

Hamilton Transit Users Group Transit Vision Project: Interim Report

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Note: The original HTML version of this report is available at:

- http://hamiltontug.com/article/vision_project_interim_report/

Executive Summary

An online survey by the Transit Users Group asking Hamiltonians to share ideas on how to improve public transit has generated a wealth of creative initiatives directed toward making transit a higher strategic priority and delivering more comprehensive service in Hamilton.

Since its release on August 24, 2009, the [Transit Vision Survey \(http://hamiltontug.com/vision/survey\)](http://hamiltontug.com/vision/survey) has received 195 submissions as at this writing and is still open to respondents. TUG launched the study to encourage Hamiltonians interested in transit issues to respond to an open-ended call for creative ideas, we can **discover common themes** running through the community and **establish a broader set of alternatives and initiatives** than Staff and Council are currently willing to entertain.

It is not intended to be a scientific study of a representative sample of Hamiltonians but the beginning of an expanded dialogue among residents who desire better transit and are willing to work to promote new ideas. It is instructive that the survey has reached a large number of people who use transit only occasionally, but would prefer to use it more often. Only about 41% of respondents use transit regularly. Just under half use transit occasionally, and 6% never use transit.

The following common themes emerge from the survey results (<http://hamiltontug.com/vision/results>):

- **Service Improvements** - Faster, more frequent vehicles, express routes, light rail transit, better coverage across the city and during off-peak hours, less crowding, and more convenient stops.
- **Pricing Changes** - Lower fares and passes, more transit tax revenue, ending area rating, introducing transit zones and differential rates based on distance traveled, and more convenient smart cards.
- **Improved Amenities** - Better customer service, more convenient schedules, new tracking technologies, cleaner, more comfortable vehicles, improved accessibility for disabled riders, and better integration with other transportation alternatives.
- **Planning Improvements** - Make transit a higher strategic priority than automobiles, introduce transit lanes, convert streets to two-way to support multi-modal transportation, and do a better job of promoting and marketing transit as a viable option.

With popular grassroots support, some of these new initiatives could transform the way Hamilton regards transit, in much the same way that the grassroots-based Hamilton Light Rail (<http://hamiltonlightrail.com>) campaign, which grew out of a TUG initiative, has already gained support among staff and council and transformed the city's long-term revitalization plans.

Public transit is too important to leave in the hands of city staff, private consultants and busy councillors. If Hamilton is to achieve its strategic objective of doubling transit ridership, concerned citizens need to get involved more directly in the process of raising the priority of transit, setting progressive goals and advocating for new policies to reach those goals.

Part 1: Vision Initiatives

1.1 Introduction

The City of Hamilton has committed to doubling transit ridership (to 100 rides per person per year) by 2020. But how do we get there from here?

Instead of waiting for the city to figure this out, the Hamilton Transit Users Group, with funding from the Hamilton Community Foundation (<http://www.hcf.on.ca/>), has undertaken a campaign to develop a new, community-based vision for transit in Hamilton in the 21st century.

Toward this end, TUG has been making presentations to neighbourhood associations and community groups, talking with transit users downtown and promoting an online Transit Vision Survey (<http://hamiltontug.com/vision/survey>) through the local mainstream and alternative newsmedia.

Our hope is that by encouraging Hamiltonians interested in transit issues to respond to an open-ended call for creative ideas, we can **discover common themes** running through the community and **establish a broader set of alternatives and initiatives** than Staff and Council are currently willing to entertain.

With popular support, some of these new initiatives could transform the way Hamilton regards transit, in much the same way that the grassroots-based Hamilton Light Rail (<http://hamiltonlightrail.com>) campaign, which grew out of a TUG initiative, has already gained support among staff and council and transformed the city's long-term revitalization plans.

We are continuing to promote the survey and engage with community groups to develop a new vision for transit, but this report represents an initial analysis and summary of the survey responses (<http://hamiltontug.com/vision/results>) we have received so far.

1.2 The Initiatives

There were a large number of proposals on how to improve transit service and increase ridership, but they seem to generalize into four broad categories: Service, Pricing, Amenities, and Planning.

The following sections detail each category with the specific initiatives under that category, including the number of respondents who identified each initiative and a relevant quote from a survey response.

1.2.1 Service

- Faster, more frequent service - *82 respondents*

.....
 Making it more convenient to take public transit - due to infrequent service it takes far too long to get anywhere and makes it hard to use the HSR without much notice. I always need to plan my HSR rides an hour or two in advance so that I am not late for where i need to go.

- Express routes, rapid transit, LRT - *55 respondents*

An emphasis on fixed infrastructure development in the form of LRT; using such infrastructure as the backbone for smart urban development; elevating transit as a priority when considering patterns of movement and spatial use.

- Better service to outlying areas - *31 respondents*

Right now it takes 45 mins. to get to McMaster University from my home on an HSR bus (I can walk it in 45 mins). The bus goes through Dundas, then you have to transfer to another westerly bus. It takes me under 10 mins. to drive there along Cootes so why would I take a bus when it's so much shorter to drive?

- Better service on off-peak hours, weekends, holidays - *31 respondents*

Improved service along downtown routes, especially on weekends during festivals. If you can't even properly service the infrequent transit user, how can you expect people to trust transit regularly?

- Reduce crowding, adjust seating, manage buggies/strollers - *19 respondents*

Less crowding on major routes - with two small boys and a stroller to manage - most major routes are simply not an option due to the 'sardine can' phenomenon. If traveling at any time other than the middle of the day, it just makes more sense to take the car.

- Add / adjust / rationalize routes - *15 respondents*

Re-examine, and change if necessary, some of the current bus routes. For example, the Delaware buses (5 and 5A in particular). At least 1 of them - the 5 probably makes more sense - should continue travelling eastbound along Lawrence Road until it gets to King Street where it will continue going eastbound. That way, we'll have the 5E/52 and the 41 servicing King Street between Ottawa and Greenhill and we'll have the 5 servicing Lawrence Rd. between those 2 points. That way, more people will find the routes convenient.

- Bus stops - quality, location - *9 respondents*

Every transit trip starts with a walking trip. We need better sidewalks and more comfortable transit stops / stations. If we're really getting LRT we still need to up the game on the feeder buses.

1.2.2 Pricing

- Hold or reduce fare, ticket, pass prices - *42 respondents*

I think that lowering the fare (and increasing municipal taxes proportionally, even to the point of making riding free) would encourage those who drive to take transit. Currently, a round trip almost costs \$5 and parking downtown is so cheap that those with vehicles are unlikely to choose the alternative.

- Increase transit tax / eliminate area rating - *7 respondents*

End area rating. Everyone in the city should pay what the old city currently pays. City needs to grow service and can't do that without putting more money into it.

- Zones / pay by distances traveled - *7 respondents*

Zoned fares: I would like to be able to pay \$1 to take the bus from King and James to Queen and King, or from Barton and John to the Farmer's Market, for example. I would be happy to pay more to get to places on the mountain.

- Smart Cards - *2 respondents*

Loadable cards like a metro card would improve service for me, as would more frequent service on all routes.

1.2.3 Amenities

- Better customer experience, more operator courtesy - *21 respondents*

I think there needs to be a very focused look at bus driver customer service. This is not a complaint. The best rides I have are where the driver has a personality and shows it, like calling out the stops and saying a bit fat hello to riders. This helps us to feel like someone is in charge while on the bus.

- Better schedules, bus tracking tools (e.g. online GPS system) - *20 respondents*

Increased frequency (at least every 15 minutes), real-time information about arrival of next bus. Schedule information at all bus stops.

- Establish or improve stations, hubs, transfers, GO connections - *20 respondents*

15 minute wait tops. Express routes in many more places with depots that are hubs with buses fanning out at regular intervals. Express routes across the mountain along the link. Small buses on less popular routes

- Safe, clean, comfortable vehicles - *12 respondents*

Make it safer. I don't like the feeling of people getting on who are rude, boisterous, aggressive.

- Better accessibility for the disabled - *7 respondents*

Better designed bus shelters and landing pads for persons with disabilities using assistive devices. Honestly some of the places we are expected to get on and off at are no larger than a postage stamp AND add a bus ramp, a four foot scooter or wheelchair and you are up to your axels in mud, snow, ice or dangling from some sidewalk with no where to go but out on your face. Also bus bench advertising should not be a barrier to getting on or off the bus for us. We have enough difficulties with urban landscapes without adding to the congestion. Put benches back a bit from the street/stop or ask the planners to come up with some solution.

- Integration with carshare, park-n-ride, cycling - *4 respondents*

Ability to carry more than two bikes per bus. More park and rides with free parking reduce overcrowding - keep track of high school schedules i.e holidays on high school routes.

- Integration with DARTS - *2 respondents*

 HSR needs to be integrated with DARTS to create a more efficient, cost-effective system.

- Better operator facilities - *1 respondent*

 Better washroom access for the drivers along all bus routes.

1.2.4 Planning

- Make transit a higher transportation priority, dedicated lanes - *11 respondents*

 Move beyond the 'social service' objective to create a full transit system intended to become more popular for city travel than cars. This will require more funding than is spent on roads, plus giving transit vehicles priority on the streets.

- Promote, advertise, market transit - *7 respondents*

 I think it is mostly "stigma" that keeps people off the buses and their addiction to cars - therefore maybe "sexy" up bus ridership.

- Two-way street conversion - *2 respondents*

 Convert all major one-way streets to two-way. This would allow for easier access of public transit.

1.3 Conclusion

The common thread that connected nearly all of the survey responses was an overarching desire to see the city *commit more* to transit: more money, more vehicles, faster service, broader coverage, higher quality, better connections, and greater convenience. One particularly thoughtful comment seems to capture the essence of the survey, and is worth quoting in full:

 I believe the central misconception about public transit that continues to hamper development is that the HSR is for HSR users. As long as HSR users are left paying to keep the service alive, the service will be weak, fees will be high, and ridership will be low.

As soon as policymakers discover that a healthy and robust transit system is for the good of the entire city (or even province) it starts to make sense to invest more and more public dollars in improving infrastructure and service.

There is no way that the current ridership or current budgets could justify the expense of a full city light-rail loop (extending from McMaster to Eastgate to Paramount to Meadowlands to McMaster) but this is exactly what's needed to make the transit system fast and reliable. Until the system is fast, reliable, and subsidized to the point that it's cheaper to use than our cars, the majority of Hamilton residents will continue to drive.

We cannot wait until Hamilton is a big and wealthy city to develop a robust transit strategy. Quite the contrary! The robust transit system is a necessary precondition to the healthy and wealthy city that is within our reach. [emphasis added]

In other words, if Hamilton is to become a great city, it needs great transit - transit that meets the needs of a great many citizens, transit that makes our streets safer and friendlier, transit that gets people out of their cars and into their communities, transit that makes Hamilton a richer, more productive city.

Part 2: Multiple-Choice Responses

2.1 Introduction

In addition to the open-ended, vision-oriented questions, the Survey also asks a number of multiple-choice, Agree/Disagree and Yes/No questions. While the set of respondents is self-selected and non-representative, it is still instructive to discover the distribution of demographic identifiers among respondents, as well as the diversity of beliefs, experiences and lifestyles across which a common interest in transit brings their voices together.

One important observation is that the survey has reached a large number of people who use transit only occasionally, but would prefer to use it more often. Only about 41% of respondents use transit regularly. Just under half use transit occasionally, and 6% never use transit. (Another 5% didn't respond to this question.)

Looked at differently, the primary travel mode question breaks down the following way: Only 29% of respondents use transit as their primary travel mode. By contrast, just over a third use driving as their primary mode, about 20% use walking, about 15% use cycling, and less than 2% use a power wheelchair. (Another 1.6% didn't respond to this question.)

These are exactly the people to which the HSR needs to appeal if it is going to realize its strategic objective of doubling ridership. A clearer understanding of what currently stops such potential transit users - and what might attract them - is essential to the city reaching and even exceeding its goals.

The following sections break each multiple-choice question down by the number of selections for each option, including a chart for visual comparison of responses.

The various multiple-choice questions are grouped in the following categories: Policy Questions, Transit Use Questions, Service Quality Questions, and Demographic Questions. The last category is simply a summary of the various ratings respondents gave to the survey itself.

2.2 Policy Questions

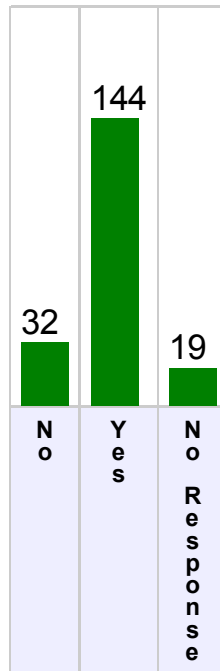
The following survey questions identified respondents' beliefs regarding a number of policy issues and proposals related to transit.

2.2.1 The Entire Urban Area Of The City Should Have A Single Tax Rate For Transit.

City-Wide Transit Tax Rate

Option	Count	% of Total
No	32	16.4%
Yes	144	73.8%
No Response	19	9.7%
Total Result	195	100.0%

Chart

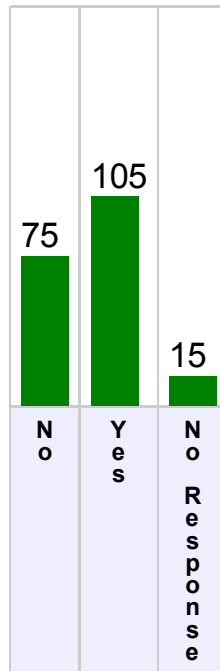


2.2.2 I Can Afford To Pay More Tax For Transit Service Improvements.

Willing to Pay More Tax

Option	Count	% of Total
No	75	38.5%
Yes	105	53.8%
No Response	15	7.7%
Total Result	195	100.0%

Chart

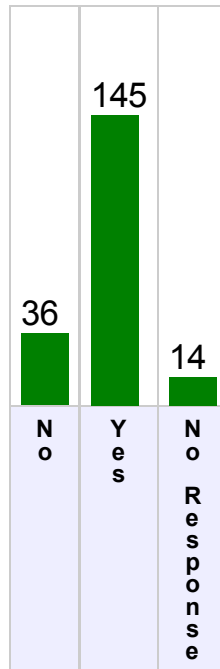


2.2.3 I Believe Drivers Have A Role In Supporting Transit By Any Or All Of The Following: Gas Tax, Roads Tolls, Parking Fees, Or Licensing Fees.

Drivers Should Support Transit

Option	Count	% of Total
No	36	18.5%
Yes	145	74.4%
No Response	14	7.2%
Total Result	195	100.0%

Chart

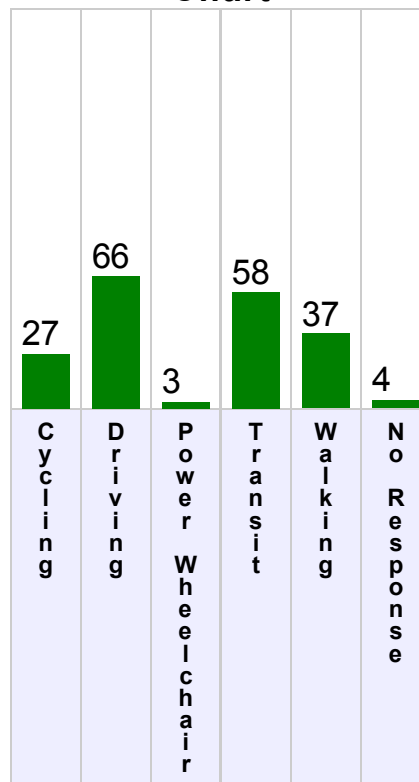


2.2.4 I Most Often Use The Following To Get Around:

Primary Travel Mode

Option	Count	% of Total
Cycling	27	13.8%
Driving	66	33.8%
Power Wheelchair	3	1.5%
Transit	58	29.7%
Walking	37	19.0%
No Response	4	2.1%
Total Result	195	100.0%

Chart



2.3 Transit Use Questions

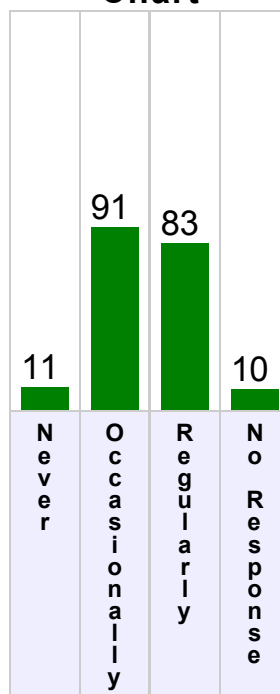
These survey questions identified details about respondents' current transit use: frequency, method of payment, scheduling, and so on.

2.3.1 I Use Transit:

Use Transit

Option	Count	% of Total
Never	11	5.6%
Occasionally	91	46.7%
Regularly	83	42.6%
No Response	10	5.1%
Total Result	195	100.0%

Chart

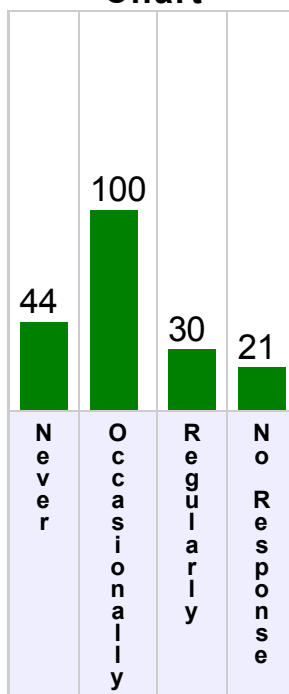


2.3.2 I Use The B-Line Express:

Use B-Line

Option	Count	% of Total
Never	44	22.6%
Occasionally	100	51.3%
Regularly	30	15.4%
No Response	21	10.8%
Total Result	195	100.0%

Chart

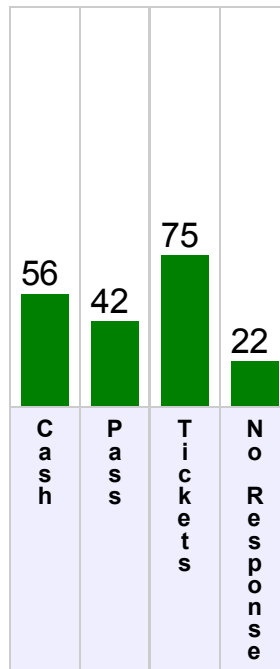


2.3.3 I Pay My Fare Mostly With:

Pay Fare

Option	Count	% of Total
Cash	56	28.7%
Pass	42	21.5%
Tickets	75	38.5%
No Response	22	11.3%
Total Result	195	100.0%

Chart

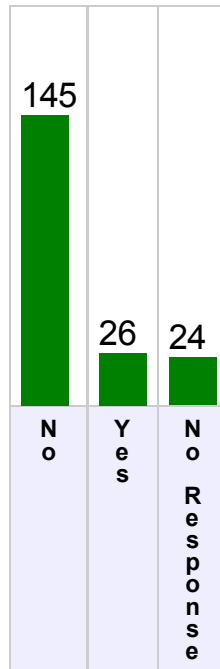


2.3.4 I Have A Discounted Pass As A Senior, A Social Assistance Recipient, Member Of The Working Poor Or A Student:

Eligible for Discount

Option	Count	% of Total
No	145	74.4%
Yes	26	13.3%
No Response	24	12.3%
Total Result	195	100.0%

Chart

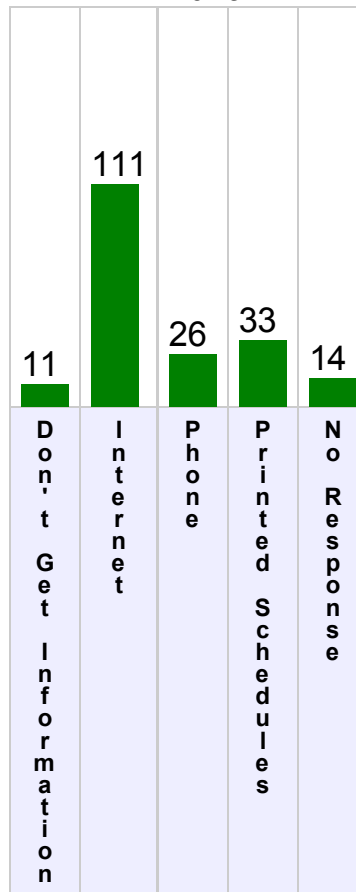


2.3.5 I Get Information On Routes And Schedules Via:

Route Info Via

Option	Count	% of Total
Don't Get Inform	11	5.6%
Internet	111	56.9%
Phone	26	13.3%
Printed Schedules	33	16.9%
No Response	14	7.2%
Total Result	195	100.0%

Chart



2.4 Service Quality Questions

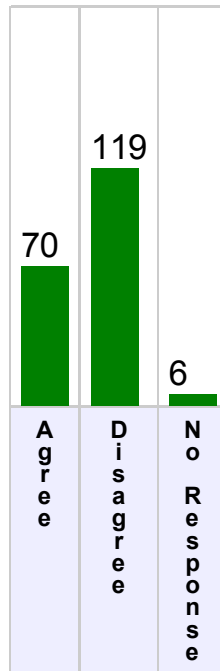
These survey questions identify how respondents feel about the current level of transit service, and whether it meets their needs.

2.4.1 The Current Level Of Transit Service Meets My Needs.

Meets Needs

Option	Count	% of Total
Agree	70	35.9%
Disagree	119	61.0%
No Response	6	3.1%
Total Result	195	100.0%

Chart

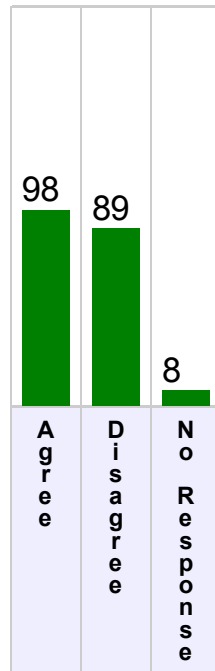


2.4.2 Transit Service Is Reliable In Getting Me Where I Want To Go On Time.

Service is Reliable

Option	Count	% of Total
Agree	98	50.3%
Disagree	89	45.6%
No Response	8	4.1%
Total Result	195	100.0%

Chart

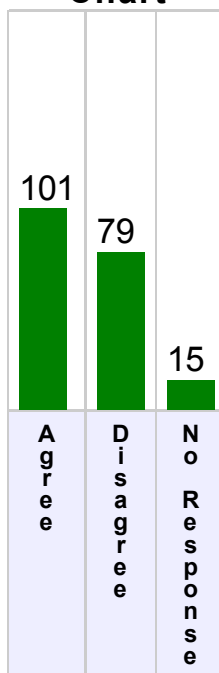


2.4.3 Transit Schedules Make Transferring Hard For Me.

Transferring is Hard

Option	Count	% of Total
Agree	101	51.8%
Disagree	79	40.5%
No Response	15	7.7%
Total Result	195	100.0%

Chart

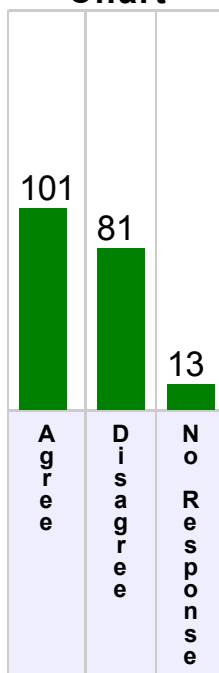


2.4.4 Riding The Bus Is A Pleasant Experience.

Pleasant Experience

Count	% of Total	
Agree	101	51.8%
Disagree	81	41.5%
No Response	13	6.7%
Total Result	195	100.0%

Chart

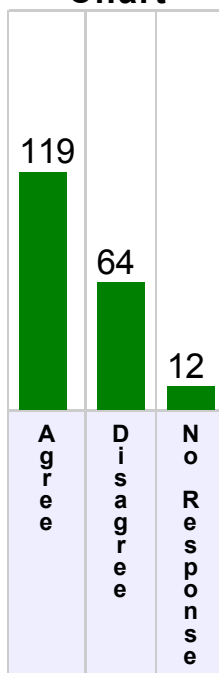


2.4.5 I Get Good Value For The Money I Spend On Transit.

Good Value

Option	Count	% of Total
Agree	119	61.0%
Disagree	64	32.8%
No Response	12	6.2%
Total Result	195	100.0%

Chart



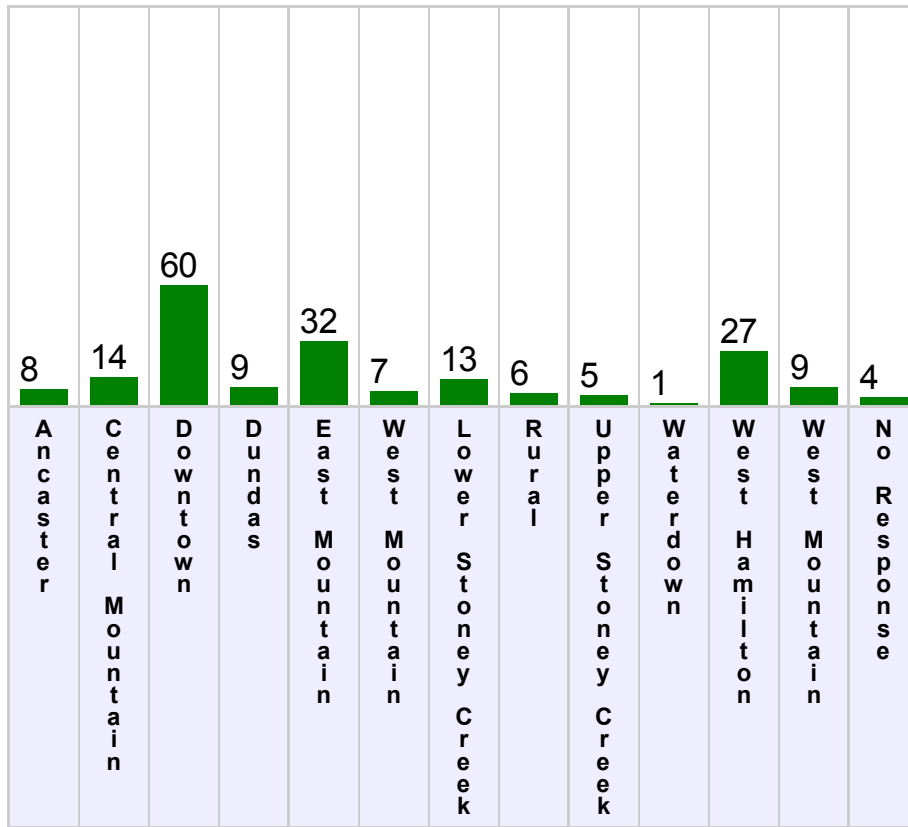
2.5 Demographic Questions

These survey questions capture general demographic information about respondents: age, location, employment status, and so on.

2.5.1 In What Area Do You Live?

Area		
Option	Count	% of Total
Ancaster	8	4.1%
Central Mountain	14	7.2%
Downtown	60	30.8%
Dundas	9	4.6%
East Hamilton	32	16.4%
East Mountain	7	3.6%
Lower Stoney Creek	13	6.7%
Rural	6	3.1%
Upper Stoney Creek	5	2.6%
Waterdown	1	0.5%
West Hamilton	27	13.8%
West Mountain	9	4.6%
No Response	4	2.1%
Total Result	195	100.0%

Chart

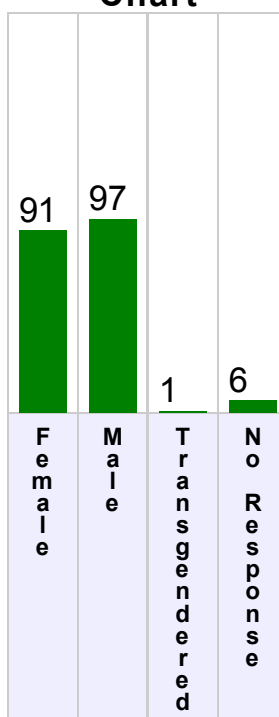


2.5.2 Your Gender:

Gender

Option	Count	% of Total
Female	91	46.7%
Male	97	49.7%
Transgendered	1	0.5%
No Response	6	3.1%
Total Result	195	100.0%

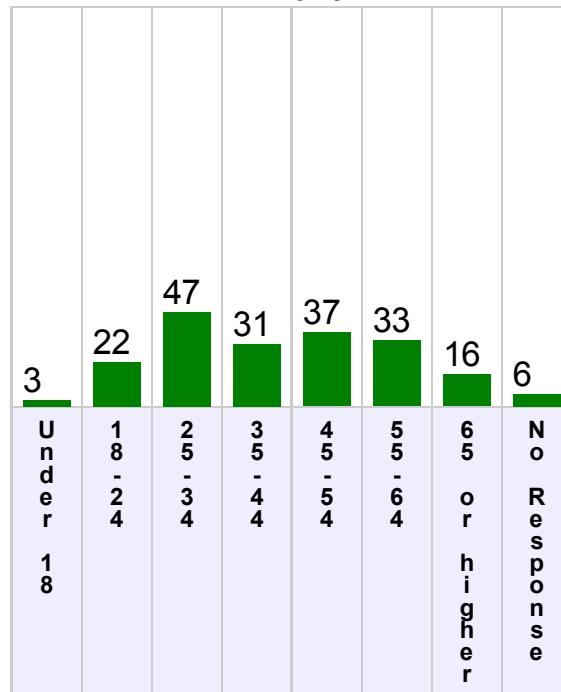
Chart



2.5.3 Your Age:

Age		
Option	Count	% of Total
Under 18	3	1.5%
18-24	22	11.3%
25-34	47	24.1%
35-44	31	15.9%
45-54	37	19.0%
55-64	33	16.9%
65 or higher	16	8.2%
No Response	6	3.1%
Total Result	195	100.0%

Chart

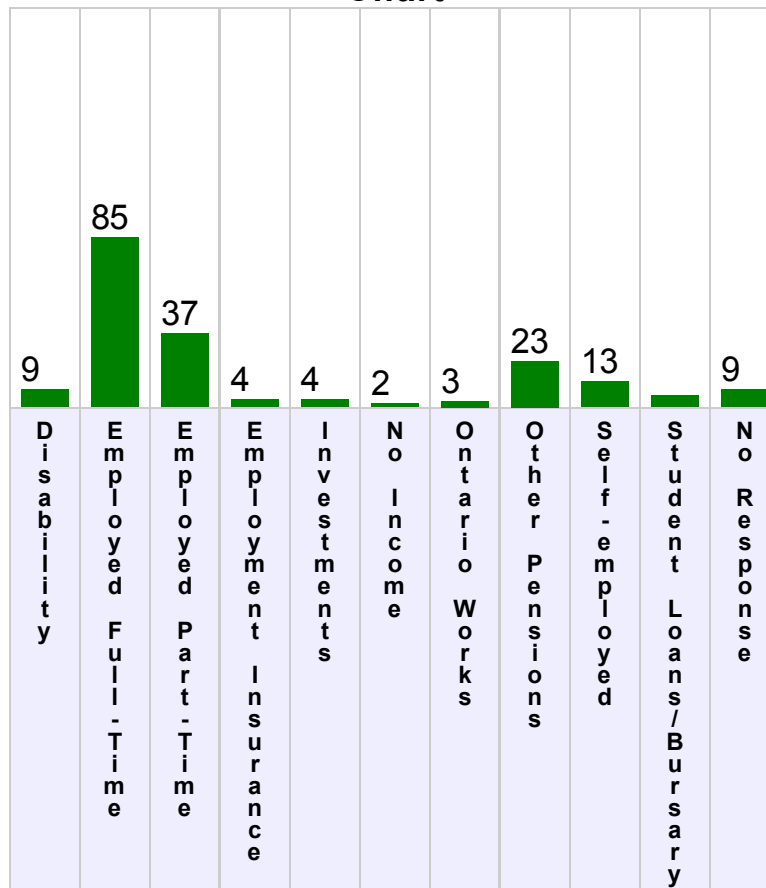


2.5.4 Your Principal Source Of Income

Principal Income Source

Option	Count	% of Total
Disability	9	4.6%
Employed Full-Time	85	43.6%
Employed Part-Time	37	19.0%
Employment Insurance	4	2.1%
Investments	4	2.1%
No Income	2	1.0%
Ontario Works (Welfa	3	1.5%
Other Pensions	23	11.8%
Self-employed	13	6.7%
Student Loans/Bursar	6	3.1%
No Response	9	4.6%
Total Result	195	100.0%

Chart



2.6 Rate Survey

Finally, this question asks respondents to rate the survey itself. Unfortunately, we do not have data on what people who didn't complete the survey thought of it, so the usefulness of learning whether people who went through the effort to complete a survey liked the survey may be limited.

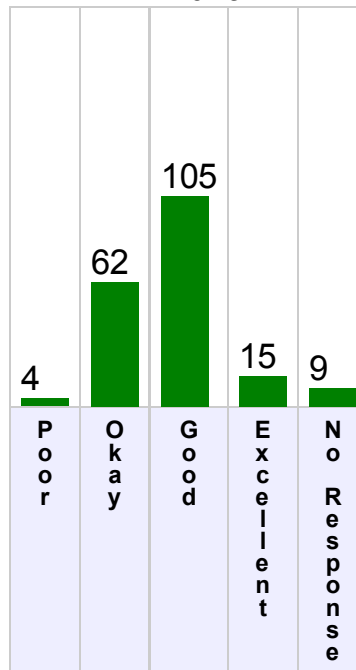
We did receive some critical feedback on the survey, which generally fell into one of two categories: concern that the open-ended questions were too intimidating, and concern that the sheer number of questions is off-putting.

2.6.1 How Would You Rate This Survey?

Rate Survey

Option	Count	% of Total
Poor	4	2.1%
Okay	62	31.8%
Good	105	53.8%
Excellent	15	7.7%
No Response	9	4.6%
Total Result	195	100.0%

Chart



Appendix: Raw Survey Results

You can view individual survey results on the results page:

- <http://hamiltontug.com/vision/results>

Alternately, you can download all the raw data as a spreadsheet:

- <http://hamiltontug.com/vision/results/?download=true>

This project is organized by Hamilton Transit Users group (<http://hamiltontug.com>), and funded by the Hamilton Community Foundation (<http://www.hcf.on.ca/>).