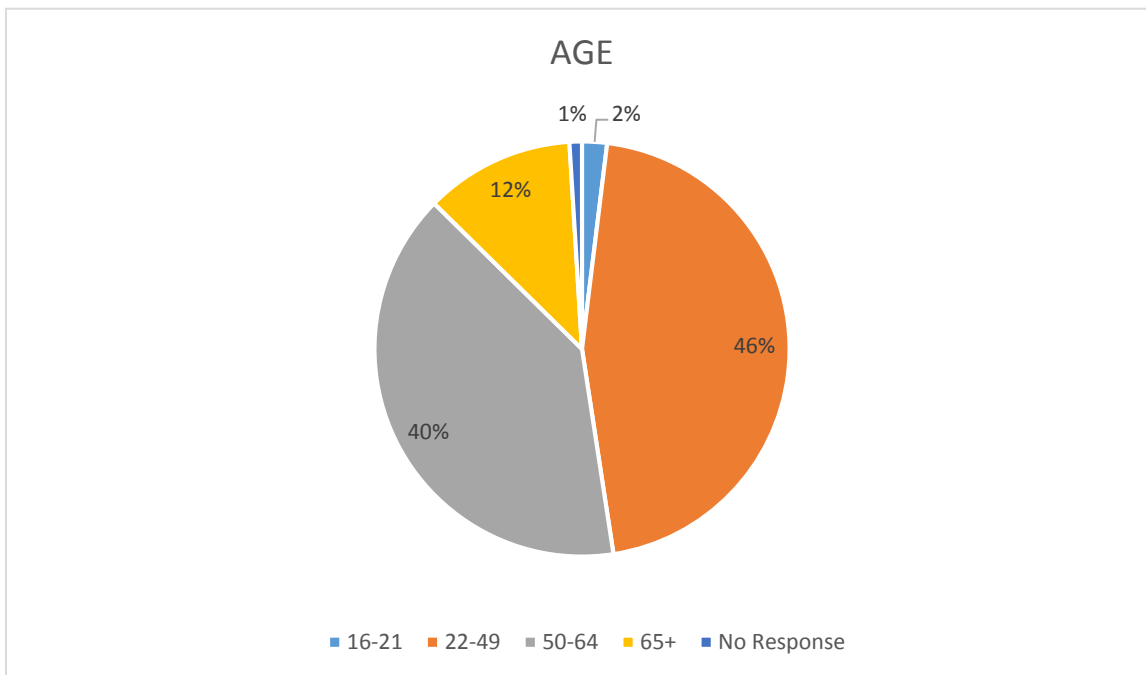
## Age and Gender of Riders

Fort Smith Transit serves a lot of elderly people, as over half is over the age of 50 (52%). The largest cohort are riders between the ages of 22-64 (86%). The 16-21-year-old group is barely represented (2%). The under 16 ridership group is non-existent. A slightly higher rate of males' ride transit (55%) compared to their

counterparts. According to the American Community Survey, Fort Smith's population is 51.1% female and 48.9% male. However, the survey results trended



with a larger portion of male transit users versus female.

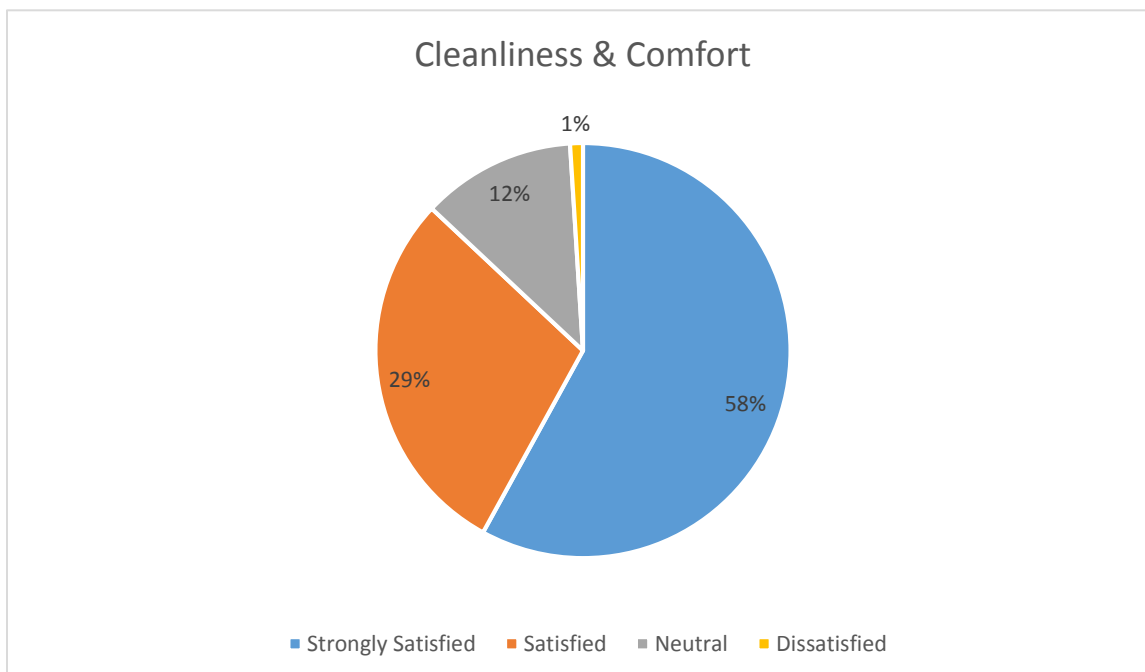
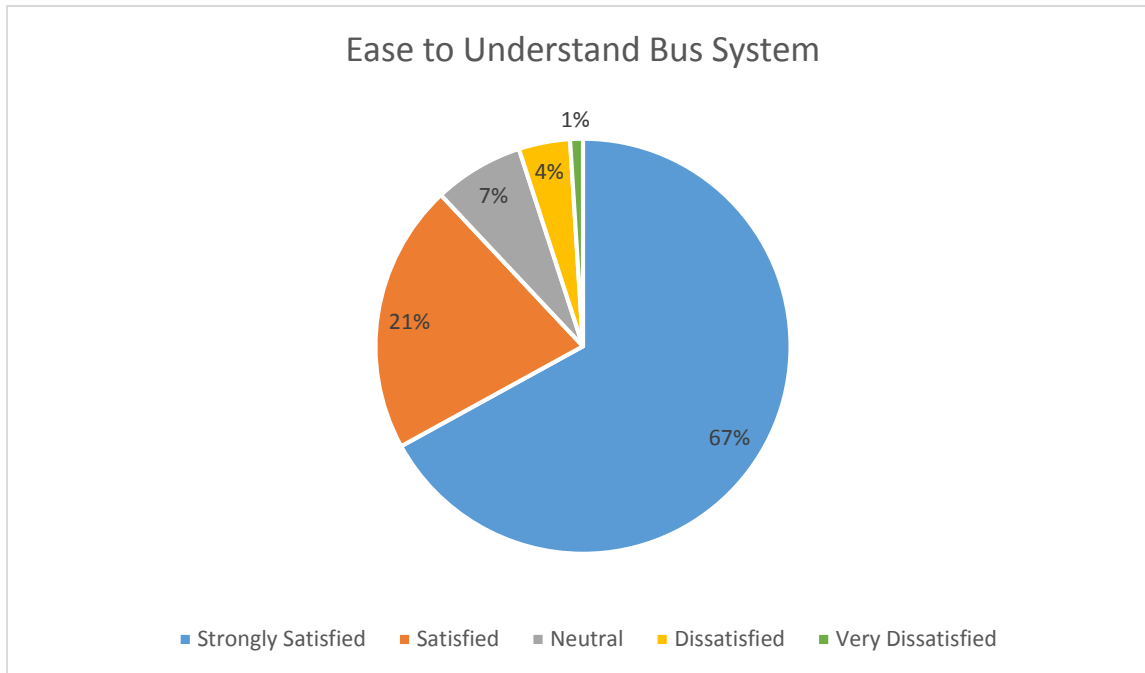


### Riders are Satisfied with Fort Smith Transit

The survey included questions to help Fort Smith Transit understand customers' perceptions of the agency's performance.

#### Ease to Understand the System

Riders are overall satisfied with the ease to understand the bus system (88%). 7% were neutral about it, while 5% were generally unsatisfied with it. Some riders noted that the route map needs updated to make it clear to understand.

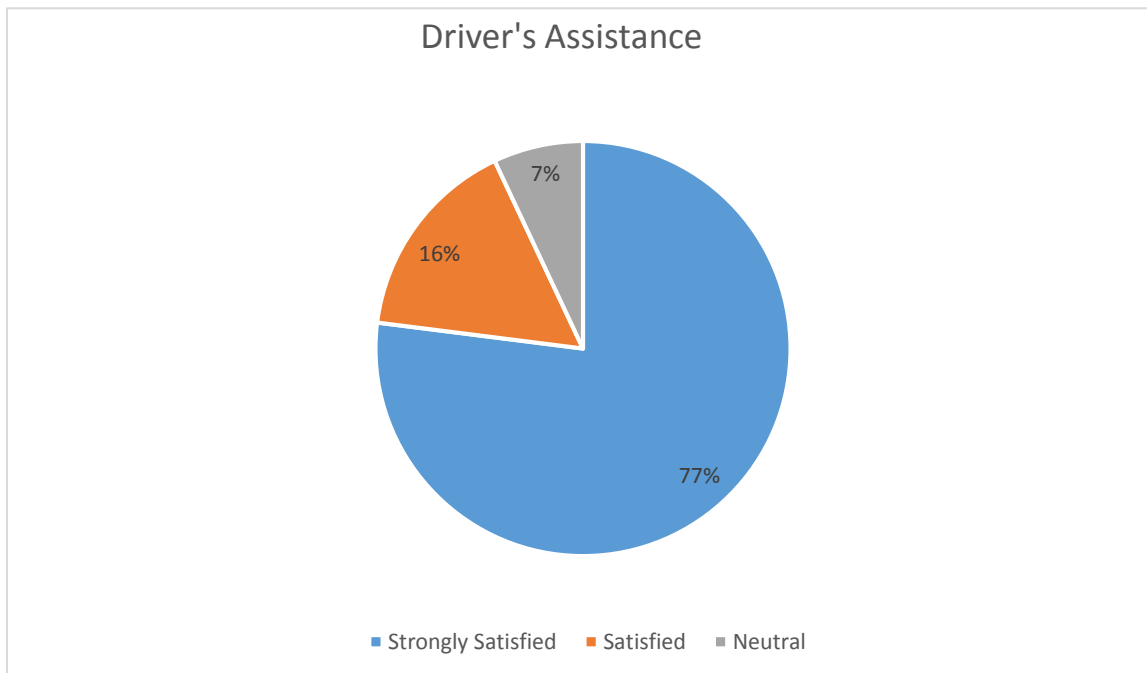


**Bus Cleanliness & Comfort**

Overall, Riders are happy with the bus cleanliness (87%), while 12% are neutral. Only 1% of Riders are dissatisfied.

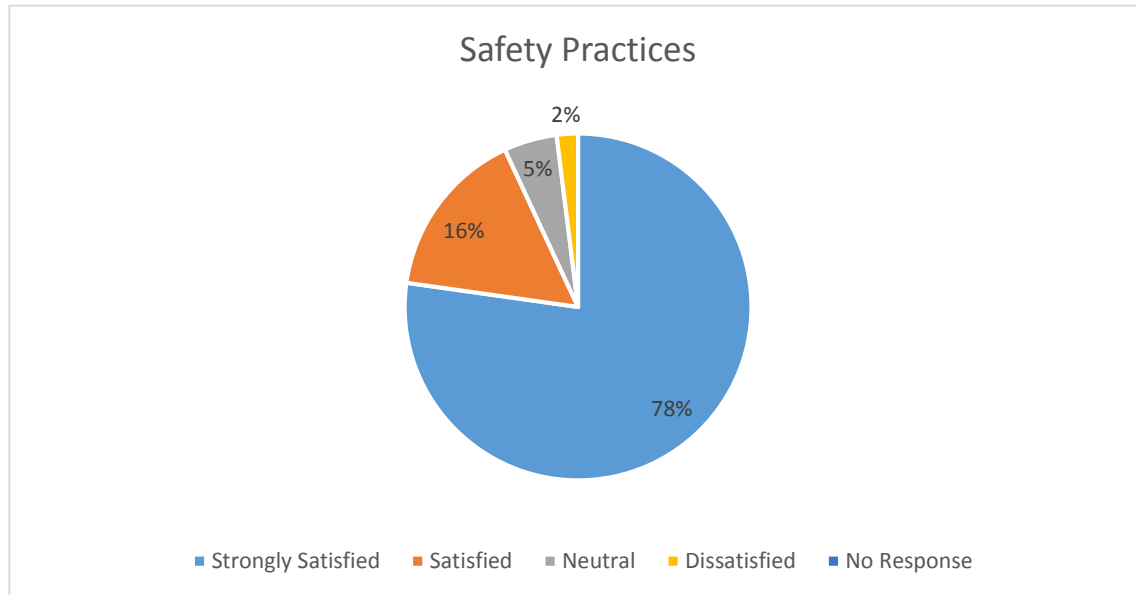
**Driver's Assistance, Courtesy, & Skill**

Riders are largely strongly satisfied to satisfied and pleased with the Driver's assistance and skill. Positive remarks regarding driver's assistance from "the drivers are very friendly and answer questions to riders with medical issues stating "they (the drivers) check in on me to make sure that I am okay." In general, 93% of the Riders are satisfied, while 7% were neutral. None answered that they are disappointed with it.



Safety Practices

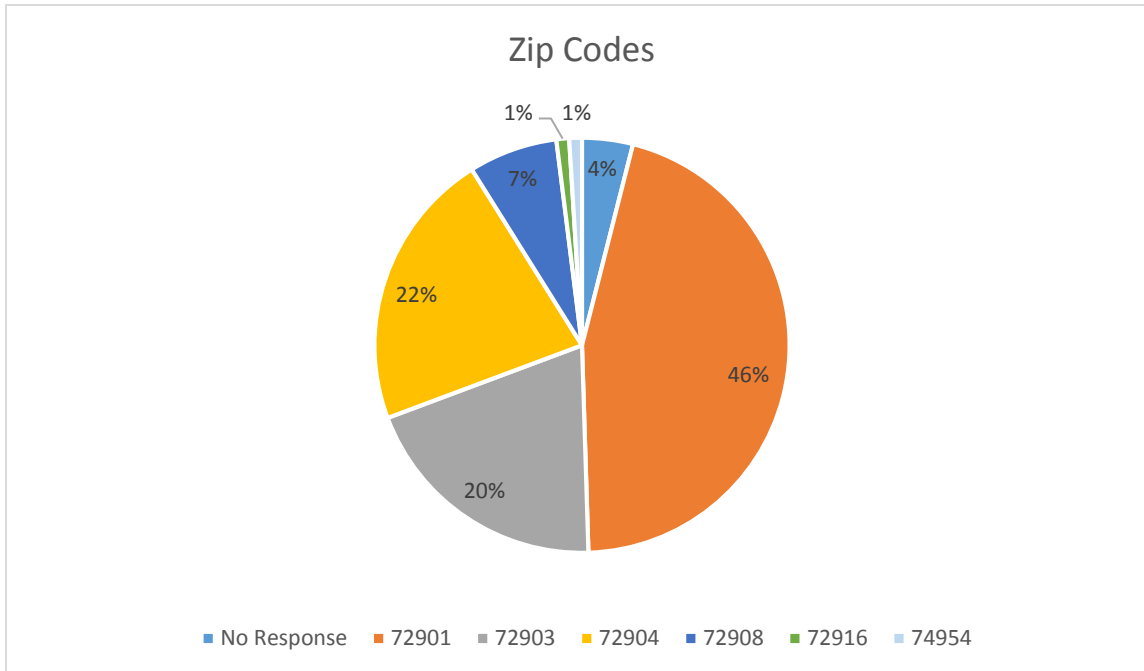
Riders are extremely happy with the safety practices and believed that the drivers take care in driving and ensuring passenger safety (94%).





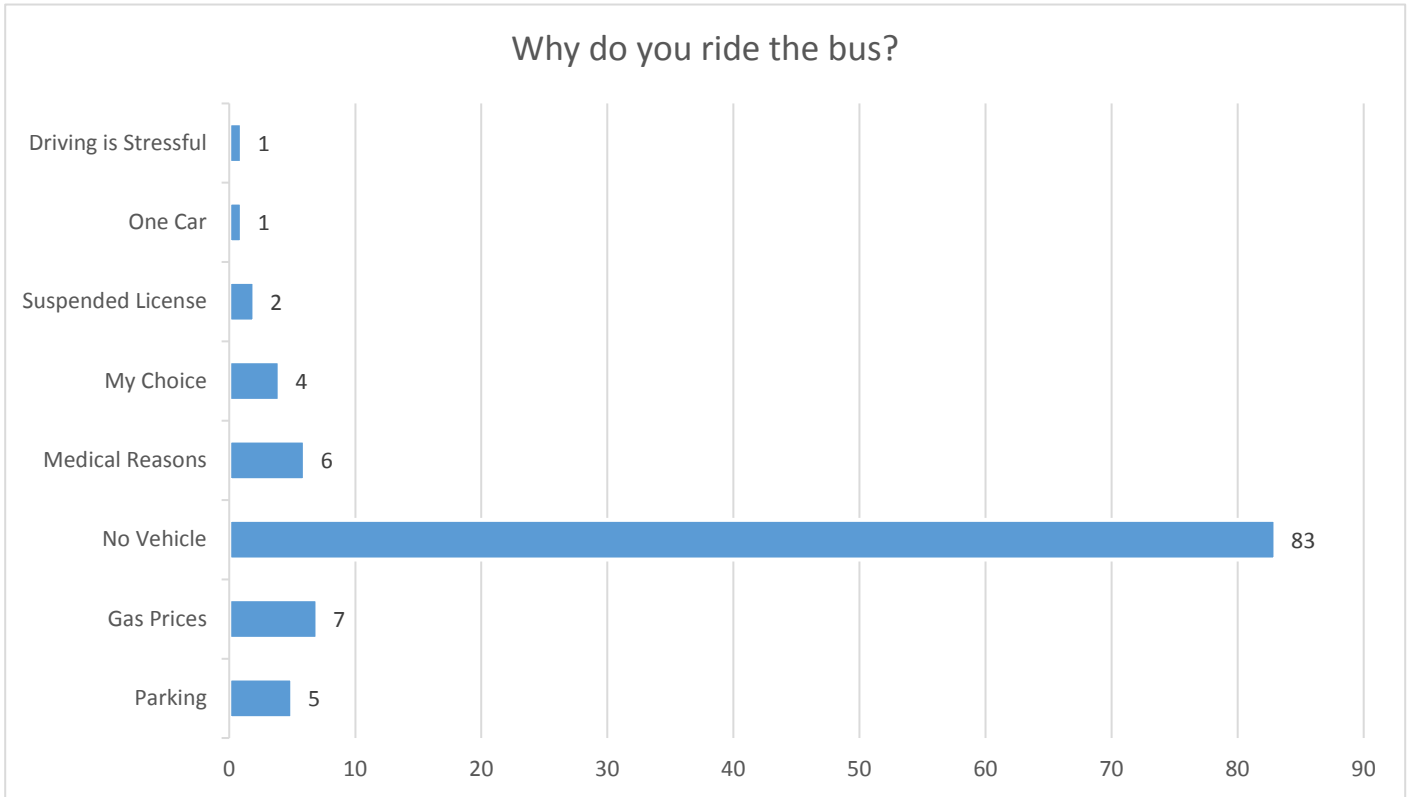
### Zip Codes Served

Fort Smith Transit services many zip codes. Surveyed riders answered 6 different zip codes. The highest is 72901 (46%), following 72904 (22%) and 72903 (20%).



The 72901 zip code area is primarily located in the downtown core, north Fort Smith and south toward Hwy. 71.

## Why Ride?



### Parking

5% of riders choose transit because of parking. Either the location of the parking is inconvenient or the meter price proved challenging for them to pay.

### Gas Prices

7% of riders choose transit because of rising gas prices. As gas prices increase there is generally a corresponding rise in transit ridership.

### No Vehicle

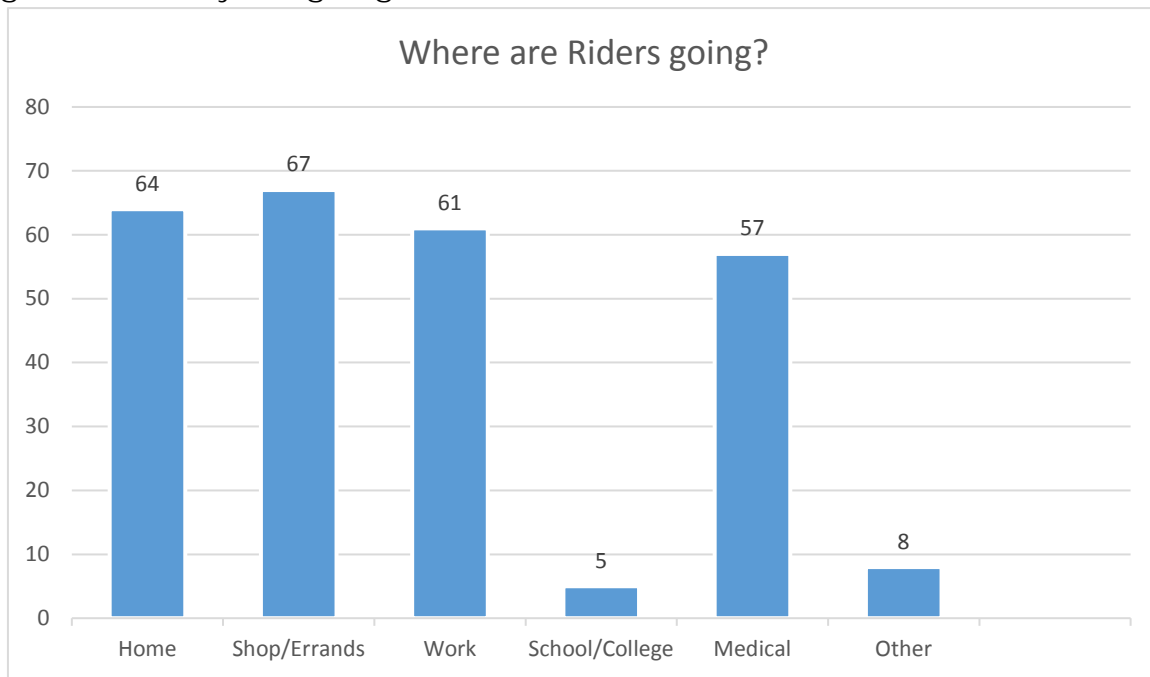
Overwhelmingly, 81% of riders choose transit because they have no access to or do not own a vehicle. Equally, a large percentage of riders are elderly and this may also account for the results.

### Other Reason

Riders listed off various other reasons why they ride transit. These reasons included choice, medical reasons, suspended license, only one car in the household, and that driving is stressful for them.

### Where are Riders Going?

The survey included 103 respondents who answered on how they use transit to get where they are going.



#### Home

As expected, 24% of riders use transit to reach home.

#### Shopping/Errands

Moreover, 26% of transit passenger go on transit to for shopping/errands.

#### Work

23% of riders are using transit services to reach their place of employment. Some individuals noted that the hours of service and bus routes do not always permit them to use the bus to return at home in the evening.

#### Medical

22% of riders are using it for medical reasons such as doctor's visits, prescription pick-ups, community clinics, and other social support services.

#### School/College

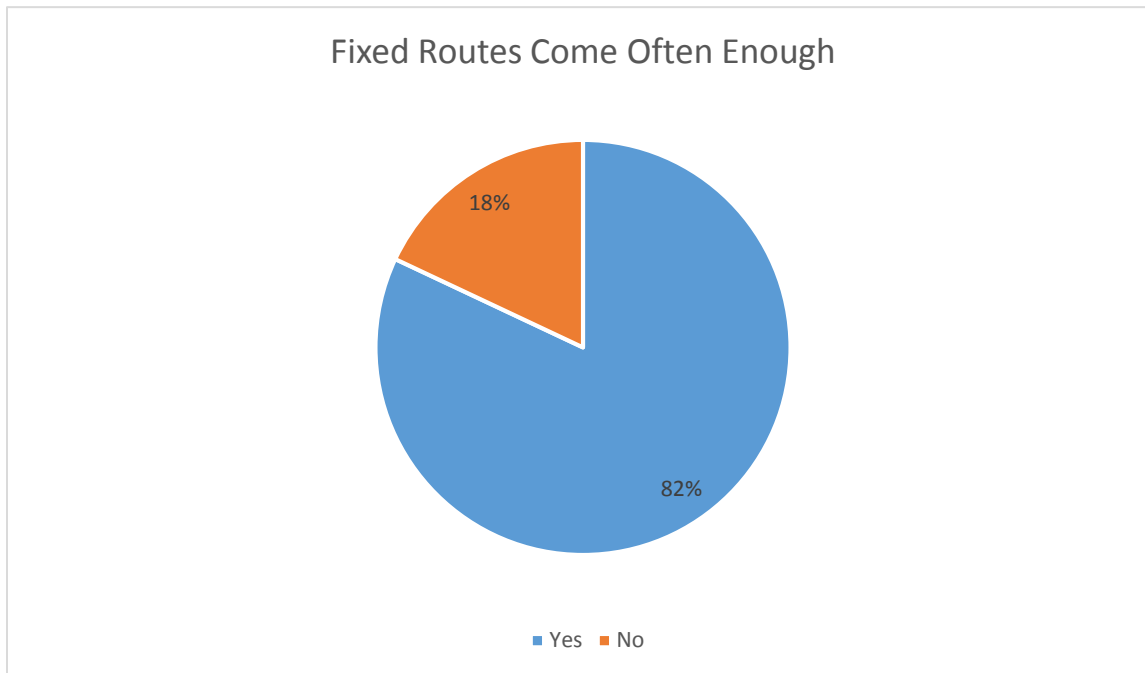
2% of riders catch transit to attend school/college.

### Other Reason

3% of riders are using it for other reasons, such as to reach entertainment venues.

### Customer Satisfaction, Perception for Fixed Route Service

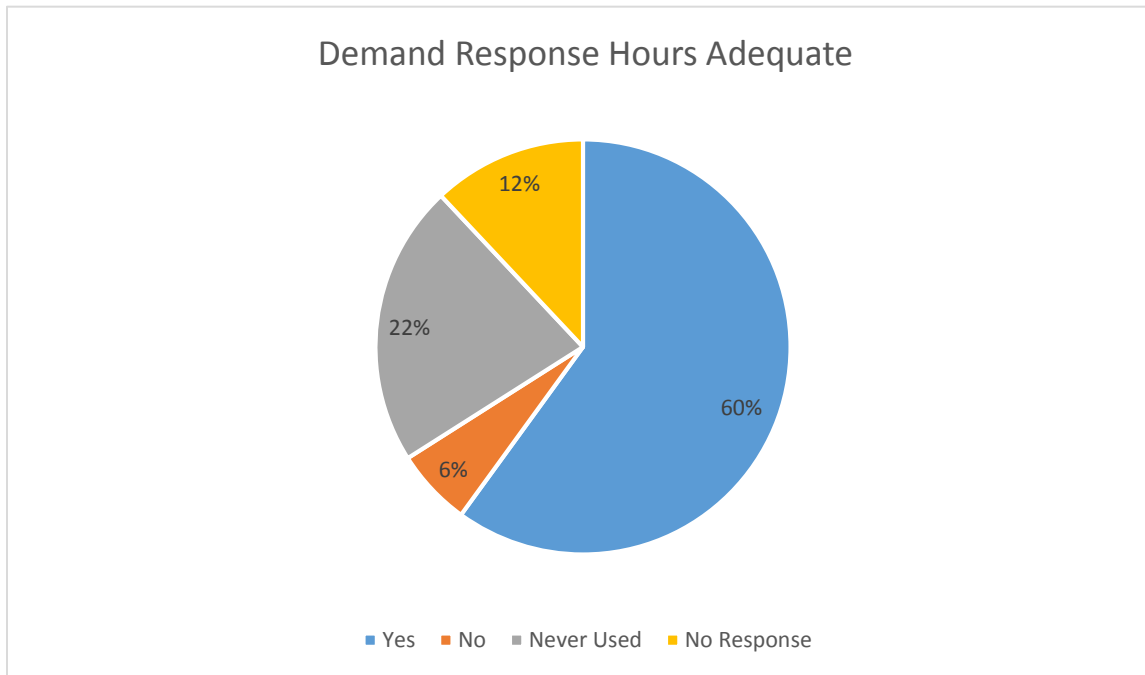
Riders are happy with the timing of the routes as 82% of them agreed that the schedules are currently sufficient.



### Customer Satisfaction, Perception for Demand Response Hours of Service

Most riders agree that the demand response hours are adequate (60%). While 6% of riders feel that the demand response hours is deficient, especially for those

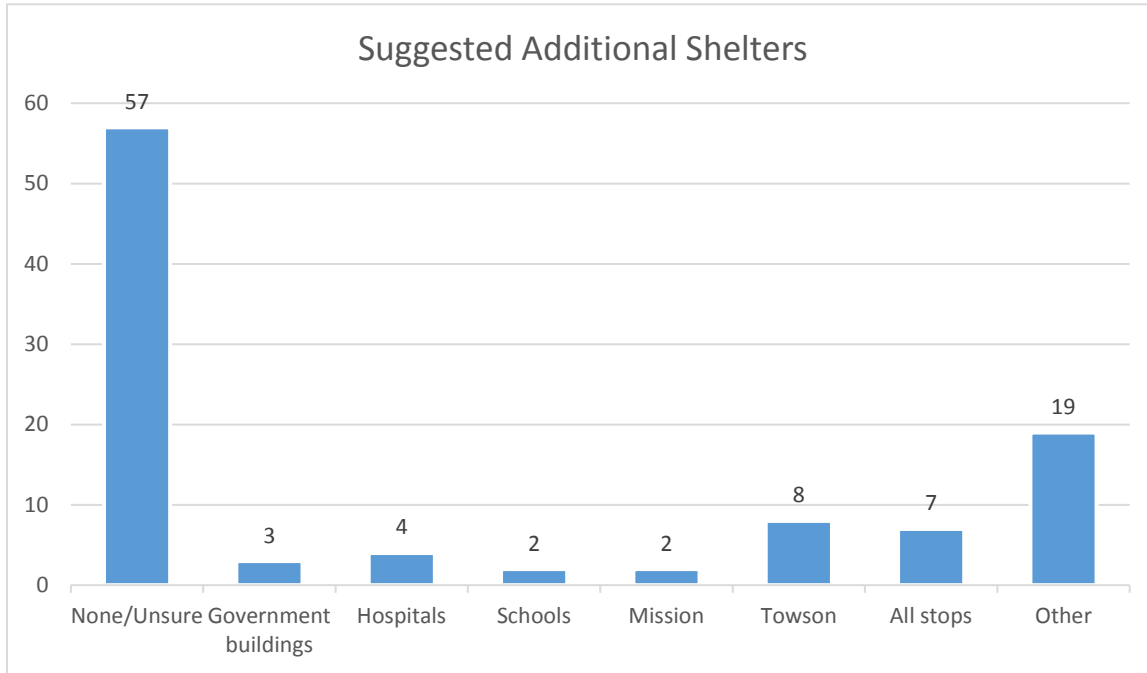
with late evening jobs or evening appointments. Opportunities for expanded fixed bus route or on-demand hours could be examined.



### Customer Locations for Additional Shelters

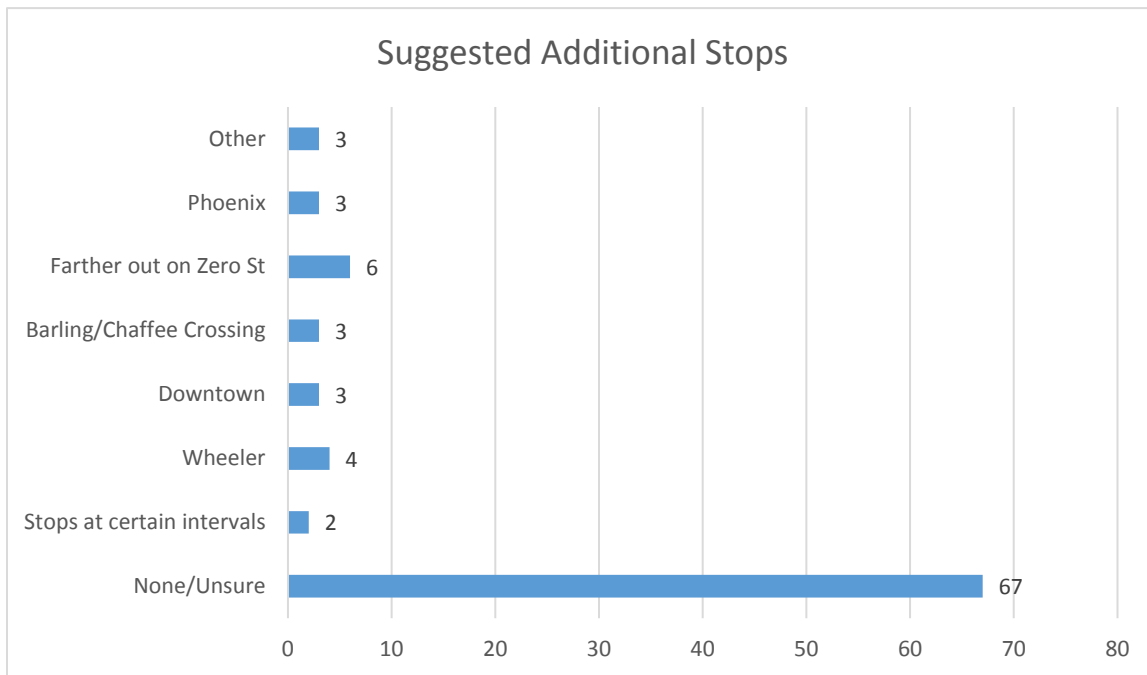
Most riders marked none or unsure about where additional shelters should be placed. In general, this proved a challenging question for respondents to answer. Many felt that additional stops are necessary, yet given the short timeframe in which to respond, they lacked the time to offer recommendations. The next highest suggested spot for shelters is Towson. Following that, "All stops" was the next highest suggested. Fort Smith Transit has about 600 stops, so while all stops may not be doable, the primary locations could be covered.

Suggested shelters at Sparks Medical and the Children’s Emergency Crisis Shelter also proved a popular discussion item among transit riders.

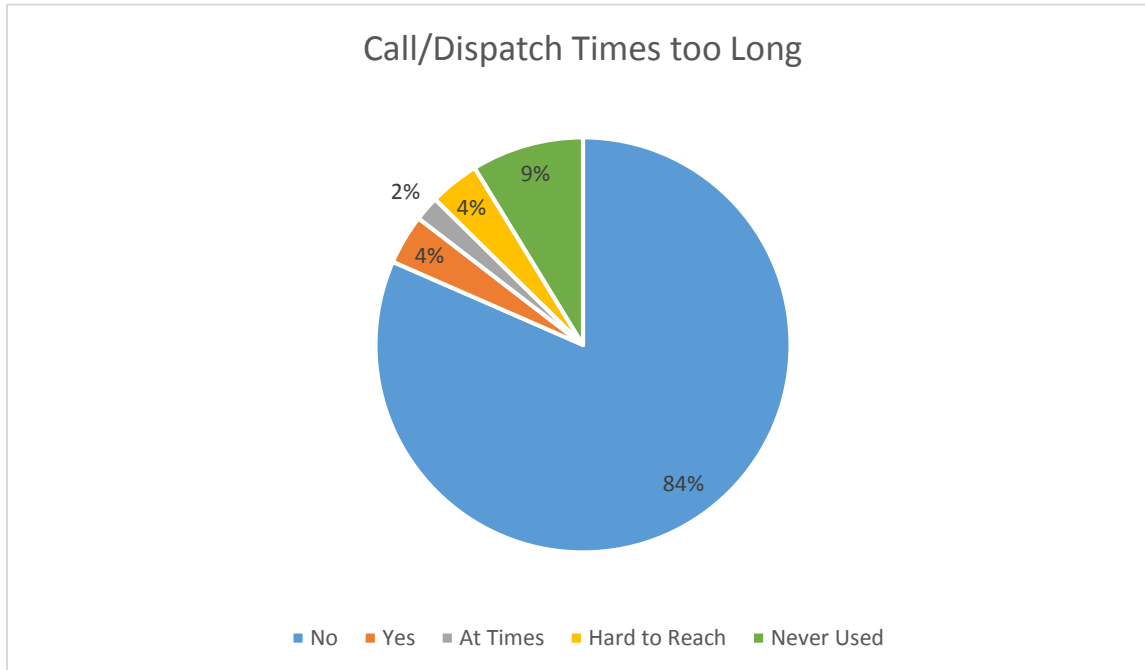


### Customer Locations for Additional Bus Stops

Similar to the shelters, most riders marked none or felt uncertain about future locations for additional stops. Highly recommended stops are described as “further out on Zero” and “Wheeler.”



## Customer Satisfaction, Perception for Dispatch



Dispatch offered 84% of the respondents the ability to reach Fort Smith Transit with ease. For those having difficulty contacting dispatch, about 10% (total) believed this proved challenging. However, 9% either did not know how to reach dispatch or did not have a need to reach dispatch.

### Survey Approach Overview

Frontier Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) staff assisted with the development of the survey in coordination with Fort Smith Transit. In order to reduce respondent fatigue, fewer questions were asked of the riders. Also, in an attempt to learn where riders needed facilities, questions on transit stops and shelters were added. Frontier MPO staff conducted on-board surveys. In addition, staff reached out to riders waiting at the Fort Smith Transfer Station for their next bus. The data was collected during mid-February and then again at the beginning of March to capture more responses due to increased ridership.

Data Collected  
Route Surveyed, Time of Day

Route	Date	Time
Jenny Lind	2/15/18	1:00pm
Towson	2/16/18	9:00am
Midland	2/16/18	10:00am
Rogers DT	2/16/18	11:00am
Rogers SC	2/16/18	2:00pm
Blue Demand	3/2/18	12:00pm
Green Demand	3/2/18	1:00pm
Red Demand	3/5/18	12:00pm
Towson	3/6/18	2:00pm
Grand	3/7/18	2:00pm
Rogers DT	3/7/18	3:00pm
Rogers SC	3/8/18	3:00pm

It is recognized that depending on the time of day, the time of the month, and the weather conditions such as heavy rains, that this can cause ridership counts to vary. For instance, at the beginning of the month, ridership increases due to income being received. In the future, conducting surveys in coordination with these considerations will assist in obtaining additional data and details from the respondents.

**Trip Purpose**

In order to gain understanding of the primary reasons and what trips individuals made, six types of trip purposes were given. These included home, shopping/errands, work, medical, school/college, and other reason. The predominant trips were to shopping/errands, work, and medical. In general, these trip purposes are the main cause of travel for individuals.

**Demographic Information**

By and large, males and middle age to elderly people dominate the usage of Fort Smith Transit. The survey also presented high usage of transit to medical facilities to reach healthcare services.



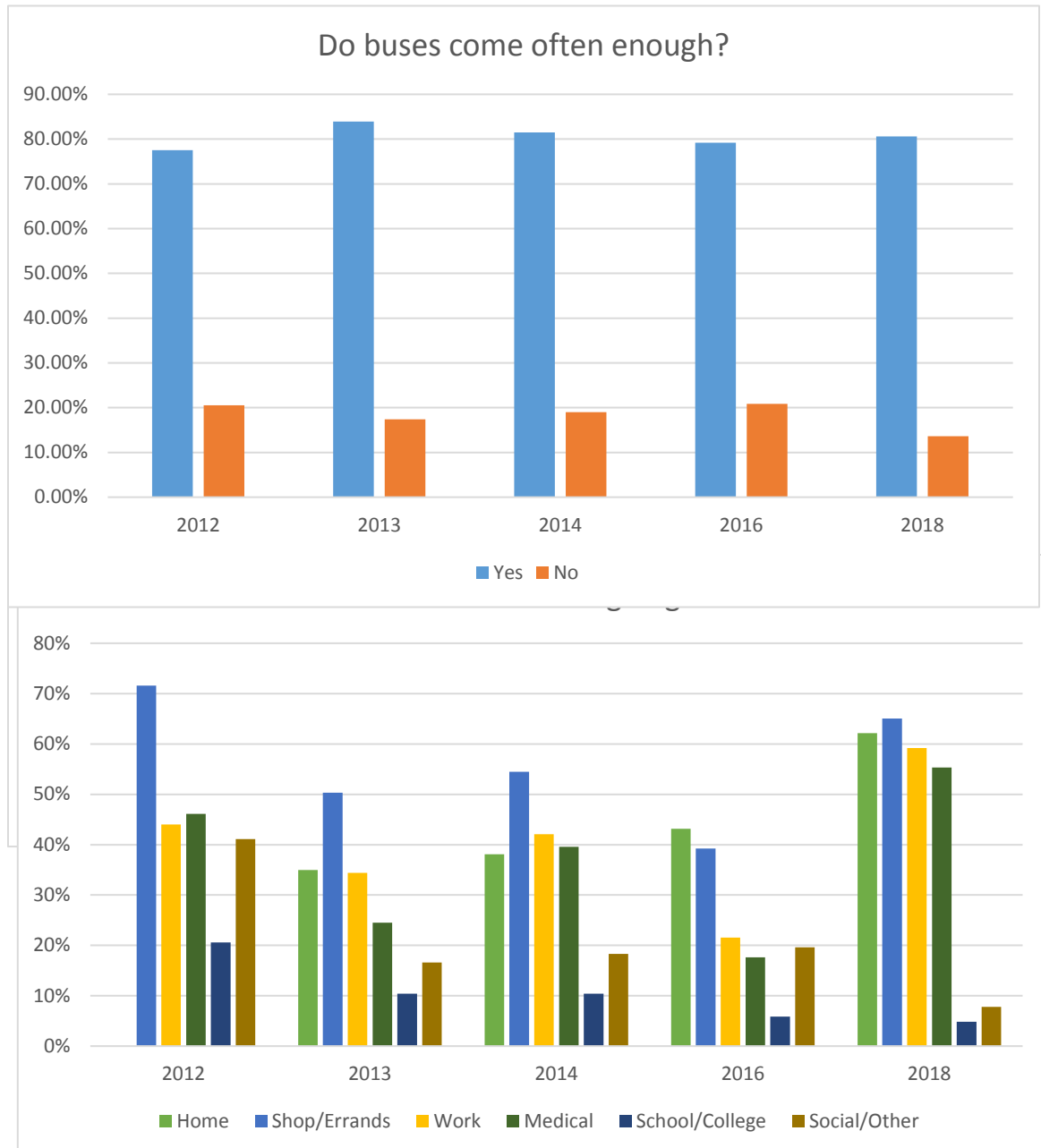
### Customer Satisfaction

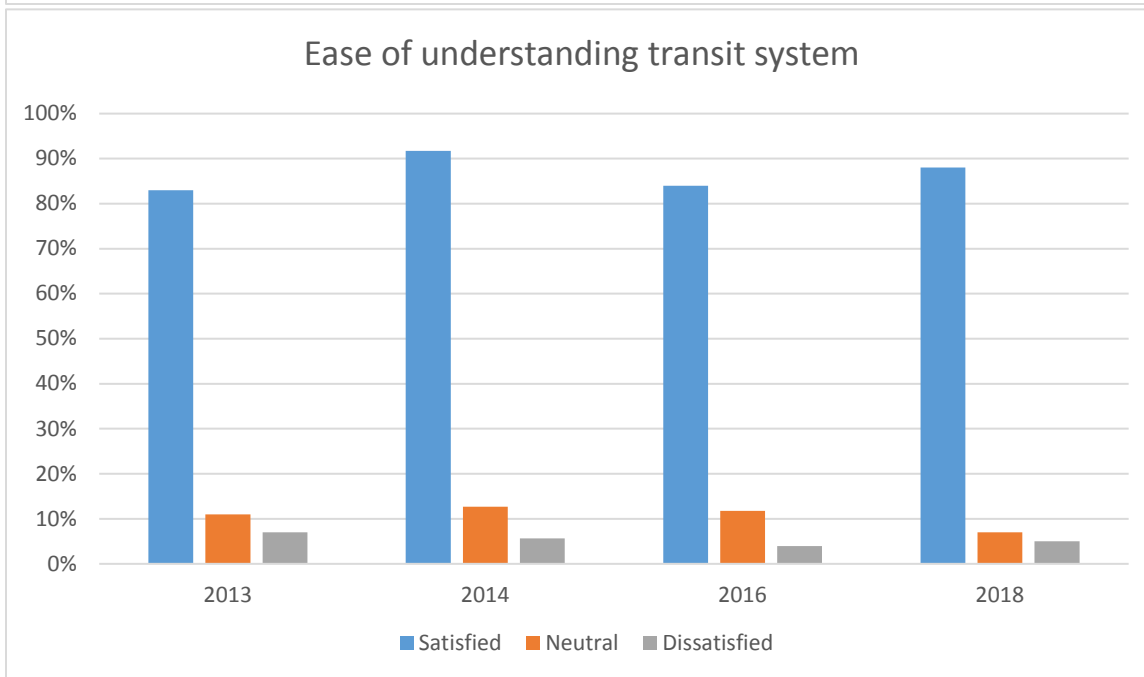
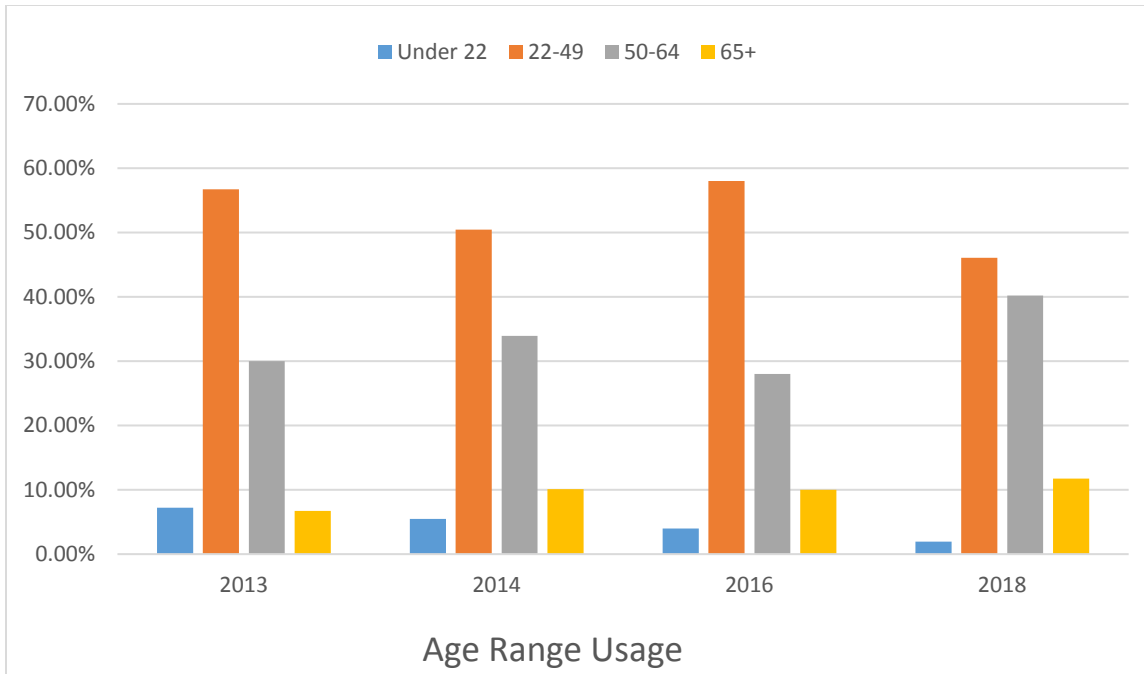
As surveyors interviewed customers of Fort Smith Transit, it is highly evident that many riders find the service and the drivers quite friendly, concerned, and well-trained. Indeed, transit riders are overall very happy with Fort Smith Transit.

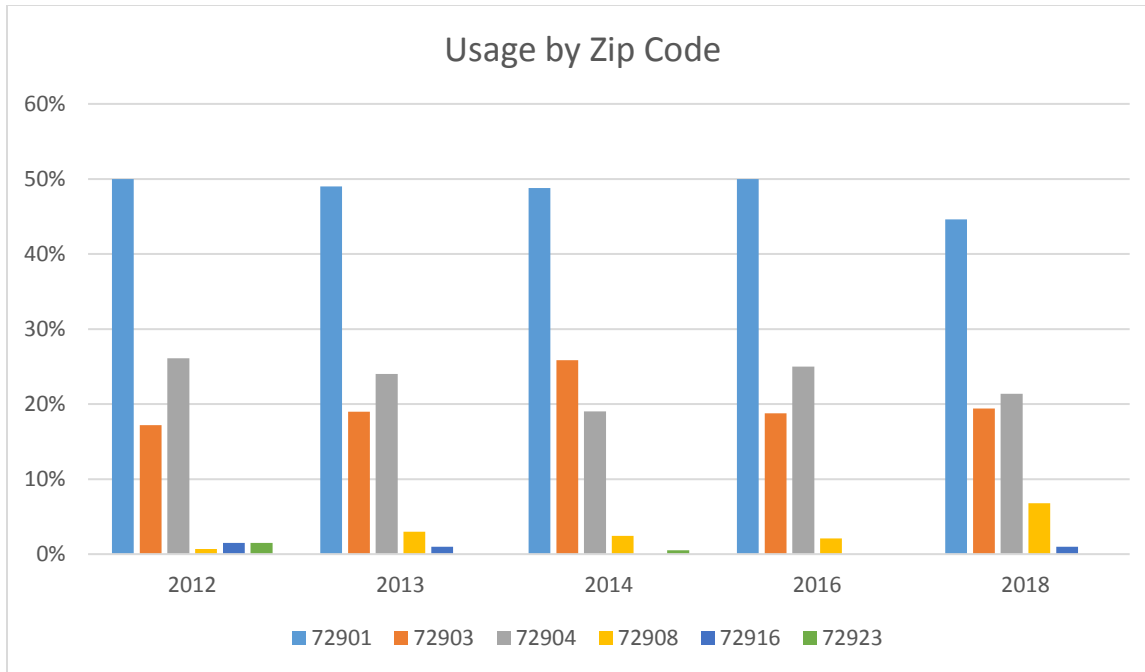
### Key Findings

Fort Smith Transit is exceeding or meeting customer expectations. Future planning efforts, such as a strategic plan could offer insights into developing further operational efficiencies.

### Trends







### Conclusion

The survey provided a clear indication of the clients sweeping support and satisfaction with Fort Smith Transit. While Frontier MPO could not capture the emotions of the riders, it is clear that many clients felt respected and valued. Often a stigma is attached to transit riders which is archaic and frequently false.

In addition, clients discussed walkability, such as sidewalk expansion, and the challenges in reaching bus stops. These details will help to provide further guidance for upcoming transit shelter placement. The general consensus is that Fort Smith Transit riders use the service to access basic needs like groceries, healthcare, education, and jobs. More assessments for reducing transportation infrastructure barriers and improving transit for the community are recommended. As John Hickenlooper stated, "Infrastructure is more than laying new roads...transportation is fundamental to success."