Metro Ride Transit Development Plan Final Report

October **2022**


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Contents

The Metro Ride Transit Development Plan was created with input and support from many local stakeholders. The Wausau Metropolitan Planning Organization and City of Wausau, Metro Ride, oversaw the planning process with valuable input from the Project Oversight Committee.

RLS & Associates, Inc. would like to thank all local participants for their time, including the support from our subconsultants, Yaffe Mobility and Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service.

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Metro Ride department of the City of Wausau provides fixed route bus service within city limits, currently more than 460,000 rides per year. The route design resembles a wheel, with the Wausau Transit Center as the spoke and routes radiating to and from the center. The central hub is located at 555 Jefferson Street in downtown Wausau. Passengers can transfer from one route to another at the Transit Center. All routes operate at 30-minute intervals, meaning passengers can catch the bus at the transit center or any point along the route every 30 minutes. Metro Ride also offers Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) paratransit service to eligible individuals within three quarters of a mile from any regular bus route.

Reductions in funding in recent years has significantly impacted service levels and ultimately, ridership.

- In 2012, the system experienced a major revenue and consequent service reduction. That same year, passenger fare prices were increased to help offset the loss of local revenue. Ridership declined drastically from 788,748 trips to 631,360 trips per year as a result of the 2012 service changes.
- The system partially recovered in 2013 when it temporarily restored some limited service until 2015.
- In 2015, the limited service (Route K) was eliminated again, and Metro Ride experienced another decline in ridership.
- This reduced level of ridership persisted through 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Travel patterns temporarily, but significantly reduced public transit demand in Wausau. The pandemic had similar impacts on transit systems across America.
- During the recovery period since the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Metro Ride has gradually regained riders but continues to fall short of its potential.

This Transportation Development Plan (TDP) was prompted by the transit ridership decline, changes in demand from within Wausau and its surrounding communities, and potential for applying new service modes and transit technologies. The TDP process was initiated in 2021 with guidance and input from the Marathon County Metropolitan Planning Organization, Metro Ride, a Project Oversight Committee, and local stakeholders.

Public transit budgets are dependent upon public funding. As with many transit systems across America today, sustaining sufficient funding from Federal, state, and local sources is a primary concern for Metro Ride. While a significant portion of the Metro Ride operating and capital budgets come from the Federal Transit Administration, revenue is necessary from passenger fares, and state and local sources. This TDP planning process takes careful steps to understand community needs and place those strategically, considering fiscal realities and possibilities for Metro Ride service improvements.

Planning Process Overview

The Transit Development Plan includes a comprehensive evaluation of current Metro Ride service as well as market conditions for expansion in Wausau, Weston, Rib Mountain, Rothschild, and Schofield. Employment densities, ridership patterns, and socio-economic and demographic conditions of all communities were analyzed and compared with existing services to identify latent demand. Currently, no Metro Ride service is provided outside of the Wausau city boundaries.

The consulting team talked with local officials, Metro Ride staff, employers, human service agencies, and other community stakeholders through various community engagement activities. The extensive outreach effort resulted in broad input into the strengths and weaknesses of the existing system. Community engagement activities were conducted

at milestones throughout the planning period and included:

- Rider and public surveys
- Public meetings
- Interviews with local officials from Wausau, Weston, Rib Mountain, Schofield, and Rothschild; agency representatives; employers; and other stakeholders
- Meeting with local employers and agencies
- Focus groups
- Regular engagement with the Project Oversight Committee

Conclusions

Transit service and technology recommendations are presented in three scenarios. Recommendations within each scenario can be implemented in combination or as stand-alone improvements. Different scenarios are necessary because expansion of service beyond the Wausau city limits was identified as a top priority but such an expansion can be implemented only through new, formal, funding agreements between Wausau and the neighboring communities. Since no inter-governmental agreements were reached during the planning process, all recommendations for expanding the service area are presented separate from Wausau-based recommendations (Scenario 2). Metro Ride and the local communities will continue to negotiate and consider the potential for inter-governmental agreements.

Scenario 1 focuses on recommendations that can be accomplished within the city. These recommendations will require additional funding from local, State and Federal sources.

Scenario 3 offers recommendations that reduce the number of fixed routes and the frequency of service and reallocate the cost savings to implementing some of the top priority service improvements such as longer hours or days of service.

All recommendations are based on quantitative data analysis and qualitative community engagement input. Scenarios are designed for implementation over a five-year horizon; however, a change in executive leadership at Metro Ride is predicted for 2023 and may delay progress in the short term.. Three scenarios are summarized as follows:

Scenario 1: Improve and Expand Metro Ride Services within Wausau

Scenario 1 focuses on options to improve transit technology at Metro Ride including farebox and fare media, Route/Stop Annunciators, Real Time Bus Location data feeds for rider use, and Automated Passenger Counters (APCs). The scenario also considers new fare structure options. Finally, Scenario 1 explores possible service expansions within Wausau City Limits including on-demand microtransit zones; expanding operating hours to meet the needs of employers, employees, and other purposes; and adding Saturday service.

Scenario 2: Expand Public Transit Service into Rib Mountain, Rothschild, Weston, and Schofield

Scenario 2 focuses on service area expansions into the nearby communities most desired by riders and general public members who participated in the study. The expansions are designed to serve important shopping and employment locations, many of which are located outside of Wausau. The new VA Veterans Clinic and the Department of Motor Vehicles sites are nearby, but outside Wausau city limits. Some medical facilities; price-conscious shopping including Walmart, Sams Club and Aldi; and major employers including Greenheck and Crystal Finishing are situated outside of Wausau. None of these are accessible by public transit. Service area expansions will require additional revenue provided through inter-governmental funding agreements between Wausau and the communities served by the extensions. Contractual agreements with private industry or human service agencies may also be used to help supplement the expansions.

Scenario 3: Service Reductions

Scenario 3 focuses on options that reduce the total number of fixed routes and associated operating expenses. Cost savings would be reallocated to

support service improvements within Wausau, such as expanding the hours of operation or improving coverage. Service options in Scenario 3 are not locally preferred. These options would result in reduced frequency of bus route service for the core of the region's population. Less frequent service is less convenient for riders and could result in overcrowded buses running late during peak hours. Disruptions of this nature tend to have a negative impact on transit ridership, unless implemented along with an equal level of service enhancements. Scenario 3 is an option of last resort because of the potential negative impacts on riders and schedule adherence.

Challenges to be Addressed

At the conclusion of the planning process, local participants determined that service area expansion is the most desirable and logical option. However, given current organizational and funding constraints, expansion beyond Wausau City Limits requires new financial partnering agreements. These agreements would be between Metro Ride and interested neighboring communities, employers and other private sector partners. To gain Metro Ride service, a new jurisdiction must financially contribute to the operating and capital cost in a sustainable manner. Latent demand and unmet needs in nearby communities are documented in this TDP. However, such expansions are only possible if the jurisdiction governing bodies agree to become financial partners and commit to providing Metro Ride the requisite portion of funds for new local services. Considering state levy limits placed on each community, identifying additional funding from the existing municipal budgets difficult. Annual allocations would consider the benefits of transit to the community and its residents.

Metro Ride has explored an alternative organizational structure including creation of a Regional Transit Authority (RTA). An RTA would have governing authority independent of the local communities and could serve the entire region. The RTA structure would relieve the local municipalities from responsibility to provide the necessary local match to fund transit. However, an RTA structure is not likely to receive the required support from the Wisconsin Legislature. Further exploration of an RTA structure was not included in this TDP. An RTA remains an option if State legislative support shifts or new legislation supports such an initiative.

Report Organization

The TDP consists of eight chapters, as follows:

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the study area and evaluates demographic and socio-economic conditions. The data informs estimations about transit demand and gaps in service.

Chapter 2 provides a profile of Metro Ride service characteristics, performance trends, and coverage.

Chapter 3 summarizes rider survey results.

Chapter4 summarizes public survey results.

Chapter 5 summarizes community input obtained through public meetings, stakeholder interviews and meetings and focus groups.

Chapter 6 summarizes prior relevant studies, including the 2017 Transit Development Plan Update which included a statistically valid household survey regarding public transit.

Chapter 7 details the recommended major service and technology change scenarios and identifies the projected expenses and revenues associated with each option.

Chapter 8 summarizes recommendations that could be explored for improvements over the five-year planning horizon.

The appendix includes details about the public and rider surveys, and the focus group report created by Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service.

Chapter 1. Existing Conditions and Demographic Analysis

The study area includes Wausau and the other municipalities within the Wausau Urbanized Area. The data for this demographic analysis was obtained from the United States Census Bureau's 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates and 2018 Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) Origin-Destination Employment Statistics data.

Population

The Wausau Urbanized Area contains Wausau, Rib Mountain, Rothschild, Schofield, and Weston; with approximately 85,000 population. The most densely populated areas are dark blue, symbolizing at least 2,167 people per square mile in Figure 1, appearing throughout Wausau. Other areas of higher population density are in Rothschild, Schofield and Weston.

Figure 1. Population Density

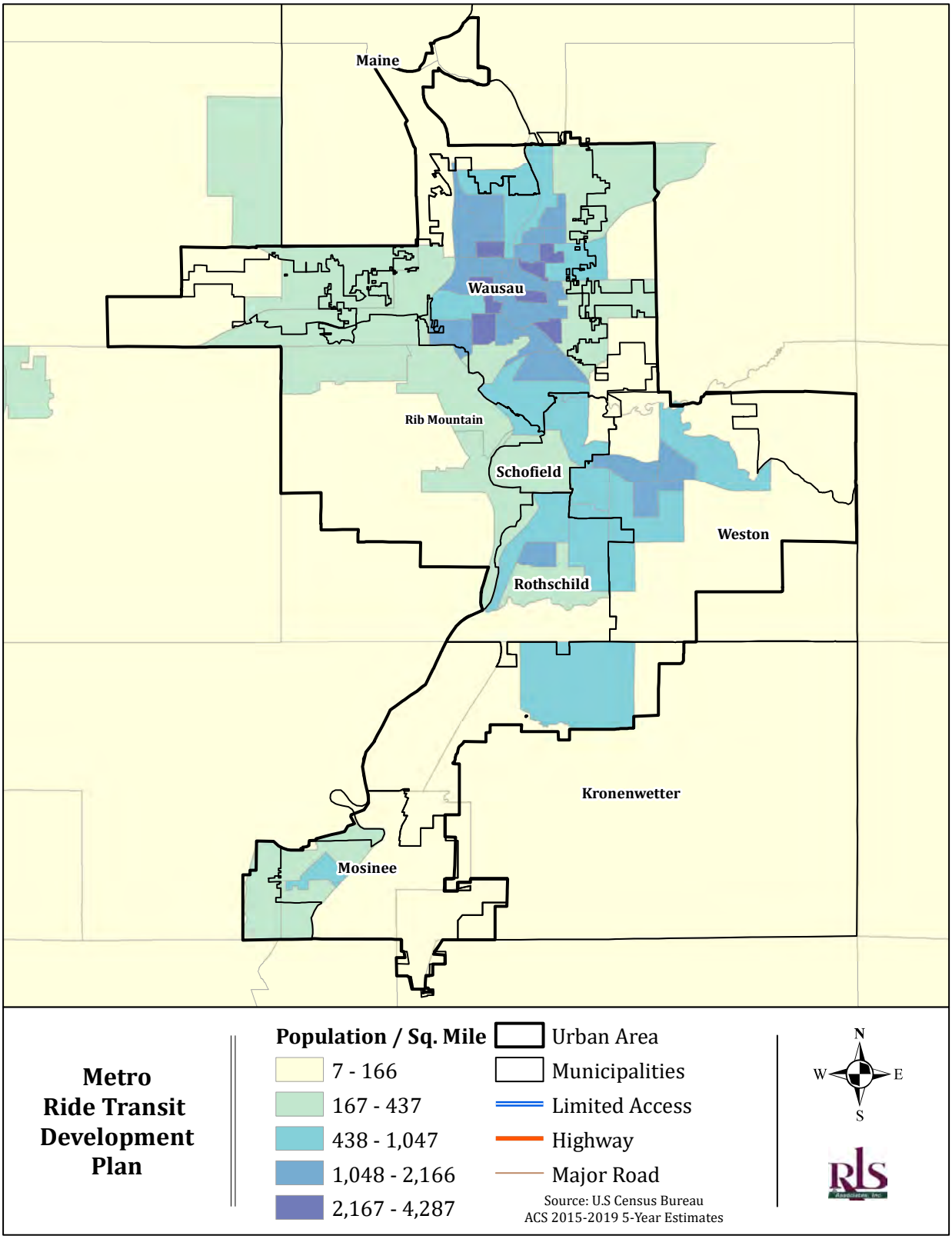


Table 1 shows the population breakdown of the larger municipalities within the Wausau Urbanized area. Outside of Wausau, Weston has the largest population at 15,723, and Schofield has the smallest population at 2,157.

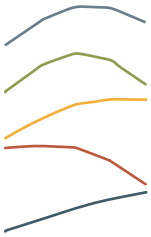
Table 1. Population by Municipality

Municipality	Population
Wausau	39,994
Weston	15,723
Rib Mountain	6,061
Rothschild	5,567
Schofield	2,157

The Wisconsin Department of Health Services estimates that the population of Marathon County will increase by 5.6 percent between 2020 and 2030. As the population increases, so does the likelihood for increased demand for public transit. Wausau, Weston, Rib Mountain, and Rothschild populations each are projected to increase. Demand for transit from those communities also is likely to increase. The population of Schofield is expected to remain steady.

Figure 2. Population Trends and Projections

	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040
Wausau	40,460	41,100	41,490	41,450	41,070
Rib Mountain	7,055	7,145	7,190	7,165	7,080
Rothschild	5,525	5,655	5,755	5,795	5,790
Schofield	2,205	2,210	2,205	2,180	2,135
Weston	16,770	17,870	18,890	19,700	20,330



Older Adult Population

For this report, older adults are individuals age 65 and older. The Wausau Urbanized Area contains roughly 15,000 older adults. In 2020, the older adult population made up only 17.8 percent of the County population. By 2040, the older adult population will be 23.9 percent of the population, according to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. As people give up driving, they will require rides. The aging population will most likely increase demand on public transit services.

The block groups with the highest density of older adults can be found in northeast Wausau and Mosinee. These areas contain at least 394 people per square mile and are shown in dark green in Figure 3.

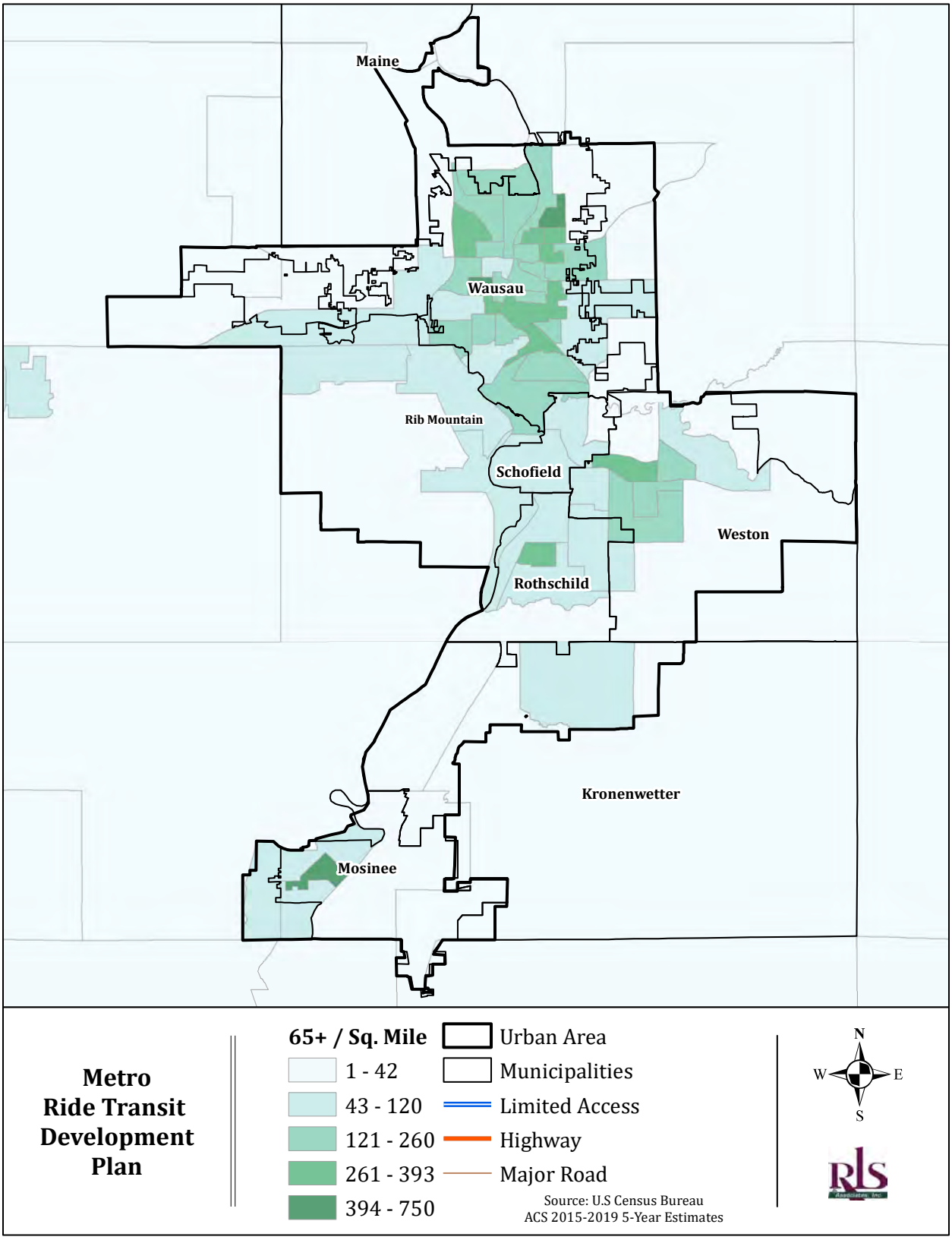
Older adults are most likely to use transportation services when they are unable to drive themselves or choose not to drive. Self-imposed limitations on driving often include not driving at night or making trips to more distant destinations. Older adults also tend to be on a limited retirement income and, therefore, public or subsidized transportation services are a more economical alternative to owning a vehicle. For these reasons, the population of older adults in an area indicates potential transit demand.

As indicated in Table 2, Wausau has the highest number of older adults. Still, the older adult populations of Rib Mountain and Schofield make up larger percentages of their total individual municipal populations.

Table 2. Older Adult Population by Municipality

Municipality	Older Adults	Percent of Population
Wausau	6,703	17%
Weston	2,423	15%
Rib Mountain	1,348	22%
Rothschild	811	15%
Schofield	381	18%

Figure 3. Older Adult Population Density



Household Income and Poverty

The Wausau Urbanized Area contains about 36,000 households. The major municipalities in the area, which make up roughly 80 percent of the urban area's households, have a wide range of median household incomes. Table 3 shows the median for each municipality, with Rothschild having the highest at $70,925 and Wausau having the lowest at $46,824.

Table 3. Median Household Income by Municipality

Municipality	Median Household Income
Rothschild	$70,925
Rib Mountain	$69,882
Weston	$66,716
Schofield	$48,654
Wausau	$46,824

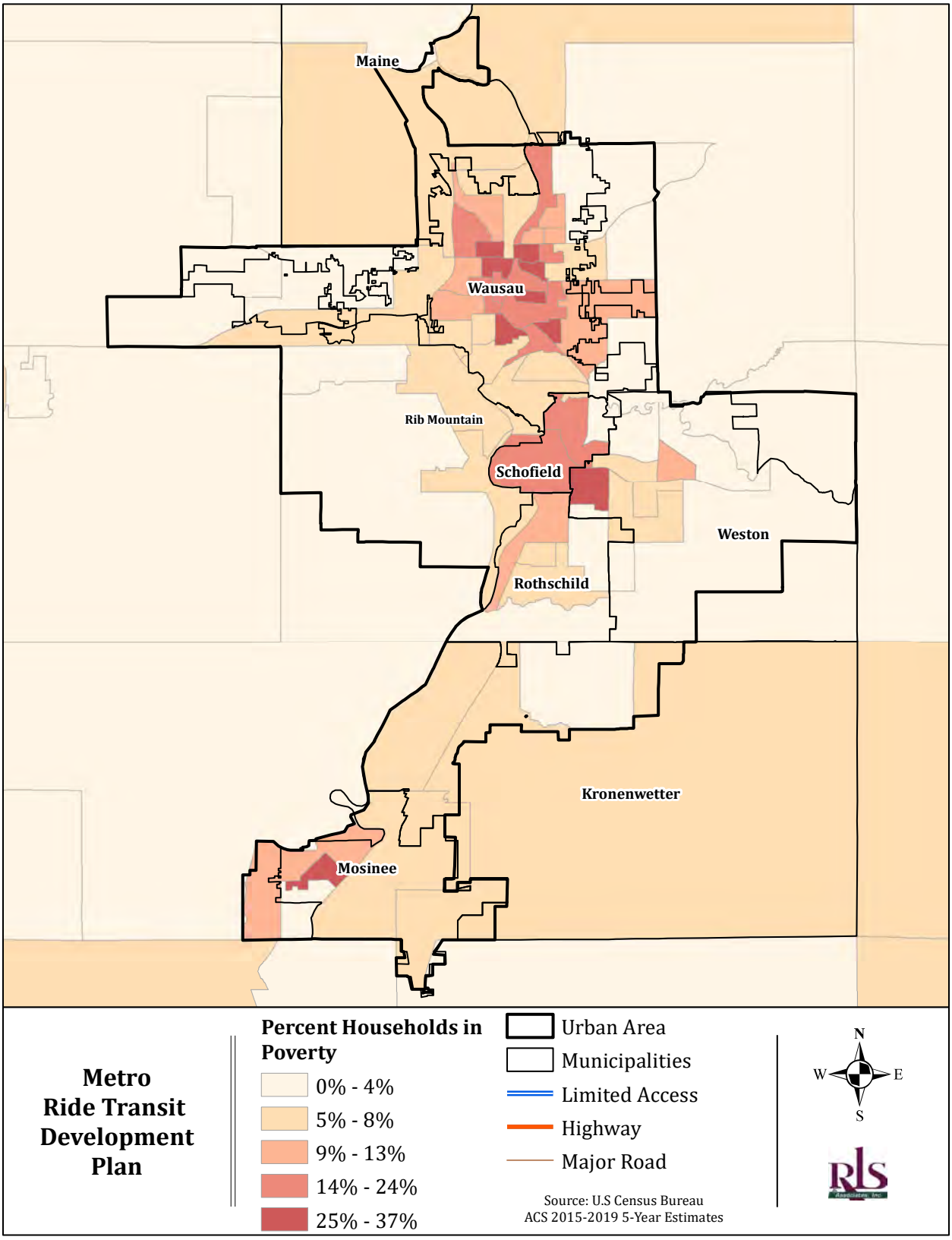
The difference in median household incomes is also reflected in the number of households in poverty. Table 4 shows the number of households in each municipality in poverty. Wausau and Schofield have much higher percent households in poverty, 13 and 16 percent respectively than the other three municipalities where Weston's seven percent is the highest. Rothschild and Rib Mountain have the highest median household incomes and the lowest percent of total households below poverty.

Table 4. Households in Poverty by Municipality

Municipality	Households in Poverty	Percent Households in Poverty
Schofield	164	16%
Wausau	2,278	13%
Weston	440	7%
Rothschild	135	6%
Rib Mountain	106	5%

Figure 4 shows the distribution of households in poverty throughout the Wausau urban area. The block groups that have the highest percent of households in poverty can be found throughout Wausau, in western Weston, and Mosinee. In these block groups, at least 25 percent are in poverty. Other areas of higher poverty (14 to 24 percent) are found throughout Wausau, Schofield, and Mosinee.

Figure 4. Percent Households in Poverty

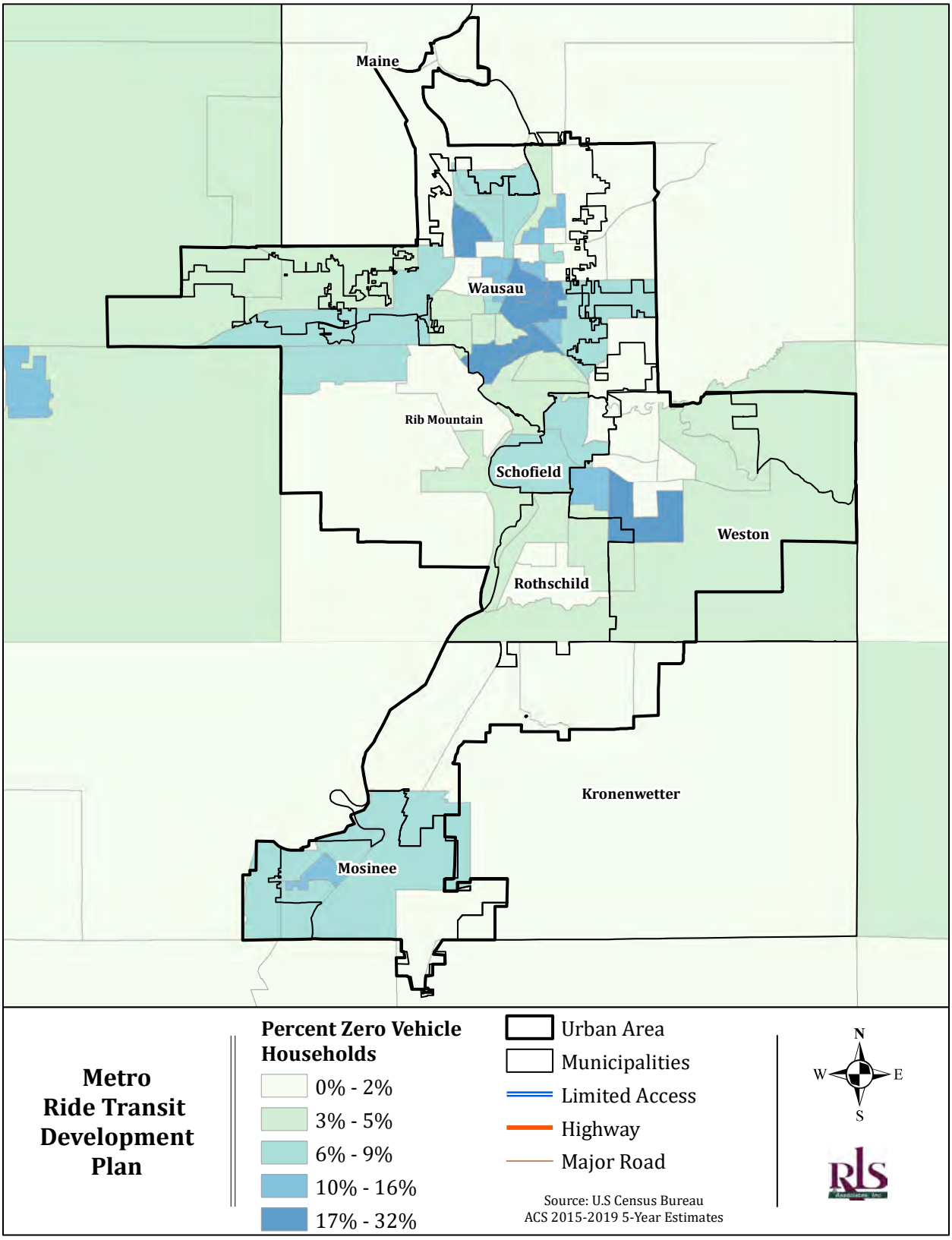


Zero and One Vehicle Households

The number of vehicles available to a household is also an indicator of demand for transit. Households with no available vehicle are more likely to depend on public transit for all or most transportation needs. Within the Wausau urban area are roughly 36,000 households including about 2,100 (5.8 percent) with zero vehicles available. Figure 5 shows the distribution of these households throughout the area. The densest areas are throughout Wausau and in western Weston. The densest areas have at least 17 percent of households without vehicles.

Families with one vehicle may have more than one adult driver. Access to public transit is a low-cost alternative to sharing a vehicle. Access to transit can enable both adults to work and/or go to school. Wausau and Weston were the work destinations for the highest numbers of Marathon County workers in 2018.

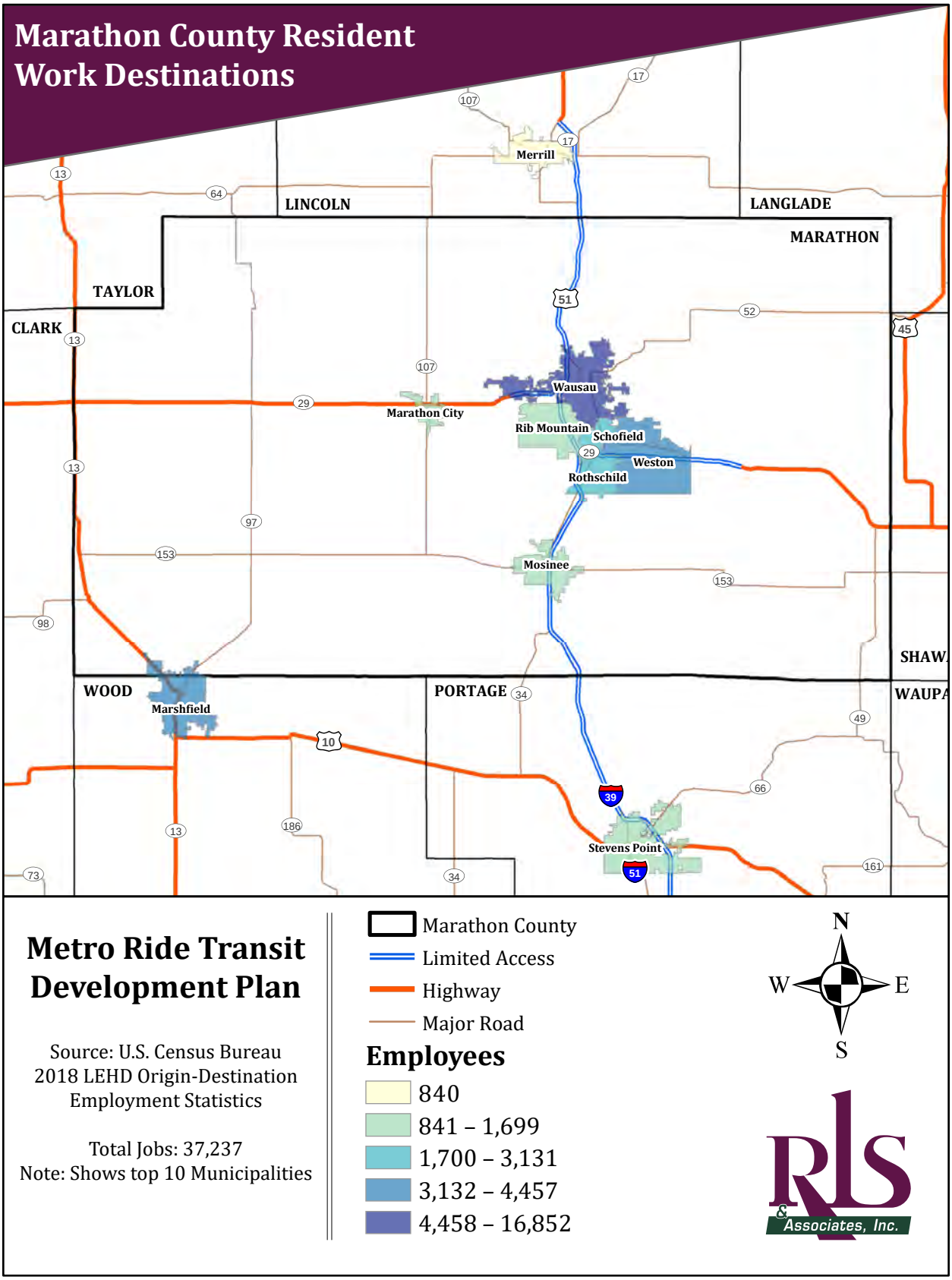
Figure 5. Zero Vehicle Households



Employment

Equally important to where people live are the destinations they frequent. Employment is one of the major destinations for residents. In 2018, 37,237 jobs were located in Marathon County. Figure 6 illustrates the density of work destinations for Marathon County residents. Wausau ranked highest in location of jobs for local residents. Weston ranked second highest. Rothschild and Schofield fell into the third highest work destination for Marathon County residents; similar to the number who commute to Marshfield. A range of 841 to 1,699 jobs for Marathon County residents are in Rib Mountain and Mosinee; similar to the number of Marathon County residents who commute to Stevens Point.

Figure 6. Marathon County Resident Work Destinations



Summary

The population of Marathon County will increase by 5.6 percent between 2020 and 2030. The average age will increase as well. In 2020, 17.8 percent of the population was age 65 and older. By 2040, the older adult population will be 23.9 percent of the total county population. The growing and aging population in Wausau, Weston, Rib Mountain, and Rothschild will likely increase demand on public transit services.

Household income is also a predictor of transit use. Wausau and Schofield have much higher percentages of households in poverty, 13 and 16 percent respectively than the other three municipalities where Weston's seven percent is the highest.

Access to a vehicle is a fourth indicator of demand for public transit. Within the Wausau urban area, 5.8 percent of households have zero vehicles available. In some census block groups, 17 percent or more of households do not have a vehicle. These areas are likely to have higher levels of demand for public transit service than areas where more people have access to a vehicle.

Families with a vehicle may have more than one adult sharing it for all trip purposes. Access to public transit is a low-cost alternative to sharing a vehicle. Access to transit can lead to the opportunity for both adults to work and/or go to school. Wausau and Weston were the work destinations for the highest numbers of Marathon County workers in 2018.

Chapter 2. System Profile

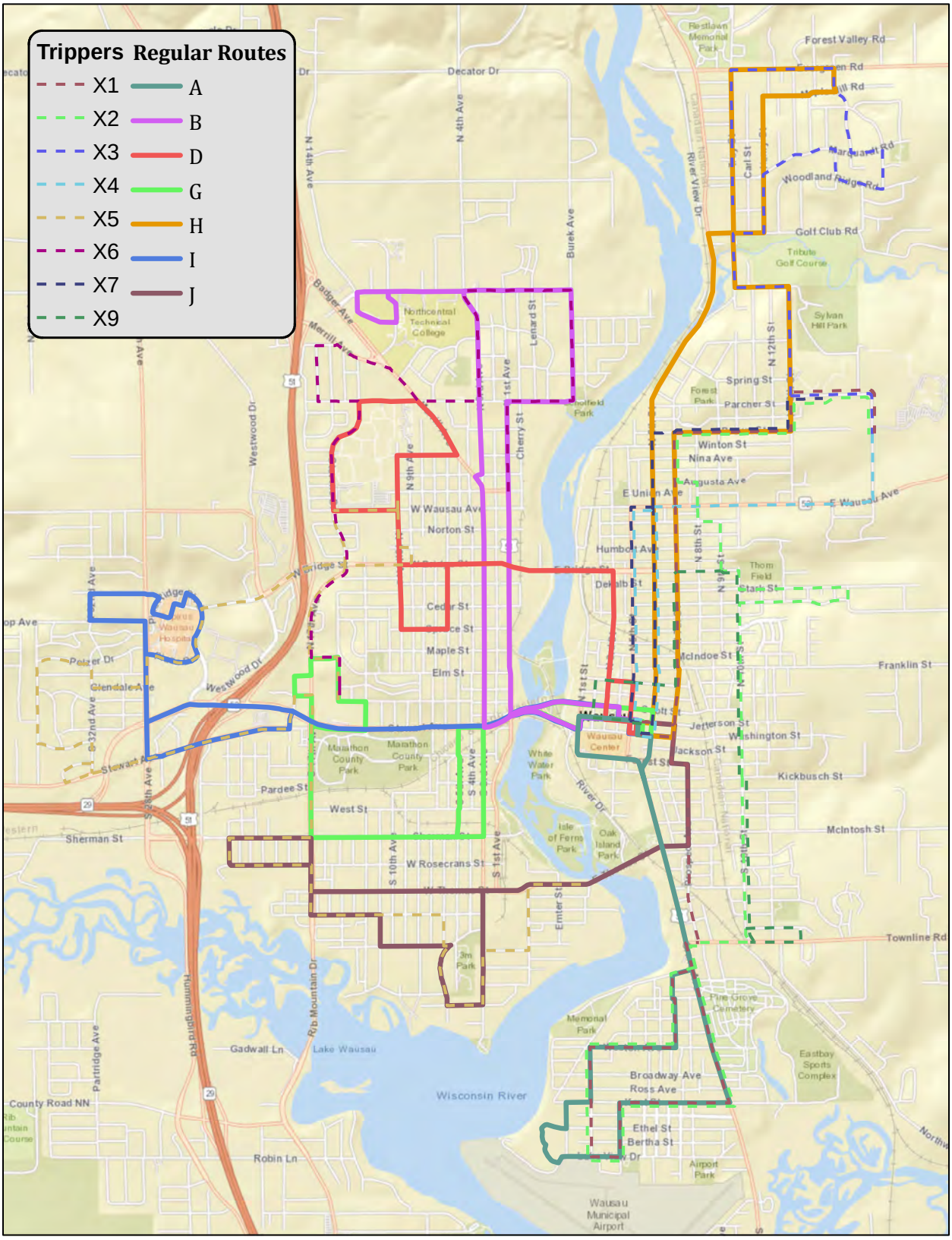
Overview

Metro Ride currently operates within Wausau, about 20 square miles. Most of the City is within walking distance of Metro Ride stops. The main exception is the Wausau West Industrial Park. Discontinued Metro Ride routes have served neighboring towns including Schofield, Rothschild and Weston.

Complimentary ADA paratransit service is available to passengers within a ¾ mile radius of fixed routes. Metro Ride provides fixed route service with a fleet of 22 buses. Eighteen of the 22 vehicles are used during peak service. Four smaller vehicles are available for paratransit service. All vehicles are equipped for wheelchair accessibility, and fixed route buses have bicycle racks.

The active fleet vehicle inventory is provided in the Appendix.

Figure 7. Route map



Metro Ride capital resources include both vehicles and facilities. The Metro Ride Transit Center is located downtown at 555 Jefferson Street, Wausau. The Metro Ride administration and maintenance facility is located at 420 Plumer Street in Wausau. Bus stops and shelters are distributed throughout the service area. Bus shelters are located at the following stops.

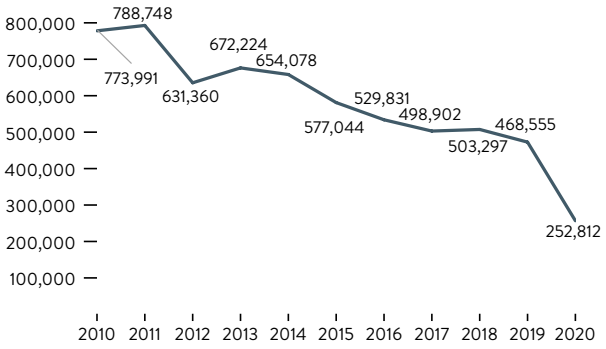
Table 5. Bus Shelter Locations

Route	Shelter Location
A	North Central Health Care
A	Sturgeon Bluff Apartments
A	Riverview Towers
B	North Central Technical College
D	Kannenberg Plaza
I	Marshfield Clinic
I	Aspirus Hospital Main Entrance
H	Horace Mann Middle School

Performance Trends

As discussed in the previous chapter, Metro Ride has experienced reductions in funding that have significantly impacted service levels and ultimately, ridership in recent years. In 2012, the system experienced a major service reduction and implemented a major fare increase. Ridership declined drastically from 788,748 trips to 631,360 trips per year as a result of the 2012 service changes. The system partially recovered in 2013 when it restored some limited service (Route K). That limited service was eliminated again in 2015, prompting another decline in ridership. Ridership continued to decline through 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic temporarily, but significantly reduced public transit demand in Wausau. The pandemic had similar impacts on transit systems across America.

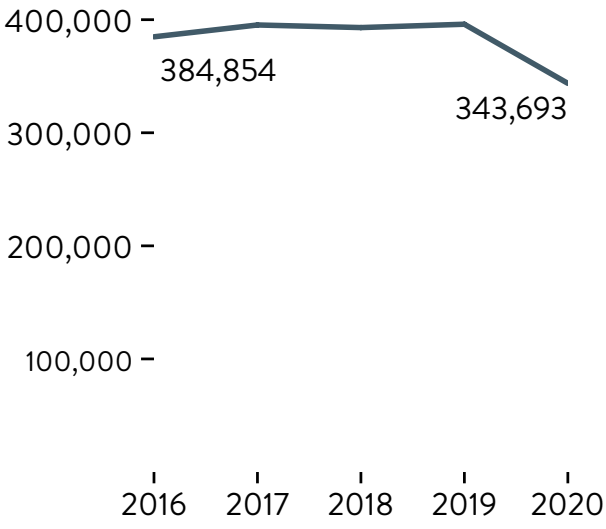
Figure 8. Ridership Trend



Source: Metro Ride

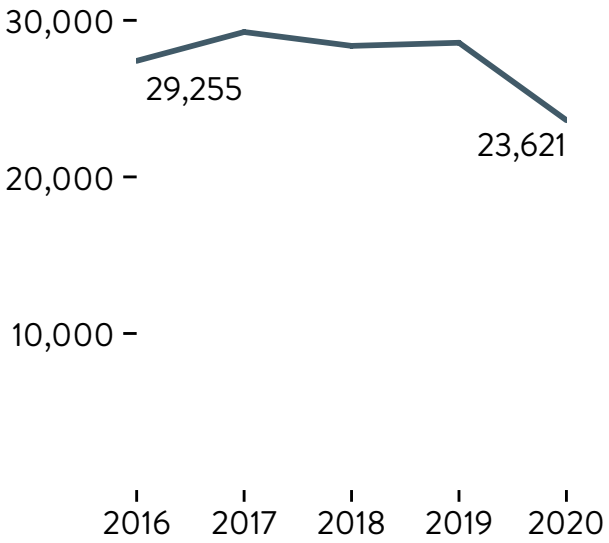
Since the most significant service reductions (2012–2015), Metro Ride's annual revenue miles and hours have remained relatively steady with minor fluctuations. Between 2016 and 2017, the annual revenue miles and hours increased by 2.7 percent and 6.7 percent, respectively. In 2018, revenue miles decreased slightly (0.6 percent) and revenue hours decreased by three percent. 2019 was steady with less than a one percent change. Metro Ride operated approximately 17 percent less revenue hours and 13 percent fewer revenue miles between 2019 and 2020. The drastic decline between 2019 and 2020 was largely a result of COVID-19. Figure 9 and Figure 10 illustrate the change in service levels between 2016 and 2020.

Figure 9. Revenue Miles, 2016 to 2020



Source: Metro Ride

Figure 10. Revenue Hours, 2016 to 2020



Source: Metro Ride

The following paragraphs discuss the specific characteristics of Metro Ride service.

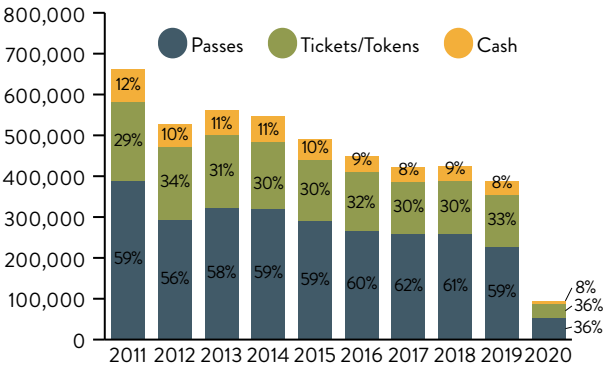
Fares

As of November 2021, fare for a one-way trip on this service is $1.75. Additionally, discounted passes are offered at a rate of $11.00 for 10 one-way tokens, and an unlimited monthly ride pass can be purchased for $42.00. Discounted rates for seniors and individuals with disabilities who have a Medicare Card or ID issued by Metro Ride are $0.85 for a one-way trip and $21.00 for unlimited monthly ride pass.

Metro Ride Transit also offers several fare options for children ages 5 through their senior year in high school. A student one-way fare paid in cash is $1.50. Similarly to adult fares, 10 one-way student tickets can be purchased for $9.50. A monthly student pass for unlimited rides in a calendar month is $21.00 and a special "Youth Freedom Pass" is available for $28.00. The Youth Freedom Pass allows for unlimited rides to youth riders during the summer months (June 1st–August 31st).

Monthly passes and multi-ride tickets and token purchases are the most popular fare type used on Metro Ride services, regardless of service type. Since 2011, monthly passes have accounted for over 55% of passenger fares. Tokens and multi-ride ticket book purchases account for around 30%. Cash fares are only used for approximately 10% of all trips. As shown in Figure 11 below, this ratio has held true regardless of overall ridership on the system.

Figure 11. Metro Ride Historic Fare Type Usage



Source: Metro Ride

This trend indicates a heavy preference for monthly passes among riders. This preference may be because paying cash requires exact change. Having ready exact change may be cumbersome, especially the reduced rate fare of $0.85. Additionally, using a monthly pass saves money. A rider can receive a substantially discounted fare by using a monthly pass, even if they only use it for trips to and from work or school. An adult monthly pass just used to commute to and from work for a month only costs $1.05 per ride. That is a savings of $0.70 or 40% per trip. For a regular commute, adult riders receive the equivalent of 16 free rides by using the pass. Student pass users receive 23 rides.

Peer Fare Structure Comparison

To gain a better understanding of the fare structure at Metro Ride, five peer agencies in Wisconsin were reviewed and compared to Metro Ride. Only peers in Wisconsin were chosen that also provide K-12 school transportation as part of their regular service. The five systems chosen were Eau Claire, Beloit, Janesville, Oshkosh and LaCrosse.

Most of these peer systems have fare structures that reflect the distinctive needs of their riders and correspond to their service structures. Only fares types that most closely matched those offered by Metro Ride were used for this analysis. Some systems offer other types of tokens, tickets and multi-ride passes that were excluded from the comparison, but are discussed for informational purposes. Table 6 below shows how Metro Ride's fares compare to these peer systems in the selected fare categories.

Table 6. Peer Fare Comparison

	Wausau	Eau Claire	Beloit	Janesville	Oshkosh	LaCrosse
Adult Cash Fare	$1.75	$1.75	$1.50	$1.50	$1.50	$1.50
Adult Multi-Ride Token/ Ticket Bundle	10 for $11	$4.00 for 3	10 for $12	10 for $12	20 for $30	10 for $14.50
Adult Monthly Pass	$42	$50.00	NA	$52.00	$35.00	$35.00
Elderly/Disabled Cash Fare	$0.85	$0.85	$0.75	$0.75	$0.75	$0.75
Elderly/Disabled Monthly Pass	$21	$25.00	NA	NA	NA	$25.00
Student Cash Fare	$1.50	$1.25	NA	NA	Free	$1.25
Student Multi-Ride Token/Ticket Bundle	10 for $9.50	NA	NA	10 for $7.50	Free	10 for $12
Student Monthly Pass	$21.00	$10.00*	$17.00*	$24.00*	Free	$23
Day Pass	NA	$3.75	NA	$4.00	NA	NA

*These systems offer semester-based passes rather than monthly passes for students. For the purposes of this analysis, the semester pass cost was divided by five to show a monthly rate.

As the table shows, Metro Ride's cash fare is slightly higher than others in the peer group, while the monthly pass cost is lower than others.

Current Fixed Route Service in Wausau

Metro Ride currently operates 15 routes within the city limits of Wausau (See Figure 12). Most of these routes are in service Monday–Friday from 6:30 AM to 6:30 PM. No evening or weekend service is provided. The 15 routes are separated into seven standard routes that serve all origin and destination types and eight express routes open to the public but primarily used by Wausau middle and high school students. Each of the standard routes operates on a 30-minute pulse schedule meeting at the Transit Center on Washington Street on the hour and half-hour. The express routes are timed to meet school bell schedules. Metro Ride service is available every day of the year except for six holidays: New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day.

In 2019, Metro Ride vehicles on fixed routes travelled 402,220 miles, carried 468,555 passengers and had 31,978 hours of service. In 2020, Metro Ride vehicles covered 359,440 miles in 27,419 service hours with 252,812 passengers.

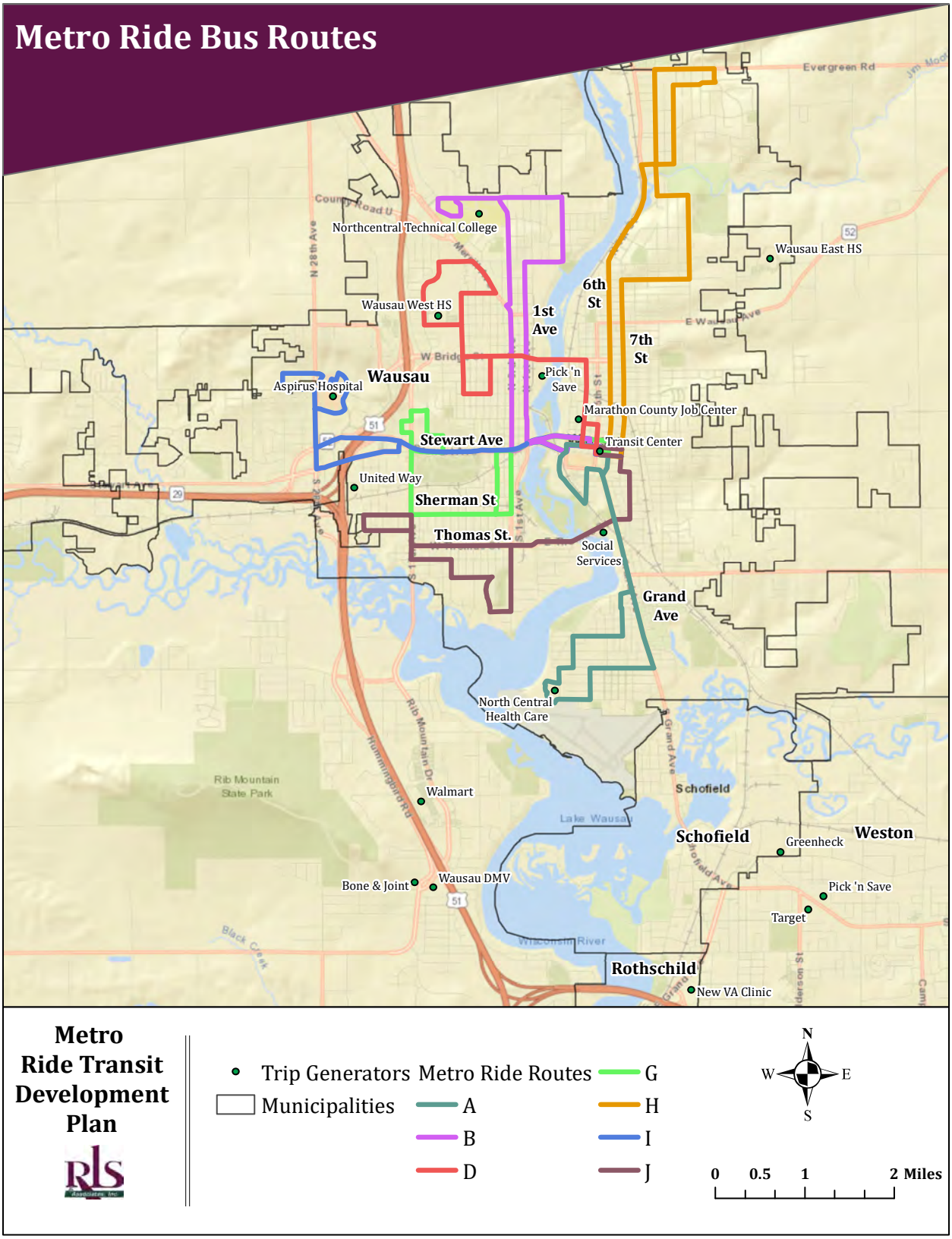
Standard Fixed Route Daily Schedule

Each of the seven standard fixed routes operate on the same pulse schedule. To begin the day, each trip departs the Transit Center, the first time point, on the half hour. After departing, these first trips reach their second time point at 37 minutes past the hour, the third time point at 45 minutes past the hour and the fourth at 52 minutes past the hour. The vehicle then returns to the transit center on the hour to begin the next run, which arrives at the subsequent timepoints at seven, 15, and 22 minutes past the hour. If the bus arrives early at a time point, the bus waits until departing on schedule. Arrival times at the transit center usually are early, to allow for a brief driver break. This pattern is repeated until service ends at 6:30 PM. Table 7 illustrates this schedule.

Table 7. Metro Ride Standard Route Schedule

Transit Center	Timepoint 2	Timepoint 3	Timepoint 4
6:30 AM	6:37 AM	6:45 AM	6:52 AM
7:00 AM	7:07 AM	7:15 AM	7:22 AM
7:30 AM	7:37 AM	7:45 AM	7:52 AM
8:00 AM	8:07 AM	8:15 AM	8:22 AM
8:30 AM	8:37 AM	8:45 AM	8:52 AM
9:00 AM	9:07 AM	9:15 AM	9:22 AM
9:30 AM	9:37 AM	9:45 AM	9:52 AM
10:00 AM	10:07 AM	10:15 AM	10:22 AM
10:30 AM	10:37 AM	10:45 AM	10:52 AM
11:00 AM	11:07 AM	11:15 AM	11:22 AM
11:30 AM	11:37 AM	11:45 AM	11:52 AM
12:00 PM	12:07 PM	12:15 PM	12:22 PM
12:30 PM	12:37 PM	12:45 PM	12:52 PM
1:00 PM	1:07 PM	1:15 PM	1:22 PM
1:30 PM	1:37 PM	1:45 PM	1:52 PM
2:00 PM	2:07 PM	2:15 PM	2:22 PM
2:30 PM	2:37 PM	2:45 PM	2:52 PM
3:00 PM	3:07 PM	3:15 PM	3:22 PM
3:30 PM	3:37 PM	3:45 PM	3:52 PM
4:00 PM	4:07 PM	4:15 PM	4:22 PM
4:30 PM	4:37 PM	4:45 PM	4:52 PM
5:00 PM	5:07 PM	5:15 PM	5:22 PM
5:30 PM	5:37 PM	5:45 PM	5:52 PM
6:00 PM	6:07 PM	6:15 PM	6:22 PM
6:30 PM			

Figure 12. Fixed Routes Map Including Major Destinations



Standard Fixed Route Descriptions

Route A "Grand Avenue/Health Care Center" serves the southern portion of Wausau and runs along Grand Avenue for a large segment of its route. Route A serves destinations such as the Wausau Downtown Airport, the Marathon County Health Department, and John Marshall Elementary School. Annual ridership on Route A was 20,898 in 2020 and 51,957 in 2019. Route A was one of the most productive standard routes with 1.33 passengers per mile and 16.26 passengers per hour in 2019. This level of use can only be accommodated on a fixed route bus system such as Metro Ride. In 2020, Route A achieved 0.53 passengers per mile and 6.52 passengers per hour.

Year	Passenger Trips Per Mile	Passenger Trips Per Hour
2019	1.33	16.26
2020	0.53	6.52

Route B "North First Avenue/NTC" serves the northwest portion of Wausau on the east side of the Wisconsin River using the one-way paired First and Third Avenues to reach most destinations. Major destinations on Route B are Northcentral Technical College and Thomas Jefferson Elementary School. Annual ridership on Route B was 25,384 in 2020 and 50,030 in 2019.

Year	Passenger Trips Per Mile	Passenger Trips Per Hour
2019	1.16	17.04
2020	0.53	7.82

Route D "Bridge Street/West High School" also serves the northwestern portion of Wausau. The major destinations along this route include the Bridge Street Mission, Grant Elementary School, St. Anne Catholic School, Wausau West High School, and Kannenberg Plaza. Annual ridership on Route D was 22,713 in 2020 and 48,486 in 2019.

Year	Passenger Trips Per Mile	Passenger Trips Per Hour
2019	1.29	16.94
2020	0.55	6.98

Route G "Sherman Street" serves the western portion of Wausau, mainly around Marathon County Park. Major trip destinations on Route G are University of Wisconsin Stevens Point at Wausau, Trinity Lutheran School, Lincoln Elementary School, John Muir Middle School, and Crossroads County Market. Annual ridership on Route G was 24,620 in 2020 and 52,259 in 2019.

Year	Passenger Trips Per Mile	Passenger Trips Per Hour
2019	1.11	14.51
2020	0.58	7.56

Route H "North Sixth Street/Riverview" serves the northern portion of Wausau to the east of the Wisconsin River. The major destinations along this route are Riverview Elementary School and Horace Mann Middle School. Annual ridership on Route G was 18,186 in 2020 and 35,805 in 2019.

Year	Passenger Trips Per Mile	Passenger Trips Per Hour
2019	0.63	10.01
2020	0.35	5.58

Route I "Stewart Avenue/Aspirus Hospital" serves the western-most portion of Wausau and includes Aspirus/Wausau Hospital, The Women's Community Inc., Marshfield Clinic and Faith Christian Academy as its major destinations. Annual ridership on Route G was 17,173 in 2020 and 36,596 in 2019.

Year	Passenger Trips Per Mile	Passenger Trips Per Hour
2019	0.74	10.56
2020	0.37	5.21

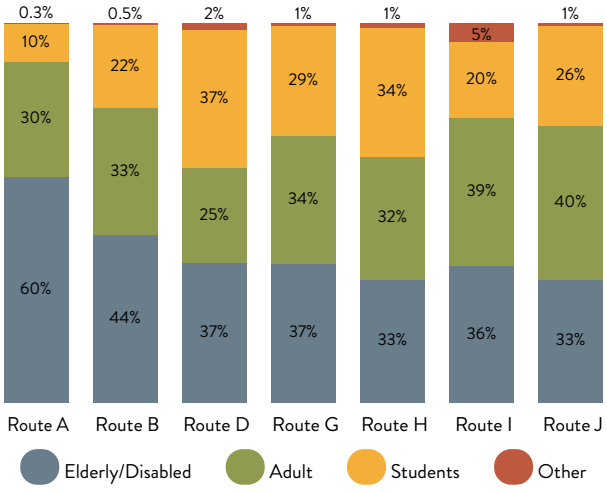
Route J "Thomas Street" serves the area to the south of Marathon County Park in the western portion of Wausau. Destinations served by Route J include GD Jones Elementary School, Our Savior School, St. Vincent de Paul, and 3M Park. Annual ridership on Route J was 13,181 in 2020 and 23,387 in 2019.

Year	Passenger Trips Per Mile	Passenger Trips Per Hour
2019	0.41	6.20
2020	0.29	4.08

Ridership Distribution

Figure 13 illustrates the distribution of riders by route. Passengers eligible for the elderly and disabled discounted fare make up the largest percentage of riders for every route except Route J. Adults are the largest group of riders on Route J. For all routes other than Route J, adult riders make up the second largest percentage of riders. Each route has student riders, with Route H having the highest percentage of student riders and Route A having the lowest percentage.

Figure 13. Ridership Distribution by Route

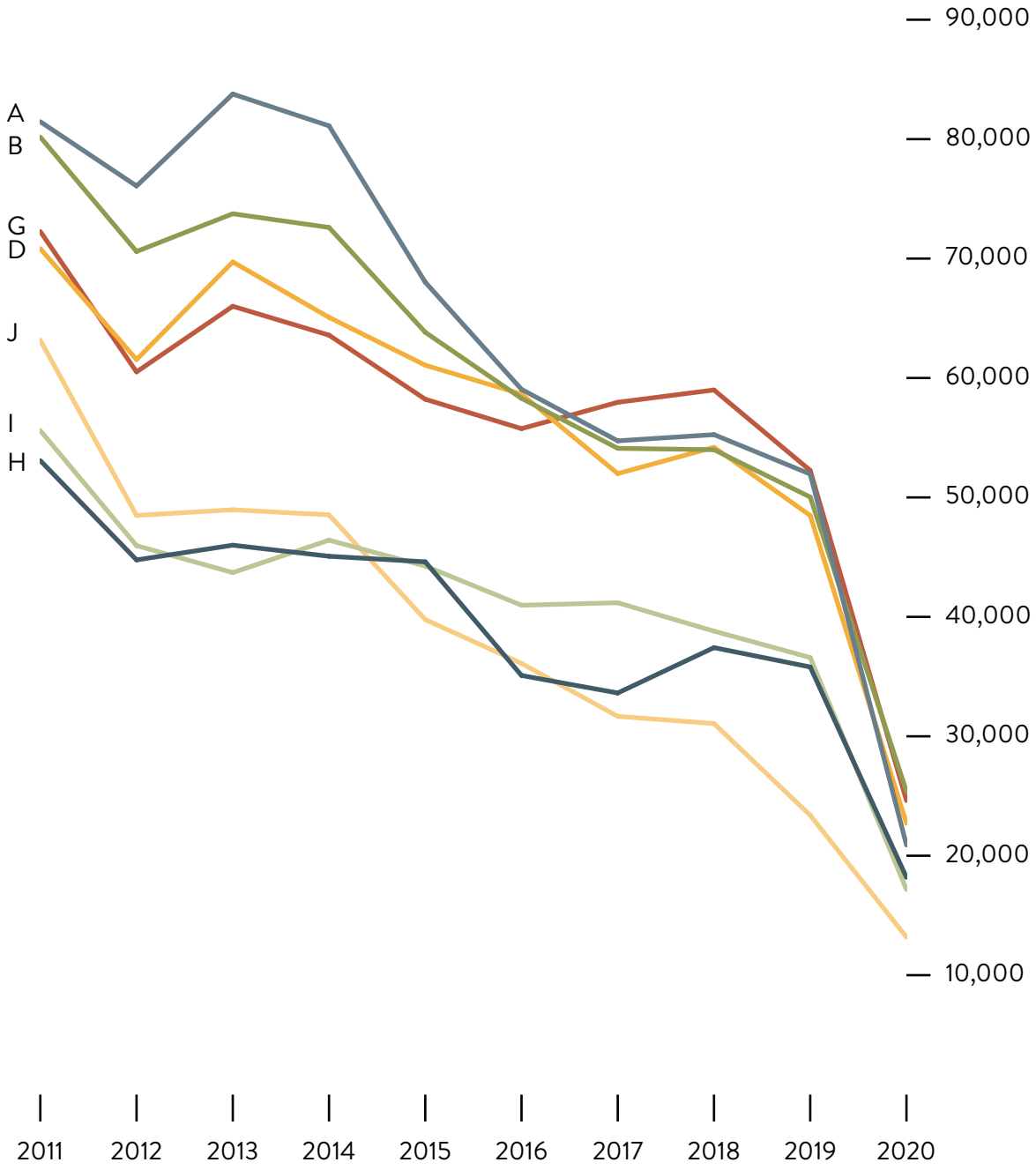


Source: Metro Ride

Standard Fixed Route Ridership Trends

Ridership on Metro Ride's standard fixed routes has declined annually excepting for a slight upturn between 2012 and 2013. Figure 14 below illustrates annual ridership figures for the seven standard routes that are currently in service. Since 2015, Routes A, B and J have experienced the most significant ridership loss. Routes G and I have remained relatively steady. Ridership on Routes D, H and G increased between 2017 and 2018.

Figure 14. Metro Ride Annual Standard Route Ridership



Source: Metro Ride

Express Fixed Route Daily Schedule

Metro Ride's eight express routes are centered around serving the K-12 school population, but are open to the general public. Five of the express routes (X1, X2, X3, X5 and X6) make only one trip in each direction per day — once in the morning and once in the afternoon. Routes X4 and X9 have multiple trips per day, but the X4 is not in service between 8:30 AM and 11:30 AM and the X9 is not in service between 8:30 AM and 2:30 PM. The X7 makes two trips in the morning that depart from the Transit Center and one in the afternoon that departs from Horace Mann Middle School.

Express Fixed Route Descriptions

Route X1 begins its morning service at Fairmont and Ruder Streets at 7:00 AM in the southern portion of Wausau. The route then traverses the area surrounding John Marshall Elementary School before heading north towards downtown serving multiple stops along the way. The final stops on the X1 morning trip are Horace Mann Middle School and Wausau East High School, with the trip ending at 7:30 AM. In the afternoon, the X1 travels in a pattern generally the reverse of the morning service. The X1 begins at Horace Mann Middle School at 3:03 PM, then serves Wausau East High School at 3:10 PM before going south along Seventh Street. The X1 reaches the Transit Center (not on the morning run) at 3:20 PM. The route then serves stops around John Marshall Elementary School and ends at 3:30 PM at the stop at Kent Street and Grand Avenue.

Route X2 begins service at 7:05 AM at Townline Road at Torney Avenue. The bus proceeds north to serve stops along Tenth Street before arriving at Horace Mann Middle School at 7:25 AM and Wausau East High School at 7:30 AM. In the afternoon, the route partially reverses, beginning at Horace Mann Middle School at 3:03 PM, then Wausau East High School at 3:10 PM, similar to the X1 route. After traveling south serving stops on Tenth Street, the X2 route deviates from its morning service pattern to serve stops around John Marshall Elementary School in the same manner as Route X1. Route X2 then ends service at 3:35 PM at the stop at Kent Street and Grand Avenue.

Route X3 serves the northern portion of Wausau and begins service at 7:05 AM at the stop at Highwood Road and Troy Street. The route makes several stops in the area around Riverview Elementary School before heading south to Horace Mann Middle School and Wausau East High School at 7:20 AM and 7:25 AM, respectively. In the afternoon, the route begins at Horace Mann Middle School at 3:10 PM, then Wausau East High School at 3:15 PM. From there, the route reverses its morning pattern and ends service at the stop at Highwood Road and Troy Street.

Route X4 is one of only three of Metro Ride's express routes that provides more than two trips per day. Route X4 begins service at 6:30 AM at the Transit Center (first of 4 departures), traveling north along Sixth Street before turning onto Wausau Avenue, serving stops along the way. At 6:45 AM the route arrives at Wausau East High School. The route then reverses and uses Fifth Street to return to the Transit Center at 7:00 AM. This pattern repeats until the 8:30 AM arrival at the Transit Center, after which the route is out of service until 11:30 AM. At 11:30 AM, the route restarts at the Transit Center and repeats the previously described pattern 12 times until finally arriving at the Transit Center at 6:00 PM for its last stop.

Route X5 serves the southwest portion of Wausau, beginning at 6:50 AM at Thomas Street at McCleary Street. The route continues through the area around 3M Park and Our Saviors' School before arriving at the next timepoint at 6:56 AM at Bopf Street and 17th Street. The route then continues to the west and north, arriving at Faith Christian Academy at 7:10 AM. Route X5 then serves Newman Catholic High School and Wausau West High School at 7:20 AM and 7:23 AM, respectively, ending service at John Muir Middle School at 7:30 AM. In the afternoon, the route reverses and begins service at John Muir Middle School at 3:00 PM and ends at the stop at Thomas Street at McCleary Street at 3:38 PM.

Route X6 serves the northwestern portion of Wausau beginning at First Street and Union Avenue

at 7:03 AM. The route then moves north to serve the area around Thomas Jefferson Elementary School before arriving at Wausau West High School at 7:17 AM and last at John Muir Middle School at 7:26 AM. In the afternoon, the pattern from the morning run is reversed, beginning at John Muir Middle School at 3:00 PM. The route then serves Wausau West High School at 3:08 PM before continuing north and west before ending service at First Street and Union Avenue at 3:15 PM.

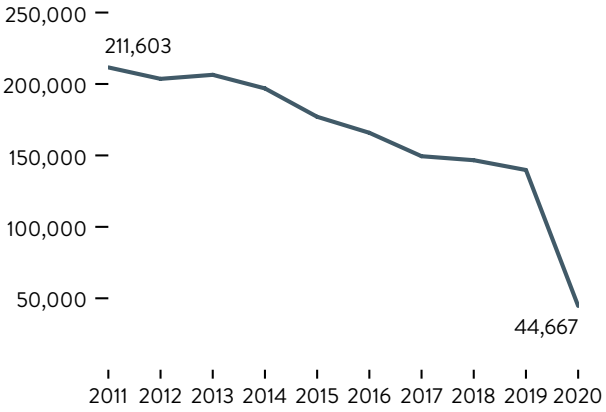
Route X7 is unique among Metro Ride's express routes in that it makes two morning trips outbound beginning at the Transit Center, but only one afternoon trip departing from Horace Mann Middle School. For the morning trips, Route X7 begins at the Transit Center at 7:00 AM. Similar to the X4, it heads north on Sixth Street, but unlike the X4 it continues north to Brown Street, serving stops along the way before arriving at Horace Mann Middle School at 7:15 AM and Wausau East High School at 7:20 AM where the run ends. A separate run of the X7 begins service at the Transit Center at 7:25 AM and follows the pattern described above, ending service at Wausau East High School at 7:40 AM. In the afternoon, Route X7 begins its only run at Horace Mann Middle School at 3:03 PM, reversing the pattern from the morning service and ending at the Transit Center at 3:16 PM.

Route X9 is the third Metro Ride express route that provides more than two trips per day. This route begins service at the Transit Center at 6:30 AM then moves north along Seventh Street before turning south on Tenth Street for the majority of stops. It then arrives at Monroe St at 12th Street at 7:15 AM, the first of four morning arrivals. From there, the X9 reverses the pattern and arrives at the Transit Center at 7:30 AM. This pattern continues with service at the Transit Center on the hour and half hour until the last run of the morning ending at the Transit Center at 8:30 AM. In the afternoon, service on the X9 begins by departing the Transit Center at 2:30 PM, the first of eight departures. The pattern described above then continues until the final arrival at Monroe Street at 6:15 PM and the Transit Center at 6:30 PM.

Express Fixed Route Ridership Trends

Metro Ride does not collect ridership data on individual express routes. Instead, all routes are grouped together for analysis. Figure 15 below shows total annual ridership on all express routes from 2011 to 2020.

Figure 15. Metro Ride Annual Express Route Ridership



Though the express routes are generally designed to serve the school-aged population in Wausau, they are open to the public and used by other passengers with non-school trip purposes. This is evidenced by the fares collected on express routes which accepts fare types other than student passes and cash.

Grocery Shopping Fixed Routes

Schedule and Route Descriptions

In addition to the standard and express routes, Metro Ride also provides free weekly Grocery Shopping Routes. The routes serve several senior living complexes on Wednesday mornings. The routes each make stops at two or more residential campuses before arriving at the grocery store. Grocery shopping routes are open to any complex resident and the general public that board at the stops listed. Table 8 below shows the schedule of these shopping routes.

Table 8. Grocery Shopping Fixed Route Schedule

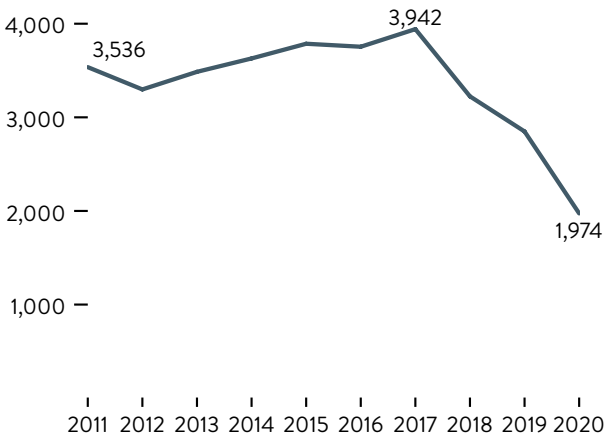
Location	Pickup Time	Arrive at Grocery Store	Depart Grocery Store	Arrive at Pickup Location
City Walk	8:50 AM	9:10 AM	9:35 AM	9:45 AM
Riverview Towers	8:55 AM	9:10 AM	9:35 AM	9:50 AM
Riverview Terrace	9:00 AM	9:10 AM	9:35 AM	9:55 AM
Kannenberg Plaza	9:15 AM	9:35 AM	10:35 AM	10:45 AM
Island Place	9:25 AM	9:35 AM	10:35 AM	11:00 AM
Sturgeon Bluff	10:00 AM	10:35 AM	11:10 AM	11:30 AM
Landmark Apartments	10:15 AM	10:35 AM	11:10 AM	11:20 AM

Due to the limited stops and direct route patterns, these shopping routes are some of the most efficient services provided by Metro Ride. In 2019, the shopping routes had an overall passenger per mile of 2.03 and passengers per hour of 16.28. In 2020, these performed at 1.51 and 11.84 passengers per mile and hour respectively. This is higher than the average performance of Metro Ride's standard fixed routes for both years.

Historic Trends

Ridership on individual routes in this category are not collected by Metro Ride. As shown in Figure 16 below, ridership on the grocery shopping routes remained consistent between 3,000 and 4,000 riders for many years. However, ridership has declined since 2017. Note that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted ridership starting in early 2020.

Figure 16. Grocery Shopping Fixed Route Ridership



Metro Ride ADA Paratransit Service

Overview

Metro Ride provides complimentary ADA paratransit services to riders within ¾ mile of their fixed route services and during the same time period per day (6:30 AM–6:30 PM). However, the earliest passengers can be picked up is 6:45 AM and must begin their final trip at or before 6:00 PM to allow for travel to be completed within the service day.

Paratransit riders must be certified by Metro Ride to access this service. Once an application is submitted, the rider is notified of their eligibility determination within 21 days.

Fares

The fare for a one-way trip using Metro Ride's paratransit service is $2.50 and must be paid in cash with exact change. Passes, tokens and tickets are not available for purchase.

Ridership

In fiscal year 2019, Metro Ride's ADA paratransit service averaged 16 one-way rides per day (based on 255 days/year). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to telework, rides have declined to the point where 16 one-way rides is a high ridership day. With trip volumes that low, not many rides are

shared. Metro Ride usually only operates one or two of their Glaval cutaway vehicles in a given day, assigning trips to extraboard bus operators or part-time express route bus operators. ADA paratransit ridership is not currently sufficiently robust or consistent to require a dedicated driver assignment.

Unlike many transit systems, human service agency and Medicaid-eligible non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) trips are a minimal part of Metro Ride's ADA paratransit service. Medicaid-eligible trips are handled through a statewide transportation broker, Veyo. Metro Ride is not part of Veyo's provider network. North Central Health Care provides rides to older adults and people with disabilities using Wisconsin 8521 Specialized Transportation Assistance Program for Counties funding. The 8521 Program funding is allocated to counties based on their proportion of the total statewide population of older adults and individuals with disabilities. Each county provides a local cash match equal to 20 percent of its state aid allocation. The funding must be used primarily for transportation of older adults and individuals with disabilities.

Figure 17 and Figure 18 illustrate that the ADA trip destinations and origins in 2021 follow a similar pattern to those of 2019, even though ridership levels have declined. The larger dots on each map illustrate destinations that are served with the highest frequency.

Figure 17. ADA Paratransit Destinations, October 2019

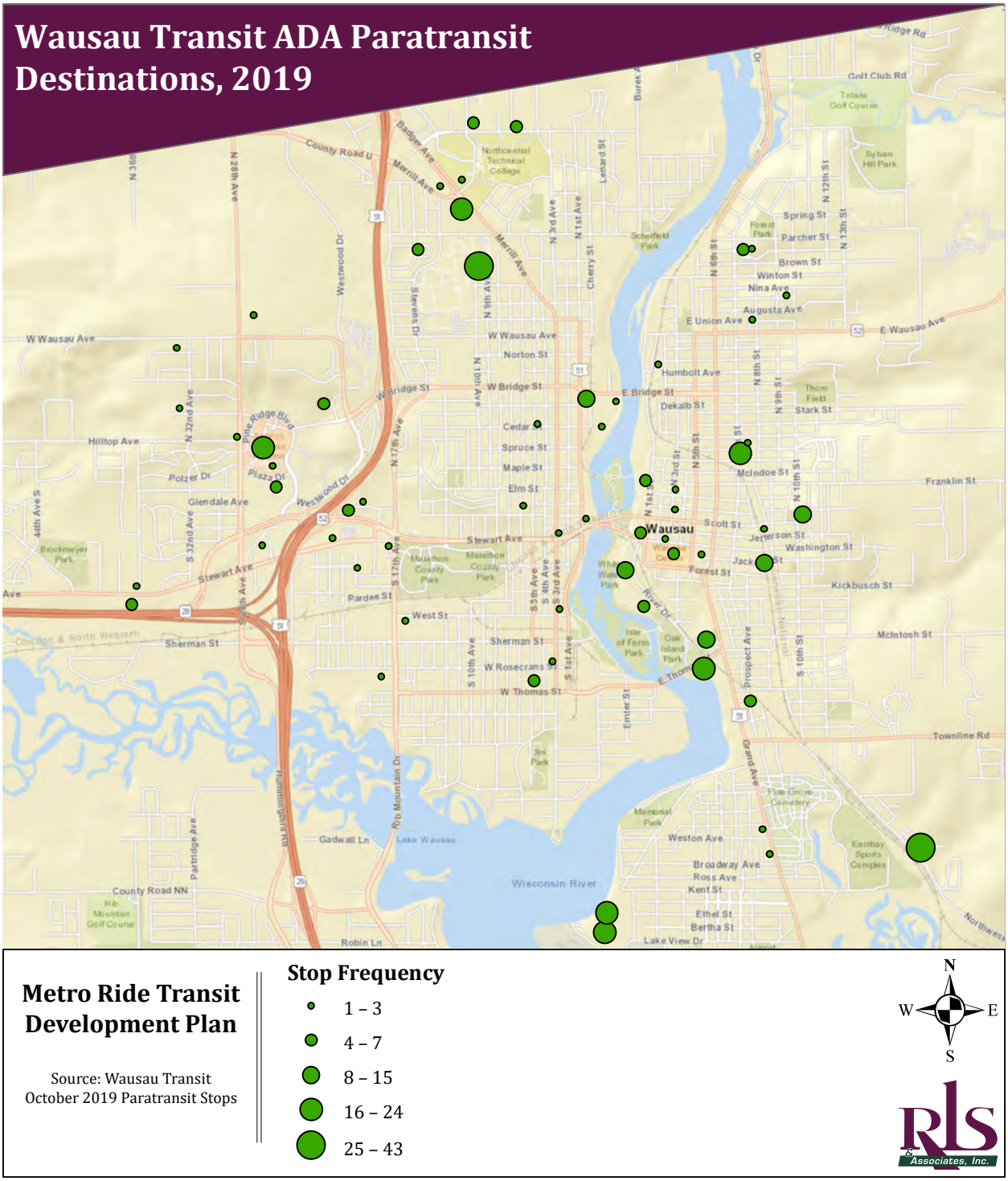
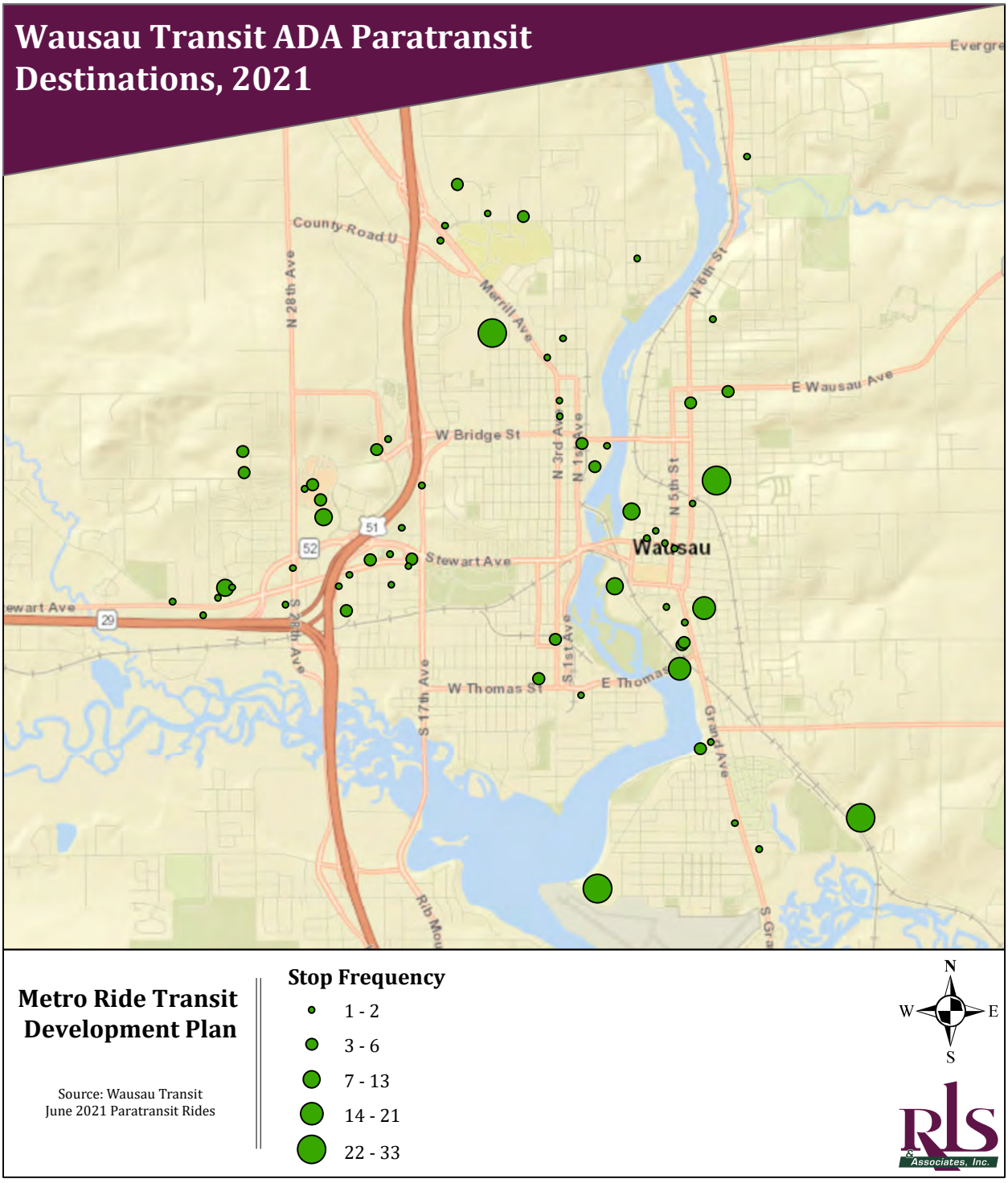


Figure 18. ADA Paratransit Destinations, June 2021



ADA Paratransit Scheduling

Trip requests are scheduled by hand and keyed into the Trapeze Simpli software which produce a driver manifest or schedule. For recurring rides with the same origin and destination on a set schedule, passengers may request a subscription trip. Metro Ride offers the subscription trips for periods of two to 12 months. To deter no-shows on these trips, agency policy dictates that a rider who cancels a subscription trip three times in a single month has their subscription removed. Non-subscription trips must be called in at least one working day before the ride is needed.

Summary

Metro Ride is a fixed route transit system operating entirely within the city boundaries of Wausau. Most of Wausau is within walking distance of a Metro Ride Stop – the main exception being the Wausau West Industrial Park. Seven routes are operated only 6:30AM – 6:30PM weekdays, meeting downtown every 30 minutes. Eight express routes with restricted schedules to meet middle and high school bell schedules are operated during the school year. These are also used by the public. Metro Ride also offers group shopping trips on Wednesdays, targeting senior housing complexes.

Metro Ride formerly served the surrounding jurisdictions of Rothschild, Schofield, and Weston. However, they discontinued subsidizing services which were consequently withdrawn. The adjacent jurisdiction of Rib Mountain which contains several affordable big box stores has never been served by Metro Ride.

As measured by boardings for each vehicle hour of service, Metro Ride pre-pandemic productivity justifies the type of service offered. The pandemic drop in ridership has proven temporary in many cities.

Most riders buy discounted monthly passes including reduced fares for older adults and people with disabilities or use discounted student fare tickets. Metro Ride also offers an ADA Paratransit service for those who can't use Metro Ride due to a disability. The ADA paratransit demand is low, as most medical and human service rides are covered by other transportation providers.

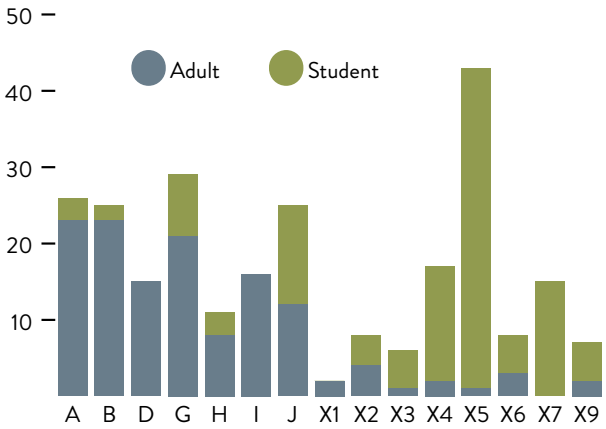
Ridership has declined substantially in the past decade due to two factors: service cuts in response to funding reductions and more recently, the pandemic.

Chapter 3. Passenger Survey

Overview

During the span of four days in October, 2021, RLS & Associates, Inc. conducted an onboard rider survey of Metro Rider fixed route riders. The purpose of this survey was to collect feedback from current Metro Ride riders to determine areas for improvement and future changes. The riders were also questioned regarding demographics, frequency of bus usage, trip purpose, and travel needs outside of Wausau. Two similar surveys were provided: one for adults and one for students using tripper routes. The surveys were also available in large print and Hmong. Over the four days of the survey period (October 18th – 21st), a total of 253 surveys were collected: 133 from adults and 120 from students. Figure 19 shows the breakdown of responses collected by route and survey type.

Figure 19. Survey Responses



The following points summarize key survey results. Detailed rider survey information is provided in Appendix A.

Fare Utilization

Nearly half of the adult (non-student) survey respondents (126 people) are eligible for and use a reduced fare. Reduced fares are offered for passengers age 65 and older and persons with disabilities. Nearly half of the adult respondents (132 people) paid for their ride using monthly passes, with cash being the second most common fare media at 26 percent. About 10 percent of riders used tokens or tickets.

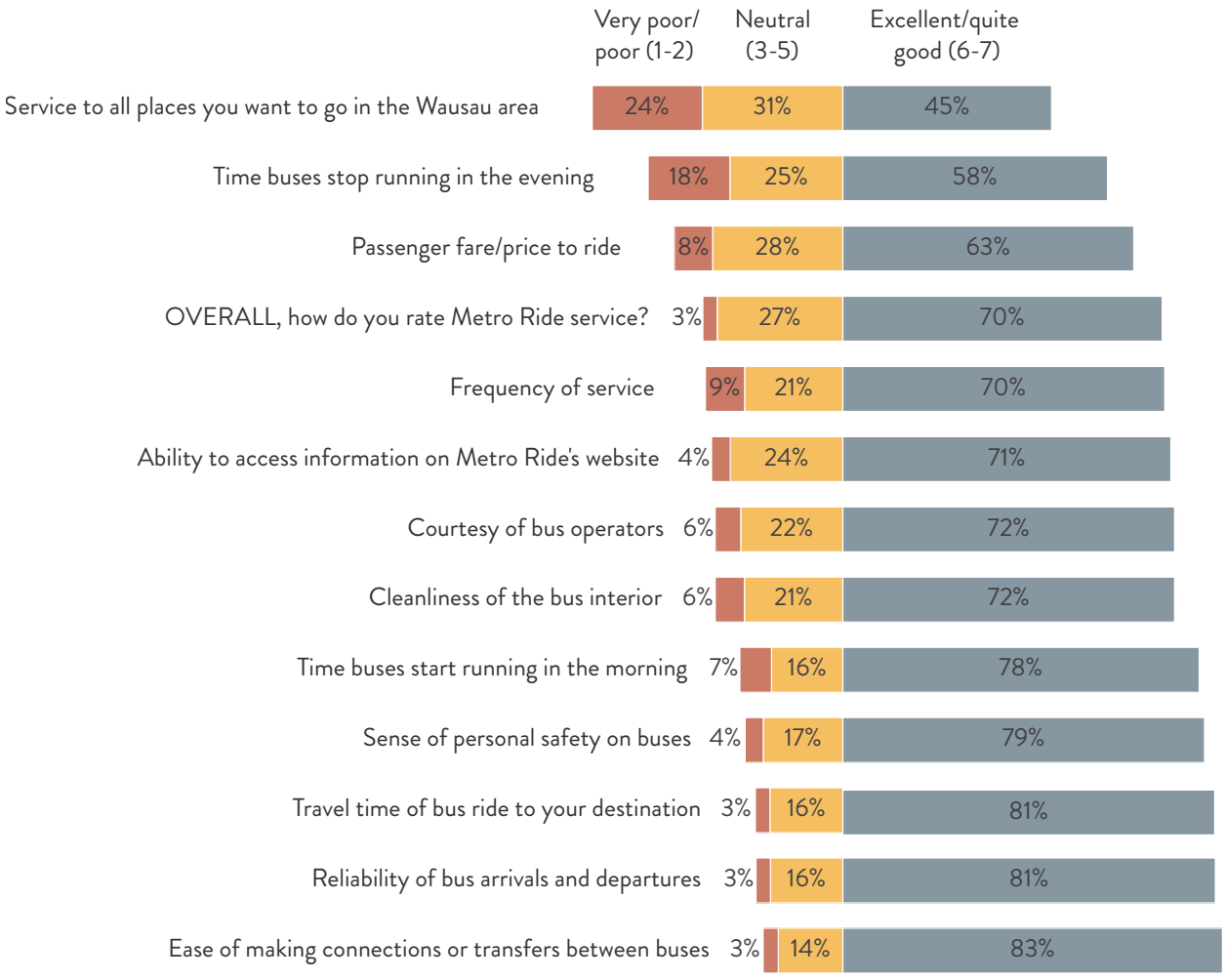
Rider Satisfaction

Riders were asked to rate their satisfaction of Metro Ride through 13 different questions by ranking them 1-7 (1=Very Poor and 7=Excellent). Figure 20 shows a breakdown responses. Scores of six or seven depict positive satisfaction, a score of three, four, or five depicting neutral satisfaction, and a score of one or two depicting dissatisfaction.

Out of the 13 satisfaction questions asked, respondents positively rated Metro Ride in 12 of them. The one question that had a majority of neutral or negative responses was "Service to all places you want to go in the Wausau area". This shows that riders would like to use Metro Ride to reach areas currently unserved.

Overall, 70 percent of riders rated Metro Ride's service positively, while only two percent rated it negatively.

Figure 20. Metro Ride Satisfaction

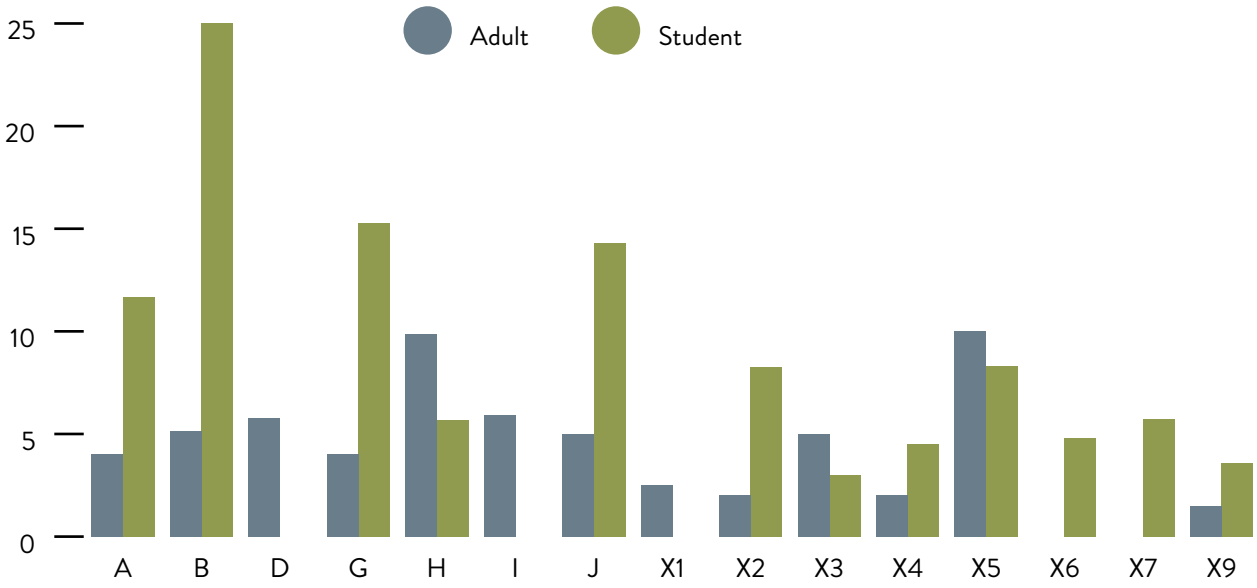


Metro Ride Usage

Riders were also asked a variety of questions about their usage of Metro Ride, including how many days per week do they use Metro Ride, how much time is required to get from home to a bus stop, and how many bus transfers they used on their current trip. Students averaged five days per week on almost all eight express routes, while adults averaged over three days per week on most regular routes

Figure 21 shows the average amount of time that respondents take to get from their home to a bus stop. Students and adults averaged between five and ten minutes, with few exceptions. Only one student indicated that it takes 25 minutes to walk to a bus stop. That length of time is an outlier compared to the majority of survey results.

Figure 21. Average Minutes to get to Bus Stop from Home



Respondents were also asked where they were going on the trip in which they were surveyed. Figure 22 shows that adult respondents were nearly evenly split between going home, to work or shopping. Students were going to school/college was the most common answer, followed by going home.

Figure 22. Trip Destination

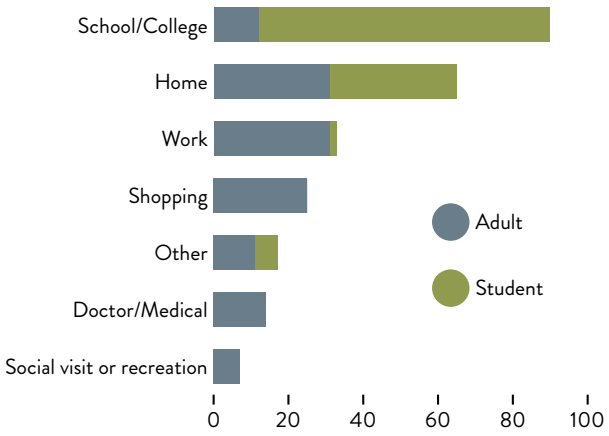


Table 9 and Table 10 show the percentage of respondents by route who had to transfer between buses to reach their destination during the surveyed trip. Of all adults, 68 percent transferred. However, only 36 percent of students had to transfer during their surveyed trip. Results show that the adult riders using the Express routes 3, 4 and 5 are riding and then transferring to another route. Some adults on Express Route 6 and 9 are able to complete their one-way trip without a transfer. Route H had the least number of passengers who transfer to complete their one-way trip.

Table 9. Adult Bus Transfers

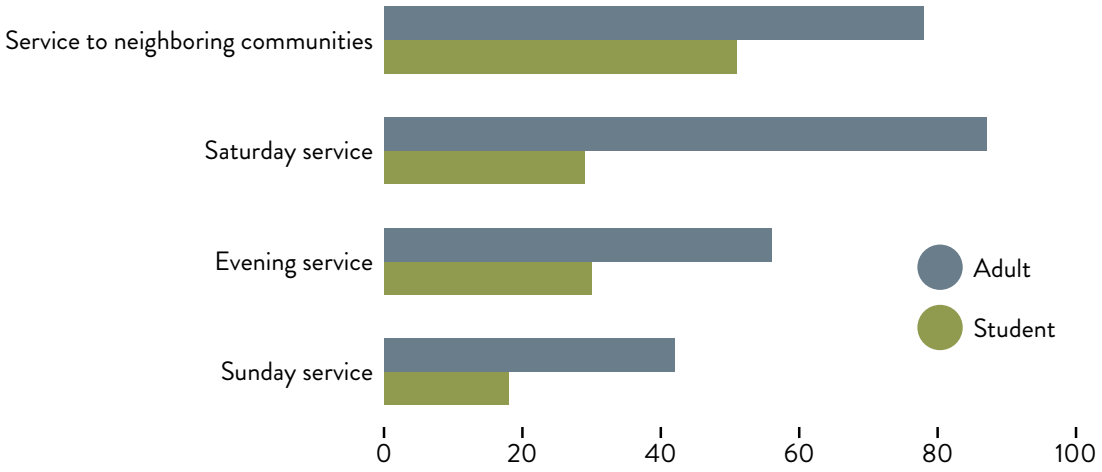
Adult	Yes	No
A	74%	26%
B	70%	30%
D	80%	20%
G	57%	43%
H	50%	50%
I	81%	19%
J	83%	17%
X1	0%	100%
X2	0%	100%
X3	100%	0%
X4	100%	0%
X5	100%	0%
X6	33%	67%
X7	0%	0%
X9	50%	50%

Table 10. Student Bus Transfers

Student	Yes	No
A	100%	0%
B	100%	0%
D	0%	0%
G	100%	0%
H	100%	0%
I	0%	0%
J	85%	15%
X1	0%	0%
X2	0%	100%
X3	0%	100%
X4	27%	73%
X5	7%	93%
X6	0%	100%
X7	27%	73%
X9	100%	0%

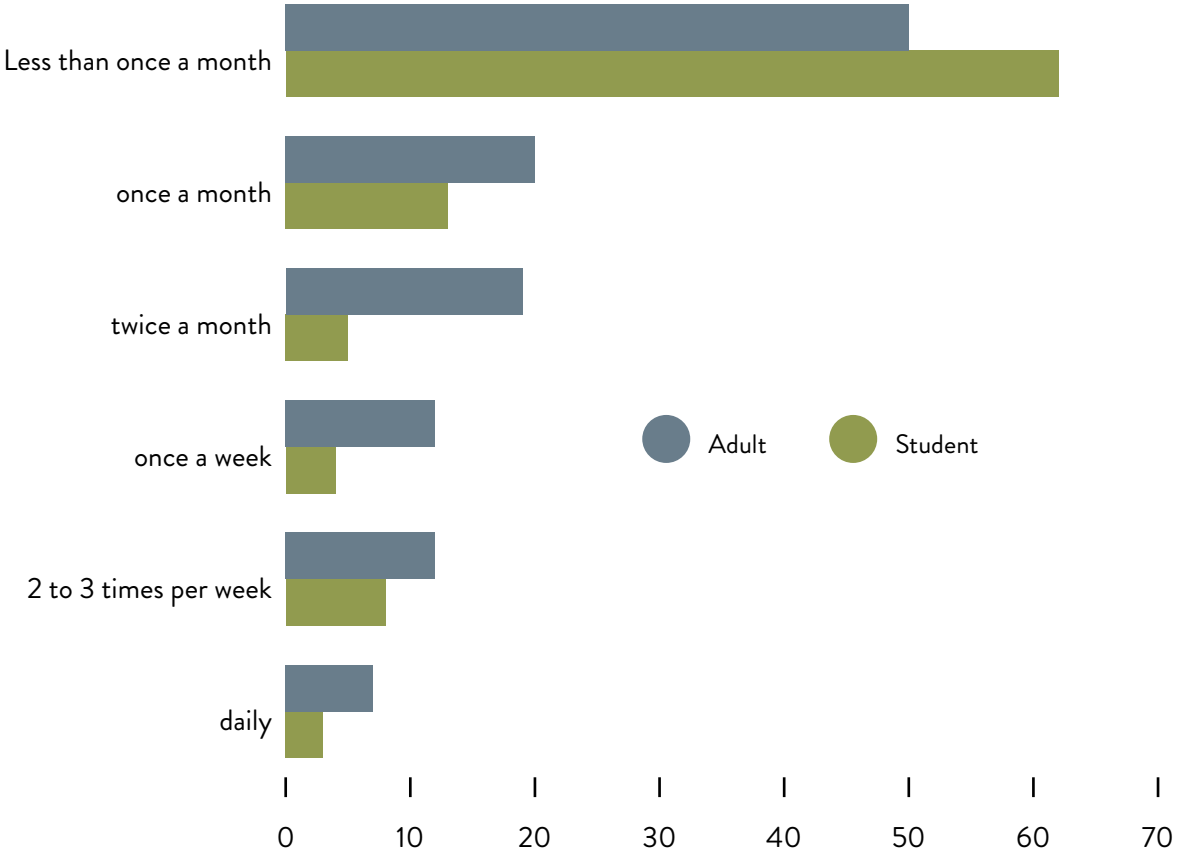
Passenger Needs And Goals For Service Improvements

Figure 23. Services Metro Ride Should Offer



More than one-half of the respondents need to travel outside of Wausau less than once a month and do not have a ride available.

Figure 24. Need to Travel Outside Wausau and Not Having a Ride



Rider Demographics

Riders were asked for a variety of basic demographic information. These included age, race, available household vehicles, and if they had a driver's license. Approximately 68 percent of adult riders do not have a valid driver's license and do not have a vehicle at home.

Riders with no available vehicle are mostly likely dependent upon Metro Ride as their primary or only mode of transportation. Without Metro Ride, their access to work, grocery stores, medical appointments, social activities, and other activities would be significantly limited.

Respondents were also asked more in-depth demographic questions. Did they have a cell phone and how do they use it, employment status, and language spoken at home. Figure 25 shows that a vast majority of the respondents had cell phones. However, at most, only about half of those with cell phones have internet access or use them to text.

Figure 25. Cell Phones

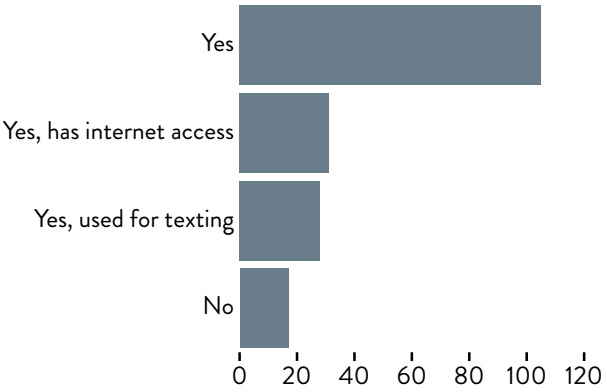
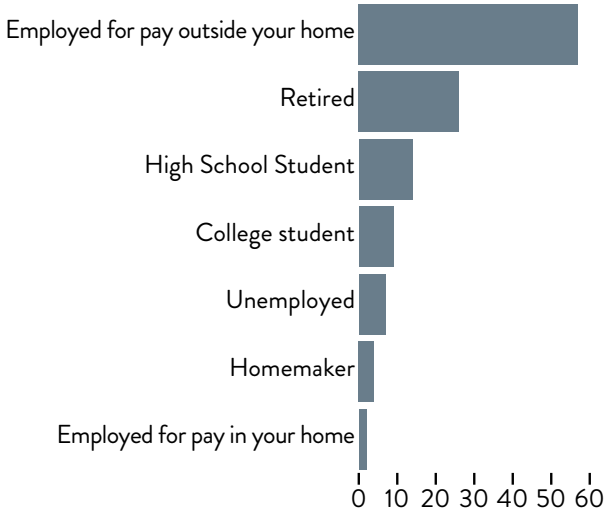


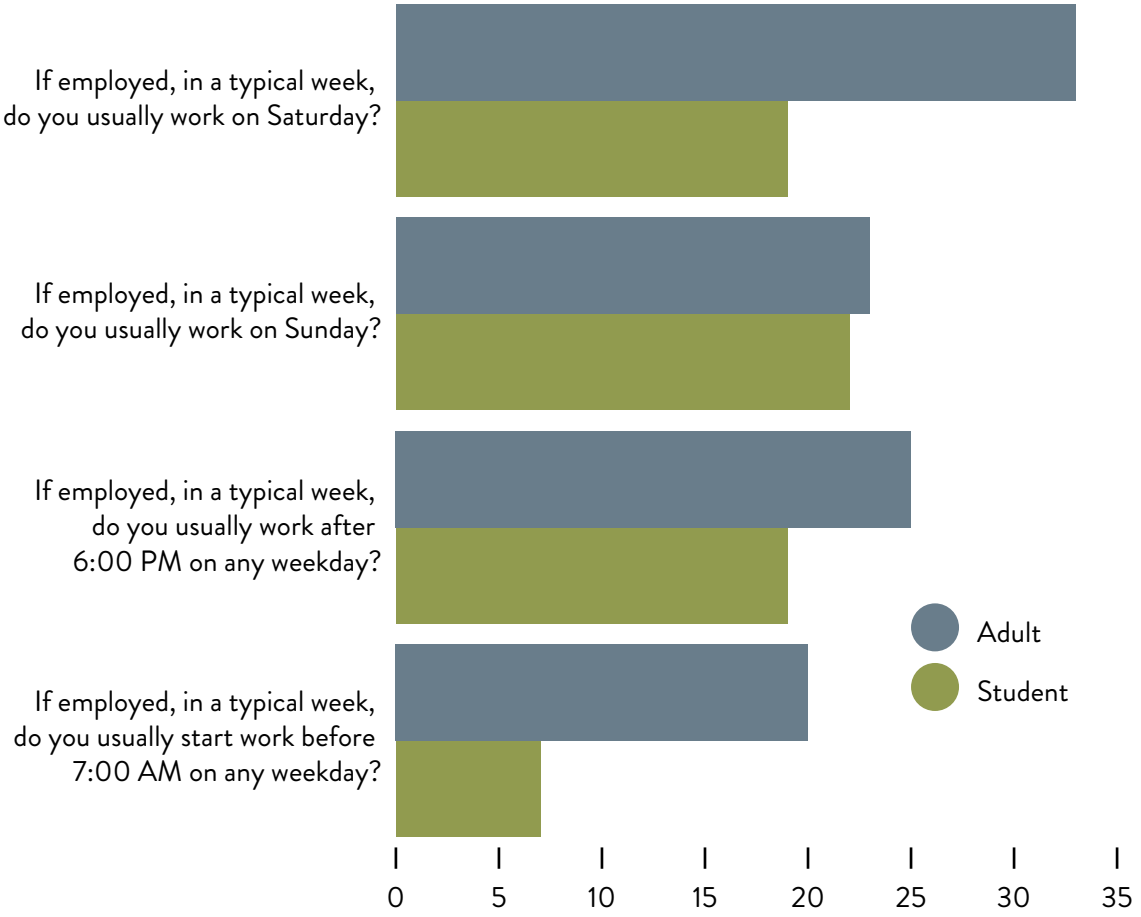
Figure 26 shows that over half of respondents are employed outside their home and a few work from home or are homemakers. About 25 percent are retired, 20 percent are high school or college students, and only six percent stated that they were unemployed. These responses support the statistics that riders are using Metro Ride to access jobs in the local area.

Figure 26. Employment Status



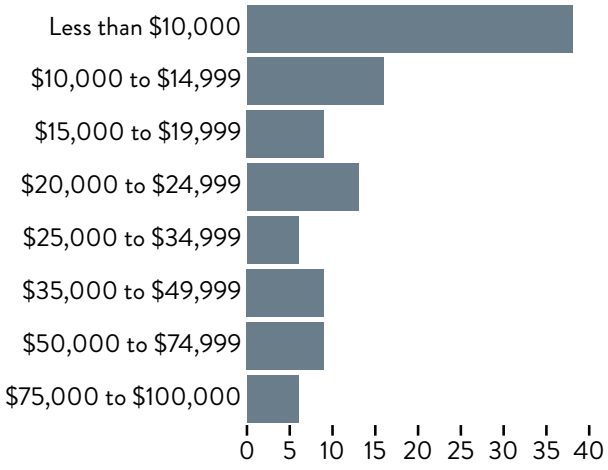
Those who were employed were asked what days and times they typically work outside normal business hours. The two most common answers, shown in Figure 27, were respondents working on Saturdays and Sundays. Metro Ride does not operate on weekends; therefore, passengers must find alternate transportation on weekends.

Figure 27. Times Working Outside Normal Business Hours



RLS compared responses indicating both the number of people per household and the annual household income to estimate the number of households who may be living in poverty. After reviewing all of the survey responses, 121 responses provided enough information to be considered. Of those 121 responses, 47 to 60 of them are living in households that are considered under the United States Department of Health and Human Services Federal Poverty Level for 2021.

Figure 28. Household Income



Summary

Riders and the public responded to surveys with a generally positive view of Metro Ride services with one major exception. They are dissatisfied with the destinations served, as they cannot reach stores and employment outside the city of Wausau. Some are also dissatisfied with the span of service hours and days offered. Many work shifts that start before 6:30 AM or end after 6:30 PM. Residents cannot use Metro Ride to reach work, community events or other activities at night or on weekends.

Most surveyed on the buses use Metro Ride regularly and have done so over four years. Most riders transfer between routes to reach their destinations. Most riders are white, not middle-aged (students or over 55), employed if not in school, and lower income. A large majority have smartphones, but often don't have internet access without WiFi. A large majority do not have a car available at home – only a third have drivers licenses. Half of respondents live in households at or under the federal poverty guidelines.

Chapter 4. Public Survey

A public survey was conducted in March 2022 as part of a multifaceted public outreach effort to gain input for the five-year Metro Ride plan. The survey results were combined with feedback received during public meetings, Metro Ride passenger surveys, stakeholder interviews, and focus groups.

During the 17 days that the survey was open, 945 responses were collected. The sample size is significant at a less than four percent margin of error for the total Wausau Metropolitan Statistical Area population. Also, the results are consistent with feedback received in the 2017 TDP public survey which did accrue statistically significant results at the individual community level.

As noted in Chapter 6, the prior TDP, completed in 2017, included a more robust public survey effort as their primary public outreach activity. Results of the 2017 survey indicate consistent trends in local opinions about public transit in the urbanized area.

The 2022 public survey was widely advertised throughout Wausau, Rib Mountain, Weston, Rothschild, Schofield, and other areas in Marathon County. It was conducted from March 7-23, 2022 using the online survey platform Survey Monkey. Paper surveys were available at Wausau Public Library and distributed by mail upon request. The survey was offered in English, Spanish, and Hmong languages.

The purpose of the public survey was to collect information from the general public about their use public transit services in Wausau and their desires and priorities for potential changes to those services. Based on public input collected during this and other public and stakeholder outreach activities in this planning process and the 2017 Wausau Metro Area TDP survey results, expanding the service area and hours of operation are the top priorities. Some questions were designed to collect additional information about the level of support for those priorities. Survey results from 2022 indicate continued support for Metro Ride and for expanding the service area beyond the City of Wausau and adding weekday evening hours and Saturday service.

The following results provide additional details about specific topics related and in addition to the top priorities.

The detailed public survey responses are included in Appendix B.

Summary and Conclusions

Current riders and those who do not currently use Metro Ride understand that public transit is needed as an alternative to driving for themselves or their friends and family members.

Approximately 35 percent of survey respondents estimate they spend more than the national average of $800 per month on transportation. Inflation related to rising fuel prices emphasizes the cost savings that transit could offer to households with low- to moderate incomes. The current spike in prices has increased household transportation spending since the survey was conducted, creating a greater burden on the household budget. Expanded public transit is a possible solution.

The following takeaways illustrate the top priorities for service improvements:

- 76 percent of respondents support expanding service to Rib Mountain.
- 69 percent supported service expansion to Weston, Schofield and Rothschild.
- 59 percent of respondents voted for adding Saturday service.
- 48 percent of responses would like service after 6:30 PM.
- Nearly 40 percent of respondents also want Metro Ride to serve more areas of Wausau.

With the demolition of the Wausau Center Mall in May/June of 2021, Wausau residents were left with minimal in-person shopping areas within the city limits. Rib Mountain, Schofield and Weston host the

area's major shopping and discount retailers. Riders currently cannot access these locations on Metro Ride, which only operates inside Wausau. If funding from other communities were available, Metro Ride would be willing to expand its service area.

Metro Ride also would like to improve services in its existing service area. To that end, survey respondents want longer weekday operating hours, Saturday service, service to more areas of the city, and the ability to use apps to plan their rides and know when the bus is coming. Support for shared ride demand response service was marginal.

Metro Ride is funded through a combination of Federal, State and local funds, and passenger fares. More than 80 percent of survey respondents support local government annual budget allocations for public transit. Residents of Wausau were the strongest supporters of additional local government transit funding. However, more than 80 percent of Weston respondents and 57 percent of the respondents from Rib Mountain also supported their local communities funding public transit

Additional financial support from public transit must come from new revenue or a reallocation of existing funds to public transit. Overall, more than half of the survey respondents would support a tax increase of as much as $50 per year to support public transit. Twenty-two percent of respondents would support a tax increase of $51 to $100 per year to support public transit in their community.

The results of the public survey will be combined with the other planning activities of the TDP. They will be used to inform the development of recommendations for the five-year plan.

Chapter 5. Public Input Meetings and Interviews

This chapter outline the public and stakeholder input received through interviews, public meetings, focus groups, and the public survey. Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service partnered with RLS in the public input process by facilitating and summarizing focus group input. The focus group summary is included in this chapter. The full focus group report is included in the Appendix.

Stakeholders identified by the MPO were interviewed early in the study process to establish a base level of input and discussion of needs. Interviews took place in person and over the phone. The following organizations were included in the one-on-one interview process:

- Aging and Disability Resource Center
- Aspirus Health
- Hmong American Center
- Local government representatives from
    - Rib Mountain
    - Rothschild
    - Schofield
    - Wausau
    - Weston
- Marathon County Health Department
- Marshfield Clinic
- Metro Ride
- Northern Valley Industries
- United Way of Marathon County
- Veterans Services Office
- Wausau MPO

Stakeholder Interview Summaries

Interview summaries are included in the Appendix. Key points from the interviews are outlined below.

Access to Healthcare Facilities

- Transportation for patients is a top need at all Aspirus facilities and transportation to access healthy food and supplies is also very important.
- Aspirus feels that the Metro Ride hours of service do not support dialysis patient or hospital employee shift times. Dialysis has three shifts, Monday through Saturday: 5:30 AM to 10:00 AM; 10:30 AM to 2:45 PM; and, 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM. Many dialysis patients live in Rothschild and Weston and some use Marathon County Transport.
- Hospital employee shift times are 24/7 but most happen on the following schedule: 6:45 AM to 3:30 PM; 3:00 PM to 11:30 PM; and, 11:00 PM to 7:00 AM. Approximately 431 paid employees ride on Metro Ride. The biggest challenge is for employees who need to get home at night after Metro Ride service ends.
- In addition to expanding hours, Aspirus considers the lack of transportation access in Rothschild and Weston clinic to be major gaps in access to transportation.
- Marshfield Clinic in Weston is a major employer (and destination) in the area. Shifts start at 7:00 AM, 3:00 PM, and 11:00 PM. They had a high employee vacancy rate (200) at the time of our interview. Night shifts are the most difficult to fill. Many employees find transportation on weekdays. Marshfield Clinic's patients also need transportation on occasion.

Service to/in Weston

- The Hmong American Center representative suggested that Metro Ride needs to add Weston to its service area. Employers including Greenheck Industries as well as other employers and affordable housing areas in Weston are key destinations for the region that could support public transit service. Destinations in Weston include the Marshfield Clinic, Weston Town

Hall, Target, Ace Hardware, and Pick n Save.

Travel Training/Understanding How to Ride/Affordable Service Options

- Some Hmong elders may need transit travel training to be confident transit users, but once trained, transit could serve as a significant advantage to those individuals.
- Metro Ride should update its website and use apps for trip planning on-line.
- Safety is a concern in the winter months when trucks plow snow into the stops and make them inaccessible. The snow piles force passengers to wait in the street for the bus.
- The option of on-demand transit service was discussed. The interviewee indicated that Uber and Lyft are not viable options for people with limited incomes. The supply of Uber and Lyft drivers in Wausau is limited. Local rides generally cost at least $15. Northwoods Taxi makes some shared rides available to jobs at assisted living sites, but even those rides are more expensive than public transit.

Service to/in Rib Mountain

- Rib Mountain is a popular community and demand for housing for older adults (55 and older) is growing.
- Many people seek Rib Mountain for a seasonal home.
- Major destinations in the area, other than housing, include medical specialists, retail stores, the Department of Motor Vehicles, and many restaurants.
- The Rib Mountain representative indicated that shared ride or public transit services in Rib Mountain would need to have schedules and hours of operation that are convenient.

Service in/to Rothschild and Schofield

- The representative from Rothschild was doubtful that there is a significant need for bus service within Rothschild. Prior bus service through the area was underutilized by Rothschild residents.
- Potential demand may exist from the senior housing complexes in Rothschild. Residents in those complexes rode the bus when it came through town and complained when the service was discontinued.
- Many veterans using the new Veterans Clinic that will occupy the old Shopko in Rothschild will come from outside Marathon County and spend the night.
- The representative from Schofield indicated that major destinations that are unserved by Metro Ride but need service include the Veterans Clinic (coming soon) and Weston.

Affordable Housing and Access to Employment and Groceries

- Wausau and the surrounding communities have a lack of affordable housing and a homeless population. The housing areas in Schofield range from trailer parks to apartment buildings with rent of $900 per month. People living in low-income housing areas need transportation and many do not have their own vehicles.
- Parts of Wausau are not served by the existing Metro Ride routes. Those areas include employment destinations west of downtown. The City of Wausau would like to see Metro Ride consider service changes that will help people get to work and shopping. Hand-in-hand with those changes would be the need to have longer hours of service on weekdays and transportation options on weekends. Weeknight transportation may be needed as late as 9:00 or 10:00 PM.
- Metro Ride should serve destinations in Rib Mountain, especially for the entry-level employment options. Metro Ride does not go where and when they need to travel.

- Metro Ride serves the wrong grocery stores. It needs to serve Walmart, Target and Aldi (all outside Wausau), not just the higher-priced stores that are currently served.
- Service is needed to the West Wausau Industrial Park.
- The area's largest food bank, Neighbors Place, is six blocks from the nearest bus stop. They give groceries in boxes. Six blocks is a long way to carry a box of groceries.
- Stewart Street corridor has the lowest income housing available. Wausau East apartment complex will be rehabilitated and will no longer offer Section 8 housing in 2024. However, Landmark is being rehabilitated and will be 100 percent subsidized/affordable housing. All of these locations need access to bus service that connects them to employment opportunities and shopping.

Public Workshop

The following bullet points provide a summary of comments and discussion topics addressed during the public workshops on October 20, 2021. Meetings were held at the Marathon County Complex at 10:00 AM and 4:00 PM. Attendees had the option to participate in person or virtually. The meetings were hosted by the Metropolitan Planning Organization and facilitated by its consultants, RLS & Associates, Inc. As illustrated by the following list of topics, the public meeting attendees participated openly and discussed a multitude of transit topics related to travel in the Wausau Urbanized Area.

Comments expressed during the public meeting are outlined below:

- Metro Ride is a valuable service. Without Metro Ride, many people would not be able to participate in the community. Everybody should be concerned about public transit in their community.
- Meeting participants encouraged the planning team to talk with local community leaders and business contacts. They also recommended that the Chamber of Commerce engage in outreach to businesses.
- The group indicated that a significant barrier to progress has been the State Legislature. Until the State legislation is changed to support public transit funding for the region, implementation of service expansions will be difficult.
- Roads and highways get more money than transit. The funding sources on both the state and federal level are a problem.
- Low-income housing is not located near where people need to work.
- Affordable housing in surrounding villages is not conducive for people to get to work right now because there is no public transit service in those communities.
- Having routes that end at 6:30 PM does not cover shift start and end times.
- Priorities for service improvements within the City of Wausau are:
    - Develop an app for riders to use
    - Spread out the bus stops
    - Eliminate service redundancy
    - Add new stops
    - Expand hours of service
    - Add weekend service
    - Go to outlying communities
    - Ensure transit is accessible to all riders including people using wheelchairs
    - Adequate bus shelters
    - Service to the Wausau Industrial Park
    - Service to Rib Mountain
    - Connection to major employment centers
- Snow removal is an issue that must be addressed for rider safety.
- Public transit service is important for the Wausau School District. Without public transit, the schools would likely pay significantly more for student transportation.

Focus Groups

The Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service (WIPPS) Research Partners[1] conducted three focus groups to gather feedback and information to help inform the larger transportation development plan. The focus group insights assist in strategic planning for transit services in Wausau, with considerations for expansion into the surrounding communities of Rib Mountain, Rothschild, Schofield, and Weston.

Three focus groups were conducted with a total of 13 representatives of local businesses and school districts; social, health, and human service organizations and community nonprofits; and community residents and transit users.

Typically, focus group discussions are in small groups. This level of participation is in line with expectations.[2] The discussions were held in-person on December 15 and 16, 2021. Each discussion lasted about 1.5 hours. To ensure that participants could speak freely, no MPO or Metro Ride staff were present during the discussions. WIPPS and RLS staff facilitated and observed the focus groups. In the small group discussions, WIPPS and RLS gathered feedback on a range of topics such as:

- What are participants' impressions of the current Metro Ride transit service?
- What do participants value among the current services?
- What are the most important current needs for transit in the community?
- What are barriers to change?

A copy of the complete discussion guide is included in the appendix. Participant feedback gathered from the discussion groups can help formulate a more-informed set of recommendations for the MPO and Metro Ride as part of the larger planning process that is underway.

Highlights from the focus groups are summarized below.

1 Focus groups participants recognized the value of the current transit service to create access, foster independence, and provide an affordable, clean, and safe mobility alternative for many community members. However, focus group participants also perceived that Wausau is lagging behind other communities in Wisconsin. Appleton and the Fox Valley, Eau Claire, Madison, Marshfield are more successful in recognizing the value of transit in making a community an attractive place to live and work, especially for younger demographics. In other communities, public transit is a part of the fabric of the community and is broadly used as an alternative to cars by professionals, youth, college students, seniors and others to access jobs, entertainment, and shopping. Many of the individuals in the focus groups grew up in or have frequently traveled to other communities in Wisconsin and have first-hand appreciation of how transit contributes to community life.

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1 WIPPS Research Partners is a unit of the Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service (WIPPS) located at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point at Wausau campus. Part of the mission of WIPPS Research Partners is to respond to community needs by providing information and to help citizens and communities make decisions about issues that matter to them. Objectivity and non-partisanship are core values of WIPPS Research Partners; we have no policy "agenda" in conducting this work. WIPPS does not make recommendations or take positions on public policy issues.

2 RLS and the MPO may wish to obtain additional feedback from organizations such as the Aging and Disability Resource Center, Aspirus and other medical providers such as the Bridge Clinic or the Marshfield Clinic Health System, Greenheck Fan, Crystal Finishing, The Chamber of Commerce, and The Greater Wausau Prosperity Partnership to further contribute to a comprehensive assessment of community feedback.

2 Focus group participants identified three primary limitations of the current transit service, including:

- Lack of service to Rib Mountain, Rothschild, Schofield, and/or Weston, which is needed for community members to access jobs and shopping.
- Current hours of 6:30 AM to 6:30 PM can limit the ability of people to access first shift work; to volunteer in the community in the evenings; complete errands after work; or attend evening events in the city like Concerts on the Square, performances at the Grand Theatre, or socialize with friends.
- Lack of Saturday service.

3 Focus group participants noted other limitations. Long distances to walk to the closest available bus stop was cited in some cases. One participant noted the closest bus stop to their house is 2 miles. More technology is needed on buses, especially a display or audio announcement of the upcoming stop or next major intersection.

4 Specific ideas for improvement to Metro Ride that were offered by the focus group participants include:

- Expand service into Rib Mountain, Schofield, Rothschild, and/or Weston, especially to include more grocery stores and shops like Aldi, Target, Walmart, and the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). If services are expanded into Rib Mountain, the DMV was viewed as an essential stop. Greenheck and Crystal Finishing were cited in all three focus groups, as employers are facing a demand for workers and could potentially benefit from bus access to fill open positions.
- Expand routes or hours to better support access to jobs, including first shift at work (for example, the 72nd Avenue Industrial Park) and to more grocery stores.
- If Metro Ride cannot expand outside the city, then expanding hours within the city would be desirable. For example, offering Saturday service or running later in the evenings, especially in the summer, so people could attend concerts or Woodchucks games and still be able to get home.
- Consider whether smaller vehicles could offer a cost savings that could be used to enhance services.
- Technology investments such as scan-able passes, WiFi, and digital or audio displays of upcoming stops.

5 Participants noted that a perceived lack of bus riders is often used as a reason to discount the value of the bus service or to not justify making changes. However, participants noted the need to consider that the lack of riders may be due to the bus not going where people need or want to go. When adding routes or improvements, enough time should be allowed for people to "catch on" with adequate promotion to build awareness of the new services. In other words, "build it and they will come" was the way one participant described it. They also noted the need to promote new service enhancements in order to create awareness and build demand.

6 Participants noted a significant need to rebrand the value of transit in the community to fight misperceptions that "only those people" ride the bus. The culture of some of the surrounding communities is: "we don't want those people coming here." Misperceptions and stigma surrounding the image of "who rides the bus" need to change.

7 Participants noted existing perceptions that Metro Ride is largely used by students or a social service only for the economically disadvantaged and/or differently-abled members of the community. The participants felt strongly that transit needs to be framed as an economic development and workforce development issue. The business community would be central to the successful implementation of any actionable plans. Whether the business community would be willing to help fund expanded services to help meet workforce needs could be explored. This could include providing employers opportunities to buy branding on buses as a source of revenue to fund expansion of services.

8 Transit planning overlaps with other City of Wausau public policy issues, including future resettlement of Afghani refugees, as well as land use planning.

9 Participants were wary whether changes or improvements in transit would result from this planning process. Some felt that there is a history of inaction after investing in or participating in similar planning processes in the past. There is a sense of "leadership inertia" and being stuck in the status quo. Some felt that a transit champion or someone to "stick their neck out" for transit would be needed to implement a new vision for transit in the Wausau area. Participants did recognize the funding constraints may be a reason behind why change may be difficult. Roadblocks at the county supervisor level and lack of buy-in from leadership in surrounding communities were also cited as barriers to change.

10 Several participants had lingering memories of divisive discussions leading to the decision by Weston to discontinue Metro Ride bus service. The hope is that this can be avoided in the future. Participants had recollections of how polarizing it was when Weston voted on the transit service. They hope that communities could come together on the issue of transit. All noted that funding and turf battles surrounding funding are always a barrier.

Summary

Public meetings and workshops, focus groups, and interviews with key stakeholders were successful in assessing attitudes toward and suggestions for Metro Ride. Leaders from Wausau and surrounding communities, healthcare and other employers, and community-based organizations provided their perspectives and ideas. Many of the suggestions from the riders were also expressed: the need to serve destinations outside Wausau city limits, desire for expanded service hours, and need to deploy new technologies to facilitate riding the buses. Some expressed frustration about transit funding limitations and divisive attitudes towards transit and transit users. While the desired direction for services was made clear, a pathway to fund service expansion was not.

Chapter 6. Prior Relevant Studies

Prior studies are an important foundation for building an understanding the history of Metro Ride. The following paragraphs provide a brief overview of recently completed studies pertaining to Metro Ride transit service.

2017 Transit Development Plan

The 2017 Transit Development Plan was prepared by the Wausau Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The report built upon previous TDPs completed in 1999, 2006, and 2012. The purpose of the 2017 TDP was to evaluate the current transit system amid a challenging period for the service provider. Between 2012 and 2017, the service area for Metro Ride was reduced, reinstated, and reduced again. In the face of a challenging fiscal situation at all levels (local, state, and federal), the future of transit in the Wausau area was unknown. The plan looked at current and future Metro Ride service with the intent to restart the conversation about transit.

The 2017 TDP planning process involved establishing a new mission, vision statement and goals for Metro Ride.

Mission Statement: Efficiently, safely, and sustainable provide mobility services to enhance quality of life.

Vision Statement: Enrich lives and independence through mobility.

Goals:

- Enhance the customer experience
- Improve mobility for all users
- Improve economic vitality
- Focus on implementation

Public Engagement

The 2017 TDP included an extensive public engagement process. In addition to meetings with communities, the MPO mailed surveys to 8,463 randomly selected metropolitan area residents to determine their attitudes about transit, the need for transit in their community, and their need for paratransit service. A total of 2,375 surveys were returned. Each community surpassed their mark for a statistically significant response, except for Scofield which missed by 23 responses. Due to the high response rate of 29 percent, these responses should still be considered significant.

Overall, 62 percent of respondents indicated their community should have transit and 54 percent said their community should budget for transit in the next few years.

In addition to public surveys, member businesses of the Wausau Area Chamber of Commerce and Hmong Area Chamber of Commerce were invited to participate in a survey. There were 224 responses. The respondents were overwhelmingly from within the City of Wausau. Respondents strongly supported transit.

Finally, a rider survey was administered by volunteers from the NAOMI coalition. In total, 485 rider surveys were returned. The results indicated that riders are largely dependent on transit to reach work and school. Riders indicated that Metro Ride should focus on weekend service and expanding the service area into other communities. Support for weekend service was strongest for work-related trips. Expansion into neighboring communities was largely tied to shopping needs. Metro Ride riders are looking for more options to support the local economy.

Challenges

Metro Ride was facing challenges related to funding and an aging vehicle fleet. In addition, trends in the national transportation landscape were shifting with the increasing popularity of rideshare companies such as Lyft and Uber. By making ride hailing and paying for a car ride as easy as a few clicks on a smartphone these services have had a measurable impact on city transportation networks nationwide. At the time of the 2017 study, use of these companies in the Wausau Metro Area was minimal.

Land use changes were also having major impacts on transit demand. Business parks in Wausau and Weston were located at an almost prohibitive distance for bus routes to serve within the existing route structure.

Recommendations

The TDP included a range of recommended changes:

- Establish a sustainable budget for long term capital costs with the intent to increase efficiency and reduce repair costs.
- Increase the budget for marketing Metro Ride to promote the benefits of transit service to the community and to recruit new drivers.
- Engage the business community and bring stakeholders, advocates, and elected officials together to present a unified front for RTA legislation and improvements to the current system.
- Expand service into other Metro Area communities.
- If current service levels are significantly diminished, a planning process is recommended to determine the best use of remaining resources.
- Identify additional funding opportunities.
- See development of a Regional Transit Authority.

2012 Metro Ride Transit Development Plan

The purpose of the 2012 TDP was to evaluate transit service from the context of a changing environment. The TDP conducted in 2006 outlined service expansions beyond the City of Wausau limits to Schofield, Rothschild and Weston. Between 2006 and 2012, however, the fiscal situation in Marathon County deteriorated. The 2012 plan focused on evaluating Metro Ride and the current needs of the population with an understanding of the realities local governments were facing at the time.

At the time of the TDP, Metro Ride operated bus and paratransit service throughout Wausau and parts of the Rothschild, Weston, and Schofield. During the course of the study, funding was removed for service beyond the City of Wausau limits and service to Rothschild, Weston and Schofield ceased at the end of 2011. In 2012, Metro Ride had reduced its service from 19 routes, including nine regular routes and 10 express routes, to seven regular routes and nine express routes within the Wausau.

Metro Ride was facing a 13 percent reduction in operating budget in 2012 from 2011. In 2012, Metro Ride would need to operate with a budget of $479,234 less than in 2011. Funding from Weston, Schofield, Rothschild, and Marathon County was also removed for 2012. Local fundraising activities were attempted. Additionally, the fares were raised for all fare media in 2012, and Metro Ride began directly providing paratransit service as opposed to contracting service to a third-party provider.

Due to loss of municipal funding, transit service was discontinued in Weston, Rothschild, and Schofield. The service area was reduced to the City Limits of Wausau.

Summary

The conclusions of both prior transit development plans supported:

- obtaining new funding to sustain transit,
- provision of transit services beyond the Wausau City limits,
- improving the marketing of Metro Ride services and
- community engagement to increase popular and business support of transit services.

Chapter 7. Recommended Service and Technology Scenarios

Overview

Examination of potential transit service alternatives must assess the impact of changes on riders and residents. Metro Ride seeks changes that sustainably support better overall service for the community. For example, if service was to be withdrawn from a neighborhood and the resulting savings diverted to expand service hours, the net impact should be more people using Metro Ride. The number of individuals that benefit from the change should outweigh the number who are inconvenienced by the route change.

The approach to examining potential major service change alternatives was two-fold. First, the team sought to identify alternatives that address the priorities identified by riders and the general public through the public and rider surveys, meetings, and focus groups. The top priorities were 1) expand the service area beyond the City of Wausau limits as well as into more areas of Wausau and 2) increase hours of operation. Second, in case no additional funding is secured for expanded service, potential cost savings are identified. Cost saving strategies include consolidating certain routes and reducing frequency from 30 minutes to 40 minutes.

Additional revenue is required for all new or expanded services. Identifying service efficiencies to produce savings may be critical to funding enhancements in transit services. However, because Metro Ride has been forced to reduce its level of service over the past several years, more service reductions may be very detrimental. Securing additional revenue to support the potential service expansions is a more practical approach than further reducing service levels and thus, the majority of recommendations focus on enhancing the existing services and planning for sustainable growth.

Three scenarios are presented for evaluation:

Scenario 1: Improve and Expand Metro Ride Services within Wausau

Scenario 1 focuses on options to improve transit technology at Metro Ride to attract and retain riders and more efficiently manage the service. These include

- Replacing 35-year-old fareboxes and accepting electronic account-based fare media,
- Installing bus route and stop annunciators,
- Offering Real Time Bus Location for use by personal computers and smartphone apps, and
- Installing Automated Passenger Counters (APCs).

The scenario also considers new fare structure options.

Finally, Scenario 1 explores fare media and fare structure changes and possible service expansions within Wausau City Limits including microtransit zones for a demand-response/on-demand service; expanding operating hours to help meet the needs of employers, employees, and for other purposes; and adding Saturday service.

Scenario 2: Expand Public Transit Service into Rib Mountain, Rothschild, and Weston/Schofield

Scenario 2 focuses on expanding the service area to reach more people who need transit and include destinations most desired by riders and those who currently don't ride. The expansions are designed to reach important shopping and employment locations. Today, the new VA Clinic and the Department of Motor Vehicles office is near but outside Wausau and are not served by public transit.

Service area expansions will require additional revenue provided through agreements between Wausau and the communities served by the extensions. Contractual agreements with private

industry and human service agencies may also be used to fund the expansions.

Scenario 3: Improved Efficiencies to Support Expansion

Scenario 3 focuses on options that reduce the total number of fixed routes and reallocate the operational cost savings to support service improvements within Wausau.

Scenario 1: Improving and Expanding Existing Metro Ride Services

Scenario 1 involves three parts:

A. Technology improvements that will benefit the riders, drivers, and Metro Ride management team and expanded operating hours and deploying microtransit to more completely serve the City of Wausau.

B. Fare structure and fare media changes to improve the customer experience.

C. Service expansions within Wausau including expanded hours for fixed route service, Saturday service, and microtransit zones during evening hours.

Each part of Scenario 1 is described in the following paragraphs.

Potential Implementation Timeline: One to three years pending additional revenue and procurement of transit technology.

A. Transit Technology Enhancements

Improving the rider experience is a top priority for Metro Ride's technology enhancement plan. Riders will benefit from having information to plan trips, to know when to wait at a bus stop, to prepay the fare, to know which bus to board and where to alight. Metro Ride also intends to use technology improvements to reduce the administrative time required to collect, summarize and report data as required by Federal and State funding sources as well as the City of Wausau. The technology hardware and software that Metro Ride should are listed in order of recommended importance.

1. Real time bus location technology: Transit riders in small towns and large cities expect to know when the bus or train will arrive at their stop. Metro Ride can create and offer this information by procurement of GPS technology equipment for each bus. Location data would be frequently transmitted to a cloud-based service for display to riders on a website and smartphone app.
2. On-Board Annunciators: On-board electronic annunciators provide real-time information about the next stops and upcoming transfer points (if applicable) to those riding in buses. This technology also adds to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance and relieves drivers from the obligation of announcing stops. Annunciators also reduce a passenger's anxiety about where the bus is and how long they have until their next stop.
3. Advanced Fare Collection Technology: New fare collection technologies enable prepayment of fares, including by employers and human service agencies, offer the ability to incrementally pay for monthly or weekly passes, and record transfer patterns between routes and by time-period. This technology would also be used to develop and assess the costs, potential revenues and rider benefits of possible service changes. This technology could be included in new fareboxes are installed separately with data integration from the new fareboxes.
4. Automated Passenger Counters (APCs): Metro Ride management should be able to automatically count passengers by time-period, route, and each bus stop. This information can be obtained by installation of automated passenger counter (APC) equipment on each bus which would automatically correlate each GPS/APC data transmission with the nearby geo-coded bus stop location. APCs equipment can also

document use of wheelchair lifts and bike racks.

5. Bus Stop Database: The Metro Ride bus stop database should include GPS locations by route and direction for every stop. The bus stop database should show each amenity, status of ADA compliance, ease of access to the stop, and nearby street intersection information.
6. Scheduling and Dispatch: Metro Ride should obtain scheduling software, equipment and data communications to improve service planning, allocation of work assignments, and manage operations. Fixed route scheduling software can pay for itself through reduced overtime and by offering work assignments that more drivers appreciate (driver retention). Microtransit service is impossible to efficiently provide without automated demand response ride assignment and service monitoring. With the proper software and communications capabilities, ADA paratransit and microtransit can be managed together to boost productivity.

Implementation of technology improvements must be coordinated for efficiency and phased in to allow time for marketing, orientation, and training of staff and riders. Metro Ride should procure one or more vendors through a formal procurement process. Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) funding is available to Metro Ride for technology procurements.

B. Fare Structure and Fare Media

With the implementation of new fare collection technology, Metro Ride has the opportunity to update its fare media and fare structure.

Fare revenue is an important part of Metro Ride's revenue, making up 10 to 11 percent of the annual budget. Peer assessment revealed that Metro Ride's current fare structure is similar to transit systems of similar size and characteristics. Free fares have been considered during this planning process. However, because of Metro Ride's already limited revenue sources, free fares are not recommended at this time. Metro Ride fare structure alternatives offer options for individuals with limited personal budgets while maintaining an important revenue stream.

Weekly Pass

The Metro Ride fare structure offers a deep discount monthly pass (Adult Pass $42.00/ Student, Senior/ Disabled Pass $21.00), and other discounts through the purchase of tokens or tickets, but no discounted weekly pass. However, some riders cannot allocate $42 for a monthly payment. The weekly pass would offer unlimited trips on a weekly basis.

The weekly pass could be set at an equal price to the Adult Fare Tokens ($11) and expire within one week of its purchase date or initial use. This week could include five or six service days if Saturday service is implemented. Such a strategy is likely to increase ridership among the current adult cash and adult token riders. The weekly pass would enable them to ride at any time during the week without paying an additional fare. The weekly pass would be offered at a discounted rate for adults age 65 and older or individuals with disabilities who have a Medicare card or reduced fare card issued by Metro Ride. $11 is easier for lower-income riders to spend at one time than the $42 required for a monthly pass.

The other discounted option of Metro Ride student tickets (10 for $9.50) and adult fare tokens (10 for $11.00) would still be available at the current distribution points. The weekly pass would be available for purchase at all locations where monthly passes are available.

Eventually, Metro Ride should consider replacing the adult tokens with the weekly pass when phasing in the user-facing app, especially if the app offers the option for passengers to purchase fares online. Eliminating adult tokens would reduce the administrative time required to sell and count tokens when reconciling fares.

Weekly Pass Fare Capping

Fare capping is an option for Metro Ride if mobile fares are implemented through an app or if rechargeable fare cards are issued. This option is a mid- to long-term option to be considered after mobile-pay functions are implemented.

Fare capping offers transit agencies an opportunity for a more equitable fare structure. Frequent riders would gain access to weekly passes regardless of whether or not they can afford to pay for the $11.00 pass as a lump sum. Fare capping, in this situation, refers to allowing passengers to pay-as-you-go until they reach the total cost of the weekly pass ($11) within a given period of time. Once the sum of fares paid during the week reaches $11.00, the passenger rides the rest of the week at no additional charge. This structure benefits two groups. First, riders who purchase a weekly pass but do not travel frequently enough for it to be financially worthwhile (at least 6 one-way trips per week) now have the option to pay-as-you-go to ensure they don't pay for unused trips. Fare capping also protects riders with uncertain travel plans, ensuring that they pay the lowest cost.

Second, customers who do not purchase a weekly pass because of its upfront cost will benefit. Fare capping protects riders with the most limited monthly incomes by allowing them to spread their transportation budget throughout the week and not pay more than they would have for the weekly pass.

Fare capping also provides flexibility to employees in a hybrid work environment that includes telework from home some days. With fare capping, they can pay-as-they go and adjust their commute throughout the week worry-free.

The financial impacts of fare capping depend on the mix of riders, the extent of corporate pass programs (if implemented), and the price breakpoint between adult cash and weekly passes. While Metro Ride does not currently have corporate pass programs, future plans for such programs must be considered prior to implementing fare capping. Corporate pass programs, including those using IRS Commuter Benefits, generally subsidize monthly passes.

At $11, the break-even point for the weekly pass compared to adult cash is six one-way trips. So, if a passenger makes six trips within one week, they will have paid for their weekly pass. Based on the assumption that the majority of Metro Ride passengers do not ride five days a week, the potential loss of revenue from capping the weekly pass benefits the rider but does not pose a significant risk to Metro Ride's revenue. The risk is low even if Metro Ride expands service to include Saturdays.

A $14 weekly pass should be considered if Metro Ride improves access to shift work at the industrial park and other major employers. At $14, the break-even point is eight one-way trips.

Fare capping on a monthly basis is not recommended, as current monthly pass customers may switch, causing a net reduction in revenue.

Fare capping has generated interest among transit agencies struggling to recapture ridership either post-COVID or from previously implemented service reductions. Fare may encourage people to ride more frequently.

C. Service Expansions within Wausau

C1. Expanded Hours of Fixed Route Service

Expansion of operating hours beyond the current 6:30 AM to 6:30 PM weekdays was identified as a top priority by the general public survey and other community outreach activities. This priority is further supported by the employers, restaurants, and entertainment venues that remain open until 10:00 PM or later or start the first shift before 6:30 AM.

Adding one to two hours on either end of each route's span of service would increase annual operating expenses. Because Metro Ride operates with a hub and spoke model, most passengers travel from all routes into the transit center and then transfer to another route to complete their trip. To comprehensively address the potential demand during early morning and evening hours, operating times for all routes would need to be expanded.

Alternatively, Metro Ride may consider expanding the hours only on routes that connect major employers with the majority of their potential workforce who depend on transit. For example, expanding the hours of Routes I, A, and D would increase travel options to the Aspirus Hospital complex, stores and businesses along Stewart Ave., and serve portions of the city where the densities are highest for zero vehicle households and households

below poverty. By expanding the service hours of select routes, the increase in annual operating costs is reduced. For example, adding one hour per day to three routes would cost approximately $97,650 per year.

Staffing Implications

Expanding hours of service will provide opportunity for part-time drivers to work more hours or even full-time. The expansion may also require hiring additional drivers which may present a challenge in the current workforce climate. Management costs also will increase, as a dispatcher/scheduler and driver supervisor must be on duty during all hours of operation.

Rider Implications

Assuming average ridership of only five passengers per hour on the added one hour per day, Metro Ride's annual ridership would increase by approximately 8,575 one-way trips per year. A two-hour expansion per day would double those projections to approximately 17,150 trips. Expanding by 3.5 hours per day could increase ridership by 17,140 trips. This strategy would also address one of the top priorities for service improvements.

Cost Implications

The projected operating costs per hour for 2023 is $132.86. Expansion of seven routes by one hour each day of operation would cost approximately $227,855 per year. Expanding by 3.5 hours per day would cost approximately $797,492.

Alternatively, expanding hours for Routes I, A, and D by one hour each (to serve the major employers and stores along Stewart Ave.) would cost approximately $97,650 per year to operate.

Additional costs of approximately $100 per vehicle revenue hour for ADA paratransit service will also be incurred.

C2. Saturday Hours

Metro Ride currently operates only on weekdays. Adding Saturday service would benefit the community by providing more options for shopping, entertainment and employment trips. These improvements are especially compelling for individuals who do not drive or do not have access to a vehicle.

Expanding all of the existing fixed route service to include Saturday hours for approximately six hours per day would require an increase in annual expenses and revenues. Assuming an average of 53 Saturdays per year, annual operating costs would increase by approximately $222,600 plus the cost of ADA paratransit service if Saturday service was added with seven routes. The cost would be reduced if fewer routes operate on Saturdays.

Metro Ride would vehicles from its existing fleet to operate the service. Additional drivers would be needed to cover the expanded hours.

C3. Evening Microtransit Zones

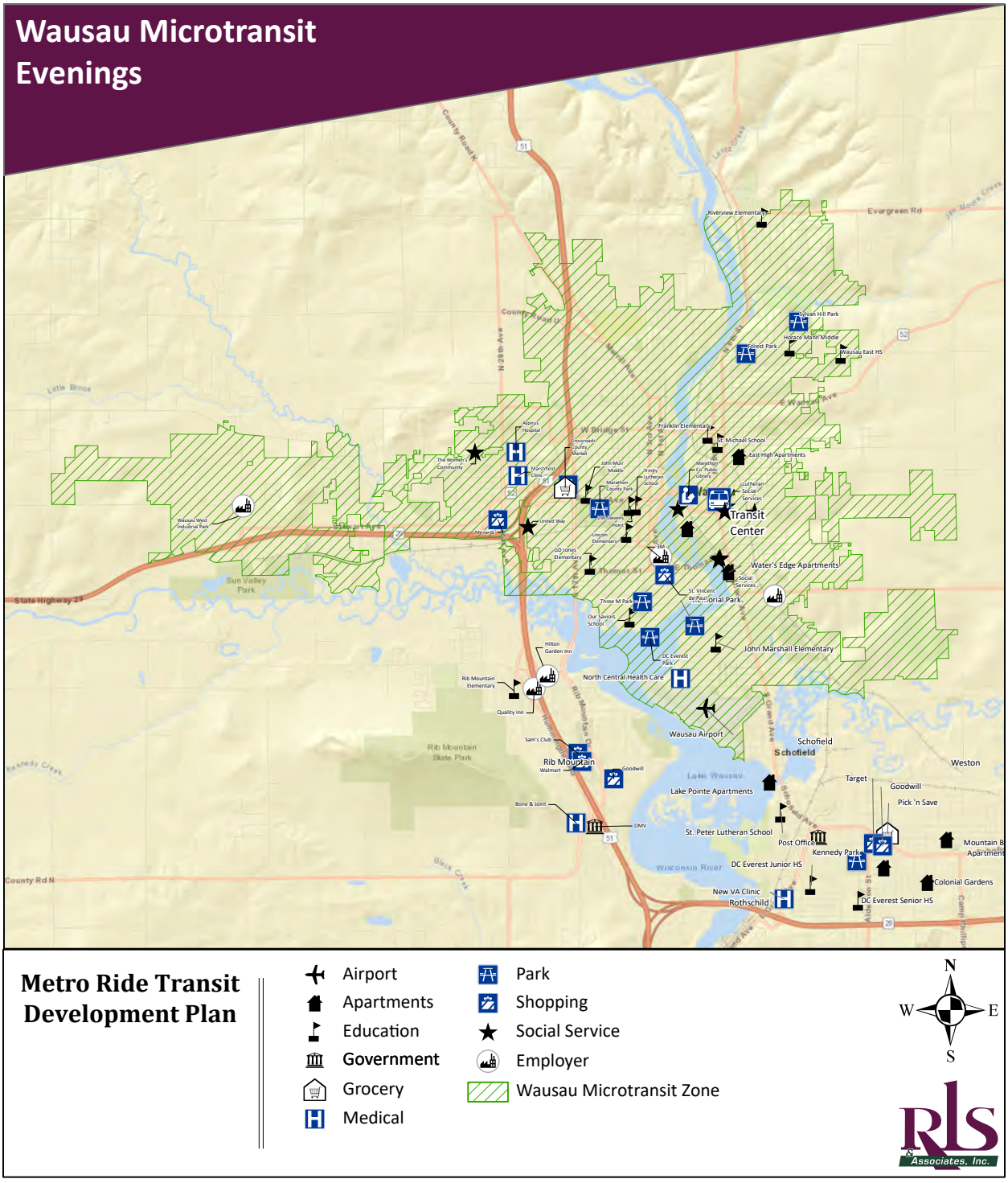
Microtransit offers a shared-ride transit service reserved in advance with short notice. The vehicle picks up the passenger at a virtual bus stop or the requested point of origin and drops them at or near the curb of the requested destination. The service area, or zone(s), can be defined as the entire city or portions of the city.

Microtransit could be used to expand mobility and accessibility options in Wausau during evening hours. The advantage of operating microtransit service instead of fixed routes (Option C1) during the extended hours is that vehicles will not operate unless a trip has been requested. Fewer and likely smaller vehicles would be used, but drivers, a supervisor and a scheduler/dispatcher would still have to be on duty.

Microtransit ride requests would be accepted by app or by phone. Rides would be provided within the microtransit service area boundary on a shared-ride basis, meaning the vehicle may be shared by multiple passengers. Wheelchair accessible vehicle will be available and service would be open to the general public.

Metro Ride's paratransit vehicles could support the microtransit service, depending on the size of the microtransit service area.

Figure 29. Evening Microtransit



Additional drivers would need to be hired. A larger scale effort (such as citywide) would require Metro Ride to hire additional drivers or contract service to a third party. If Metro Ride opts to operate the service in-house, technology may be obtained under contract to schedule trips through an app in addition to having an option to phone in a trip request.

Microtransit zones can be set up with pick up points where the passenger requesting the trip would walk to the nearest pick-up point (also known as a virtual stop). The vehicle will pick them up typically 10-30 minutes after the trip is requested. Longer wait times will discourage ridership. Pickup and drop-off locations would be within the geographic zone. Alternatively, the service can be designed to pick up passengers on a curb-to-curb basis within the zone without the need to walk to or from a meeting point.

Staffing Implications

Similar to alternative C1, expanding the daily hours of operation will require hiring personnel or contracting with a third-party operator who in turn would hire personnel. This may present a challenge in the current workforce climate. The number of additional drivers will depend on the number of vehicles in operation. Metro Ride should start with an expectation of two drivers per microtransit zone. The number of drivers and vehicles required vary by the size of the microtransit zone and demand for rides.

Rider Implications

Assuming an average of three trips per vehicle per hour and four vehicles operating an additional 3.5 hours per weekday, Metro Ride ridership would increase by 10,284 trips. ADA riders would be eligible and could be accommodated by microtransit.

Cost Implications

Assuming projected operating costs for 2023 at $132.86 per hour, 3.5 hours of service per weekday using four vehicles would cost $455,710 per year.

C4. Employer Option for Wausau West Industrial Park

The Wausau West Industrial Park is located at 72nd Avenue, within the city but outside of Metro Ride's current fixed route service area. Several employers in the Industrial Park have indicated that transportation is a barrier to employees who do not have reliable or consistent access to a vehicle. The lack of affordable and reliable transportation options also limits the ability of industrial park employers to hire. Many of them are already struggling to restore the workforce to pre-COVID levels.

Employees at the industrial park who do not drive would have to carpool, use taxis, Uber or Lyft (cost prohibitive for daily use) or rely on the Wisconsin Automotive and Truck Education Association (WATEA). WATEA is a non-profit organization that offers two options for transportation to the industrial park. Wheels to Work started in 2010 and has helped more than 300 clients with low incomes obtain or repair a vehicle so they can get or keep a job. Qualifying applicants receive affordable loans with payment plans so they can fix their current vehicle. They also can obtain a new-to-them vehicle from WATEA's donated vehicle inventory. The Wheels to Work program is a key part of Marathon County's community service system. WATEA also manages the Commute2Careers (C2C) program which provides a regional employment shuttle available to new employees who lack reliable transportation when starting a job. The program will provide up to 12 weeks of rides to and/or from the workplace for just $5 per trip. Riders who reserve two trips per day for five days get a discounted rate of $40 per week. The WATEA program is a significant asset to the eligible clients.

Metro Ride should explore developing a third-party agreement with a private and/or non-profit transportation provider to pick up Metro Ride passengers at a designated transfer point near Crossroads County Market (220 18th Avenue) and transport them to their destination within the geographic boundaries established for the service area. The boundaries will include the industrial park and could be expanded to also include Rasmussen University. Passengers would schedule their transfer to the third-party operator through Metro Ride

through a Metro Ride agreement with the third-party provider.

Staffing Implications

Contracting with a third-party provider does not require Metro Ride to directly hire additional drivers but would impose additional administrative and record-keeping responsibilities on Metro Ride's existing staff. Those costs should be included in the fully allocated cost agreement established with the provider.

Rider Implications

The option expands the transportation opportunities for Wausau residents but ridership projections would vary based on demand from employees and employers. If employers participate in an incentive program by offering subsidized employee fares, the service is more likely to be used.

Cost Implications

Projected costs for this recommendation will depend on the number of trips scheduled for the third-party operators and the operating costs for providing those trips. If this alternative is selected, Metro Ride will issue a Request for Proposals to evaluate potential costs and select a ride provider. The costs could be structured so that the passenger pays a portion of the fare with the remaining costs covered by grant funding and/or employer contributions. For example, if a taxi provider could operate a 5-mile trip for $8, grant and employer contributions could cover $6 of the trip and the passenger would be responsible for the remaining balance. In this way, Metro Ride and the employer can establish the budget for the program based on projected demand and utilization.

Public transit systems in many small cities are partnering with private or non-profit transportation operators to provide access to geographic areas unsuitable for fixed route service. In Columbia, South Carolina, for example, the public transit system has partnered with a private on-demand transportation company for trips to grocery stores that offer fresh produce. The transit system uses local tax revenue funds to supplement the cost of the trip. The average cost to the transit system is approximately $2 to $3 per trip and the passenger pays the balance which is also approximately $3.

Summary

The Scenario 1 alternatives focus on enhancements to service within the City of Wausau. Except for technology, each option requires additional funding to be derived from Federal, state, and local sources. Farebox replacement will be covered by state funds for that purpose. Funding for technology improvements will be covered 100 percent by Federal CARES Act dollars. The CARES Act dollars are a one-time grant opportunity for Metro Ride. Future technology improvements could be covered 80% by federal grants.

Service expansion recommendations range in price and ridership impact. Expanding fixed route weekday hours of service could be done incrementally with as little as one hour per day for each route. Adding 3.5 hours of microtransit service each evening is likely to be more meaningful for riders. Estimates for microtransit ridership can be refined in the final report if these options are desired for implementation.

The potential costs and revenue associated with annual implementation and maintaining the alternatives is summarized in the following table. Expenses are based on projected Metro Ride costs. Revenues are estimated based on historic trends or potential new partnerships.

Table 11. Summary of Operating Expenses and Revenues Scenario 1

OPERATING, MAINTENANCE, ADMIN. EXPENSE	2021 Budget	2022 Budget	2023 Projected	2024 Projected	2025 Projected	2026 Projected
Vehicle Operations	$2,114,519.27	$2,135,769.01	$2,199,842.08	$2,265,837.34	$2,333,812.46	$2,403,826.84
Paratransit Services	$216,994.51	$200,615.77	$206,634.24	$212,833.27	$219,218.27	$225,794.82
Vehicle Maintenance	$390,263.72	$416,597.56	$429,095.49	$446,259.31	$459,647.09	$473,436.50
Non-Vehicle Maintenance	$201,461.63	$240,231.78	$247,438.73	$254,861.90	$262,507.75	$270,382.98
General Administration	$778,999.82	$795,524.68	$819,390.42	$843,972.13	$869,291.30	$895,370.04
Contract Expense (s.85.205 ADA Funds)	($34,108.00)	($36,679.00)	($36,679.00)	($36,679.00)	($36,679.00)	($36,679.00)
CARES Act Funds	($425,000.00)					
Subtotal Existing Expenses	**$3,243,130.95**	**$3,752,059.80**	**$3,865,721.96**	**$3,987,084.95**	**$4,107,797.87**	**$4,232,132.17**
SCENARIO 1 EXPANSIONS AND IMPROVEMENTS						
Real Time Bus Location, APC, Annunciators, Bus Stop Database			$970,000.00			
New Fare Media				$5,000.00		
Fare Collection Technology (replace existing fareboxes)			$600,000.00			
Expand Service Hours one hour/day			$227,855.00	$227,855.00	$227,855.00	$227,855.00
Evening Microtransit Zone (3.5 hours/day with 4 vehicles)			$455,710.00	$455,710.00	$455,710.00	$455,710.00
Bus Shelters staff			$10,000.00	$10,000.00	$10,000.00	$10,000.00
Bus Shelters structures			$30,000.00		$10,000.00	
First/Last Mile Option (Industrial Park, College)			$312,000.00	$312,000.00	$312,000.00	$312,000.00
Saturday Service (6 hours/day) All Routes			$295,746.00	$295,746.00	$295,746.00	$295,746.00
TOTAL EXPENSES (Current plus New)	**$3,243,130.95**	**$3,752,059.80**	**$6,767,032.96**	**$5,293,395.95**	**$5,419,108.87**	**$5,533,443.17**
TOTAL REVENUE	**Budget**	**Budget**	**Estimated**	**Estimated**	**Estimated**	**Estimated**
Federal Operating Assistance + State Operating Assistance s. 85.20	$1,100,439.29	$2,063,632.89	$3,721,868.13	$2,911,367.77	$2,980,509.88	$3,043,393.74
American Recovery Act Funds (Technology)						
American Recovery Act/WisDOT funds (Farebox Replacement)						
Federal Capital Assistance (Maintenance)	$0.00	$-				
Marathon County Surcharge	$0.00	$-				
State Elderly and Disabled - S85.21	$73,008.31	$64,286.10	$73,008.31	$73,008.31	$73,008.31	$73,008.31
Public Charges for Service (Fares)	$259,206.24	$237,843.06	$261,798.30	$267,034.27	$269,704.61	$272,401.66
Advertising Revenue	$15,538.27	$50,106.93	$15,539.27	$15,540.27	$15,541.27	$15,542.27
Paratransit Services	$12,207.50	$11,520.00	$12,329.58	$12,329.58	$12,329.58	$12,329.58
Intergovernmental Charges (Wausau School District)	$12,488.20	$11,900.52	$12,488.20	$12,488.20	$12,488.20	$12,488.20
Miscellaneous Revenue	$0.00	$-				
ARPA Funds						
Employer Contributions for first/last mile			**$312,000.00**	**$312,000.00**	**$312,000.00**	**$312,000.00**
General Property Tax (City of Wausau)	$889,891.72	$1,312,770.30	$2,358,001.18	$1,689,627.55	$1,743,527.02	$1,792,279.42
TOTAL REVENUE	**$3,243,130.96**	**$3,752,059.80**	**$6,767,032.96**	**$5,293,395.95**	**$5,419,108.87**	**$5,533,443.17**
		16%	80%	41%	2%	2%
Revenue Shortfall	**$0.00**	**$0.00**	**$0.00**	**$0.00**	**$0.00**	**$0.00**

Scenario 2: Public Transit Service into Rib Mountain, Rothschild, and Weston/ Schofield

The following alternatives present options to expand the Metro Ride service area beyond Wausau city limits to Rib Mountain, Rothschild, Schofield, and Weston. An expansion would address the top priority indicated by riders and the general public. Expanding service would also require additional funding.

A. Route G: Connection to Rib Mountain

A new Rib Mountain route connecting with Route G at The Crossroads Country Market would serve the primary existing service area of Metro Ride's Route G and Rib Mountain. The route is described below and depicted in Figure 30. The Rib Mountain route would meet Route G near the Crossroads Country Market where passengers could transfer.

With the demolition of the Wausau Center Mall in May/June of 2021, Wausau residents were left with minimal in-person shopping areas within the city limits. However Rib Mountain has Old Navy, Hobby Lobby, Old Navy, TJ Maxx, Best Buy, Sam's Club, and Walmart Supercenter to name a few shopping opportunities. Rib Mountain also has many restaurants as well as the DMV Service Center for Marathon County. Although on-line shopping has increased dramatically over the past few years, many people still enjoy in-person shopping. This route alternative would expand shopping options for Metro Ride riders, including access to the area's most affordable options for groceries and retail.

The passenger survey completed between October 18–21, 2021 identified that the highest rated desire was for service to be expanded outside Wausau into neighboring communities, particularly Rib Mountain. To the questions "How often would you like to travel outside of Wausau but do not have a ride," 20 respondents said weekly, 23 indicated 2–3 times a week, while 16 said daily. In total, 49 percent of respondents desire regular service outside Wausau for their needs. Moreover, the 2018 Transportation Development Plan (TDP) indicated in a passenger survey of 485 respondents that the number two service improvement desired was "service to other communities" (39%).

Funding Partnership Requirement with Neighboring Jurisdictions Receiving Transit Service

For this alternative to be implemented, Rib Mountain must establish a funding partnership with Wausau through a Memorandum of Agreement. State of Wisconsin Statute 66.1021(12) prevents a city transit system from providing service outside its municipal boundaries without funding from the neighboring jurisdiction to be served.

The funding partnership would identify the method of cost sharing. The two communities should share costs based on the percentage of revenue miles within each jurisdiction or, potentially, based on boardings within each jurisdiction (if automated passenger counter technology is added).

An example of a cost sharing agreement based on miles is as follows. The new Rib Mountain Extension Route would operate a total of approximately 7.2 miles of which 1.7 miles are within Wausau city limits and 5.5 miles within Rib Mountain, then Wausau would pay for approximately 24 percent of the total cost of the fixed route service while Rib Mountain would pay 76 percent of the cost (minus passenger fares and Federal grant revenues).

To meet Americans with Disabilities (ADA) requirements, Rib Mountain would also be responsible for the cost of ADA complimentary paratransit service for individuals with disabilities that are unable to access the fixed route service due to a disability. Typically, paratransit operating miles are 20–25% of the total fixed route service provided. Paratransit mileage would fluctuate based on demand and an estimate of the annual mileage would be developed and agreed upon by both parties.

Figure 30. Current Metro Ride Routes J and G and Proposed Rib Mountain Extension

Advantages

This alternative meets nearly half of the current Metro Ride riders desire (identified in the October 2021 rider survey) for transit service outside of Wausau. The route alternative creates many more employment opportunities for Wausau residents. The DMV for Marathon County and many lower-cost shopping destinations are also located along this route alternative in the southern portion of Rib Mountain.

Transit service in Rib Mountain will strengthen the local businesses' ability to hire, attract and retain employees who live in Wausau. Transit in Rib Mountain will enable residents without sufficient mobility options to travel to and from Wausau for medical appointments and to Rib Mountain destinations. With rising fuel prices and inflation, more residents may seek alternatives to their personal auto to save money. Employers on a bus route have access to a broader potential employee base. Based on U.S. Census data, approximately 7,819 residents would be within ¼ mile and 5,351 within ½ mile of the proposed service.

Finally, during the stakeholder interview process, one participant identified that "If it were available, the service would benefit young residents who need access to jobs or after school activities and international students attending technical college who need transportation during evenings and on weekends." This need would be more extensively met if Metro Ride service hours were expanded during the evenings past 6:30 PM (Scenario 1).

Disadvantages

The primary challenge is the development of an acceptable funding partnership between Wausau and Rib Mountain, which includes identifying new funding to support the route extension into Rib Mountain.

Staffing Implications

The service expansion would require one to three additional drivers for fixed route and ADA paratransit service.

Rider Implications

The alternative is estimated to carry seven passengers per hour, five days per week. Approximately 20,580 one-way rides would be provided per year.

Cost Implications

Projected costs for this fixed route are based on the projected 2023 hourly operating cost of $132.86. With 2,940 hours per year, the total operating cost is estimated at $390,608. The new route would operate 12 hours per day between Crossroads Country Market and the Bone & Joint Clinic in Rib Mountain as depicted in Figure 30. Additional ADA complementary paratransit service cost of approximately 100 per hour would need to be estimated in addition to fixed routes. Paratransit services and can be estimated based on expected demand. Assuming the new route will require 4 hours per day paratransit service, the total annual cost of ADA paratransit would be $98,000.

Total fixed route and ADA paratransit costs are estimated at approximately $488,608.

Revenue Scenario

As previously noted, the costs for public transit service are covered by a combination of Federal, State, and local revenue plus passenger fares. The total cost described above represents the total operating cost for the new route (not including ADA paratransit service). That cost would be shared across Federal, State, and local sources. Passenger fare revenue also accounts for a portion of the revenue. The local share would need to be provided through an agreement between Rib Mountain and Wausau. The local share be divided based upon the number of miles operated in each community. Federal and State funding would be split as it is applied to all Metro Ride services. A scenario for the cost breakdown across revenue source is provided below for illustrative purposes. Numbers and percentages are estimates.

Table 12. New Rib Mountain Route Revenue Breakdown Scenario (Estimated costs and percentages)

Estimated Total Annual Fixed Route and Paratransit Operating Cost		=	**$488,608.00**
Federal and State Revenue Sources (60%)		=	$293,164.80
Local Funds (30%)		=	
	from Wausau (24%)	=	$35,179.78
	from Rib Mountain (76%)	=	$111,402.62
Passenger Fare Revenue (9%)		=	$43,974.72
*Other (1%)		=	$4,886.08

* If a third party is identified, a minor portion of the local share (one percent or more) may also be provided through a contract with the third party. For example, if a local business or human service agency in Rib Mountain recognizes the benefit of public transit for its consumers, that business may also contribute to the cost of service in exchange for the benefits it receives from public transit service.

B. Rib Mountain Hybrid On-Demand Microtransit and Point Deviation

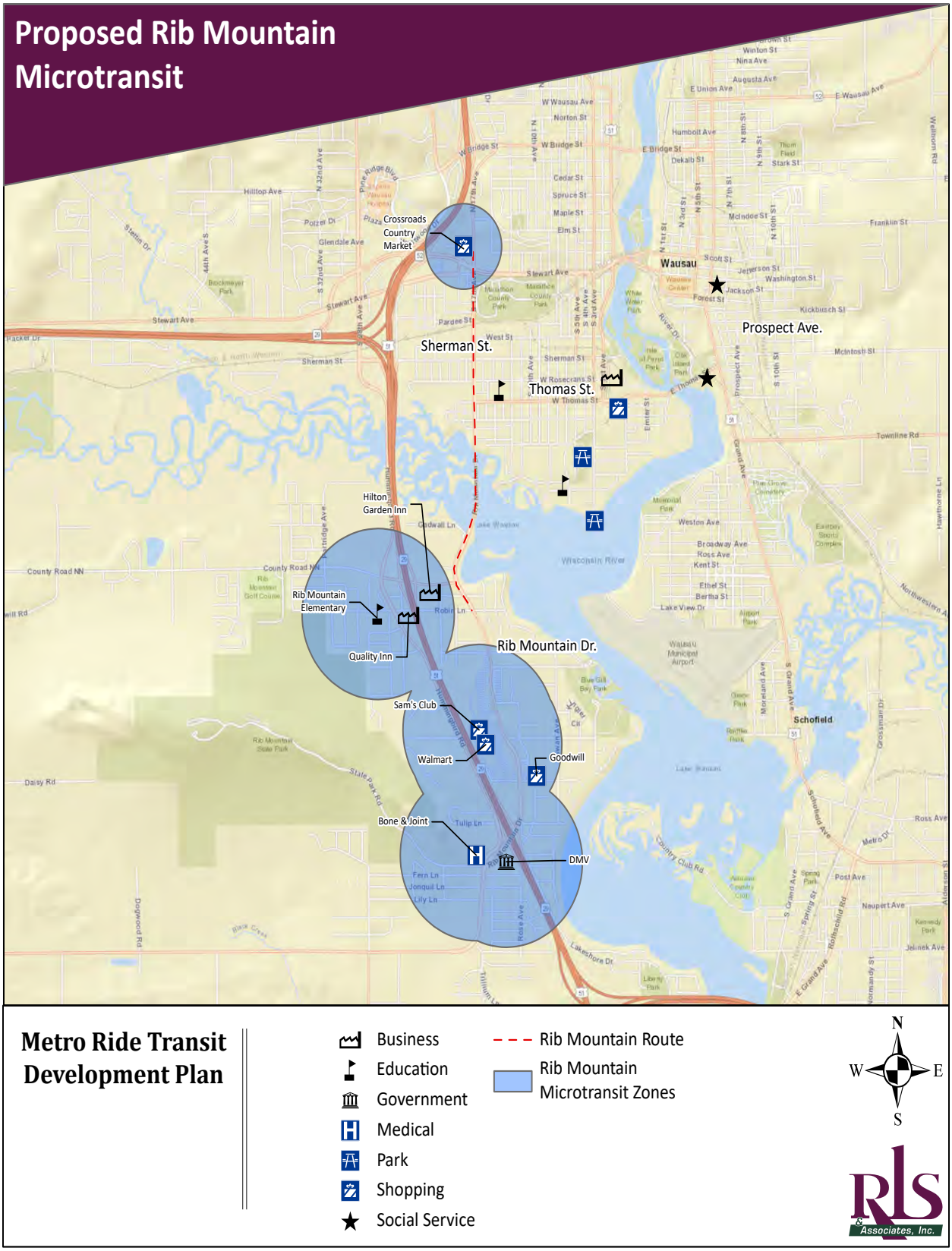
An alternative to fixed route service in Rib Mountain is a hybrid microtransit service using a point deviation route with designated time points at key destinations, connecting to Metro Ride's Route G. This option eliminates the requirement for ADA paratransit service, however, demand for ridership may still require multiple vehicles.

A small wheelchair accessible transit vehicle would travel along the designated route between Crossroads Country Market and Robin Lane in Rib Mountain. After it enters Rib Mountain, the vehicle would not operate on a fixed route with scheduled stops at the major destinations (including Walmart, Sams Club, and, on weekdays, the Bone and Join Clinic, Rib Mountain Elementary, and the DMV). In addition to scheduled stops, the vehicle will also deviate within a ½ mile radius of the bus stop to pick up or drop off passengers at requested destinations within the service zones. Passengers may call to request the vehicle picks them up at a specific location within the service zones. They also could walk to the nearest scheduled time point and board without a reservation. The On-Demand Curb2Curb option offers a hybrid of scheduled bus service and microtransit options for passengers. The bus does not travel on a set route but does stop at predetermined time points. The schedule of when the bus will stop at the time points will be published. Connections with Route G at Cross Roads Country Market will occur at least once per hour.

Advantages

The advantage of the hybrid model is that trip requests will need to be grouped around the scheduled timepoints which will help Rib Mountain and Metro Ride control costs even as demand for service grows. While passengers can call to request a trip, the trips will be grouped based on the time when the vehicle is scheduled to be in their area. With projected high demand for transportation in Rib Mountain, the hybrid model will force passengers to adjust their schedules slightly to accommodate the bus schedule. This hybrid model is more likely to achieve ridership objectives rather than a more open microtransit option with vehicles running all over Rib Mountain strictly based on customer demand. With a point deviation service, Metro Ride is not obligated to offer ADA paratransit service so long as the vehicle is wheelchair accessible and will deviate to pick up any passenger within the established zone (of at least ¼ mile) from a designated time point.

Figure 31. Rib Mountain Hybrid On-Demand Microtransit and Point Deviation



Disadvantages

Demand potentially could quickly exceed microtransit in Rib Mountain. If demand exceeds resources, passengers will not be satisfied with extended wait times or lack of availability to get a ride when they want it. If demand increases beyond the capacity for the assigned vehicle(s), Rib Mountain and Metro Ride should consider transitioning to a fixed route (such as in Scenario 2.A). Alternatively, it could purchase microtransit vehicles that are larger than Metro Ride's paratransit vehicles (8 passenger) but smaller than a large transit bus. Optional vehicles could have up to 24 seats. The disadvantage is that if microtransit is not successful, Metro Ride will have vehicles that are not appropriate for their other services. The fixed route option will be the most economical choice because it requires fewer drivers and vehicles.

Staffing Implications

One to three additional drivers would be needed for the expansion.

Rider Implications

The alternative is estimated to operate with five passengers per hour, five days per week. Approximately 14,700 one-way rides will be provided per year. This alternative is projected to have lower ridership than the fixed route option (which estimates about 20,000 rides per year) because the vehicle will be deviating to pick up people at the curb and will not have the time to make as many stops as the scheduled fixed route service.

Cost Implications

Projected costs for this option are based on the Metro Ride projected 2023 hourly operating cost of $132.86. With 2,940 hours per year, the operating cost is estimated at $390,608 for the hybrid point deviation and microtransit service. An additional cost of $40,000 is also included to support scheduling and dispatching for the on-demand service. The total cost is estimated to be $430,608.

The overall cost of Scenario 2.B. is less than Scenario 2.A because 2.B does not require ADA paratransit service. However, **Scenario 2.B will have more limited capacity and provide fewer trips. If an additional vehicle is needed to support demand for this mode of service in Rib Mountain, costs will quickly escalate to account for additional drivers and vehicles.**

Revenue Scenario

As previously noted, the costs for public transit service are covered by a combination of Federal, State, and Local revenue plus passenger fares. Rib Mountain and Wausau would share the cost of the on-demand service based upon the number of miles operated in each community. The exact cost sharing agreement would need to be negotiated. Initial recommendations are similar to the fixed route cost sharing percentages because the vehicle will spend most of its time in Rib Mountain.

Table 13. Revenue Breakdown Scenario (Estimated costs and percentages)

Estimated Total Annual Operating Cost	=	**$430,608.00**
Federal and State Revenue Sources (60%)	=	$258,364.80
Local Funds (30%)	=	
from Wausau (24%)	=	$31,003.78
from Rib Mountain (76%)	=	$98,178.62
Passenger Fare Revenue (9%)	=	$38,754.72
*Other (1%)	=	$4,306.08

C. Route A Connection with Route into Schofield-Weston (Schofield-Weston Connector Route Alternative)

This Schofield-Weston Connector Route alternative is designed to reinstitute service to much of the areas previously served but with more focus on attracting riders living in multi-house complexes. The proposed extension would connect with Route A at the North Central Health Care Center, where passengers could transfer and complete their trip. The existing stop at North Central Health Care Center provides shelter and a safe waiting area.

Advantages

This alternative meets one of the top two Metro Ride rider and stakeholder priorities by expanding service into Schofield and Weston. The route would also provide access to major employers and shopping areas including Greenheck, Pick n-Save, Aldi, and Target.

In addition, as is evident from the demographic profiles, both Schofield and Weston have a significant number of adults aged 65 or older. Older adults and individuals with disabilities are highly likely to be regular transit riders. The two groups account for 16.10 percent and 7.6 percent in Schofield and Weston, respectively.

Adding transit service would improve local access to affordable housing. The average rental cost in Schofield is about $800 per month, which is more affordable than some other communities in the area. Weston also has a significant number of mobile homes, multi-unit residential homes, and apartments. The proposed route corridor would be conducive to transit ridership along Jalenek Avenue, Birch Street, and Mt. View Avenue areas connecting to work, shopping, or college.

Table 14. Key Demographics of Schofield and Weston, WI

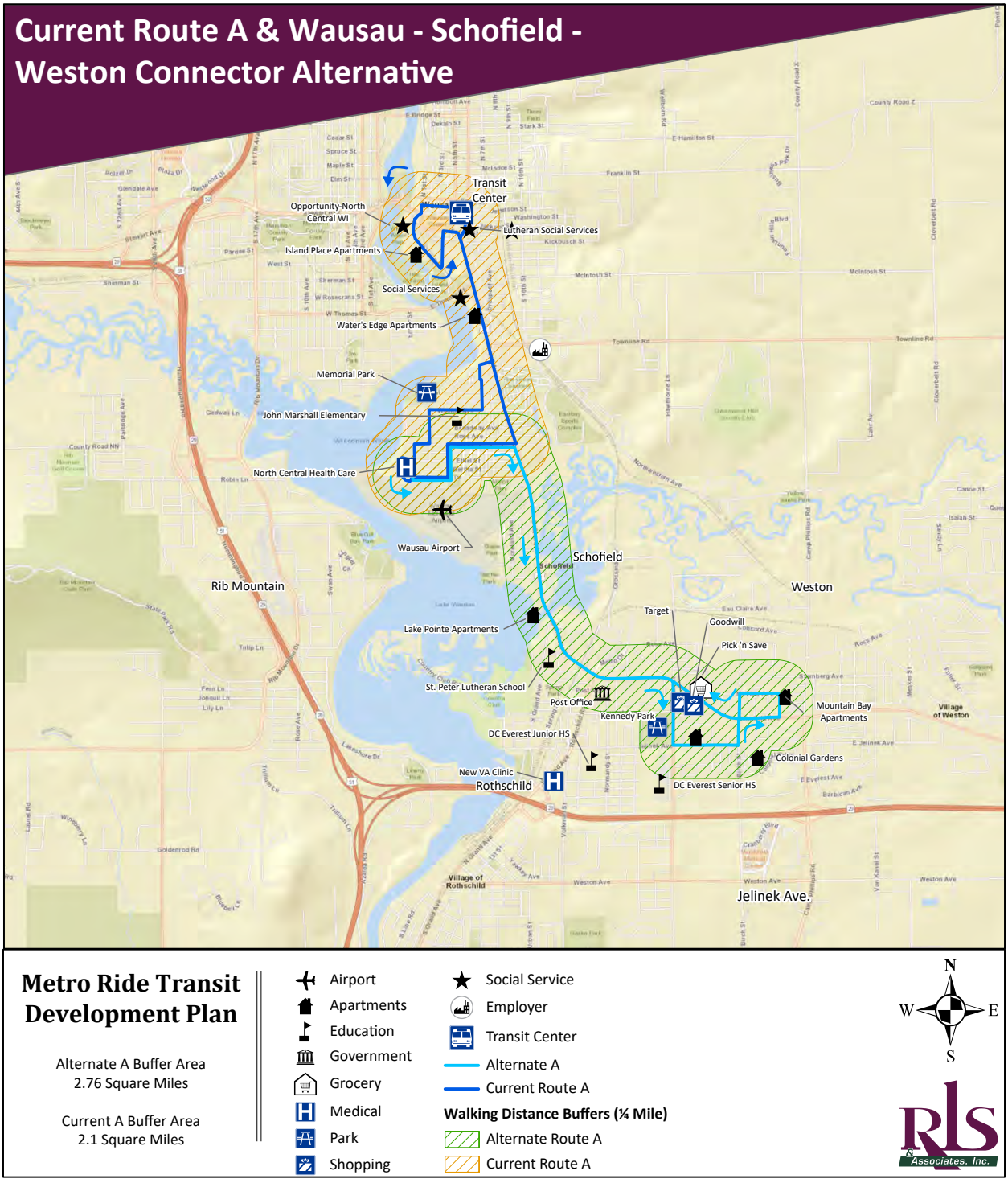
	Schofield	Weston
Population	2,157	15,723
Square Miles	2.1	21.6
Median Household Income	$48,654	$77,388
Bachelor's degree or Higher	18.10%	12.70%
65 years or older	17.10%	16%
Poverty rate (at or below)	21.70%	7.99%
Disability population	16.10%	7.60%
Auto ownership per household	2	2

Source: 2020 US Census and 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) estimate

The service provides employment opportunities for residents in Schofield, Weston, and Wausau in both directions. Younger adults and older adults retraining for a new career could reach North Central Technical College in Wausau.

Another potential advantage is a possible route connection with Rib Mountain (described later in this report). A Rib Mountain-Weston Connector Route coupled with the Schofield-Weston Connector Route would form a complete loop and transit connection between Wausau, Rib Mountain, Weston and Schofield. This loop would significantly increase mobility options to most all desired destinations in the greater Wausau area for employment, shopping, educational, recreational, and social purposes.

Figure 32. Map of Route A with Connection to Schofield-Weston Alternative



Disadvantages

New fixed route service typically takes three to five years to reach its maximum ridership potential. With attractive and safe bus stops and shelters where stops are frequently used, over time the community will begin to see transit as a safe and reliable option for travel in and around the community. If a community is unwilling to patiently enable the service to mature as an integral asset to residents and businesses, the service may not withstand public scrutiny in the first two to three years.

Staffing Implications

The expansion would require one or two additional part time Metro Ride operators if it operates on a reduced schedule (i.e., only at peak hours).

Rider Implications

The alternative is estimated to operate with five passengers per hour, five days per week, 10 hours per day, with approximately 14,700 one-way rides provided per year.

Cost Implications

Projected costs for this route are based on the 2023 hourly operating cost of $132.86. With 2,450 hours per year, the operating cost is estimated at $325,507 for fixed route service. There is also an additional cost for ADA paratransit service in this model of approximately $100 per hour. Assuming four hours per day of paratransit service (which could grow to as much as 12 hours per day), the total cost for paratransit would be an additional $98,000. The total cost for the scenario is estimated to be $423,507.

Revenue Scenario

As previously noted, the costs for public transit service are covered by a combination of Federal, State, and Local revenue plus passenger fares. Schofield, Weston and Wausau would share the cost of the route based upon the number of miles operated in each community.

Wisconsin requires Schofield and Weston to be funding partners with Metro Ride, as was previously done, in order for Metro Ride to serve the communities with fixed route service. A funding partnership between Schofield, Weston, and Wausau would specify the method of cost sharing. Many systems opt to share in funding for new service provided like this by calculating the percentage of revenue miles within each jurisdiction and paying its portion of the total cost of the route that services multiple cities.

Table 15. Revenue Breakdown Scenario (Estimated costs and percentages)

Estimated Total Annual Operating Cost	=	**$423,507.00**
Federal and State Revenue Sources (60%)	=	$254,104.20
Local Funds (30%)	=	
from Wausau (24%)	=	$30,492.50
from Schofield & Weston (76%)	=	$96,559.60
Passenger Fare Revenue (9%)	=	$38,115.63
*Other (1%)	=	$4,235.07

D.1. Rib Mountain and Weston Connector Alternatives

Based on feedback from stakeholder interviews, some participants were interested in route alternatives to connect Rib Mountain and Weston. Survey results also indicate a strong pattern of travel needs between the two communities.

This alternative provides enhanced mobility for shopping, employment, social, and overall connectivity throughout the greater Wausau area with direct service between Rib Mountain and Weston.

Advantages

The Rib Mountain-Weston Connector Route Alternative 1 shown in Figure 33 would provide enhanced mobility options for many residents. This alternative includes portions of Schofield and Rothschild whose jurisdictions border this route corridor. If the Schofield-Weston Route includes a connection to Route A (to Wausau), the Rib Mountain-Weston Alternative 1 would create a full circle of mobility options for this geographic area. Smaller less expensive buses could be used to provide this connector service.

This alternative would also provide a connection to the VA Clinic in Rothschild. The clinic is expected to offer services for vision, hearing, and dental work. According to the American Community Survey (ACS) Five Year Estimates (2015–2019), an estimated 389 veterans reside in Rib Mountain, 2,559 in Wausau, and 1,077 in Weston for a total of 4,025—a significant population group in the area that could benefit greatly to access to VA Clinic medical services.

NOTE: If the Rib Mountain alternative is implemented, then the Rib Mountain-Weston Alternative 2 would be most appropriate to prevent duplication or overlap of routes. Alternative 2 would provide service from Route J to the DMV Office in Rib Mountain.

Disadvantages

As described previously, a funding partnership in the form of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) would have to be executed by all jurisdictions agreeing to implement such a service under State of Wisconsin requirements. The agreement would also require financial commitments on ADA paratransit requirements. Specialized services (vans, taxis or other) must be provided for persons with disabilities who cannot access bus stop locations.

Staffing Implications

The expansion would require an additional part time Metro Ride operator, at minimum, if operated on a reduced schedule (i.e., only at peak hours).

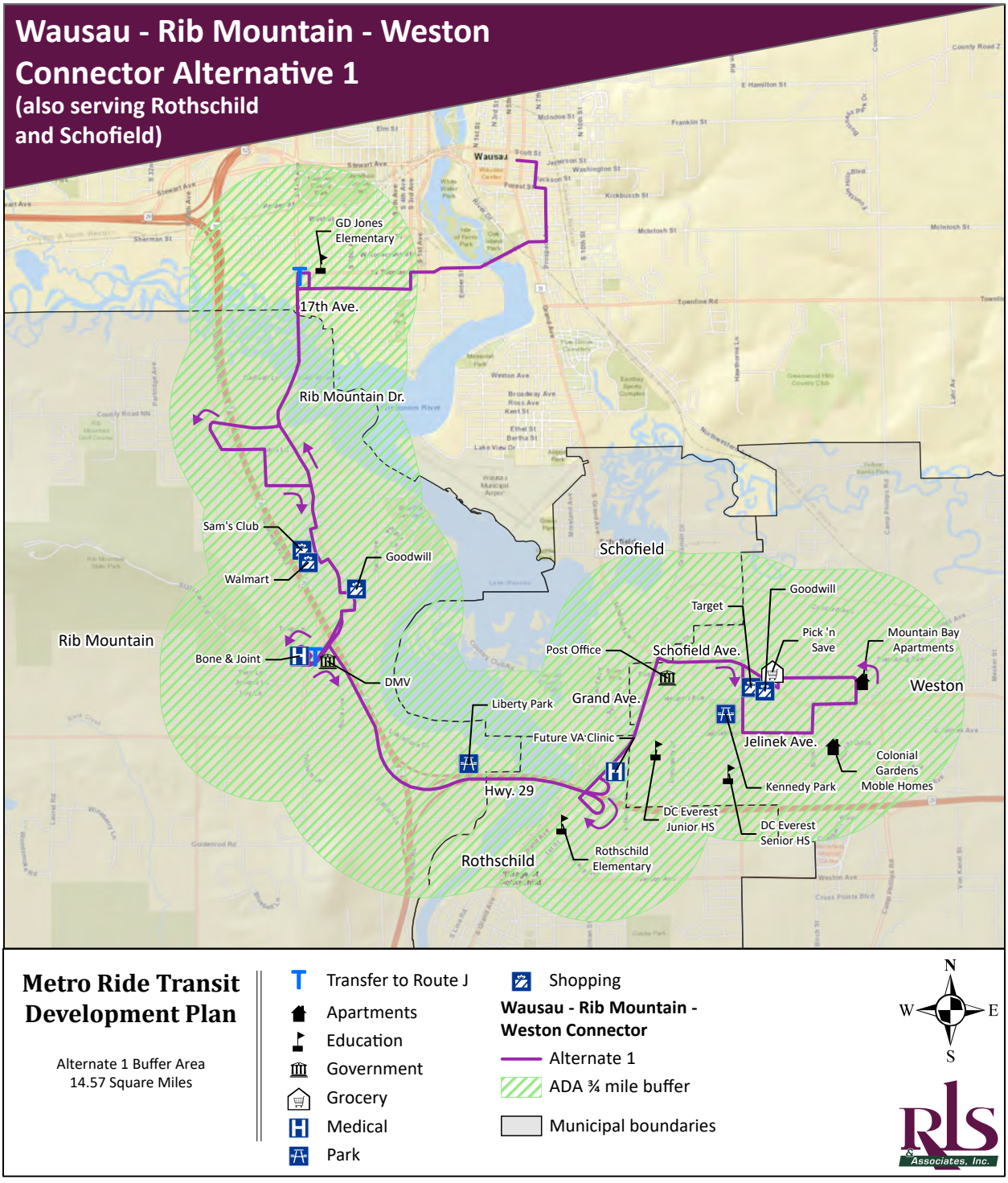
Rider Implications

The alternative is estimated to operate with three passengers per hour, five days per week, 10 hours per day. Approximately 7,350 one-way rides provided per year.

Cost Implications

Projected costs for this route are based on the 2023 hourly operating cost of $132.86. With 2,450 hours per year, the operating cost is estimated at $325,507 for fixed route service. There is also an additional cost of approximately $100 per hour for ADA paratransit service in this model. Assuming the route could require four hours per day of paratransit service, the total cost would increase to $98,000 per year.

Figure 33. Rib Mountain Connector Route Alternative 1



Revenue Scenario

As previously noted, the costs for public transit service are covered by a combination of Federal, State, and Local revenue plus passenger fares. Rib Mountain and Weston would establish a cost sharing agreement. An example scenario based on route miles is provided below for illustration. Exact percentages and amounts would need to be defined prior to implementation.

Table 16. Revenue Breakdown, Scenario D.1 (Estimated costs and percentages)

Estimated Total Annual Operating Cost		=	**$423,507.00**
Federal and State Revenue Sources (60%)		=	$254,104.20
Local Funds (30%)		=	
	from Wausau (15%)	=	$19,057.82
	from Weston (30%)		$38,115.63
	from Rib Mountain (55%)	=	$69,878.66
Passenger Fare Revenue (9%)		=	$38,115.63
*Other (1%)		=	$4,235.07

D.2. Rib Mountain-Weston Connector Route Alternative 2

This alternative does not extend into Wausau itself but would rely on the Rib Mountain alternative route with service from Wausau to Rib Mountain (Route G connection). Without that connection to Rib Mountain, this would be of little use to residents of Rib Mountain or Schofield and Weston.

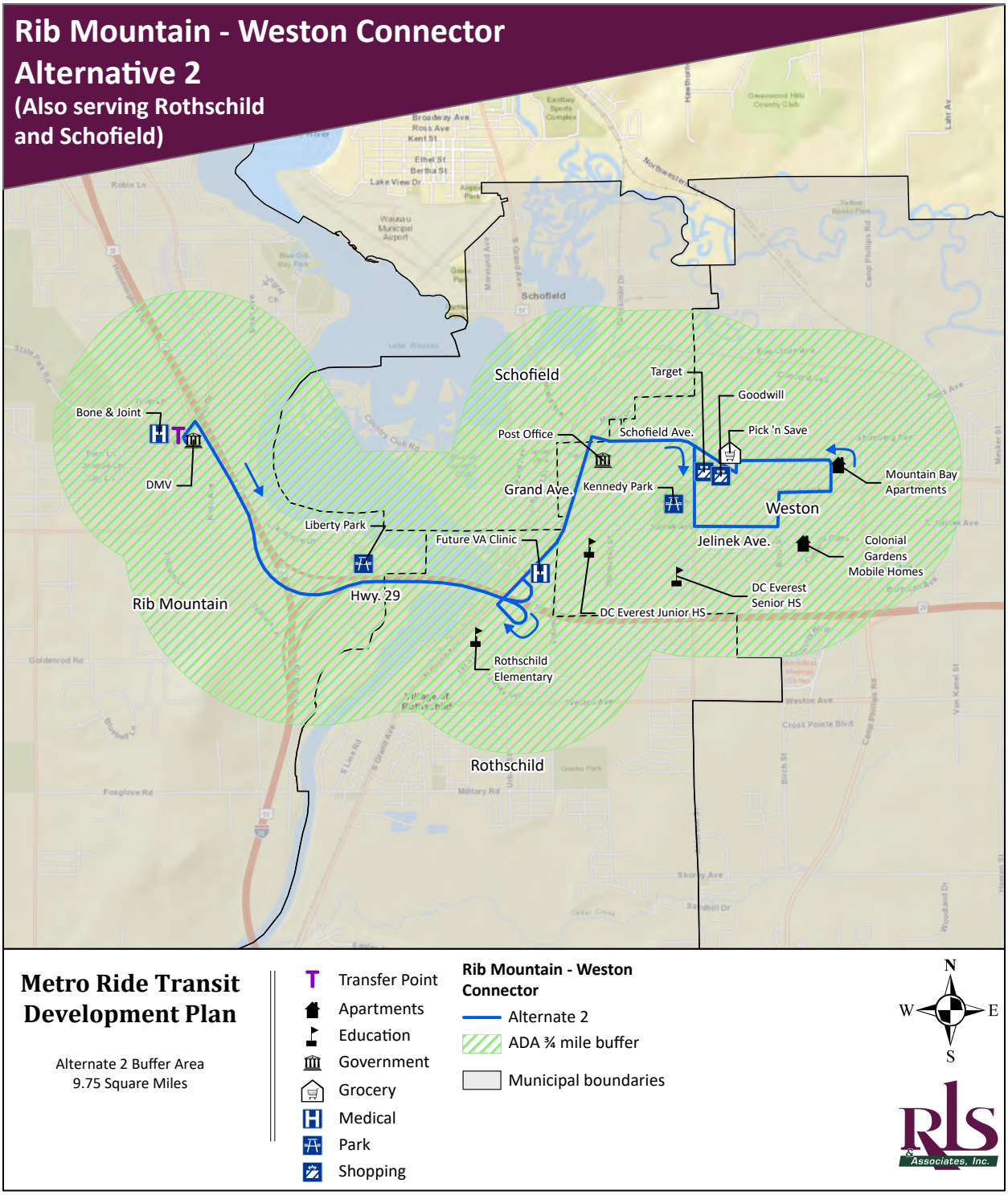
Advantages

Similar to Rib Mountain – Weston Connector Route Alternative 1, this route would significantly improve non-auto mobility options between the communities for employment, shopping, medical, educational, and social purposes.

Disadvantages

This alternative relies on implementation of the new service from Wausau to Rib Mountain. Without it, the service would only be from a small portion of Rib Mountain to Weston and not be highly productive in terms of ridership.

Figure 34. Rib Mountain-Weston Connector Route Alternative 2



E. Schofield Microtransit Zone

This option offers an alternative for Schofield in case Weston does not wish to implement public transit service. Popular destinations in Schofield and just outside the town line include Target, Pick-n-Save, ACE Hardware, and Greenheck.

Schofield microtransit demand response service operations and expenses could grow gradually with demand. The microtransit service would involve dedicating one or two paratransit vehicles to Schofield. Riders would travel between points in Schofield and to/from the North Central Health Care allowing passengers to transfer to Route A for a ride into Wausau.

Microtransit could provide on-demand transportation by accepting trip requests by phone or app from riders, then dispatching a vehicle. All trips will be shared-rides, meaning the vehicle may be shared by multiple passengers. Wheelchair accessible vehicle will be available. Service would be open to the general public. Metro Ride's paratransit drivers and paratransit vehicles could provide the microtransit service, depending on the scale of service to be implemented. If Metro Ride opts to operate the service in-house, the technology could be purchased or obtained under contract with a third party.

Staffing Implications

The expansion requires 1.5 additional Metro Ride operators. Service may warrant an additional small transit vehicle if a Metro Ride paratransit vehicle is not available.

Rider Implications

The alternative is estimated to operate with 2.5 passengers per hour, five days per week, 12 hours per day. Approximately 7,350 one-way rides provided per year.

Cost Implications

Projected costs for this service are based on the 2023 hourly operating cost of $132.86. With 2,450 hours per year, the operating costs are projected to be approximately $390,608. An additional cost of $40,000 per year will be added to support the scheduler/dispatcher hours. This additional cost could be shared across multiple local communities if other microtransit services are implemented. Costs could be reduced if a non-CDL driver is hired to operate the service and smaller vehicles are used. Costs could also be reduced by limiting the hours of operation. Total estimated operating costs are $430,608.

Revenue Scenario

The majority of service will be provided within Schofield and therefore costs will also be the responsibility of Schofield. Partnerships with local businesses and medical facilities that would benefit from the service could offer financial support (and multi-year commitments).

Table 17. Revenue Breakdown, Scenario E (Estimated costs and percentages)

Estimated Total Annual Operating Cost		=	**$430,608.00**
Federal and State Revenue Sources (60%)		=	$258,364.80
Local Funds (30%)		=	
	from Wausau (10%)	=	$12,918.24
	from Schofield (60%)		$77,509.44
	*Other (30%)	=	$38,754.72
Passenger Fare Revenue (10%)		=	$43,060.80

Summary

Each alternative offers advantages and disadvantages associated with the level of service and convenience to the customer. The alternatives can be adjusted by modifying the daily hours of operation. For example, if certain connector routes operated only at peak hours, the annual operating costs would be appropriately reduced.

The Rib Mountain route connecting with Route G is projected to yield the highest ridership and therefore the most trips hour, mile, and dollar spent. Ridership on the other alternative routes is slightly lower due to the service area, mode of service, or reduced potential for demand. However, over time, ridership is likely to increase as more people become aware of the routes and start to ride. The projected operating characteristics are summarized below.

Table 18. Summary of Estimated Total Annual Operating Parameters

Service Component	Passenger Trips/Hour	Hours	Miles	Passenger Trips	Estimated Annual Operating Cost*
Route G Connect to Rib Mountain	7.0	2,940	23,667	20,580	$537,343.80
Rib Mountain Hybrid Microtransit	5.0	2,940	23,667	14,700	$430,608.40
Schofield Weston Connector	5.0	2,450	17,150	12,250	$472,242.40
Rib Mountain Weston Connector	3.0	2,450	29,400	7,350	$472,242.40
Schofield Microtransit Zone	2.5	2,940	TBD	7,350	$430,608.40

*Does not include paratransit for fixed route services.

The following table summarizes the total cost of implementation if all options ins Scenario 2 are selected. The table also indicates the significant revenue shortfall that would need to be recovered through partnerships with local municipalities and private businesses.

Table 19. Summary of Expenses and Revenue Needed to Implement Scenario 2 in Total

OPERATING, MAINTENANCE, ADMIN. EXPENSE	2021 Budget	2022 Budget	2023 Projected	2024 Projected	2025 Projected	2026 Projected
Vehicle Operations	$2,114,519.27	$2,135,769.01	$2,199,842.08	$2,265,837.34	$2,333,812.46	$2,403,826.84
Paratransit Services	$216,994.51	$200,615.77	$206,634.24	$212,833.27	$219,218.27	$225,794.82
Vehicle Maintenance	$390,263.72	$416,597.56	$429,095.49	$446,259.31	$459,647.09	$473,436.50
Non-Vehicle Maintenance	$201,461.63	$240,231.78	$247,438.73	$254,861.90	$262,507.75	$270,382.98
General Administration	$778,999.82	$795,524.68	$819,390.42	$843,972.13	$869,291.30	$895,370.04
Contract Expense (s.85.205 ADA Funds)	($34,108.00)	($36,679.00)	($36,679.00)	($36,679.00)	($36,679.00)	($36,679.00)
CARES Act Funds	($425,000.00)					
Subtotal Existing Expenses	**$3,243,130.95**	**$3,752,059.80**	**$3,865,721.96**	**$3,987,084.95**	**$4,107,797.87**	**$4,232,132.17**
SCENARIO 2 EXPANDED SERVICE AREA						
Route G: Connection to Rib Mountain or Rib Mountain Hybrid Microtransit			**$537,303.80**	**$548,049.88**	**$559,010.87**	**$570,191.09**
Route A Connection with Schofield Weston Route w/ Paratransit			**$472,700.00**	**$589,507.00**	**$589,507.00**	**$589,507.00**
Rib Mountain and Weston Connector Alternatives			**$472,242.00**	**$457,507.00**	**$457,507.00**	**$457,507.00**
Schofield Microtransit Zone (12 hours/day)			**$430,608.00**	**$390,608.00**	**$390,608.00**	**$390,608.00**
TOTAL EXPENSES (Current plus New)	**$3,243,130.95**	**$3,752,059.80**	**$5,778,575.76**	**$5,972,756.82**	**$6,104,430.74**	**$6,239,945.26**
TOTAL REVENUE	**Budget**	**Budget**	**Estimated**	**Estimated**	**Estimated**	**Estimated**
Federal Operating Assistance + State Operating Assistance s. 85.20	$1,100,439.29	$2,063,632.89	$3,178,216.67	$3,285,016.25	$3,357,436.91	$3,431,969.89
American Recovery Act Funds (Technology)						
American Recovery Act/WisDOT funds (Farebox Replacement)						
Federal Capital Assistance (Maintenance)	$0.00	$-				
Marathon County Surcharge	$0.00	$-				
State Elderly and Disabled - S85.21	$73,008.31	$64,286.10	$73,008.31	$73,008.31	$73,008.31	$73,008.31
Public Charges for Service (Fares)	$259,206.24	$237,843.06	$264,390.36	$269,678.17	$272,374.95	$275,098.70
Advertising Revenue	$15,538.27	$50,106.93	$15,539.27	$15,540.27	$15,541.27	$15,542.27
Paratransit Services	$12,207.50	$11,520.00	$12,329.58	$12,329.58	$12,329.58	$12,329.58
Intergovernmental Charges (Wausau School District)	$12,488.20	$11,900.52	$12,488.20	$12,488.20	$12,488.20	$12,488.20
Miscellaneous Revenue	$0.00	$-				
ARPA Funds						
General Property Tax (City of Wausau)	$889,891.72	$1,312,770.30	$916,588.47	$916,588.47	$916,588.47	$916,588.47
TOTAL REVENUE	**$3,243,130.95**	**$3,752,059.80**	**$4,472,560.86**	**$4,584,649.25**	**$4,659,767.69**	**$4,737,025.42**
Projected Revenue Increase		16%	19%	22%	2%	2%
Revenue Shortfall (to be addressed through additional local match)	**$0.00**	**$0.00**	**($1,306,014.90)**	**($1,388,107.57)**	**($1,444,663.05)**	**($1,502,919.84)**

Scenario 3: Opportunities for Fixed Route Efficiencies

Based on the project's teams initial and high-level perspective of the overall system, prior to rider surveys and community feedback, opportunities for cost savings within the fixed route structure are achievable. Those savings could be reapplied to service improvements that are most desired by the riders and community. The fixed route service level (seven primary fixed routes operating on 30-minute frequencies) is high for Wausau's population of 39,994 (2020 US Census Data) compared to other communities of similar size. Scenario 3 alternatives are intended to sustain that high level of transit service while also identifying opportunities for cost savings that could be reallocated to service expansions. Potential service expansions may include adding hours to the current schedule for early morning or later evening trips, adding demand-response modes of service, or potentially expanding the service area coverage.

A more detailed analysis showed that four of the existing fixed routes (B and D serving the northeastern portion of the City and G and I serving the northeastern Wausau) could potentially be consolidated to two routes. Some riders living near streets that would lose service would walk further to a stop, a minimal decrease in service levels. In other words, the route changes would have minor negative impact to the vast majority of existing and potential transit riders. The impact felt by all riders, however, is a decrease in the frequency of buses. To achieve the service reduction, the frequency on each route would decrease from 30 minutes to 40 minutes. Five minutes would be added to the commute time per route direction (inbound and outbound from the Transfer Center). A total of seven less round-trips [from 24 to 17 round trips] on each fixed route would be provided over the course of each service day (Monday through Friday from 6:30 AM to 6:30 PM). In exchange, merging the routes would achieve operating cost savings for Metro Ride that could be applied to desired service improvements.

Implementation of a real-time bus information system utilizing Automated Vehicle Locator (AVL) technology and a customer-facing App would reduce the inconvenience. Metro Ride would be able to enhance the riders' experience by enabling all passengers with access to the internet (smart phone, tablet, or computer) to know precisely when the bus would arrive at their bus stop location. Employing this technology removes any guesswork and uncertainty of the bus arrival. This technology is typically within a few seconds of being accurate. Riders during inclement or cold weather would not have to leave their temperature controlled indoor environment until just prior to projected bus arrival time. Passengers without access to the internet will need to rely on printed bus schedules. The current 30-minute frequency schedule is easy to remember, while a 40 minute interval would be harder to follow. Ridership could decline if schedules are confusing or not user-friendly.

To ensure that all buses maintain the same arrival time at the Transfer Center in the current "pulse system" manner, the remaining three routes (A, H, and J) would also be operated on a 40-minute frequency. All of the following alternatives will be described in this report:

A. Combining Routes B and D into One Route Serving Northwest Wausau
B. Combining Routes G and I into One Route Serving West Wausau
C. Extending Route H to East Wausau High School (but continue X4)
D. Route J: Adjusted Extension to Rib Mountain

The following fixed route analysis and determination of potential alternatives will not evaluate the special and limited grocery shopping trip service provided to some apartment complexes and senior living facilities. Metro Ride would maintain these highly productive trips that provide important access to fresh food.

A. Combining Routes B and D into One Route Serving Northwest Wausau

Merging Routes B and D into one route that serves the northwest portion of Wausau will still cover over 89 percent of the same service area within a half mile and over 82 percent within a quarter mile, respectively. Based on Metro Ride's FY23 projected revenue hour cost of $132.86 and at 11.88 revenue hours of daily service for 245 service days annually, approximately $386,702 would be saved. See Figure 35.

Advantages

The potential cost savings of approximately $386,702 could be applied to extending service hours, expanded service coverage or some Saturday or Sunday service without a significant impact to those currently being served on the existing four routes.

Disadvantages

The combined route would lack capacity during peak hours (particularly during the school year) and additional vehicles would need to be operated during peak. The addition of peak vehicles reduces the overall cost savings.

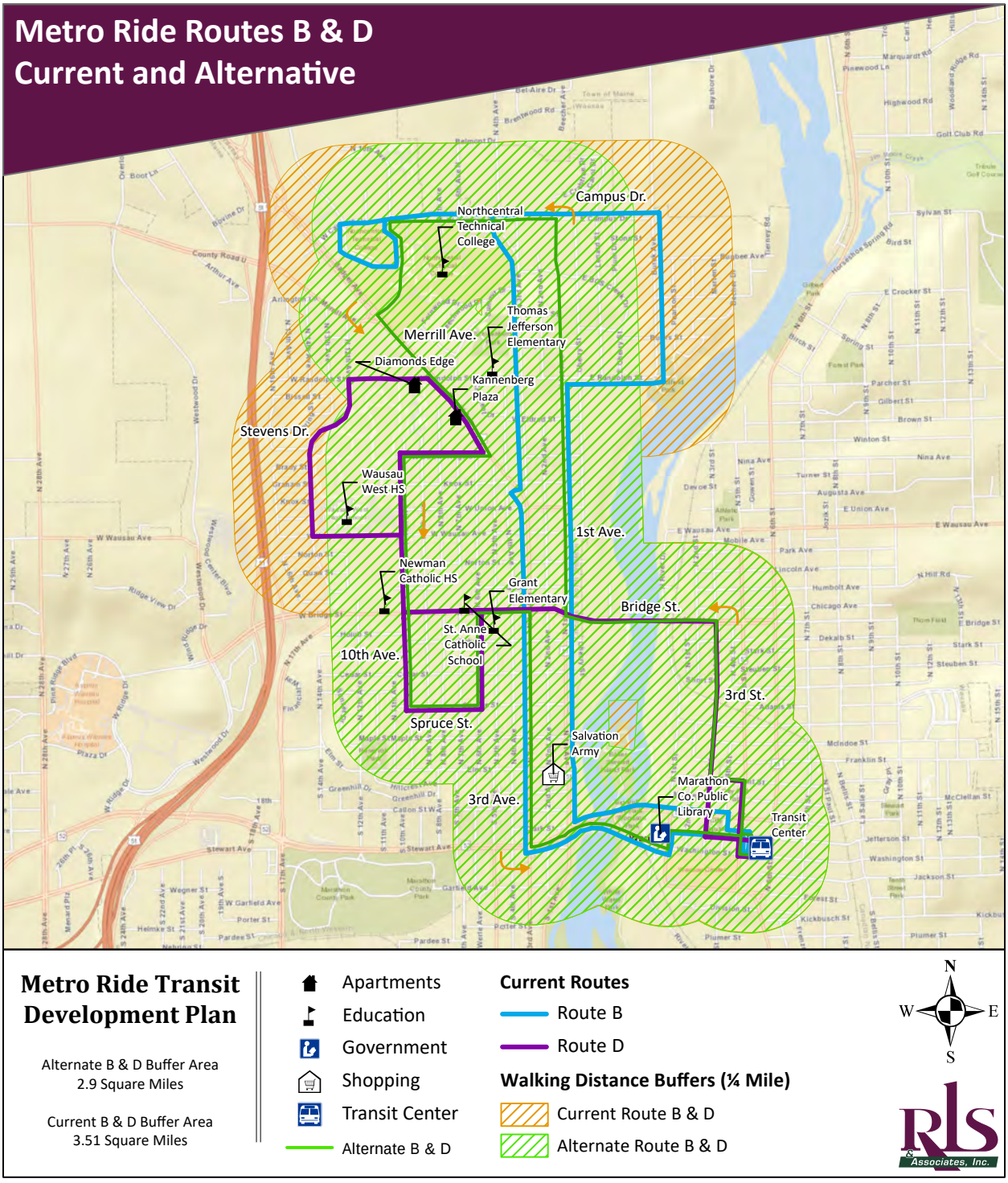
An average distance people walk to a fixed route bus stop is ¼ mile. Distances of up to ½ mile are also typical for some communities. The impact of altering portions of each of the routes would impact individuals living within ¼ and ½ mile of some stops on current Routes B and D. In general, the portion of the total population who are currently within ¼ or ½ mile of Routes B and D after combining the routes will decrease. Table 20 below compares the number of estimated populations within ¼ and ½ of a mile of Routes B and D as they currently operate and after implementation of Alternative 1. Table 20 illustrates the impact on the total population of the immediate service area; however, not all people use Metro Ride.

Table 20. Impact of Alternative 3A

Existing Route Coverage		Alternative 1 Route Coverage	Percent Change in Total Population within the immediate area of the route
Routes B+D	Population	Population	
¼ mile	12,706	10,489	-17.45%
½ mile	16,997	15,057	-11.41%

Source: Wisconsin Department of Administration Demographic Services Center, MCD and Municipal Population Projections (2010–2040)

Figure 35. Metro Ride Routes B and D Current and Alternative



On average, approximately two percent of the population within a transit system service area ride fixed route public transit on a regular basis. If two percent of individuals living in Wausau ride Metro Ride for non-school transit purposes, then we can assume that 44 potential passengers could be affected by the change because they would no longer live within ¼ of a mile from the newly designed merged route. Within ½ of a mile of the new route design, 39 potential riders could be negatively impacted. **NOTE**: The negative impacts are not necessarily implying that these riders would not receive service. Their walking distance may increase by a few minutes which could have a negative impact for individuals with mobility limitations.

Data from the recent boarding and alighting survey shows that 12 passengers boarded or exited Route B at stops that would be changed if routes B and D were streamlined. The streamlined service would have different stops in the areas that are more than ¼ mile of the existing stops which would be options for these passengers. Likewise, the boarding and alighting count indicated 74 passengers (65 percent of all riders that day) boarding at Route D stops that would be changed; 48 of the 74 passengers were boarding at Wausau West High School's most used stop. The streamlined route would still stop at Wausau West High School—only at a different stop. The streamlined Route D would adjust the number of stops at Wausau West High School from three (currently) down to one. The impact is summarized in Table 21 below.

The other disadvantage, as mentioned previously, would be that passenger ride time on both outbound and inbound routes would increase by five minutes in each direction to achieve the change from 30-minute frequency to 40-minute frequency.

Table 21. Service Impact of Combining Route B and D into One New Alternative Route

Routes B+D	Population With Increased Walking Distance	2% of Population Impacted	Square Mileage Covered from Existing B & D Routes to B & D Alternative Route	Number of Average Daily Boardings at Bus Stops Eliminated (outside ¼ mile buffer) by Alternative*
¼ Mile	2,217	44	82%	12
½ Mile	1,940	39	89%	N/A

*Based on on-board/off-board survey completed between October 28-31, 2021.

B. Combining Routes G and I into One Route Serving West Wausau

Merging Routes G and I into one route that serves the western portion of Wausau will still cover over 98 percent of the same service area within a half mile and over 97 percent within a quarter mile, respectively.

Advantages

Based on Metro Ride's FY23 projected revenue hour cost of $132.86 and at 11.88 revenue hours of daily service for 245 service days annually, the savings that could be realized if Routes G & I were combined (See Figure 36) would be approximately $386,702. These potential savings could then be applied to new extending service hours, expanded service coverage or some Saturday or Sunday service without a significant impact to those currently being served on the existing four routes.

Disadvantages

Table 22 illustrates that after combining routes G and I into a single route, the population living within ¼ mile of the streamlined routes will decrease by 7.32 percent and the population within ½ mile would decrease by 5.72 percent.

Table 22. Existing Coverage of Routes G and I

Existing Route Coverage		Alternative 1 Route Coverage	Percent Change in Total Population within the immediate area of the route
Routes B+D	Population	Population	
¼ Mile	7,140	6,617	-7.32%
½ Mile	14,844	13,995	-5.72%

Source: Wisconsin Department of Administration Demographic Services Center, MCD and Municipal Population Projections (2010-2040)

As shown in Table 23 below, the impact of essentially combining Routes G and I, yet altering portions of each of the routes slightly would result in some impact to those individuals within ¼ and ½ mile of the new service area. If two percent of individuals living in Wausau ride Metro Ride for non-school transit purposes, then we can assume that 10 passengers could be affected by the change if they are within ¼ of a mile from the newly designed merged route. Within ½ of a mile of the new route design, **17 passengers** could be negatively impacted. **Note**: These negative impacts are not necessarily implying that these riders would not receive service, but it indicates that their walking distance may increase by a few minutes.

Furthermore, the total number of boarding at stops where each route (G & I) would be streamlined (removed) and place them outside ¼ of a mile of the new route is 1 as also noted in Table 23 below.

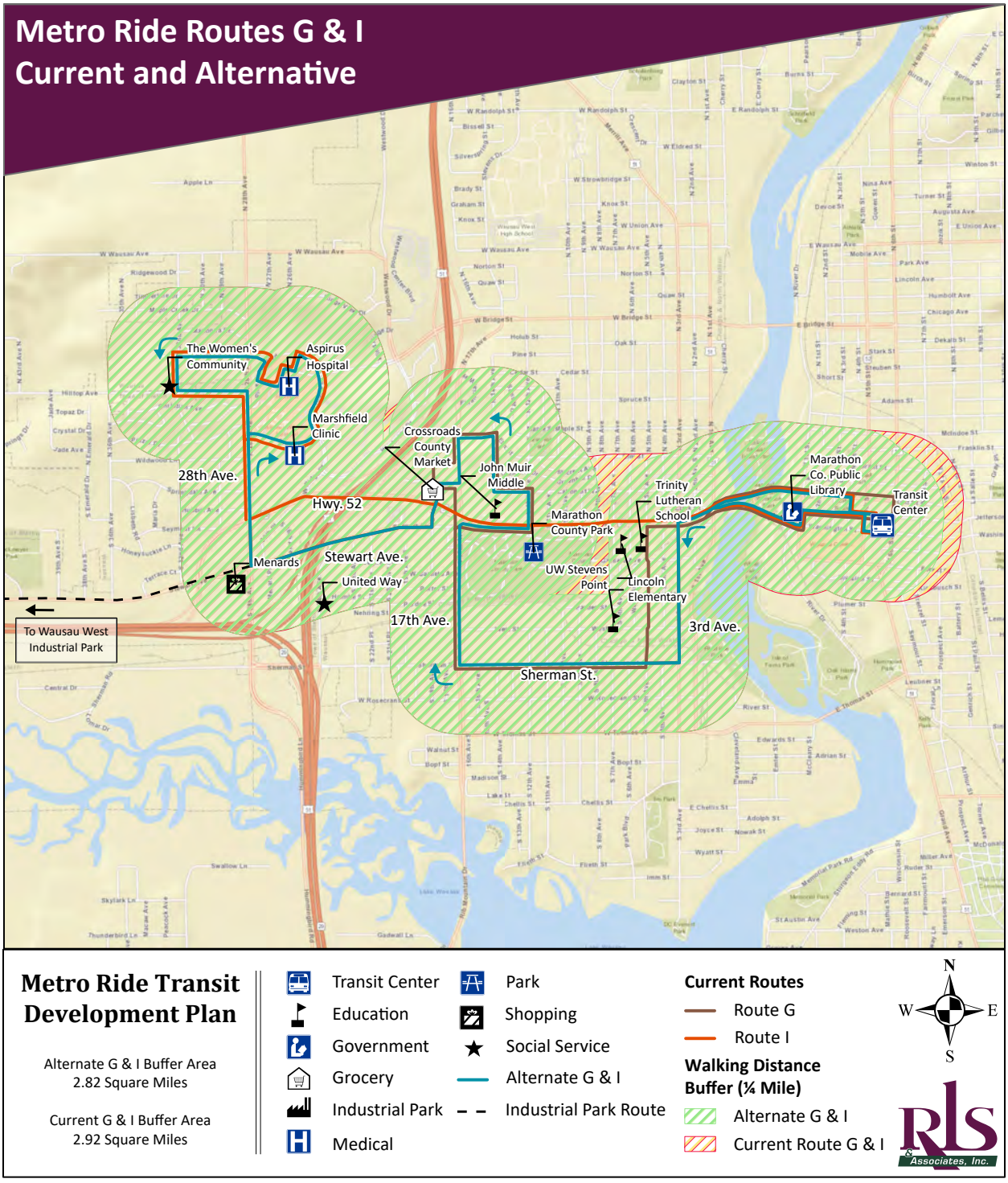
The other disadvantage mentioned previously would be that outbound and inbound routes would require ride time to increase five minutes in each direction—outbound and inbound to achieve the change from 30-minute frequency to 40-minute frequency.

Table 23. Resulting Impact of Combining Route G and I into One New Route Alternative

Routes G & I	Population With Increased Walking Distance	2% of Population Impacted	Square Mileage Covered from Existing to G & I Routes to G & I Alternative Route	Number of Average Daily Number of Boardings at Bus Stops Eliminated (outside ¼ mile buffer) by Alternative*
¼ Mile	523	10	97%	1
½ Mile	849	17	98%	N/A

*Based on on-board/off-board survey completed October 28-31, 2021.

Figure 36. Merged Routes G and I Alternative



C. Extending Route H to East Wausau High School and Keeping X4

As previously discussed, system-wide 40-minute frequencies would require adjustments to other routes. For Route H, the project team, in consultation with Metro Ride staff, explored the potential for adding service to East Wausau High School. This would alleviate high demand on X4 during peak hours but would not replace X4. Student riders would not experience a significant, negative impact.

Advantages

If Metro Ride implemented this change, based on 8.25 revenue hours per day, 173 revenue days a year (nine months for school schedule only), 1,560 revenue hours would be saved annually. At a projected cost of $132.86 per revenue hour, Metro Ride could reduce its operating expenses by $189,624 annually. As described in previous alternatives, Metro Ride could reprogram funds for expanded service and enhanced technologies to attract more riders. No Route H bus stops would be eliminated under this alternative.

No analysis of the negative impact of potential loss in coverage is required for the Route H Alternative, since it is merely adding service area that also matches the Express Route 4 area between the existing Route H and the high school. Table 24 below compares the population within ¼ and ½ mile that would be served by the current and new route.

Table 24. Existing Coverage of Routes H

Existing Route Coverage		New Route H Coverage	Percent Change in Population Served
Route H	Population	Population	
¼ Mile	10,078	10,285	+2.05%
½ Mile	13,264	13,648	+2.89%

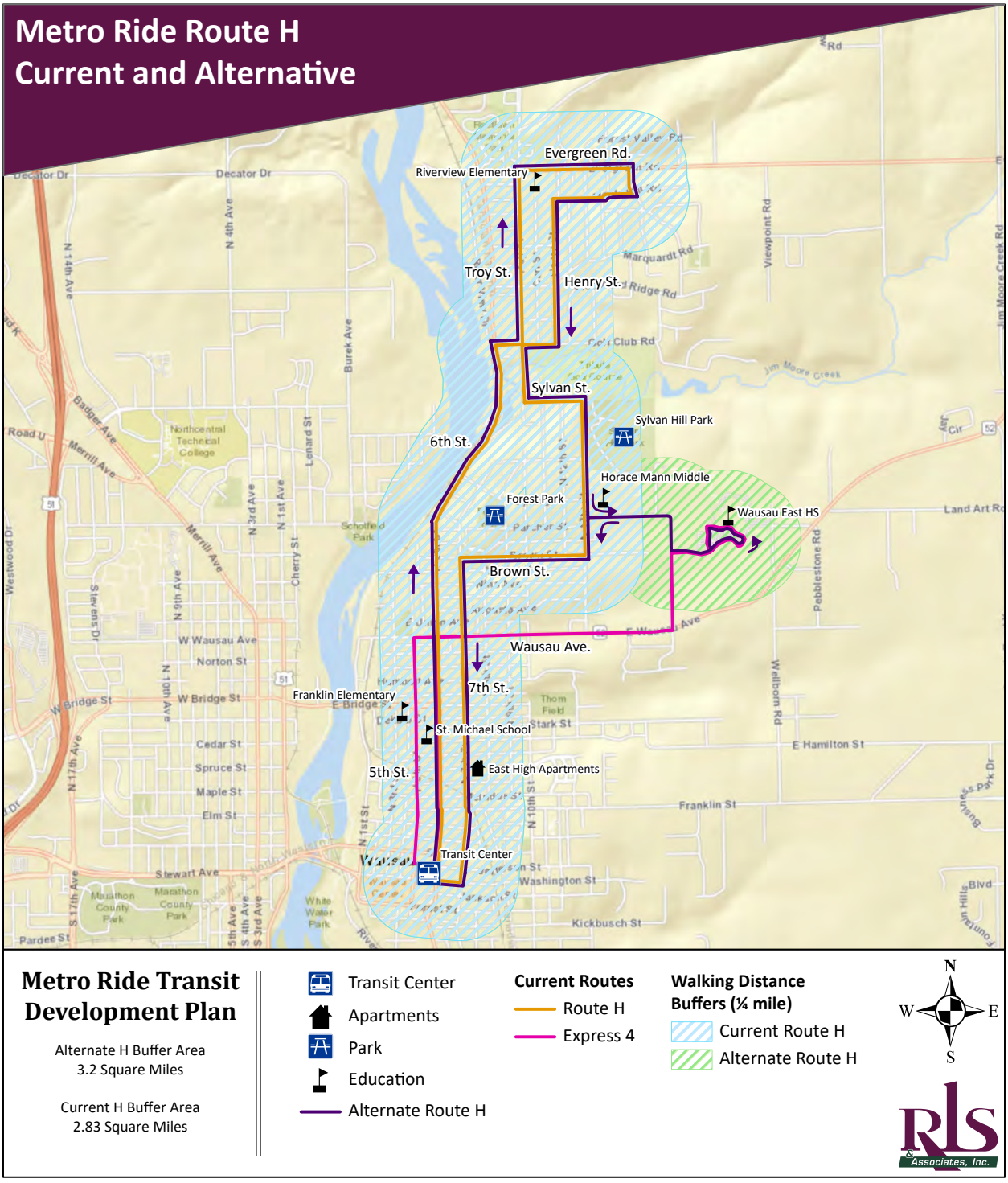
Source: Wisconsin Department of Administration Demographic Services Center, MCD and Municipal Population Projections (2010-2040)

As shown in Table 25 below, no existing service corridor would be eliminated with Route H Alternative as the route would use the same streets with the exception of extending to the east to the high school.

Table 25. Resulting Impact of Route H Alternative on General Public Riders

Routes G & I	Population With Increased Walking Distance	Square Mileage Covered from Existing Route H to Alternative Route H	Number of Average Daily Number of Boardings at Bus Stops Eliminated (outside ¼ mile buffer) by Alternative*
¼ Mile	0	100%	0
½ Mile	0	100%	N/A

Figure 37. Map of Route H Current/Alternative/Express Route 4



Disadvantages

The disadvantage, as mentioned previously would be that outbound and inbound routes would require ride time to increase five minutes in each direction—outbound and inbound—to achieve the change from 30-minute frequency to 40-minute frequency.

Also, capacity would exceed maximum standards during peak hours. An additional vehicle would need to be added during peak morning and afternoon hours. Some cost savings would occur, but operating the additional vehicle during peak would reduce the overall cost savings from combining the routes. The additional peak service may also require an additional part-time driver.

D. Extend Route J to Rib Mountain

Another alternative that Metro Ride could consider is one that would both serve the primary existing service area of Metro Ride's Route J and provide new fixed route service to Rib Mountain. This is described below and seen in Figure 38. This alternative is also designed to achieve the needed 40-minute frequency similar to other alternatives previously described.

With the demolition of the Wausau Center Mall in May/June of 2021, Wausau residents were left with minimal in-person shopping areas within the city limits. However, in Rib Mountain, shopping areas have increased dramatically in the past few years with the addition of Old Navy, Hobby Lobby, TJ Maxx, Best Buy, Sam's Club, and Walmart Supercenter, to name a few. Numerous restaurants can also be found in Rib Mountain and a DMV Service Center for Marathon County. Although online shopping has increased dramatically over the past few years, many people still enjoy in-person shopping. This route alternative would expand shopping options for Metro Ride riders, including access to the area's most affordable options for groceries and retail.

Funding Partnership Requirement with Neighboring Jurisdictions Receiving Transit Service

For this alternative to be implemented, Wausau would have to form a funding partnership through a Memorandum of Agreement with Rib Mountain. The State of Wisconsin has legislation that prevents a city transit system from providing service outside its municipal boundaries without funding from the neighboring jurisdiction its system serves. The funding partnership would identify the method of cost-sharing. Many systems opt to have new services provided by calculating the percentage of revenue miles within each jurisdiction. For example, the Route J – Rib Mountain Alternative Route is a total of 7.84 miles, of which 3.33 miles are within Wausau city limits, and 4.51 miles are within Rib Mountain. Wausau would pay for approximately 42.5 percent of the total cost of the fixed route service (minus passenger revenues and Federal grant revenues), while Rib Mountain would pay 57.5 percent. To meet Americans with Disabilities (ADA) requirements, Rib Mountain would also be responsible for the cost of ADA complimentary paratransit service for those with disabilities that are unable to access the fixed route service due to a disability which typically is 20-25% of the total fixed route service provided.

Figure 38. Metro Ride Route J Current and Alternative

Advantages

This alternative meets nearly half of the current Metro Ride riders' desire (identified in the October 2021 rider survey) for regular fixed route service outside Wausau. In addition, the streamlining of Route J permits an extension of this new service area in Rib Mountain while still maintaining the proposed 40-minute frequency goal. The route alternative also creates many more employment opportunities for Wausau residents. The DMV for Marathon County is also located along this route alternative in the southern portion of Rib Mountain.

Rib Mountain will receive transit services that strengthen the local businesses' ability to hire, attract, and retain employees that may live in Wausau with dependable transportation via Metro Ride and give its residents without sufficient mobility options to travel to and from Wausau and within its jurisdiction. With rising fuel prices and inflation, more residents may seek alternatives to their personal auto to save money. Based on U.S. Census data, approximately 7,819 residents would be within ¼ mile and 5,351 within ½ mile of the proposed service.

Also, during the stakeholder interview process, one participant identified that "If it were available, the service would benefit young residents who need access to jobs or after-school activities and international students who are attending technical college who need transportation during evenings and on weekends." This particular need would be more extensively met if Metro Ride service hours were expanded during the evenings past 6:30 PM.

Disadvantages

The primary challenge is the development of an acceptable funding partnership between Wausau and Rib Mountain, which includes identifying new funding to support the route extension into Rib Mountain.

Summary

Table 26 summarizes cost savings for each potential service change.

Table 26. Cost Savings Summary of Alternatives

Alternative	Revenue Hours Reduced	Projected FY23 Cost/Revenue Hour	Total Cost Savings Per Alternative
New Northwest Wausau Route/Streamlined B & D Replaces One All Day Bus Route (Operates 245 days/yr., 11.88 hrs./day)	2,911	$132.86	$386,702.32
Additional Vehicle During Peak Hours (average 3 hours/day)			-$75,730
New Northwest Wausau Route/Streamlined G & I Replaces One All Day Bus (Operates 245 days/yr., 11.88 hrs./day)	2,911	$132.86	$386,702.32
Estimated Annual Total Operations Savings			$773,404.64
Additional Vehicles (x2) during Peak School Year Hours (Avg. 3 hours/day/vehicle)			-$151,460.4
Estimated Annual Total Operations Savings			**$621,944.24**

Chapter 8. Recommended Service Improvements

Overview

Based on feedback from existing riders and public stakeholder groups (as documented in Technical Memoranda 1 and 2), the following system improvements are recommended.

Technology Improvements

The project team recommends that when exploring and prioritizing what and when system improvements are needed, it is critical to balance operational goals with technology-upgrade needs. Recommended priority for technology improvements are as follows.

1. GPS Source – Real-time access for Metro Ride and the riders
2. Metro Ride app offering mobile payment options and real-time tracking of vehicles
3. Annunciators on vehicles
4. Mobile Data Terminals on vehicles that auto-upload into the Metro Ride servers

Operations Improvements

Extended Service Hours (Morning or Evening)

Based on passenger surveys during this planning project, as well as previous plans, and stakeholder interviews have reinforced that there is a strong desire for more service hours provided for each weekday. Much of the feedback centered around the need for Metro Ride's ability to meet more employees work schedules that may begin or end outside the current service hours of 6:30 AM to 6:30 PM, Monday through Friday.

Limited Saturday Service

Rider and stakeholder feedback also suggested the desire for Saturday service for shopping, employment and other purposes. A number of options can be explored to meet this need with variable hours and frequency. Transit systems similar to Metro Ride often provide less frequent Saturday service on fewer routes as compared to regular weekday schedules. One option for limited Saturday service would be to combine Routes B and D into a single route and Routes G and I into another single route as described in Scenario 3. Other routes would operate as usual. A key to success for Saturday Service is to include an expansion service in Rib Mountain and or Schofield/Weston on Saturdays. With those destinations included in the service area, ridership will be stronger and the service will benefit more people.

Extended Service to the Wausau West Industrial Park

National and local studies have demonstrated that transportation is a barrier to gaining and sustaining employment, particularly for people entering or re-entering the workforce. Research is ongoing as to the most appropriate mode of service for the Wausau West Industrial Park businesses. Metro Ride should continue to explore the opportunity to operate or partner with third party to provide customizable shared-ride transportation service for the businesses at the industrial park. A microtransit or vanpool like service that can be customized by the employer is likely the most appropriate mode of service to meet demand. With employer subsidies and/or advertising on the vehicles, all or a portion of the trip costs for the employee could be covered.

Extended Service to Rib Mountain, Schofield, Rothschild, and Weston

Discussions with each community to identify the alternative mode or service design are encouraged so

that each community and Metro Ride are satisfied with the options available to them and understand the necessary additional revenue. The local cost of implementing service is shared by Federal Transit Administration funding. Local revenue must come, at least in part, from the community that is receiving the service. However, contract revenue from employers and social service agencies or advertising revenue provided by private business or other contracts can help cover local revenue requirements.

Focus on Community Education and Engagement

Finally, Metro Ride needs to enhance its community education campaign through informative outreach efforts using local media, its website, and face-to-face customer engagement. The Metro Ride passengers and many people and business leaders throughout the community recognize the value of public transit, but that is not a prevailing attitude among area residents.

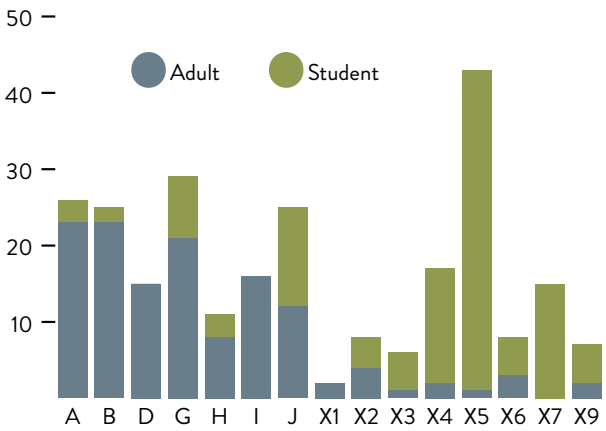
Metro Ride is an important part of Wausau and the region. A local "champion" is needed to remind people of Metro Ride's commitment to improving service and to garner local support to surmount the hurdles that Metro Ride has faced in previous years.

Appendix A Passenger Survey Results

Overview

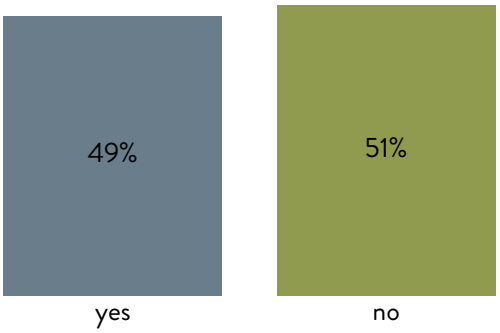
During the span of four days in October, 2021, RLS & Associates, Inc. conducted an onboard rider survey of Metro Rider fixed route riders. The purpose of this survey was to collect feedback from current Metro Ride riders to determine areas for improvement and future changes. The riders were also questioned regarding demographics, frequency of bus usage, trip purpose, and travel needs outside of Wausau. Two similar surveys were provided: one for adults and one for students using tripper routes. The surveys were also available in large print and Hmong. Over the four days of the survey period (October 18th – 21st), a total of 253 surveys were collected: 133 from adults and 120 from students. Figure A1 shows the breakdown of responses collected by route and survey type.

Figure A1. Survey Responses



To help understand Metro Ride's fare structure from the rider perspective, respondents were asked what type of fare they used on their surveyed trip. Figure A2 then shows that almost half of the respondents (126 people) rode Metro Ride on a reduced face.

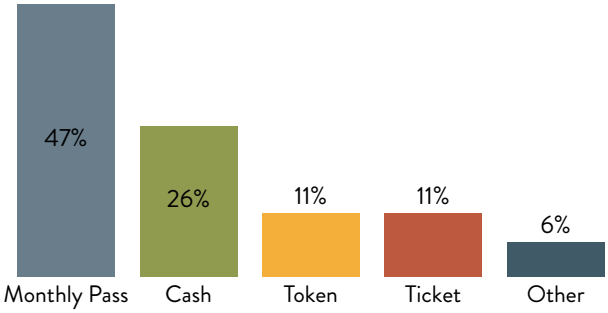
Figure A2. Reduced Fare



Note: This question was only asked on the adult survey.

Figure A3 shows how almost 50 percent of respondents (132 people) paid for their ride using monthly passes, with cash being the second most common at 26 percent.

Figure A3. Fare Type



Note: This question was only asked on the adult survey.

Rider Satisfaction

Riders were asked to rate their satisfaction of Metro Ride through 13 different questions by ranking them 1-7 (1=Very Poor and 7=Excellent). Figure A4 shows the satisfaction rating questions used in the survey.

Figure A4. Satisfaction Survey Questions

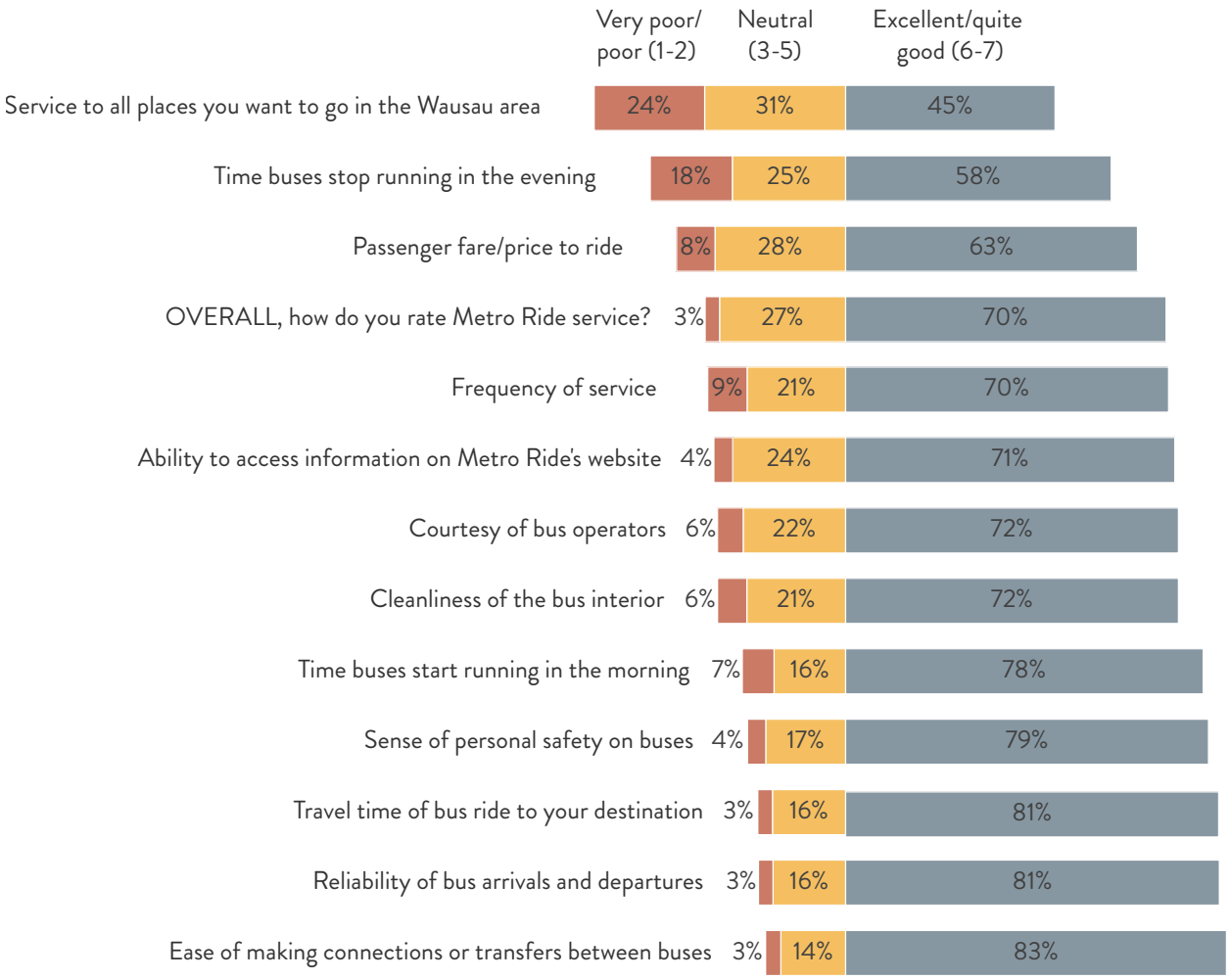
In the past 30 days, how would you rate Metro Ride services…	Excellent						Very poor	*Don't Know/ Don't use*
10. Courtesy of bus operators	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	☐
11. Sense of personal safety on buses	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	☐
12. Cleanliness of the bus interior	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	☐
13. Reliability of bus arrivals and departures	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	☐
14. Travel time of bus ride to your destination	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	☐
15. Time buses start running in the morning	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	☐
16. Time buses stop running in the evening	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	☐
17. Frequency of Service	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	☐
18. Ease of making connections or transfers between buses	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	☐
19. Ability to access information on Metro Ride's website	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	☐
20. Passenger Fare/price to ride	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	☐
21. Service to all the places you want to go in the Wausau area	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	☐

22. OVERALL, how do you rate Metro Ride service?

Excellent						Very Poor
7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Figure A5 shows a breakdown of the answers to the above questions with scores of six or seven depicting positive satisfaction, a score of three, four, or five depicting neutral satisfaction, and a score of one or two depicting dissatisfaction.

Figure A5. Metro Ride Satisfaction



Out of the 13 questions asked, respondents rated 12 of them positively. The one question that had a majority of neutral or negative responses was "Service to all places you want to go in the Wausau area". This shows that riders would like to use Metro Ride to reach areas currently unserved.

The highest response rate by the riders was "Ease of making connections or transfers between buses," which can be attributed to the Metro Ride Transit Center being used as the central location for all bus transfers. Rider's bus travel time to their destination and the reliability of the bus being on-time were two more highly rated responses. Overall, 70 percent of riders rated Metro Ride's service positively, while only two percent rated it negatively.

Metro Ride Usage

Riders were also asked a variety of questions about their usage of Metro Ride. How many days per week do they ride Metro Ride, how much time is required to get from home to a bus stop, and how many bus transfers they used on their current trip. Figure A6 shows the average days per week that respondents ride Metro Ride. Students averaged five days per week on almost all eight express routes, while adults averaged over three days per week on most regular routes.

Figure A6. Average Days per Week Riding Metro Ride

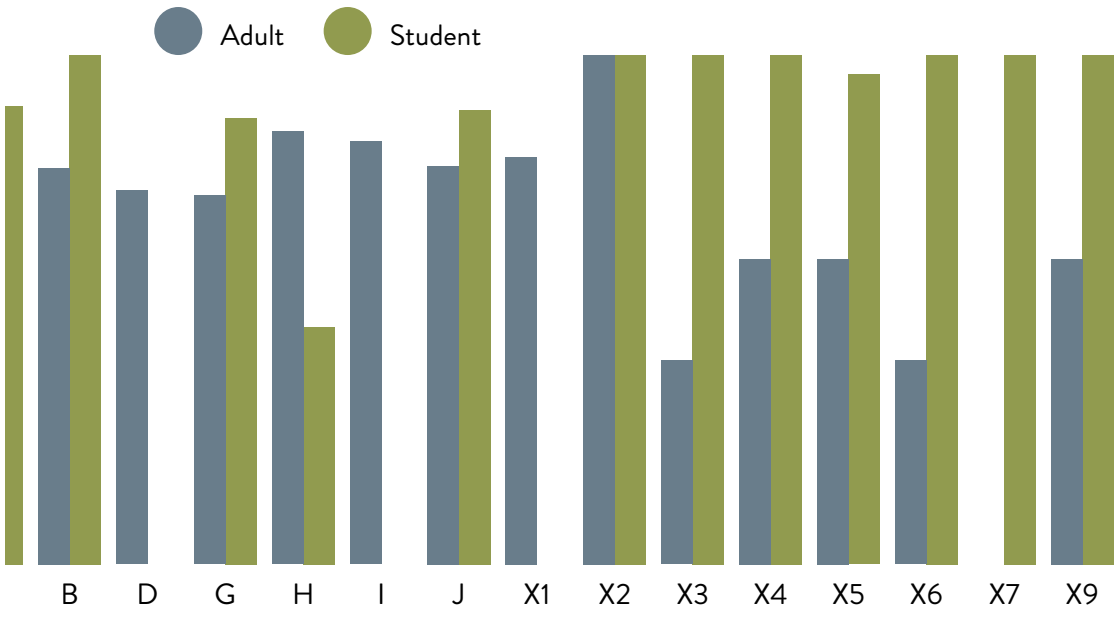
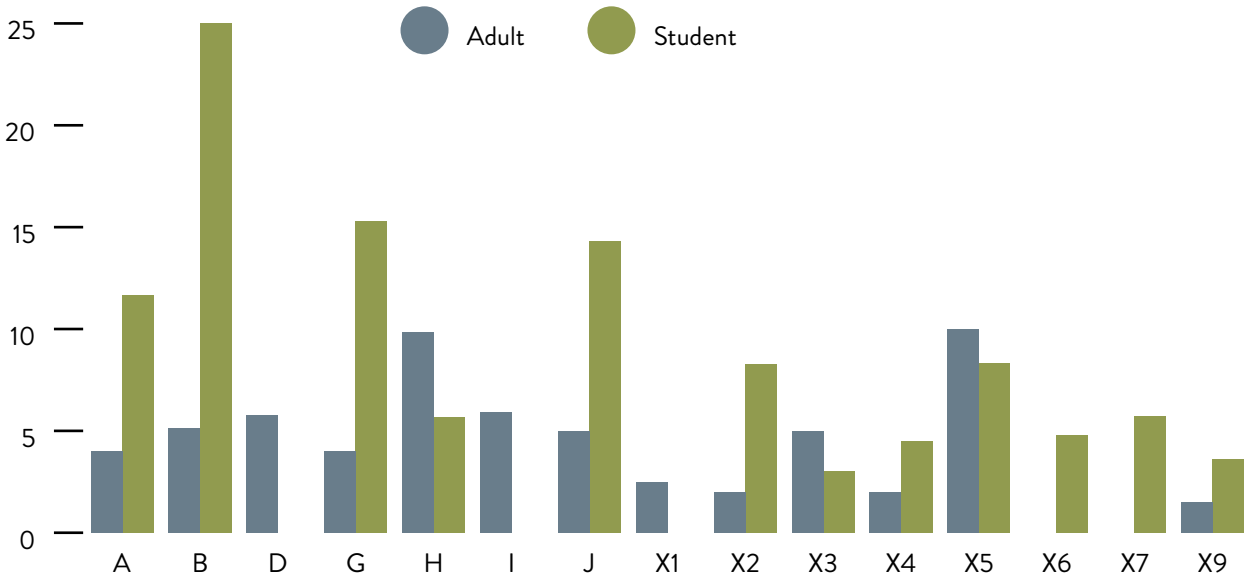


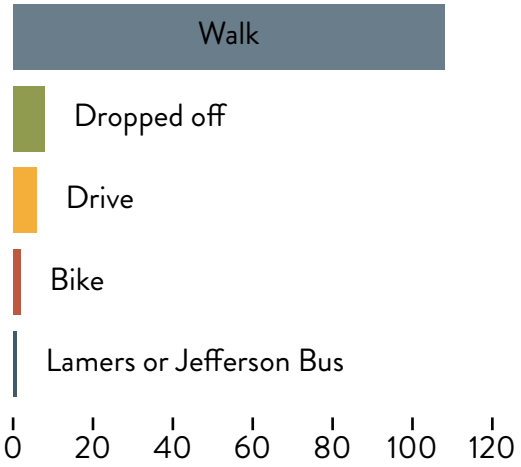
Figure A7 shows the average amount of time that respondents take to get from their home to a bus stop. Students and adults averaged between five and ten minutes, with few exceptions. One exception is the student response to Route B. Only one student indicated that it takes 25 minutes to walk to a bus stop. That length of time is an outlier compared to the majority of survey results.

Figure A7. Average Minutes to get to Bus Stop from Home



Respondents were also asked how they reach their bus stops from home. Figure A8 shows walking to be the method of most respondents. Note: This question was only asked on the adult survey.

Figure A8. Getting from Home to the Bus Stop



Respondents were also asked where they were going on the trip in which they were surveyed. Figure A9 shows that adult respondents were pretty evenly split between going home, to work, and shopping. With students, going to school/college was the most common answer, followed by going home.

Figure A9. Trip Destination

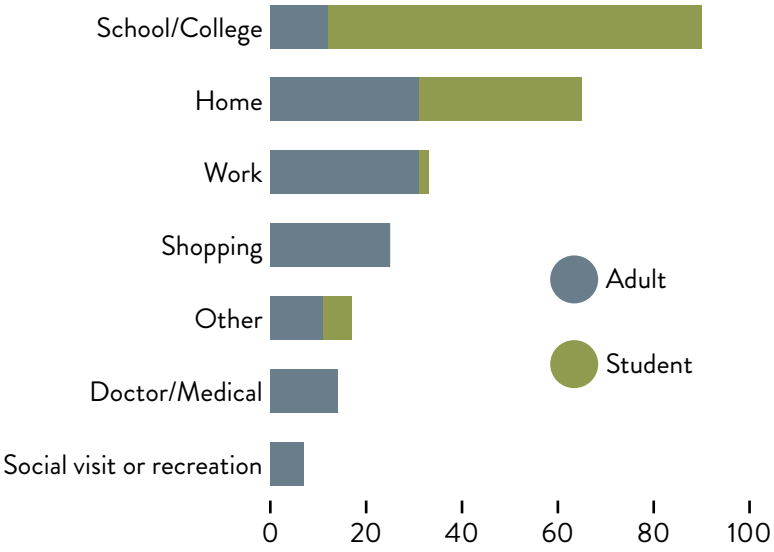


Table A1 and Table A2 show the percentage of respondents by route who had to transfer between buses to reach their destination during the surveyed trip. Of all adults, 68 percent transferred. However,

only 36 percent of students had to transfer during their surveyed trip

Table A1. Adult Bus Transfers

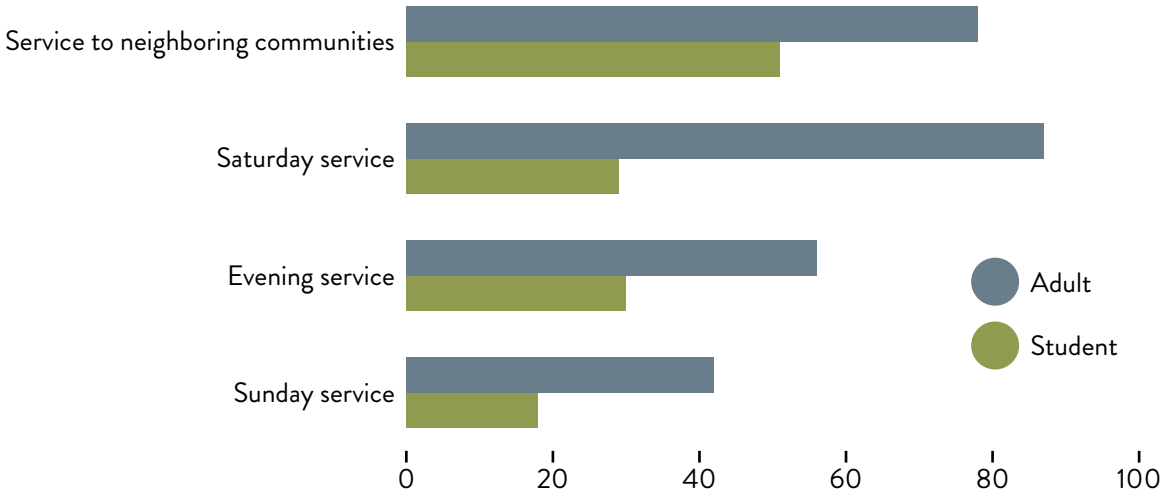
Adult	Yes	No
A	74%	26%
B	70%	30%
D	80%	20%
G	57%	43%
H	50%	50%
I	81%	19%
J	83%	17%
X1	0%	100%
X2	0%	100%
X3	100%	0%
X4	100%	0%
X5	100%	0%
X6	33%	67%
X7	0%	0%
X9	50%	50%

Table A2. Student Bus Transfers

Student	Yes	No
A	100%	0%
B	100%	0%
D	0%	0%
G	100%	0%
H	100%	0%
I	0%	0%
J	85%	15%
X1	0%	0%
X2	0%	100%
X3	0%	100%
X4	27%	73%
X5	7%	93%
X6	0%	100%
X7	27%	73%
X9	100%	0%

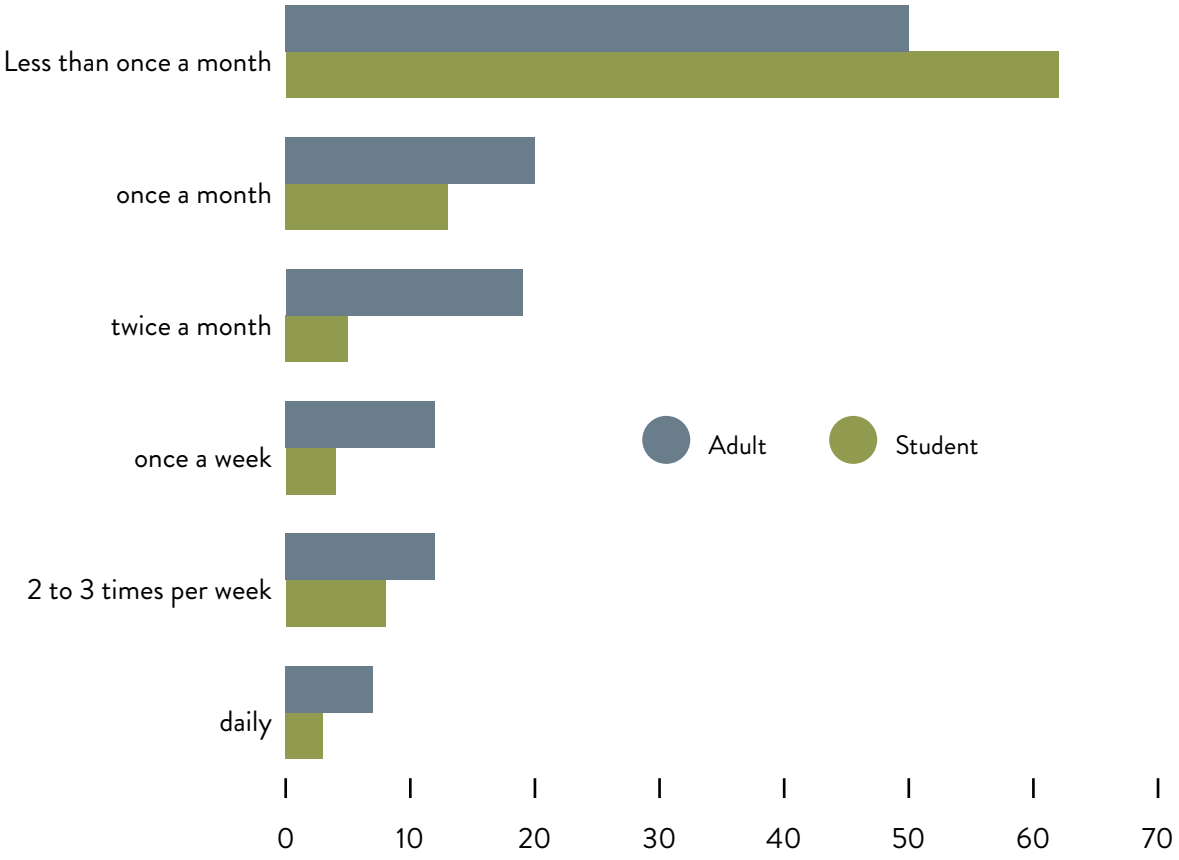
Riders also were asked important questions for the future. What services Metro Ride should offer? How often does the respondent need travels outside of Wausau and doesn't have a ride? How many times have they have utilized Metro Ride? Figure A10 shows that most respondents would like to see Metro Ride expand its service into neighboring communities and have Saturday service.

Figure A10. Services Metro Ride Should Offer



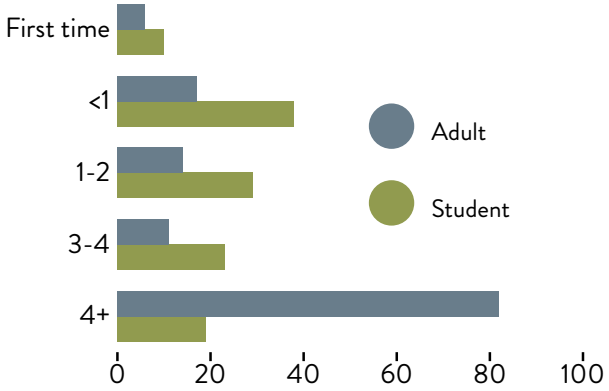
More than one-half of the question's respondents reported needing to travel outside of Wausau less than once a month and not having a ride available.

Figure A11. Need to Travel Outside Wausau and not having a Ride



A vast majority of adult riders have ridden Metro Ride more than four years, while student riders were more diverse in their answers, with a plurality of students having ridden less than one year.

Figure A12. Years Riding Metro Ride



Rider Demographics

Riders were asked for a variety of basic demographic information. These included age, race, available household vehicles, and if they had a driver's license. A breakdown of these demographic topics can be found below.

Figure A13. Rider Age Groups

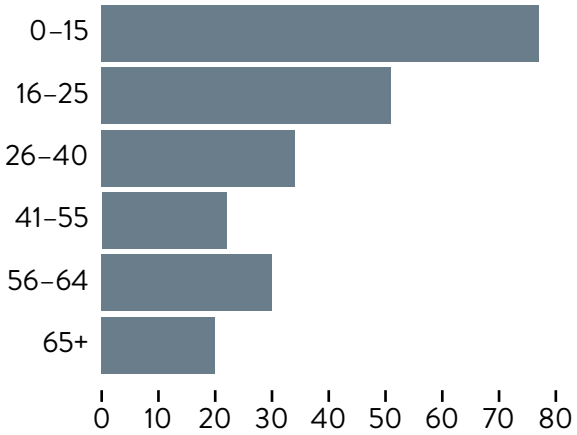


Figure A14. Rider by Race

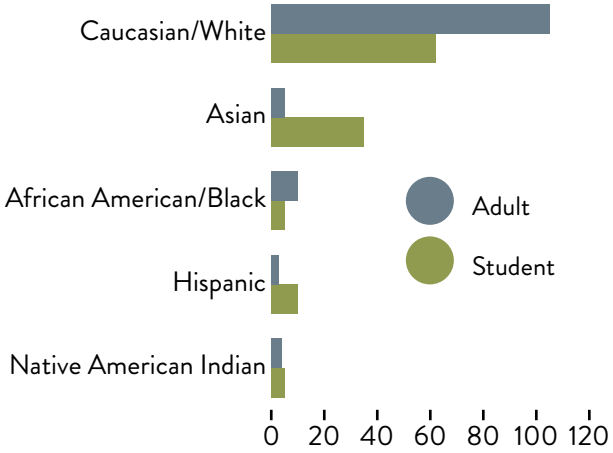
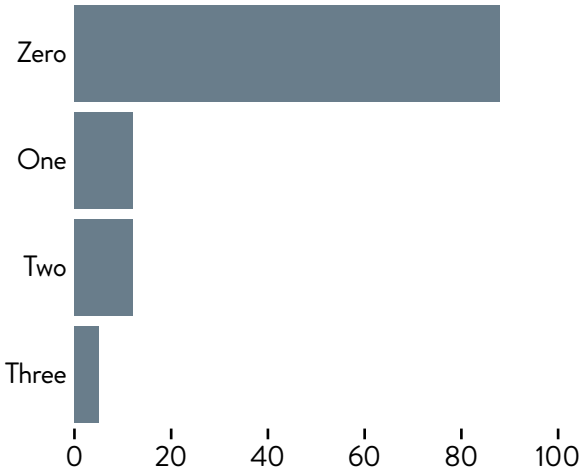
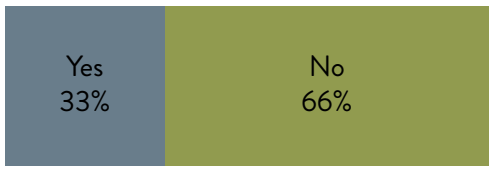


Figure A15. Available Vehicles by Household



Note: This question was only asked on the adult survey.

Figure A16. Valid Driver's License



Respondents were also asked more in-depth demographic questions. Did they have a cell phone and how do they use it, employment status, and language spoken at home. Figure A17 shows that a vast majority of the respondents had cell phones. However, at most, only about half of those with cell phones have internet access or use them to text.

Figure A17. Cell Phones

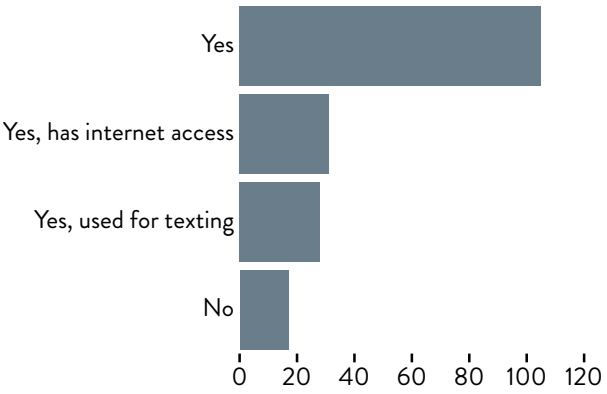
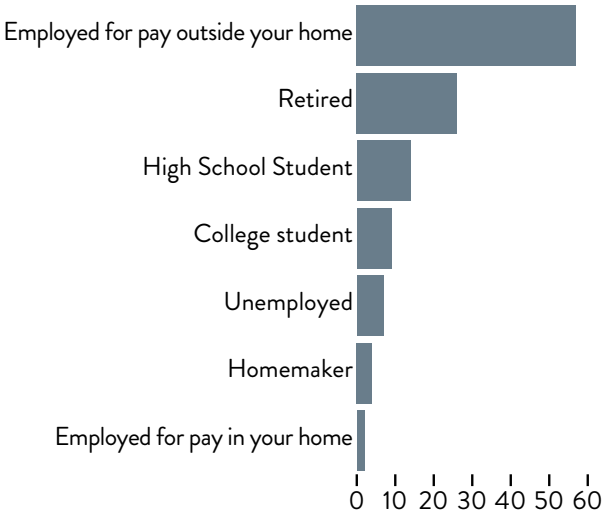


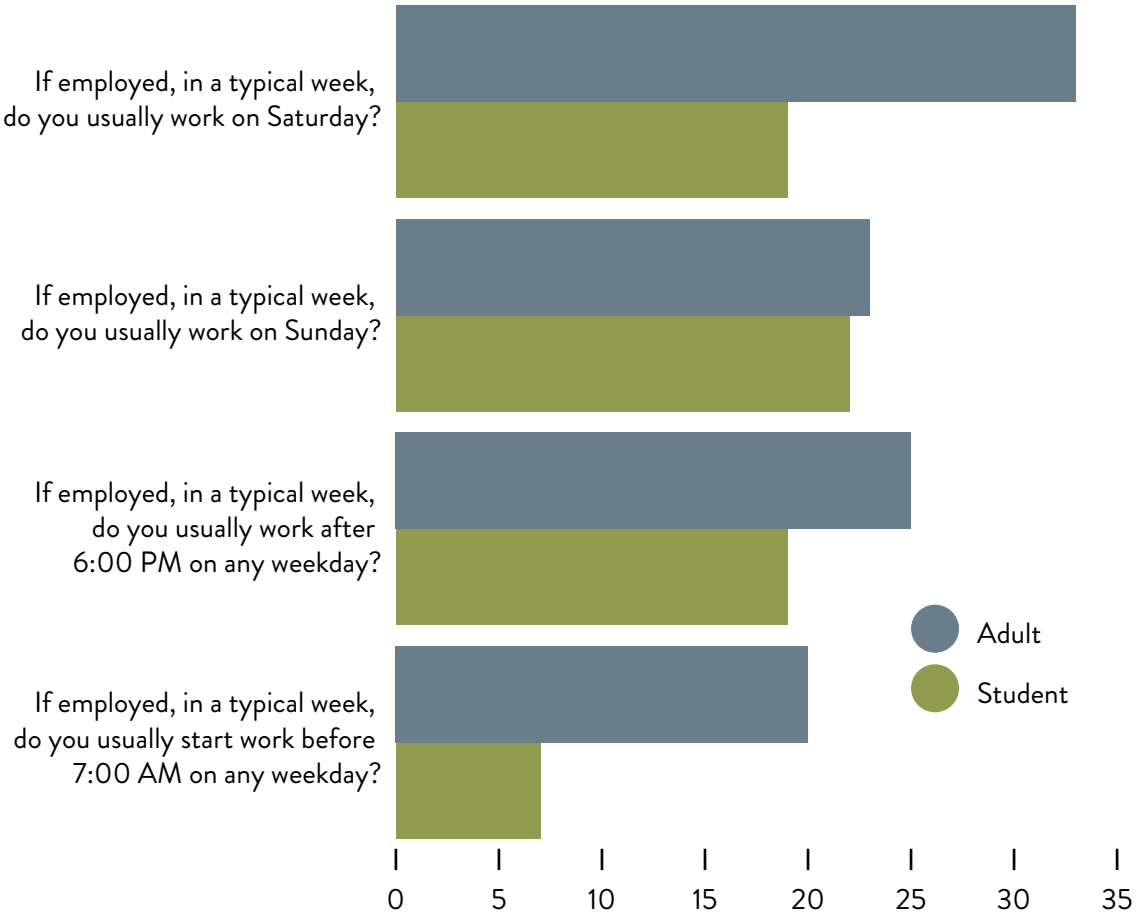
Figure A18 shows that over half of respondents are employed outside their home and a few work from home or are homemakers. About 25% are retired, 20 percent are high school or college students and only six percent stated that they were unemployed.

Figure A18. Employment Status



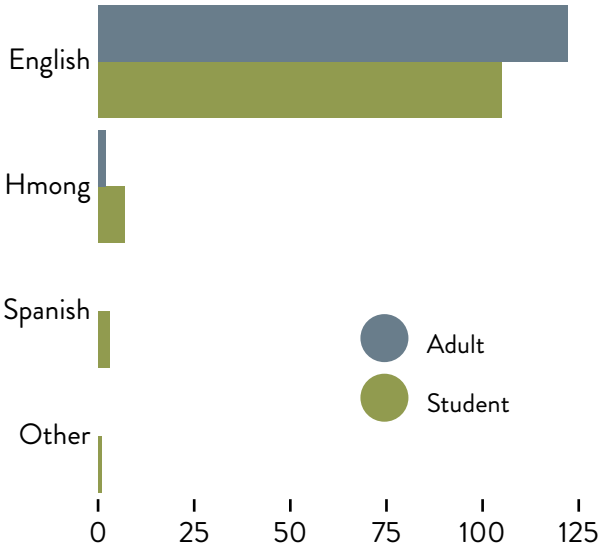
Those who were employed were asked what days and times they typically work outside normal business hours. The two most common answers, shown in Figure A19, were respondents working on Saturdays and Sundays.

Figure A19. Times Working Outside Normal Business Hours



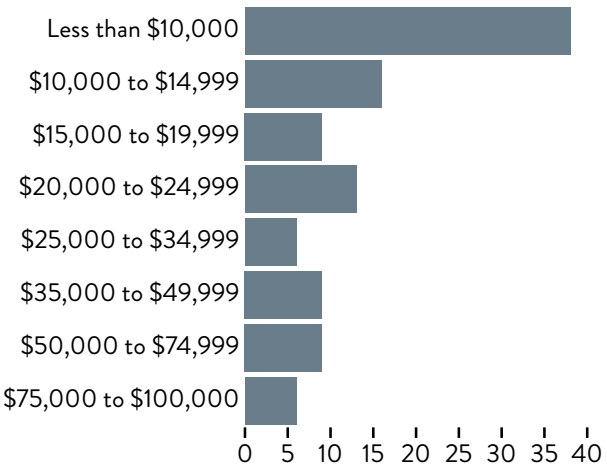
Respondents were asked what language they spoke at home. Figure A20 shows the most common language answered was English, with Hmong being the second most common. One answer was written in with "Other," being Korean.

Figure A20. Language Spoken at Home



RLS compared responses indicating both the number of people per household and the annual household income to estimate the number of households who may be living in poverty. After reviewing all of the survey responses, 121 responses provided enough information to be considered. Of those 121 responses, 47 to 60 of them are living in households that are considered under the Federal Poverty Level for 2021 according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Figure A21. Household Income



Summary

Riders and the public responded to surveys with a generally positive view of Metro Ride services with one major exception. They are dissatisfied with the destinations served, as they cannot reach stores and employment outside the city of Wausau. Some are also dissatisfied with the span of service offered. Many work shifts that start before 6:30 AM or end after 6:30 PM. Residents cannot use Metro Ride to reach community events or other activities at night or on weekends.

Most surveyed on the buses use Metro Ride regularly and have done so over four years. Most riders transfer between routes to reach their destinations. Most riders are white, not middle-aged (students or over 55), employed if not in school, and lower income. A large majority have smartphones, but often don't have internet access without WiFi. A large majority do not have a car available at home—only a third have drivers licenses. Half of respondents live in households at or under the federal poverty guidelines.

Appendix B: Public Survey Results

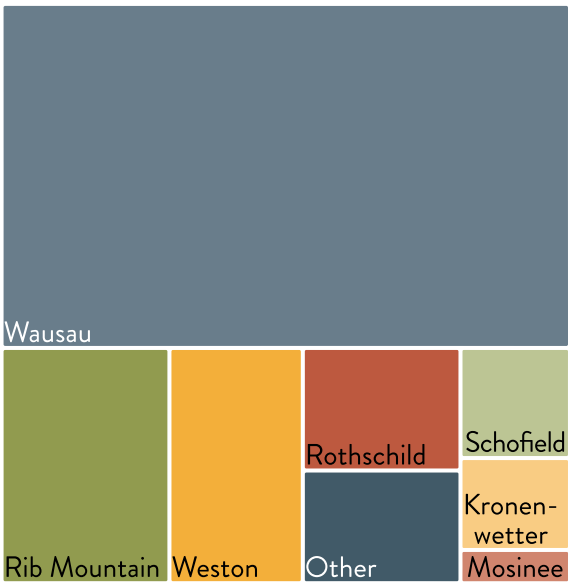
The following paragraphs provide a summary of survey questions and responses. On some questions, the percentages add up to more than 100 percent because respondents were permitted to select multiple answers.

Who Responded to the Survey?

Where People Live

Of those who answered the question (818), Figure B1 shows that 59 percent (486) of them live in the City of Wausau. The next two highest number of participants from individual communities were Rib Mountain (98) and Weston (78). Forty-eight responses were from residents of Rothschild, and 30 were from Schofield residents. Of the 44 respondents who answered "Other," common answers were the Village of Maine (eight), Stettin (five), and Ringle (four).

Figure B1. Where do you live?



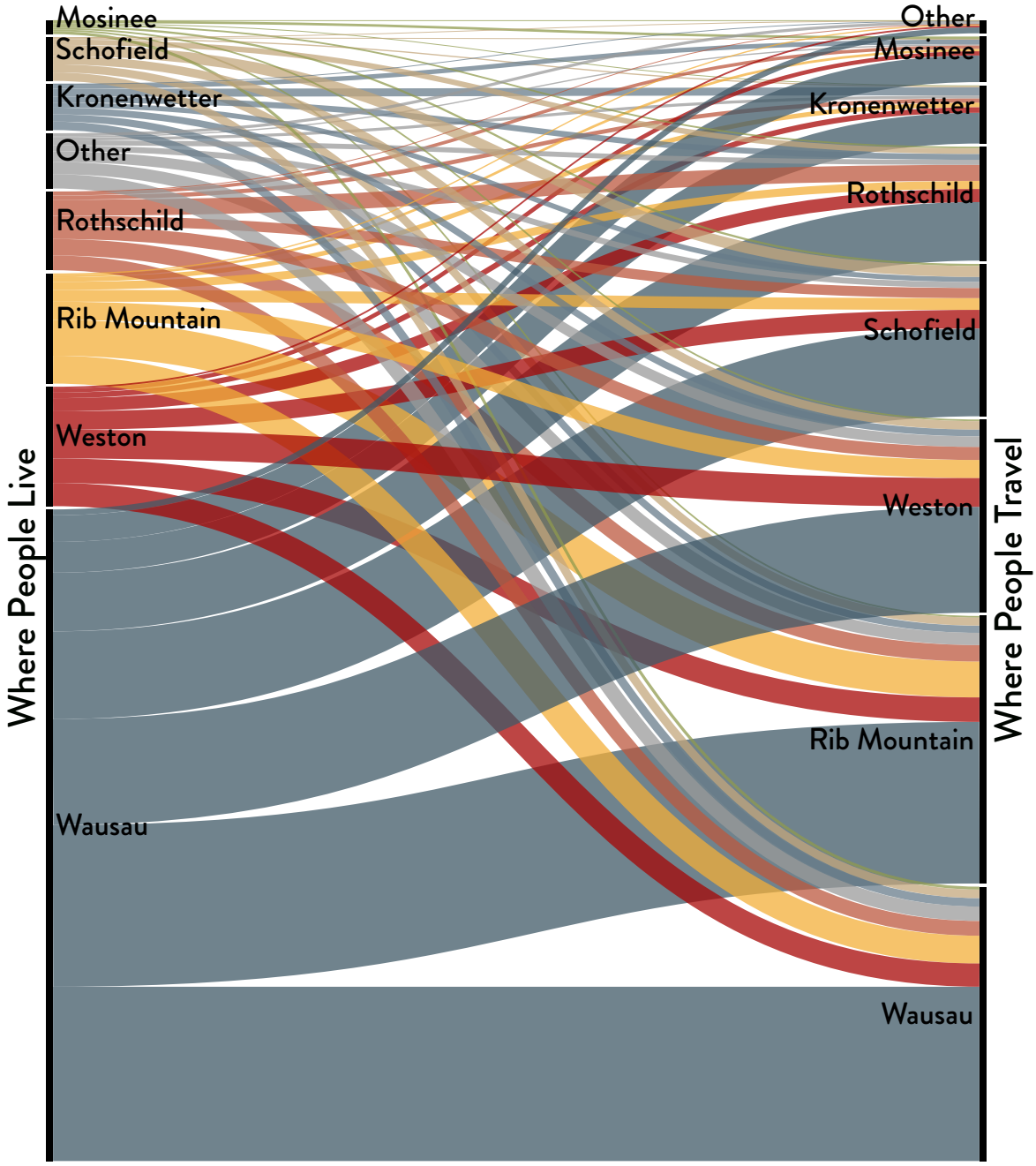
Where People Most Often Travel

Respondents were asked which three communities in the Wausau Metro Area they most often needed to travel to. By combining that information with the community they live in, results indicate that Wausau was the most common destination overall, with 650 responses (24.5% of 2,649 responses). Rib Mountain closely followed Wausau at 634 responses. As shown in Table B1 and Figure B2, Rib Mountain is the most popular out-of-town destination for respondents from Wausau, Weston, Rothschild, and Kronenwetter. Rib Mountain is the second most popular destination for residents from all other communities in the area. This pattern most likely reflects that the region's major shopping locations, including discount shopping, are located in Rib Mountain.

Table B1. To which municipalities do you most often need to travel?

Where People Live	Where People Travel							
	Kronenwetter	Mosinee	Rib Mountain	Rothschild	Schofield	Wausau	Weston	Other
Kronenwetter	19	11	17	14	12	20	16	0
Mosinee	2	6	4	4	5	7	4	0
Rib Mountain	11	6	85	19	28	66	43	3
Rothschild	10	8	39	38	24	35	31	1
Schofield	3	1	19	13	26	20	20	1
Wausau	73	63	383	139	208	413	251	14
Weston	13	10	58	31	44	55	68	4
Other	7	3	29	12	14	34	25	7
Total	**138**	**108**	**634**	**270**	**361**	**650**	**458**	**30**

Figure B2. Alluvial chart for residents' travel patterns



Respondents were also asked if Wausau is their top destination specifically for work, medical care, and shopping. Of the 938 who responded to the follow-up survey question, 51 percent said these major destinations are usually not in Wausau. **If the destinations where people most need to travel are not in Wausau, then Metro Ride is not a transportation option. Public transit service is only available within the city limits.**

Metro Ride

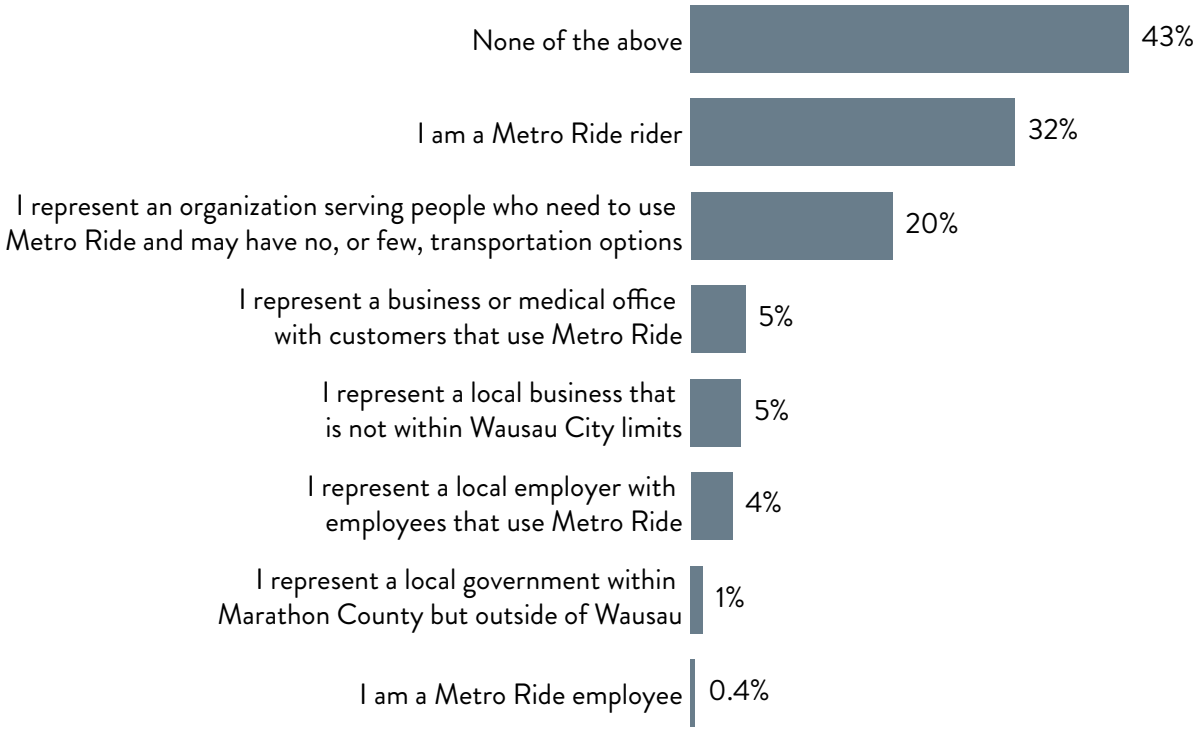
Metro Ride is the only public transit system in the Wausau Metro Area. Gaining information on the respondent's understanding and previous knowledge of Metro Ride provides context for their responses.

The following questions explore the local awareness of Metro Ride.

Figure B3 illustrates the respondent's current relationship with Metro Ride. Of those who answered the question (937):

- 43 percent do not currently use Metro Ride;
- 32 percent of respondents are Metro Ride riders;
- 20 percent represent an organization that serves people who could benefit from Metro Ride; and,
- Less than five percent of respondents represented a business, medical office, or local government.

Figure B3. Do any of the following apply to you?



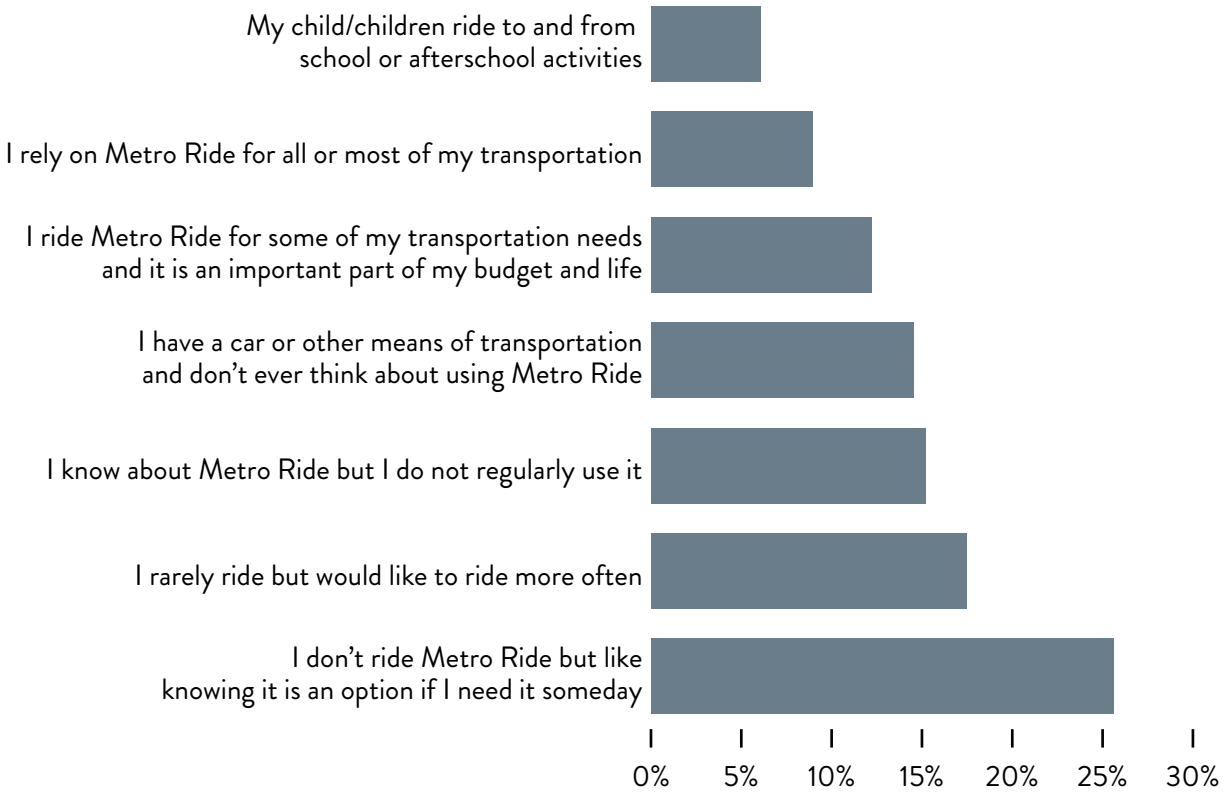
To get more information on the respondent's previous background knowledge of Metro Ride, respondents were asked if they knew Metro Ride's schedule and fare structure. Of the 833 individuals that answered the question, 62 percent were aware.

Wausau residents were more likely to be aware of the Metro Ride fare structure than non-residents. This fact is probably reinforced because the public transit service area is limited to Wausau and not available to areas outside of the city limits.

Figure B4 provides more detail into the respondents' awareness of Metro Ride.

- 72 percent of respondents from Wausau ride Metro Ride with some frequency, compared to 31 percent of non-Wausau residents.
- 34 percent of respondents stated that they do not currently use Metro Ride, but like having that option if needed in the future.
- Of all the respondents, 52 percent stated that they or their child(ren) ride Metro Ride in some capacity.

Figure B4. Which of the following statements best describes your use and/or awareness of Metro Ride?



Many of the survey respondents who use Metro Ride, are regular riders, indicating that they depend on public transit as their primary mode of transportation.

- 25 percent of all respondents and 35 percent of Wausau resident respondents currently use Metro Ride once a week or more.

The respondents who were not currently using Metro Ride were asked the likelihood of riding if the service went where they lived and needed to go. Table B2 shows that most individuals would use Metro Ride occasionally or regularly.

Table B2. If you aren't using Metro Ride now, how likely is it that you would ride if it were available where you live and when you need to go?

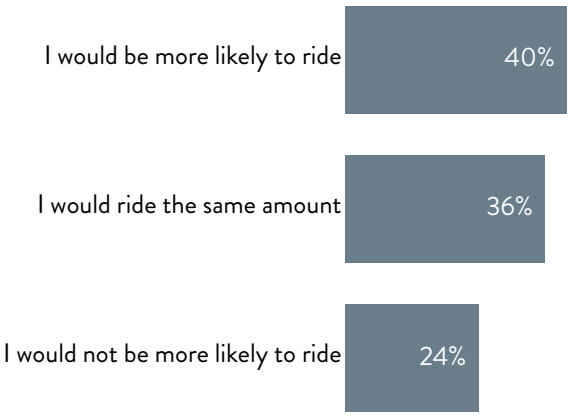
	Kronenwetter	Mosinee	Rib Mountain	Rothschild	Schofield	Wausau	Weston	Other	Total
I use it now and will continue to ride	0	1	5	2	4	123	3	2	140
I would use it regularly	11	4	22	10	6	123	28	7	211
I would use it occasionally	5	3	37	28	18	178	25	20	314
I am not at all likely to use it	2	1	31	5	1	51	15	6	112
I would let my client, constituents, or employees know about using Metro Ride	9	4	18	15	4	106	25	16	197

Metro Ride Passenger Fares

The following survey questions relate to the public impressions of changes to Metro Ride service options and the resulting impact on personal transportation budgets.

Survey responses indicate that 76 percent of individuals would use Metro Ride at the same frequency or more often if rides were free. This is an important factor for Metro Ride to consider, because passenger fares make up approximately 10 percent of the system's total operating revenue. A decision to introduce free fares would need to be coupled with using a new funding source to compensate for the lost fare revenue.

Figure B5. If the Metro Ride was fare-free, would you be more likely to ride?



Desired Service Changes to Metro Ride

Survey respondents considered what changes they would like Metro Ride to make. **The major changes relate to expanding the geographic boundaries of the service area. The secondary requests were to add service on Saturdays and operate until 6:30 PM on weekdays.**

- 76 percent of respondents support expanding service to Rib Mountain.
- 69 percent supported service expansion to Weston, Schofield and Rothschild.
- 59 percent of respondents voted for adding Saturday service.
- 48 percent of responses would like service after 6:30 PM.
- Nearly 40 percent of respondents also want Metro Ride to serve more areas of Wausau.

Also, nearly twenty-five percent of respondents want a service that picks them up at a scheduled location (other than a bus stop) and takes them where they are going. This type of service would be similar to a demand-response or on-demand mode of service using a smaller vehicle without a fixed schedule. The vehicles would transport fewer passengers per trip than a fixed route bus, but still on a shared-ride service.

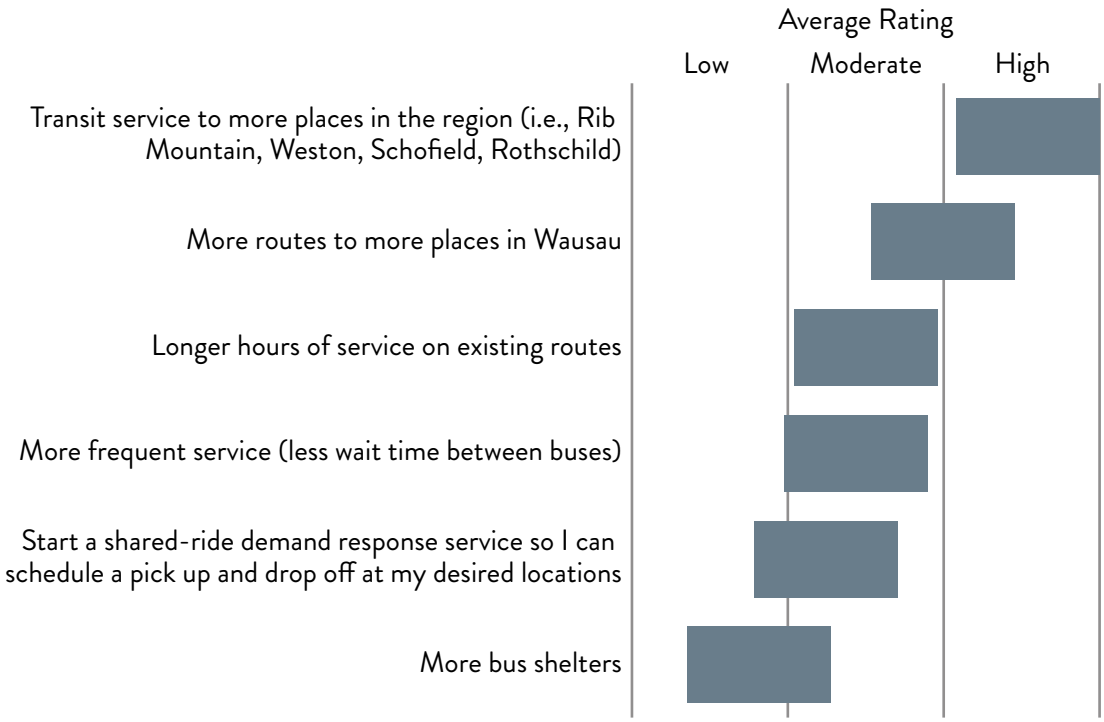
Twenty-two percent of respondents also indicated that they would like to be able to reserve a trip using an app or website. Currently, Metro Ride only offers fixed route services for the general public (no advance scheduling required) or paratransit service for certified-eligible individuals with a qualifying disability. Paratransit riders call in advance to schedule a trip. Riders do not currently have the option to schedule using an app or website.

Figure B6. What would you change to make public transportation options more appealing?

1. Service to/in Rib Mountain
2. Service to/in Weston/Schofield/Rothschild
3. Service on Saturdays
4. Service after 6:30 PM
5. Serve more areas of Wausau
6. Driver to pick me up and take me to where I am going
7. Trip reservation app or website
8. Bus stops closer to my home or destinations
9. Service before 6:30 AM
10. Other

Passengers were asked to rate which changes they most strongly prefer. Figure B7 illustrates that expanding transit service to more places in the region is their priority, followed by more routes to more places within Wausau. Starting a demand response service and adding more bus shelters received the lowest overall average ratings.

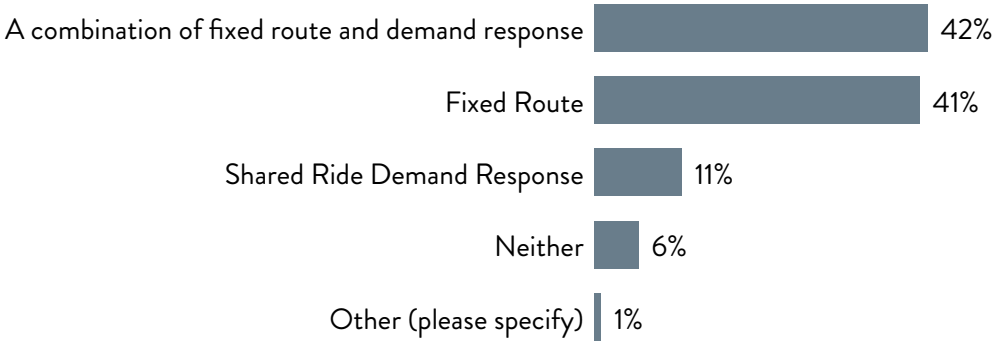
Figure B7. Rate the service improvements you prefer most.



Currently, Metro Ride operates fixed route transit with no general public demand response options. Metro Ride's demand response paratransit, service is available only to eligible individuals with disabilities. Demand response rider are picked up at a designated location and dropped off at their destination. Demand response public transportation is always a shared ride—someone might already be on-board at the pickup location or stay on-board at the drop-off location. Demand Response rides are requested in advance. The ride provider may request notice a week before the trip, a day before, or an hour before, depending on the service offered.

Nearly equal numbers of responses supported Metro Ride providing a combination of fixed route and demand response options as opposed to only fixed route service. The options for only offering demand response (without fixed route) received low ratings.

Figure B8. Which type of public transit is most appealing to you?



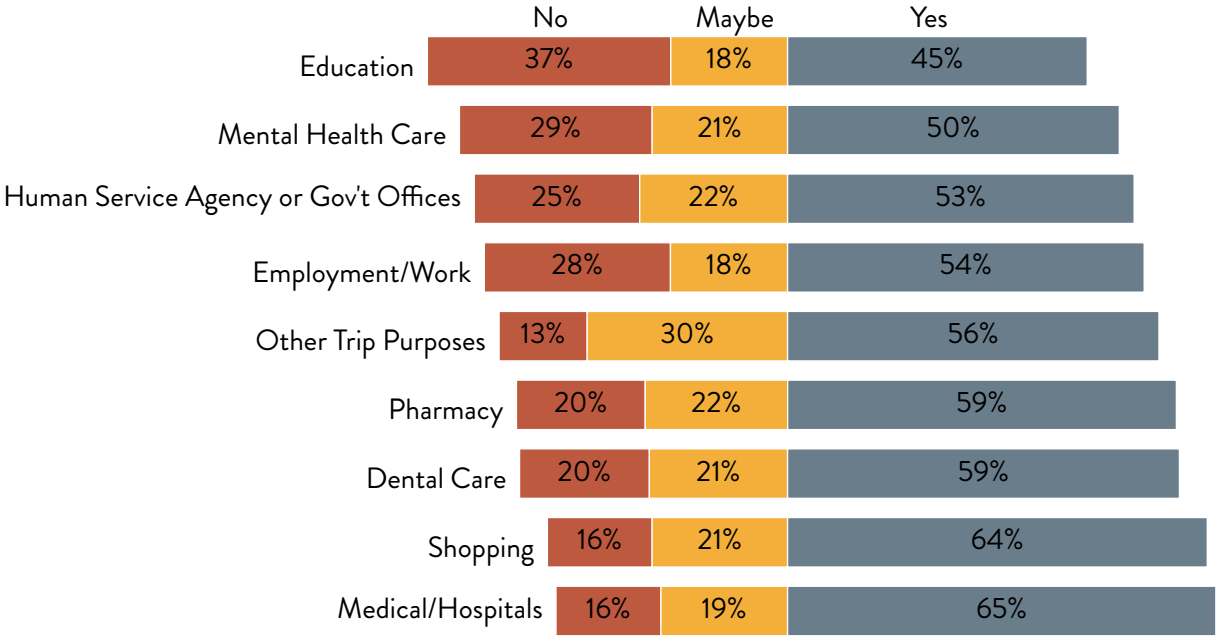
The Need for Public Transit

At least half of the respondents who travel to all types of destinations would use public transit if available. The exception was for education-related destinations; still, 45 percent of people who travel to education-related destinations would use transit.

- 65 percent of respondents would ride transit to medical-related or hospital sites.
- 64 percent would ride to shopping destinations.

As shown earlier in Table B1, many destinations are outside of Wausau and not currently served by Metro Ride.

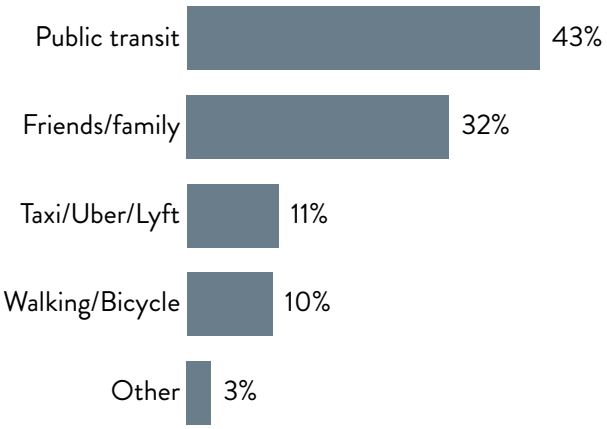
Figure B9. If available, would you take public transit to access the following types of destinations?



The necessity of public transportation is apparent when faced with losing one's ability to drive.

- 43 percent of respondents identified public transit as the mode they would rely upon if they lost the ability to drive.
- 32 percent would rely on family or friends to give them a ride if they lost the option to drive.
- Others would use private transit services, walk, or bicycle.

Figure B10. If you lost the ability to drive today, how would you get around?

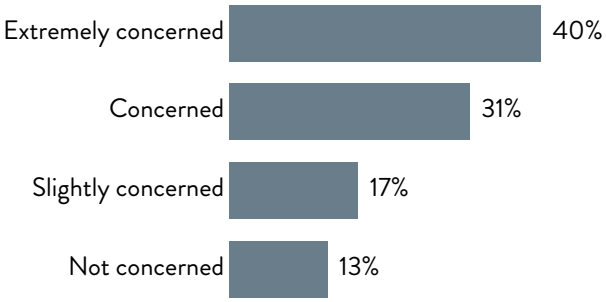


Many respondents are concerned that a friend or family member would not be able to drive them where they need to go. This question is particularly relevant to an aging population, working parents of teenagers who will soon need transportation to work and education-related activities, and caregivers of individuals with disabilities.

The issue of public transit is often an afterthought for people who drive or have regular access to a ride. Affordable transportation becomes necessary when driving a car or riding with a friend or family member is not an option to reach a needed destination.

- 87 percent of the respondents are concerned that someone they care about in the local area may lose the ability to drive.

Figure B11. Are you concerned that, in the future, you or a friend/family member in the local area may not drive and will need public transportation options?



The Price and Value of Transportation

Public transit is funded through Federal, State, and local funds, and passenger fares. Sustainable local public budget implications are a key focus in the planning of Metro Ride services.

Survey participants were asked a series of questions about their perception of public spending related to transit services.

- 82 percent of survey participants would support their local community government in spending related to public transportation.

Figure B12. Would you support your local community government spending money in the annual budget to pay for public transit services in your community?

* This question was asked only of residents who do not live in Wausau because the City of Wausau already provides funding for Metro Ride.

Survey participants supported increasing public funding for expanded service hours at Metro Ride. Eighty-three percent of survey respondents would support their local community spending public funds to expand hours of operation.

Figure B13. If Metro Ride expanded hours of operation or days of service to start before 6:30 AM or end after

6:30 PM, would you support the community spending money to fund these additional hours?

The following scenario was presented to survey participants to clarify the relationship between the implications of spending additional public dollars and their desire for public transportation.

If no additional funding is available to your local government, would you support a decision to decrease spending in another area of its budget in order to help fund transit services that would operate in your community?

Figure B14 shows all responses to the scenario, regardless of where the respondent lives.

- 82 percent of all survey respondents stated they would support the budget rearrangement to help fund transit services in the community.

Figure B14. Would you support a decision to decrease spending in another area of your community's budget to help fund transit services that would operate in your community?

Wausau residents were the largest subgroup to participate in the survey question overall at 62 percent of the total responses.

- 83 percent of respondents from Wausau stated that if additional funding for transit were not available, they would support decreased spending in another area of the City's budget to support increased Metro Ride operations in their community.

Rib Mountain residents comprised 12 percent of the total responses.

- 57 percent of responses from Rib Mountain favored the scenario of adjusting the Village budget to fund public transportation. This is consistent with responses to the 2017 public survey which received a statistically significant number of responses from Rib Mountain households.

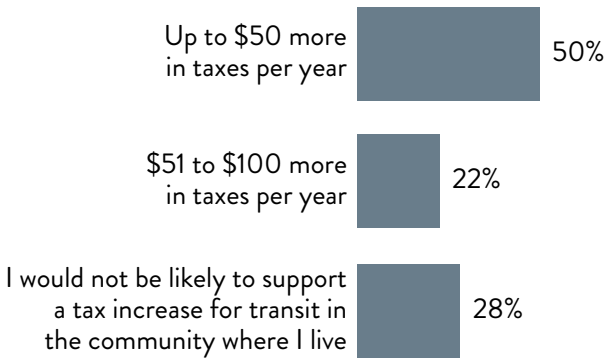
Weston residents accounted for 10 percent of the total responses.

- 79 percent of the respondents were in favor of adding transportation to the local budget. This result is also consistent with the 2017 public survey which received a statistically significant number of responses from Weston households.

Related to tax spending, all survey participants were asked about what level of tax increase they would support for public transit. Below are the responses based on total answers and subsets of communities. These results do not and are not intended to provide statistically valid results from individual communities within the study area. However, responses are consistent with the 2017 public survey, which provided statistically valid response rates at the community level.

- Overall, 50 percent of all survey respondents would pay up to $50 more per year in taxes to increase or start public transit in their community.
- Another 22 percent would support an increase of $51 to $100 or more in taxes per year to support public transit.

Figure B15. If starting public transit service in your community could be funded by an increase in taxes, how much of an increase would you be likely to support per year?



- Almost half of Wausau residents surveyed responded that up to $50 in additional taxes per year would be considered acceptable.
- 20 percent of Wausau residents supported between $51-$100 more in taxes. 27 percent stated they would not support a tax increase for transit. The Wausau resident subgroup accounted for 73 percent of all responses.
- 34 percent of Rib Mountain residents surveyed responded that up to $50 more in taxes per year would be considered acceptable.
    - 24 percent of the Rib Mountain residents supported between $51-$100 more in taxes. 38 percent stated they would not support a tax increase for transit. The Rib Mountain resident subgroup accounted for 15 percent of all responses.
    - 51 percent of respondents from Weston said that up to $50 more in taxes per year would be considered acceptable.
    - 23 percent of the Weston residents supported between $51-$100 more in taxes. 22 percent stated they would not support a tax increase for transit. The Weston resident subgroup accounted for 12 percent of all responses.

Thirty-five percent of survey participants responded that they spend more than the national average of $800 per month on transportation. Only 21 percent of those respondents included public transit as part of their transportation budget.

These respondents are likely spending a disproportionate amount of their household income on transportation, reducing their ability to cover other necessities. Especially in the current times of inflation related to rising fuel prices, households with low- to moderate incomes would benefit from a more affordable transportation option. Over 63 percent of respondents indicated their current personal or household transportation spending primarily is linked to automobile insurance, fuel and car payments or maintenance. Based on national inflation rates, household spending on transportation probably has increased even more since the time of this survey.

Figure B16. In 2020, the average U.S. household spent about $800 per month on transportation. Does your household spend more or less than the U.S. average?

Sixty-five percent of respondents indicated that using Metro Ride to their regular destinations like work, school and appointments would save money in their personal budgets. All respondents, regardless of where they live, responded similarly to the question.

Figure B17. Would using Metro Ride save you money in your transportation budget if you could use it for transportation to work, school, after school or appointments?