

**OFFICIAL NOTICE AND AGENDA**

of a meeting of the County Board, Committee, Agency,  
Corporation or Sub-Unit thereof,

COUNTY OF MARATHON  
WAUSAU, WI 54403

**MARATHON COUNTY METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION'S  
TRANSIT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE  
AGENDA**

**FEBRUARY 22, 2022**  
**1:00 pm**

**LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM**  
**210 RIVER DRIVE, WAUSAU, WI**

**Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Commission Purpose:** *The Commission shall be concerned with studies and recommendations relating to activities including but not limited to land-use; natural resources; utilities; and transportation systems within the metropolitan planning area. (Commission Bylaws last updated: 12-18)*

**Committee Purpose:** The Transit Oversight Committee shall be concerned with monitoring and providing information to the consulting firm, RLS & Associates, tasked to create a Transit Development Program (TDP) for the Wausau MPO area.

**Committee Membership:** John Robinson - MPO Chair, Katie Rosenberg - Wausau Mayor, Becky McElhaney - Transit Commission Chair, Gaylene Rhoden - Rib Mountain Administrator, Keith Donner - Weston Administrator, Will Harris - County Board, Robert Tess - Wausau School District, Kathi Zoern - Transit Commission Member

**AGENDA ITEMS:**

1. WELCOME / CALL TO ORDER
2. REVIEW AND FINALIZE THE TRANSIT PUBLIC SURVEY
3. REVIEW TECHNICAL MEMORANDUMS 1 & 2
4. TRANSIT SERVICE ROUTES AND TIMING ALTERNATIVES
5. ITEMS FOR THE NEXT AGENDA AND MEETING DATE
6. ADJOURN.

***Any person planning to attend this meeting who needs some type of special accommodation in order to participate should call the County Clerk's Office at 715-261-1500 or e-mail [infomarathon@mail.co.marathon.wi.us](mailto:infomarathon@mail.co.marathon.wi.us) one business day before the meeting.***

**SIGNED**   
**PRESIDING OFFICER OR DESIGNEE**

EMAILED TO: Daily Herald 848-9361 City Pages 848-5887  
Mid-west Radio Group - 848-3158  
CenterState Marketplace – 446-2370

EMAILED BY: BI \_\_\_\_\_

EMAILED DATE/TIME: 02/15/2022 2:55pm

NOTICE POSTED AT COURTHOUSE:

By: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Metro Ride Public Survey**

Metro Ride is the public transit service within the City of Wausau. To understand the impact that Metro Ride has on you and our community and the changes that could be made to better serve you, Marathon County Metropolitan Planning Organization and Metro Ride are creating a 5-Year Plan. Metro Ride service changes could result from this plan, and we need your input.

Please complete this brief survey by March 18, 2022. The survey will take approximately 5 minutes and the results can have an impact for many years to come.

If you have any questions about the survey or need assistance, please email Nathan Bubash at [nbubash@rlsandassoc.com](mailto:nbubash@rlsandassoc.com) or call (937) 299-5007. Thank you in advance for your time!

1. Where do you live?
  - Wausau
  - Weston
  - Rib Mountain
  - Schofield
  - Rothschild
  - Kronenwetter
  - Mosinee
  - Other (Please specify):
  
2. Which municipalities do you most often need to travel to (select up to three)?
  - Wausau
  - Rib Mountain
  - Weston
  - Schofield
  - Rothschild
  - Kronenwetter
  - Mosinee
  - Other (please specify)
  
3. Where do you most often need to travel to for work, medical care, shopping, or other reasons?
  - The destinations I need are usually in the City of Wausau
  - The destinations I need are usually in another town/municipality

4. Do any of the following apply to you? (Select one option that applies the most to you.)
- I represent a local employer with employees that use Metro Ride
  - I represent business or medical office with customers that use Metro Ride
  - I represent a local business that is not within Wausau City Limits
  - I represent a local government within Marathon County but outside of Wausau
  - I represent an organization serving people who need to use Metro Ride and may have no, or few, transportation options
  - I am a Metro Ride employee
  - None of the above

Did you know?

**Metro Ride provided more than 460,000 rides during 2019?**

Also, throughout the COVID pandemic Metro Ride has remained on the front lines serving as an important transportation resource for Wausau and providing over 407,000 rides per year in 2020 and 2021.

**Metro Ride passenger fare is only \$1.75 (adults), \$0.85 (age 65+ and individuals with a disability), and \$1.50 (students).**

**For even more savings, monthly passes can be purchased for frequent riders.**

That cost of operating Metro Ride is shared between the City of Wausau, State, and Federal Transit Administration. Approximately 28% of the operating budget comes from local sources and passenger fares make up about 11%.

5. Are you aware of Metro Ride's schedule and fare structure?
- Yes
  - No
6. Do you currently use Metro Ride once a week or more often?
- Yes
  - No
7. Which of the following statements best describes your use and/or awareness of Metro Ride? (Select all that apply.)
- I rely on Metro Ride for all or most of my transportation
  - I ride Metro Ride for some of my transportation needs and it is an important part of my budget and life
  - My child/children ride to and from school or afterschool activities
  - I rarely ride but would like to ride more often

- I don't ride Metro Ride but like knowing it is an option if I need it someday
  - I have a car or other means of transportation and don't ever think about using Metro Ride
  - I know about Metro Ride but I do not regularly use it
8. What would you change to make your public transportation service options more appealing to you? (Select all that apply)
- Provide service to/in Weston/Schofield/Rothschild
  - Provide service to/in Rib Mountain
  - Provide service after 6:30 PM during the week
  - Provide service before 6:30 AM during the week
  - Have service available on Saturdays
  - Serve more areas of Wausau
  - If I could schedule a driver to pick me up at my house and take me to where I am going/ shared rides with others in a car, van, or small bus
  - Offer a trip reservation app or website to schedule transportation
  - Other (please specify)
9. What service changes do you prefer most?
- More routes to more places in Wausau
  - More frequent service (less wait time between buses)
  - Transit service to more places in the region (i.e., Rib Mountain, Weston, Schofield, Rothschild)
  - Start a shared-ride demand response service so I can schedule a pick up and drop off at my desired locations
  - Longer hours of service on existing routes
  - More bus shelters
10. Which type of public transit is most appealing to you?
- Fixed Route: Busses ride along pre-determined routes and stops with assigned times that they arrive at certain locations
  - Shared Ride Demand Response: You schedule a bus/van to pick you up and it takes you where you need to go, sharing rides with a few other people in the same vehicle
  - A combination of the two above options
  - Neither
  - Other

11. 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? (Select all that apply.)
- I use it now and will continue to ride
  - I would use it regularly
  - I would use it occasionally
  - I am not at all likely to use it
  - I would let my clients, constituents, or employees know about using Metro Ride

12. If Metro Ride was fare-free, would you be more likely to ride?
- I would be more likely to ride
  - I would ride the same amount
  - I would not be more likely to ride

**Public transit provides people with access to work, grocery and other shopping, medical appointments, and social and recreational activities. It can be a helpful way to get youth to activities or jobs. And, it can also be a valuable alternative to adults who do not drive or do not wish to drive their cars.**

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

	Yes	No	Maybe
Employment/Work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Medical offices, clinics, or hospitals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mental health care	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dental care	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pharmacy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Shopping	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Human service agencies or government offices	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other trip purposes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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

- Public transit
- Taxi/Uber/Lyft
- Friends/family
- Walking/Bicycle
- Other (please specify):

15. 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?

- Extremely concerned
- Concerned
- Slightly Concerned
- Not Concerned

16. Would you support your local community government spending money in the annual budget to pay for public transit services that would operate in your community? (Note that currently, Metro Ride only operates within the City of Wausau)

- Yes
- No

17. If you would support your local government spending money to pay for public transit services what kind of service do you prefer?

- Fixed Route: Busses ride along pre-determined routes and stops with assigned times that they arrive at certain locations
- Shared Ride Demand Response: You schedule a bus/van to pick you up and it takes you where you need to go, sharing rides with a few other people in the same vehicle
- A combination of the two above options
- Neither
- Other

18. If Metro Ride hours of operation or days of service could be expanded to start before 6:30 AM or end after 6:30 PM, would you support your community decreasing spending in one area of its budget in order to help fund the additional hours?

- Yes
- No

19. If no additional funding is available to your local government, would you support your community decreasing spending in one area of its budget in order to help fund transit services that would operate in your community?

- Yes
- No

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

- Up to \$50 more in taxes per year
- \$51 to \$100 more in taxes per year
- I would not be likely to support a tax increase for transit in the community where I live

**Transportation is a necessary part of most personal budgets for Americans. Metro Ride passengers who buy a monthly pass each month spend \$504 per year on Metro Ride. In Wausau, these passengers may also need to include taxi/Uber/Lyft fares or reimburse family and friends if the bus service is not available to meet all of their needs (i.e. evening trips to the grocery store or early shifts at work).**

21. 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?

- My household spends more than the U.S. household average
- My household spends less than the U.S. household average

22. What kinds of transportation expenses did you include in your estimate above? (Please select all that apply.)

- Metro Ride bus passes/fare
- Car payment/value
- Automobile insurance
- Fuel for the car
- Taxi/Uber/Lyft fares for local trips
- Parking
- Other (Please specify):

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

- Yes
- No
- Yes, I am already a rider and I would save more money if I could use Metro Ride for more purposes.

24. Do you have any other comments about transit services in the Wausau area?



# Transit Development Plan Draft Technical Memorandum 1

January 2022

Prepared for the Wausau Metropolitan Planning Organization  
&  
Metro Ride



Submitted by: RLS & Associates, Inc. |  
With Yaffe Mobility Consulting

**METRO RIDE TRANSPORTATION DEVELOPMENT PLAN  
DRAFT TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM 1**

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# METRO RIDE TRANSPORTATION DEVELOPMENT PLAN

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## INTRODUCTION

The Transportation Development Plan (TDP) is overseen by the Wausau Metropolitan Planning Organization and Marathon County with Metro Ride Transit System. Local officials, nonprofit agencies, employers, and the general public have assisted with the data collection documented in this technical memorandum.

The decision to conduct the TDP was derived from the local assessment that transit performance had not improved since the last planning effort, and the transit system needed evaluation for service and technology improvements. This planning process includes an assessment of existing services and community transportation needs, followed by a five-year plan for securing necessary funding and implementing changes to improve transit service performance.

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

Primary activities for the TDP include:

- 1) Interviews with staff, local officials, and other community stakeholders
- 2) Focus groups with existing and potential transit users
- 3) Public meetings and multiple engagements with local decision-making bodies
- 4) Public and transit rider surveys
- 5) Evaluation of latent demand
- 6) Detailed service evaluation
- 7) Detailed technology evaluation and recommendations for improvements
- 8) Major service recommendations based on findings of previous tasks
- 9) A cost analysis with a five-year financial plan

The following chapters outline the evaluation of demand and Metro Ride Service profile. Additional information will be added to this report as it is collected. This document is the first in a series of technical reports for the TDP.

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## CHAPTER 1. EXISTING CONDITIONS – DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

Metro Ride serves the City of Wausau. However, the study area for this TDP includes Wausau and other municipalities that currently make up 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

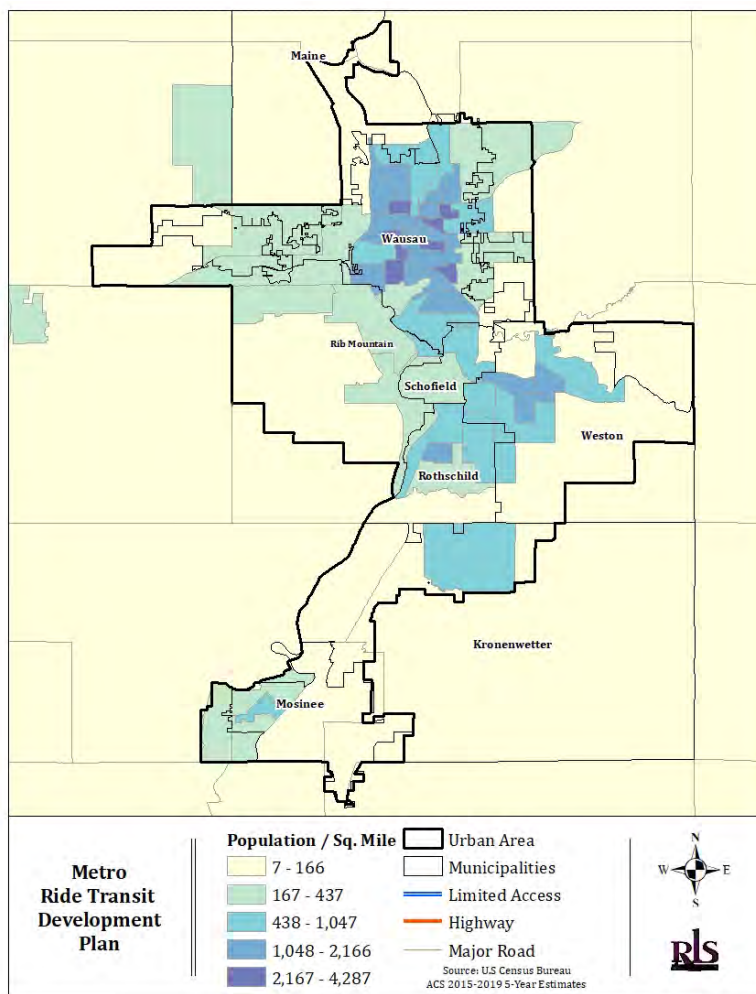


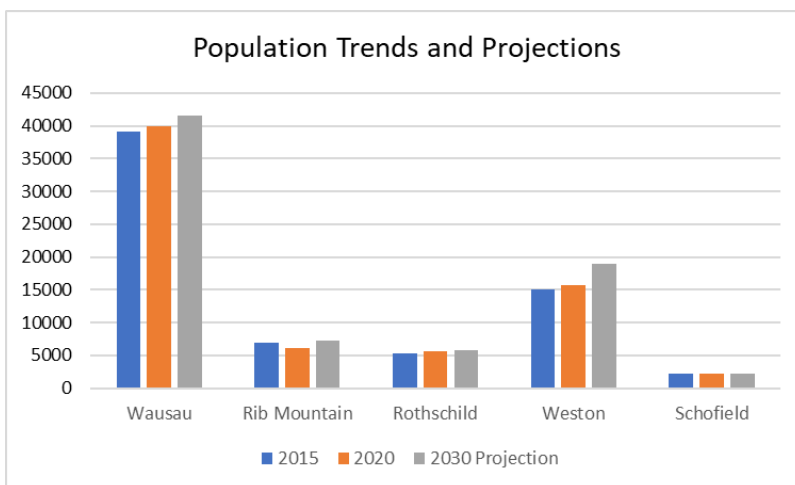
Table 1 shows the population breakdown of the larger municipalities within the Wausau Urbanized area. Outside of Wausau, Weston has the largest population at 15,723, and Schofield has the smallest population at 2,157.

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 are projected to increase; therefore, it is more likely that changes in demand for transit will be generated from these communities. The population of Schofield is expected to remain steady.

Figure 2: Population Trends and Projections



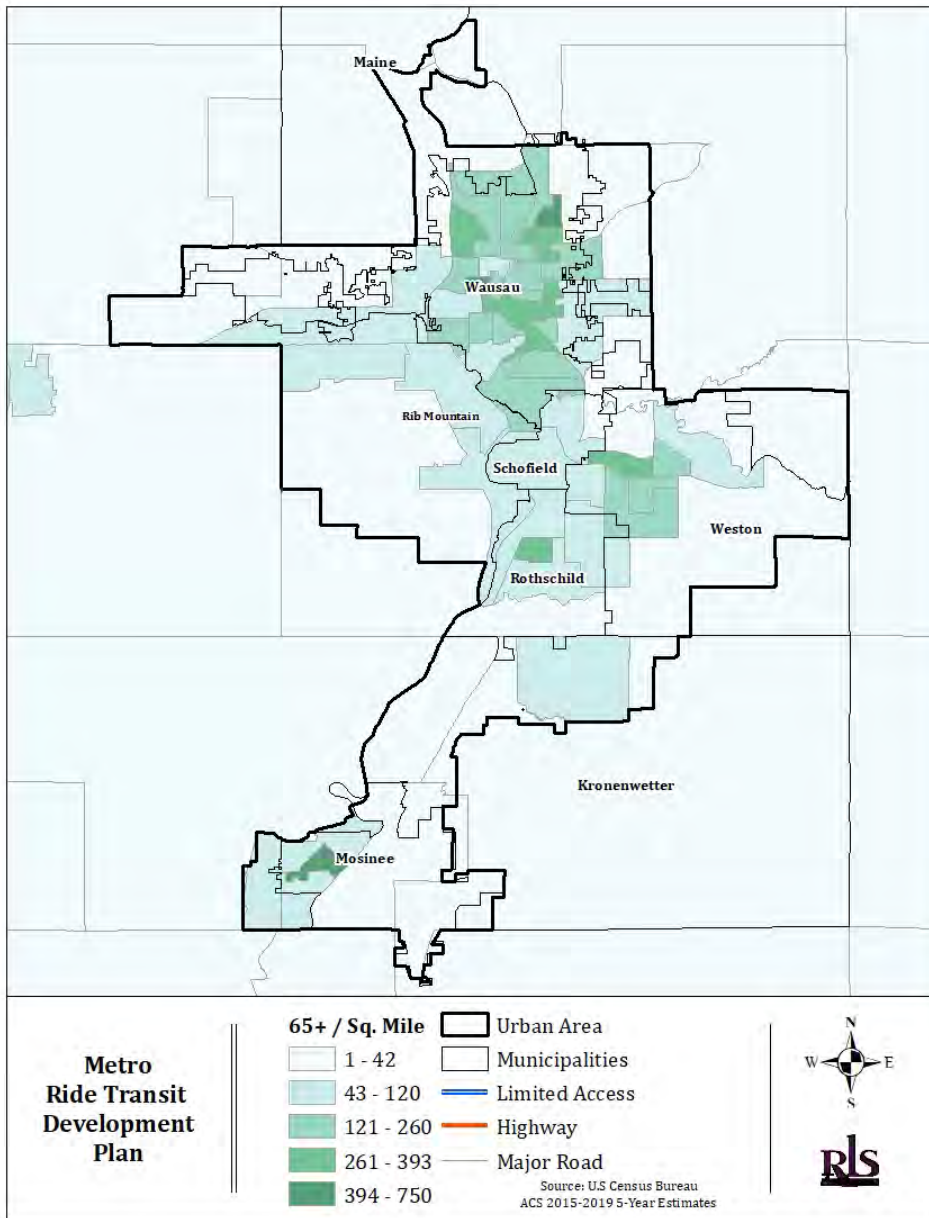
### **Older Adult Population**

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. 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.

Figure 3: Older Adult Population Density



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 the total individual municipal population.

*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%

## 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

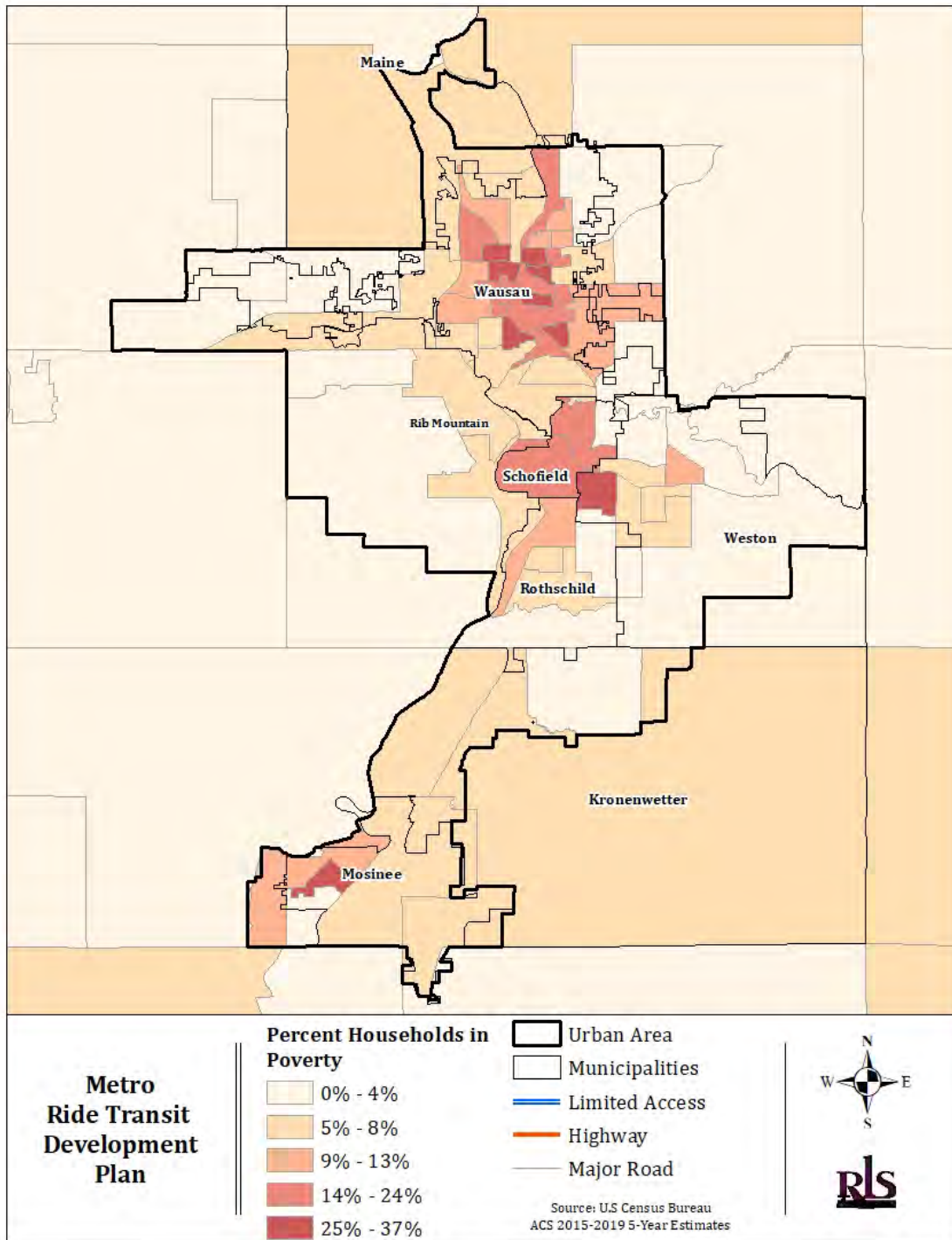
The difference in median household incomes is also reflected in the number of households in poverty. Table 4 shows the number of households in each municipality in poverty. Wausau and Schofield have much higher percent households in poverty, 13 and 16 percent respectively than the other three municipalities 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

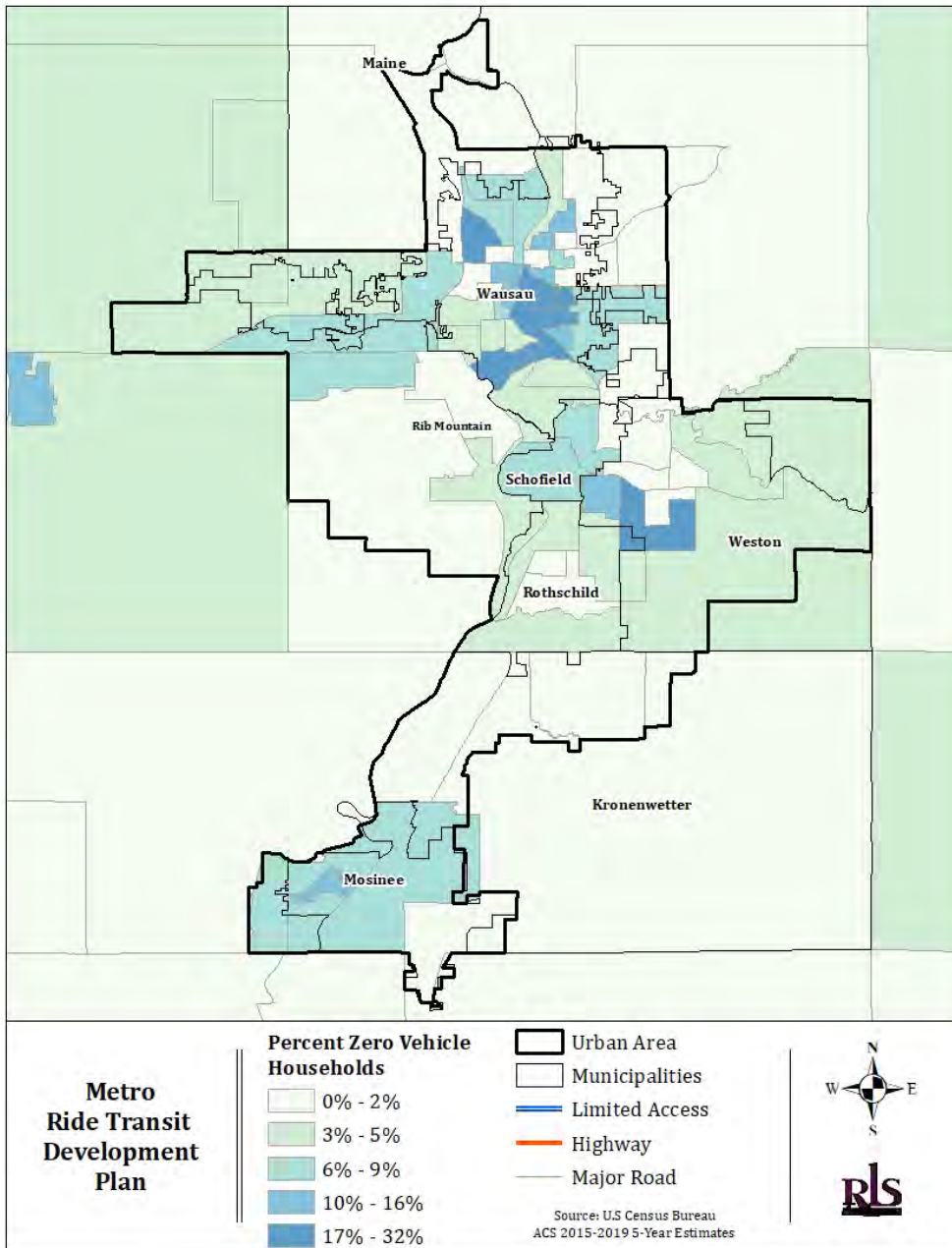




## ZERO VEHICLE HOUSEHOLDS

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

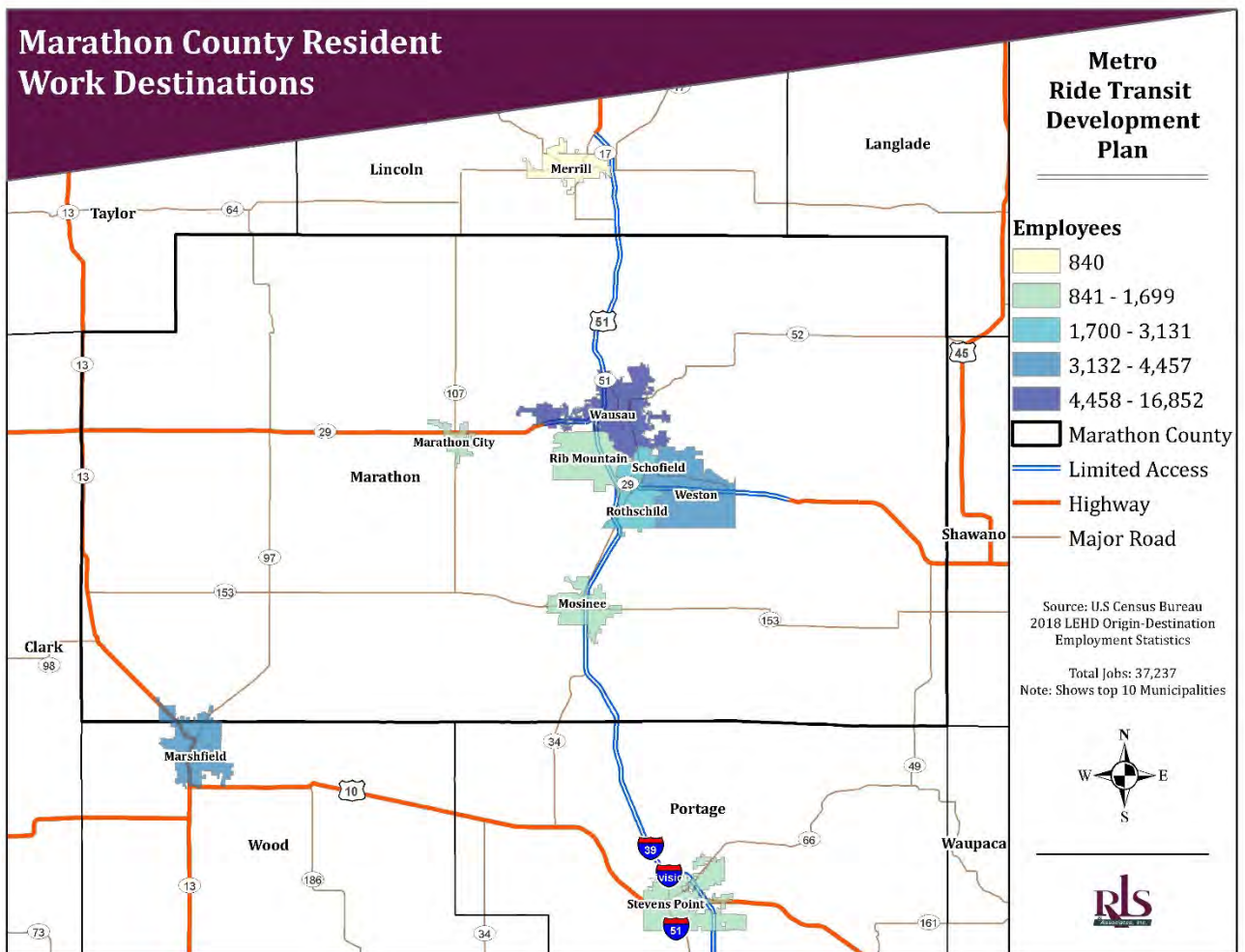
Figure 5: Zero Vehicle Households



## EMPLOYMENT

Equally important to where people live is the destinations they frequent. Employment is one of the major destinations in the area. In 2018, there were 37,237 jobs in 10 municipalities throughout 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 Wisconsin Department of Health Services estimates that the population of Marathon County will increase by 5.6 percent between 2020 and 2030. 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 will likely increase demand on public transit services. Wausau, Weston, Rib Mountain, and Rothschild populations are projected to increase; therefore, it is more likely that changes in demand for transit will be generated from these communities.

The Wausau Urbanized Area contains about 36,000 households, of which roughly 80 percent are in the major municipalities. There is a wide range of median household incomes for each municipality, with Rothschild having the highest at \$70,925 and Wausau having the lowest at \$46,824. The difference in median household incomes is also reflected in the number of households in poverty. 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.

Along with age and income, access to a vehicle is another indicator of demand for public transit. Within the Wausau urban area, there are roughly 36,000 households, of which about 5.8 percent have zero vehicles available. While the percentage of zero vehicle households is low when considering the entire urban area, it is important to note that there are block groups within the area where 17 percent or more of the 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. PRIOR RELEVANT STUDIES

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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. There was strong support for transit from respondents.

Finally, a rider survey was administered by volunteers from the NAOMI coalition. In total, 485 rider surveys were returned. The results indicated that ridership is largely transit dependent for getting to work and school. Riders indicated that Metro Ride should focus on weekend service and expanding the service area into other communities. Results indicate that 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, rideshare 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.



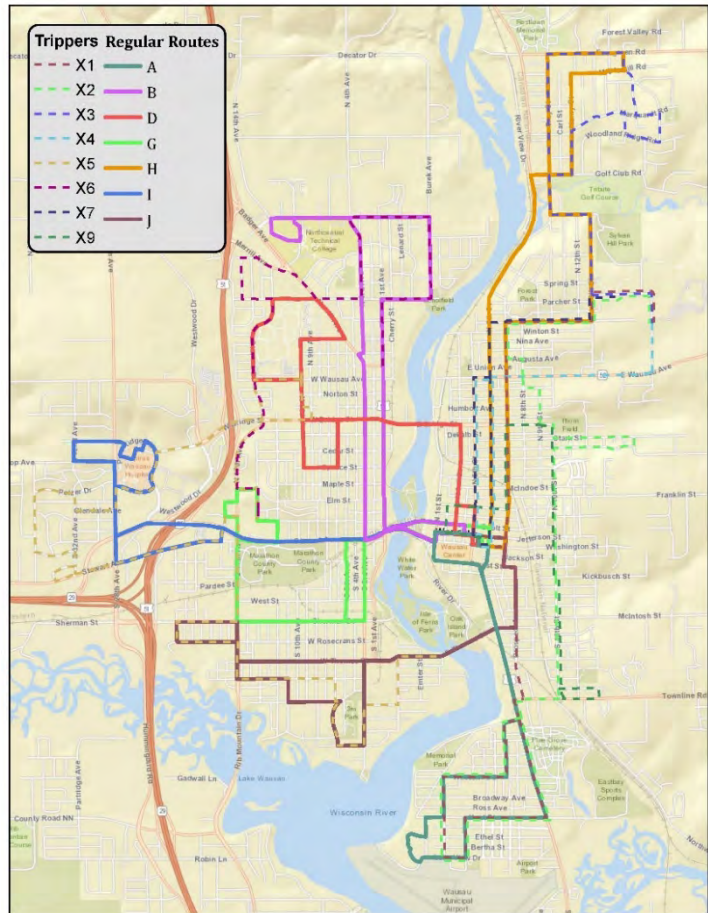
## CHAPTER 3. SYSTEM PROFILE

### OVERVIEW

Metro Ride operates within Wausau where municipal boundaries encompass about 20 square miles. Fixed-route service is only currently available within the city limits, though past routes have served neighboring towns including Schofield, Rothschild and Weston.

Complimentary ADA paratransit service is available to passengers within a ¼ mile radius of fixed routes. Metro Ride provides fixed route service with a fleet of 22 buses and four vehicles that could be used for paratransit service. The active fleet vehicle inventory is provided in the Appendix.

Metro Ride capital resources include vehicles and facilities. All vehicles are equipped for wheelchair accessibility, and fixed route buses have bicycle racks. Eighteen of the 22 vehicles are used during peak service. 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.

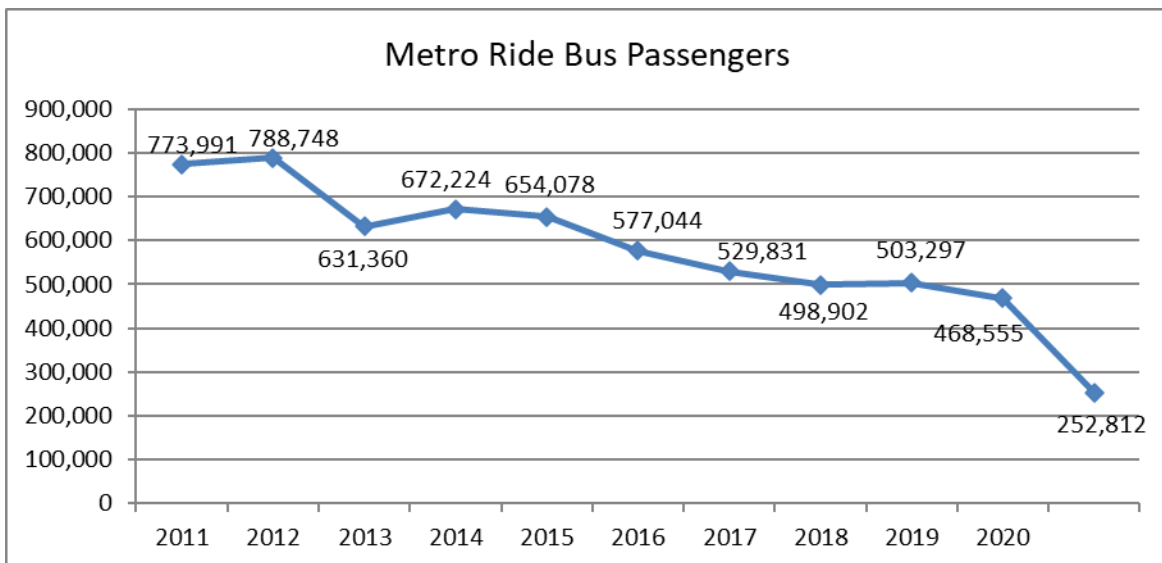


Route	Shelter Location
A	North Central Health Care
A	Sturgeon Bluff Apartments
A	Riverview Towers
B	North Central Technical College
D	Kannenberg Plaza
I	Marshfield Clinic
I	Aspirus Hospital Main Entrance
H	Horace Mann Middle School

## 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 which caused another decline in ridership. Ridership continued to decline through 2020 when the COVID 19 pandemic impacted travel patterns and temporarily, but significantly reduced public transit demand in Wausau. The pandemic had similar impacts on transit systems across America.

Figure 7: Ridership Trend

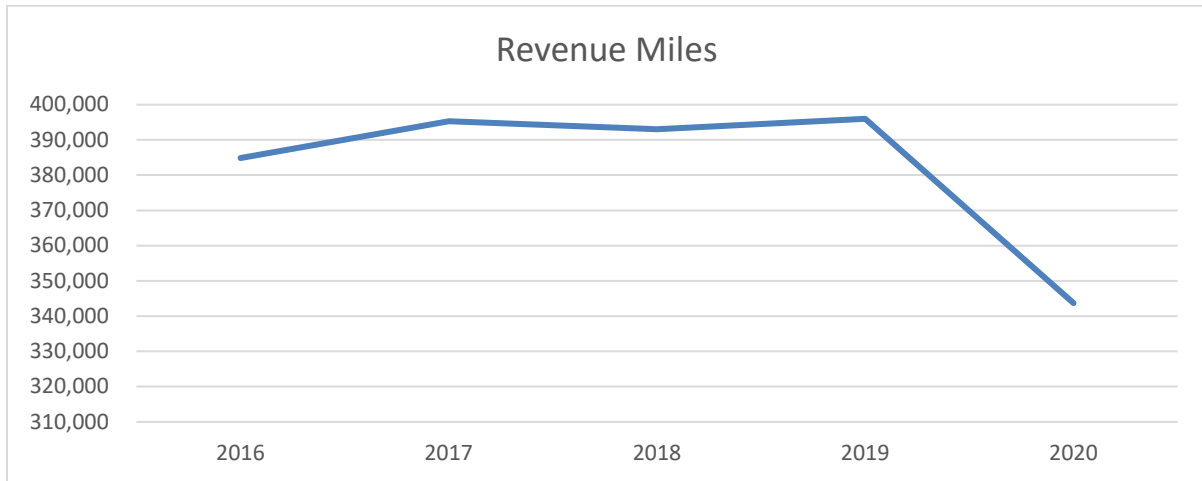


Source: Metro Ride

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. In 2019 there was less than a one percent change. Metro Ride operated approximately 17 percent less revenue hours and 13 percent less revenue miles between 2019 and 2020. The drastic decline between 2019 and 2020 was largely a result of COVID-19. Figures 8 and 9 illustrate the change in service levels between 2016 and 2020.

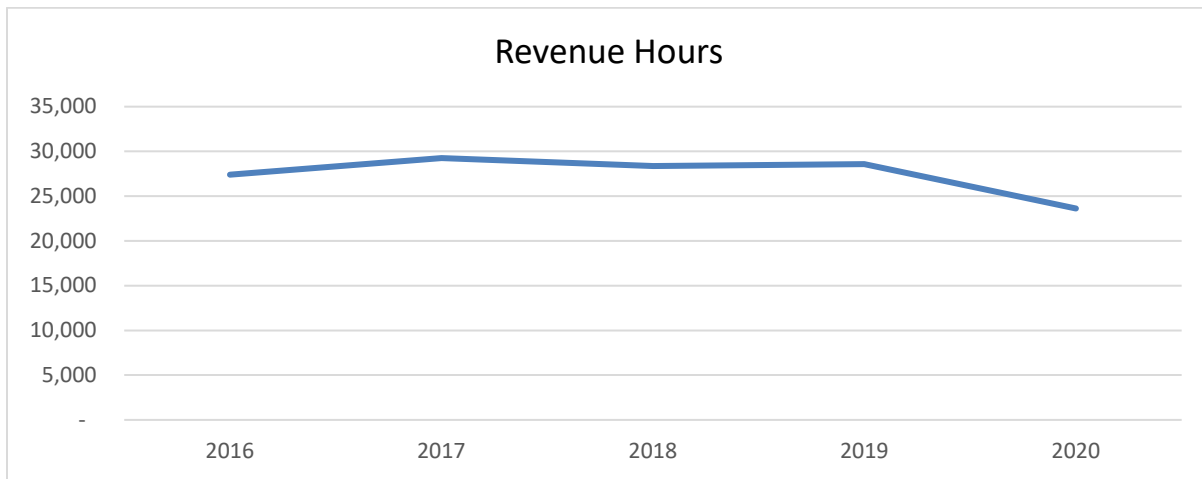


Figure 8: Revenue Miles, 2016 to 2020



Source: Metro Ride

Figure 9: Revenue Hours, 2016 to 2020



Source: Metro Ride

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

## FARES

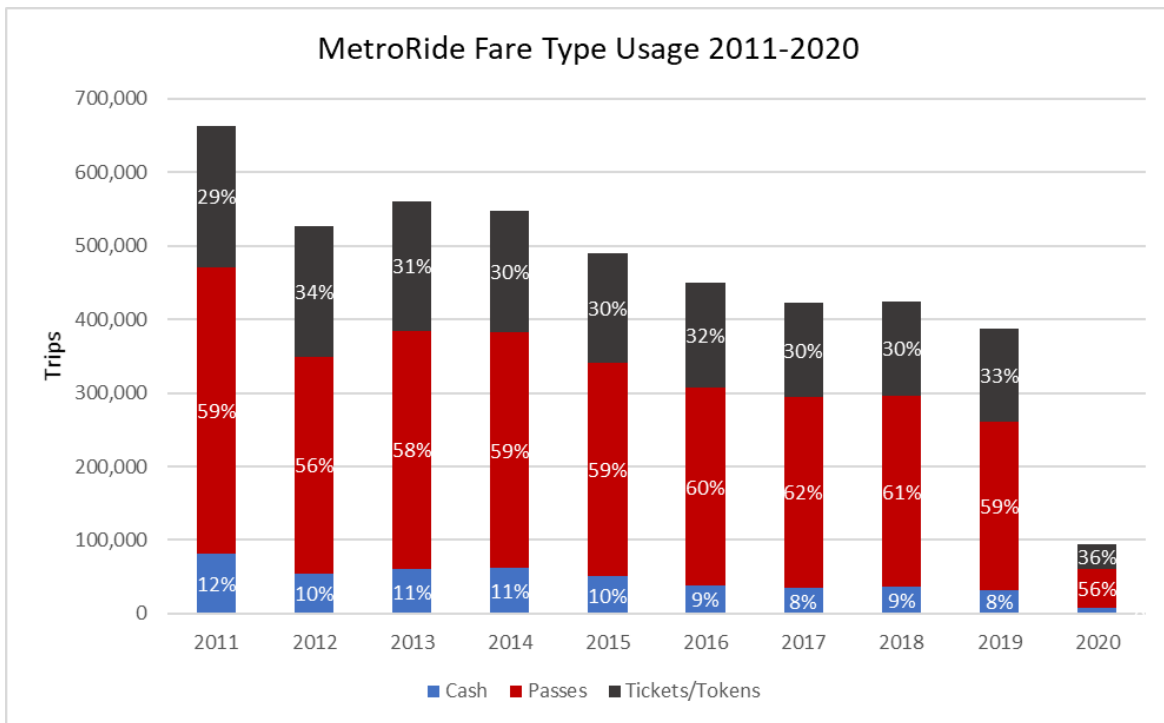
As of November 2021, fare for a one-way trip on this service is \$1.75. Additionally, discounted passes are offered at a rate of \$10.00 for 11 one-way tokens, and an unlimited monthly ride pass can be purchased for \$42.00. Discounted rates for seniors and individuals with disabilities who have a Medicare 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 \$1.25, and similarly to adult fares, 10 one-way 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, which allows for unlimited rides to youth riders during the summer months (June 1<sup>st</sup> – August 31<sup>st</sup>).

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%, and cash fares are only used for approximately 10% of all trips. As shown in Figure 10 below, this ratio has held true regardless of overall ridership on the system.

Figure 10: Metro Ride Historic Fare Type Usage



Source: Metro Ride

This trend indicates a heavy preference for monthly passes among riders, conceivably because the cash fare requires exact change which may be cumbersome for passengers to have on hand, especially the reduced rate fare of \$0.85. Additionally, 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. For example, if an adult commutes to and from work for a month using a monthly pass, each trip only costs the rider \$1.05, a savings of \$0.70 per trip. Metro Ride loses 40 percent of the fare revenue for those trips versus a cash fare. This means that after accounting for commuting, adult riders receive the equivalent of 16 free rides by using the pass, while student pass users receive 23 rides. If these additional trips are not being used by the passholders, Metro Ride benefits from the increased revenue without having to carry additional

passengers. However, the inverse is also true and Metro Ride fails to generate revenue as soon as an adult or student makes more than 40 trips per month using the pass.

### 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 due to the unique nature of these systems, which 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. Therefore, only fares types that most closely matched those offered by Metro Ride were used for this analysis. Some types of tokens, tickets and multiride passes that are available from these systems are not included in the comparison but are discussed for informational purposes. Table 5 below shows how Metro Ride’s fares compare to these peer systems in the selected fare categories.

*Table 5: Peer Fare Comparison*

	Wausau	Eau Claire	Beloit	Janesville	Oshkosh	LaCrosse
<b>Adult Cash Fare</b>	\$1.75	\$1.75	\$1.50	\$1.50	\$1.50	\$1.50
<b>Adult Multi-Ride Token/Ticket Bundle</b>	10 for \$11	\$4.00 for 3	10 for \$12	10 for \$12	20 for \$30	10 for \$14.50
<b>Adult Monthly Pass</b>	\$42	\$50.00	NA	\$52.00	\$35.00	\$35.00
<b>Elderly/Disabled Cash Fare</b>	\$0.85	\$0.85	\$0.75	\$0.75	\$0.75	\$0.75
<b>Elderly/Disabled Monthly Pass</b>	\$21	\$25.00	NA	NA	NA	\$25.00
<b>Student Cash Fare</b>	\$1.50	\$1.25	NA	NA	Free	\$1.25
<b>Student Multi-Ride Token/Ticket Bundle</b>	10 for \$9.50	NA	NA	10 for \$7.50	Free	10 for \$12
<b>Student Monthly Pass</b>	\$21.00	\$10.00*	\$17.00*	\$24.00*	Free	\$23
<b>Day Pass</b>	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 Rides 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 10). Most of these routes are in service Monday – Friday from 6:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. There is no evening or weekend service provided. The 15 routes are separated into seven standard routes that serve all origin and destination types and eight express routes, that are open to the public and centered around providing service to the K-12 schools in Wausau. Each of the standard routes operates on a 30-minute pulse schedule with each route arriving at the Transit Center on Washington Street on the hour and half-hour during service hours. The express routes operate on varying schedules and have limited numbers of trips per route, which also vary by route and time of day. 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 run departs the Transit Center on the half hour which is the first time point for every run of every route. After departing, the runs 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. This pattern is repeated until service ends at 6:30 p.m. Table 6 illustrates this schedule.



Table 6: Metro Ride Standard Route Schedule

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

**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 is one of the most productive standard routes with 1.33 passengers per mile and 16.26 passengers per hour in 2019. In 2020, Route A achieved 0.53 passengers per mile and 6.52 passengers per hour.

Route A		
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.

Route B		
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.

Route D		
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.

Route G		
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.

Route H		
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.

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

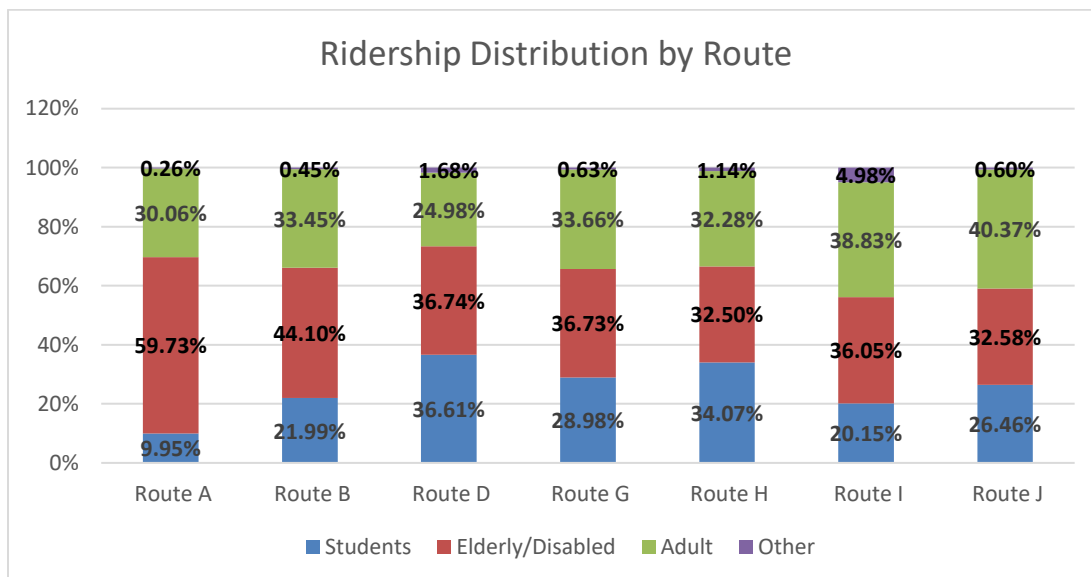
**Route J “Thomas Street”** serves the area to the south of Marathon County Park in the western portion of Wausau. Destinations served by Route J include GD Jones Elementary School, Our Savior School, St. Vincent de Paul, and 3M Park. Annual ridership on Route J was 13,181 in 2020 and 23,387 in 2019.

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

**Ridership Distribution**

Figure 12 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 where the largest group of riders are adults paying standard fare. For all routes other than Route J, adult riders make up the second largest percentage of riders. There are student riders on each route with Route H having the highest percentage of student riders and Route A having the lowest percentage.

Figure 12: Ridership Distribution by Route



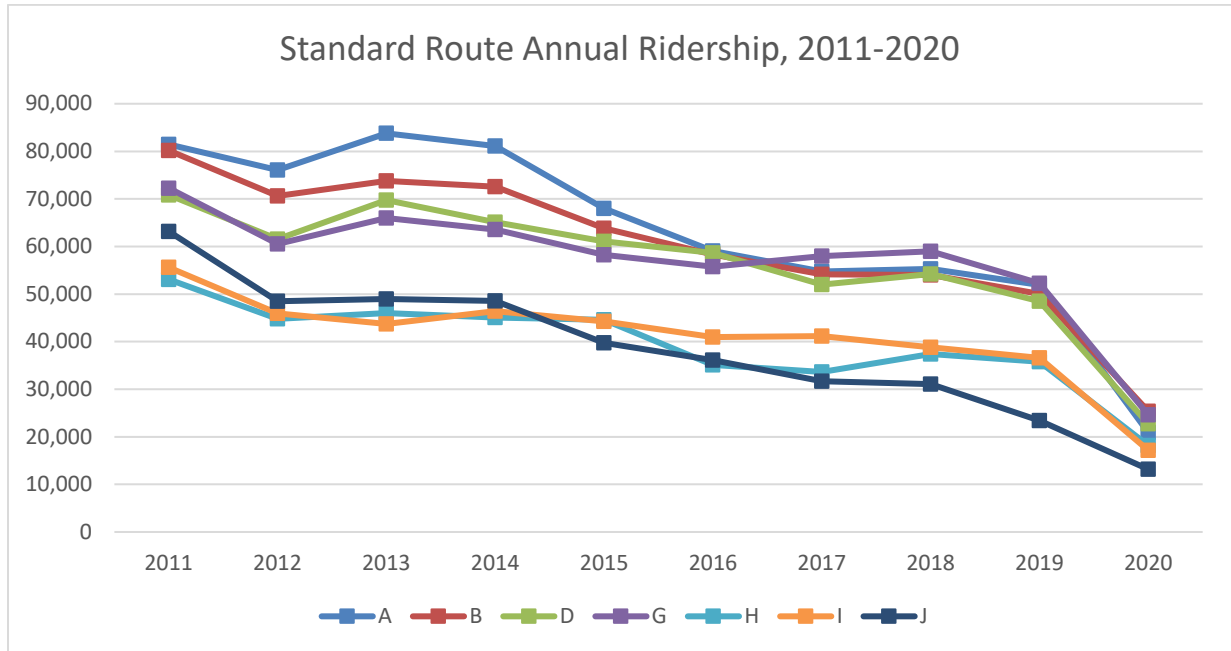
Source: Metro Ride



### Standard Fixed Route Ridership Trends

Since 2011, the first-year for which ridership data are available, ridership on Metro Ride’s standard fixed routes has declined overall excepting for a slight upturn between 2012 and 2013. Figure 13 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 was increasing between 2017 and 2018.

Figure 13: 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 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. and the X9 is not in service between 8:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. 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 a.m. 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 and the trip ends at 7:30 a.m. In the afternoon, the X1 travels in a pattern that is in general the reverse of the morning service, except that it begins at Horace Mann Middle School at 3:03 p.m., then serves Wausau East High School at 3:10 p.m. Once the route moves south along Seventh Street, it reaches the Transit Center at 3:20 p.m., unlike the morning run. The route then serves stops around John Marshall Elementary School and ends at 3:30 p.m. at the stop at Kent Street and Grand Avenue.

**Route X2** begins service at 7:05 a.m. at Townline Road at Torney Avenue. From there, it moves north to serve stops along Tenth Street before arriving at Horace Mann Middle School at 7:25 a.m. and Wausau East High School at 7:30 a.m. In the afternoon, the route partially reverses and begins at Horace Mann Middle School at 3:03 p.m., stops at Wausau East High School at 3:10 p.m., similar to the X1 route. After traveling south on Tenth Street and serving stops there, 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 p.m. at the stop at Kent Street and Grand Avenue.

**Route X3** serves the northern portion of Wausau and begins service at 7:05 a.m. 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, where it stops at 7:20 a.m. and 7:25 a.m., respectively. In the afternoon, the route begins at Horace Mann Middle School at 3:10 p.m., then stopping at Wausau East High School at 3:15 p.m. 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 a.m. at the Transit Center, traveling north along Sixth Street before turning onto Wausau Avenue, serving stops along the way. At 6:45 a.m. 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 a.m. This pattern repeats until the 8:30 a.m. arrival at the Transit Center, after which the route is out of service until 11:30 a.m. At 11:30 a.m., the route restarts at the Transit Center and repeats the previously described pattern until finally arriving at the Transit Center at 6:00 p.m. for its last stop.

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

**Route X6** serves the northwestern portion of Wausau and begins service at First Street and Union Avenue at 7:03 a.m. The route then moves north to serve the area around Thomas Jefferson Elementary School before arriving at Wausau West High School at 7:17 a.m. and John Muir Middle School at 7:26 a.m., where it ends service for the morning. In the afternoon, the pattern from the morning run is reversed, beginning at John Muir Middle School at 3:00 p.m. The route then serves Wausau West High School at

3:08 p.m. before continuing north and west before ending service at First Street and Union Avenue at 3:15 p.m.

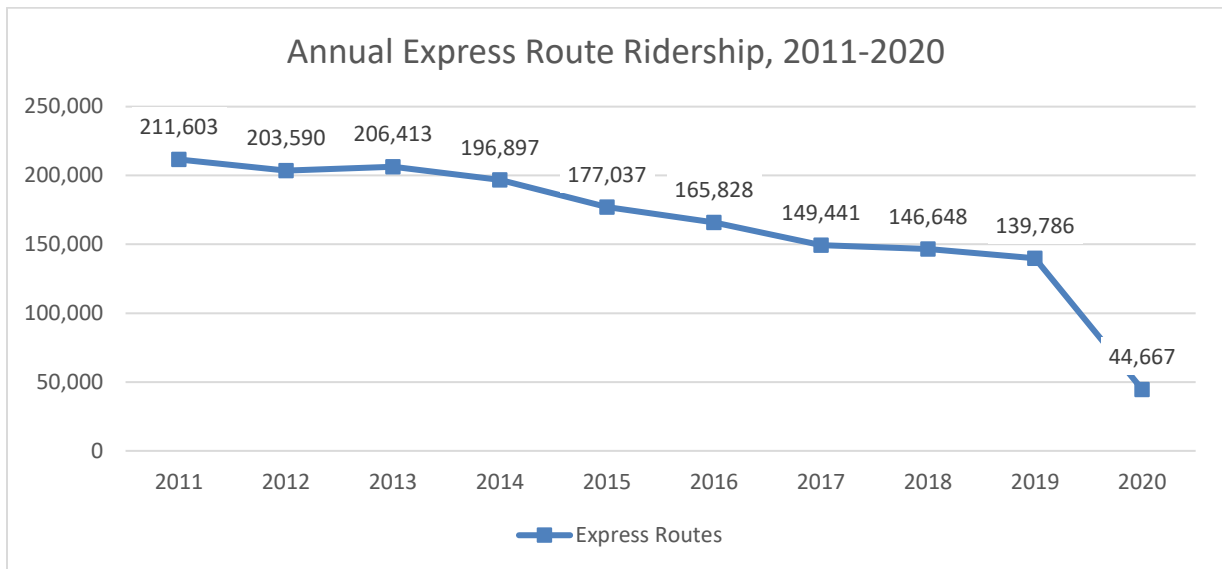
**Route X7** is unique among Metro Ride’s express routes in that it makes two morning trips outbound beginning at the Transit Center, but only one afternoon trip departing from Horace Mann Middle School. For the morning trips, Route X7 begins at the Transit Center at 7:00 a.m. Similar to the X4, it heads 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 a.m. and Wausau East High School at 7:20 a.m. where the run ends. A separate run of the X7 begins service at the Transit Center at 7:25 a.m. and follows the pattern described above, ending service at Wausau East High School at 7:40 a.m. In the afternoon, Route X7 begins its only run at Horace Mann Middle School at 3:03 p.m., reversing the pattern from the morning service and ending at the Transit Center at 3:16 p.m.

**Route X9** is one of only three of Metro Ride’s express routes that provides more than two trips per day. This route begins service at the Transit Center at 6:30 a.m. then moves north along Seventh Street before turning south on Tenth Street for the majority of its service. It then arrives at Monroe St at 12th Street at 7:15 a.m. From there, the X9 reverses the pattern and arrives at the Transit Center at 7:30 a.m. This pattern continues with service at the Transit Center on the hour and half hour until the last run of the morning, which ends at the Transit Center at 8:30 a.m. In the afternoon, service on the X9 begins by departing the Transit Center at 2:30 p.m. The pattern described above then continues until the final arrival at Monroe Street at 6:15 p.m. and the Transit Center at 6:30 p.m.

### **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 14 below shows total annual ridership on all express routes from 2011 to 2020. Ridership

Figure 14: 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 utilized 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 service weekly Grocery Shopping Routes, which serve several senior living complexes on Wednesday mornings. These routes each make stops at two or more residential campuses before arriving at the grocery store. These trips are open to any resident of the complexes served or the general public that board at the stops listed. There is no fare charged. Table 7 below shows the schedule of these shopping routes.

Table 7: Grocery Shopping Fixed Route Schedule.

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

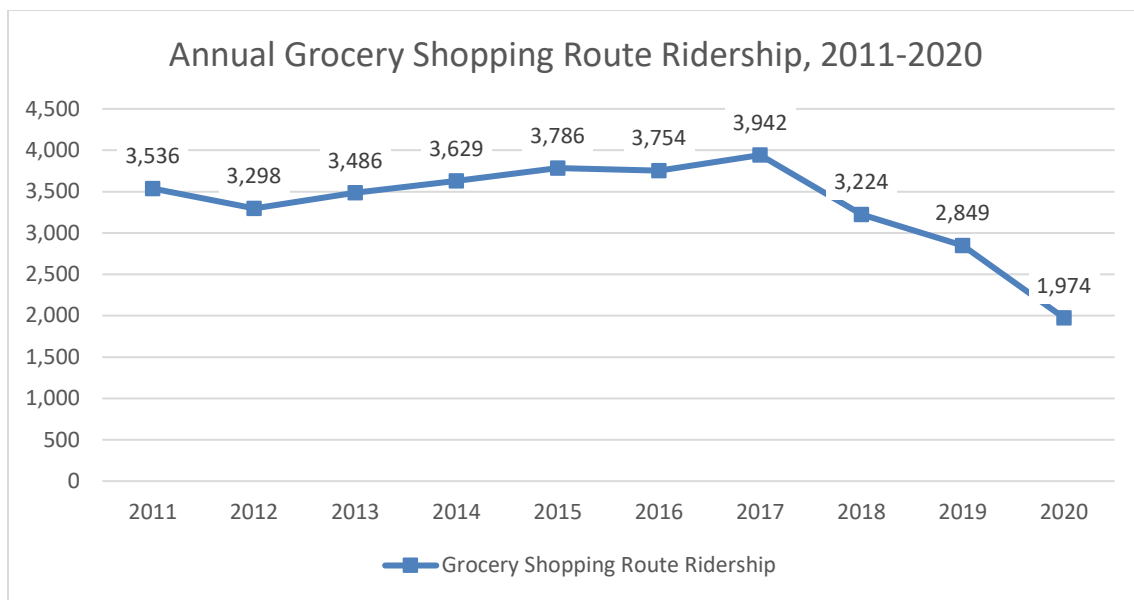
Due to the limited stops and direct route patterns, these shopping routes are some of the most efficient services provided by Metro Ride. In 2019, the shopping routes had an overall passenger per mile of 2.03

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.

### **Grocery Shopping Fixed Route Ridership: Historic Trends**

Ridership on individual routes in this category are not collected by Metro Ride. As shown in Figure 15 below, ridership on the Grocery Shopping Routes remained consistent between 3,000 and 4,000 riders for many years. However, since 2017 ridership has declined. Note that the COVID 19 pandemic impacted ridership starting in early 2020.

Figure 15: Grocery Shopping Fixed Route Ridership



## **METRO RIDE ADA PARATRANSIT SERVICE**

### **Overview**

Metro Ride provides complimentary ADA paratransit services to riders within ¼ mile of their fixed route services and during the same time period per day (6:30 a.m. – 6:30 p.m.). However, the earliest passengers can be picked up is 6:45 a.m. and must begin their final trip at or before 6:00 p.m. 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 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 cut-a-way 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, and Metro Ride is not part of Veyo's provider network. Also, 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 its portion 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 16 and Figure 17 illustrate that the 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 16: ADA Paratransit Destinations, October 2019

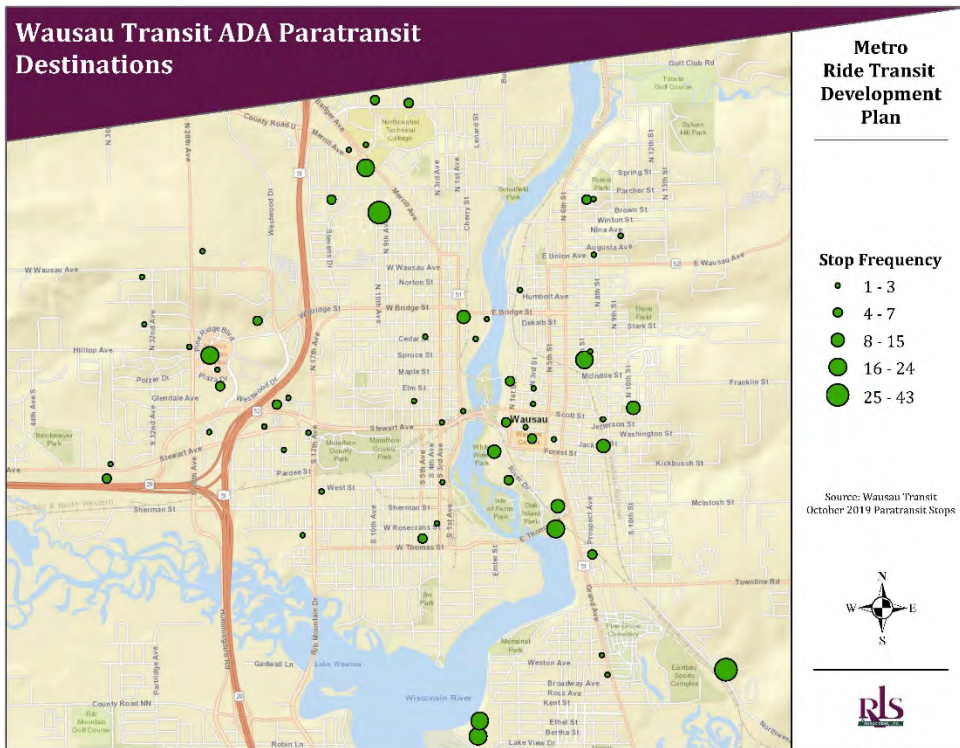
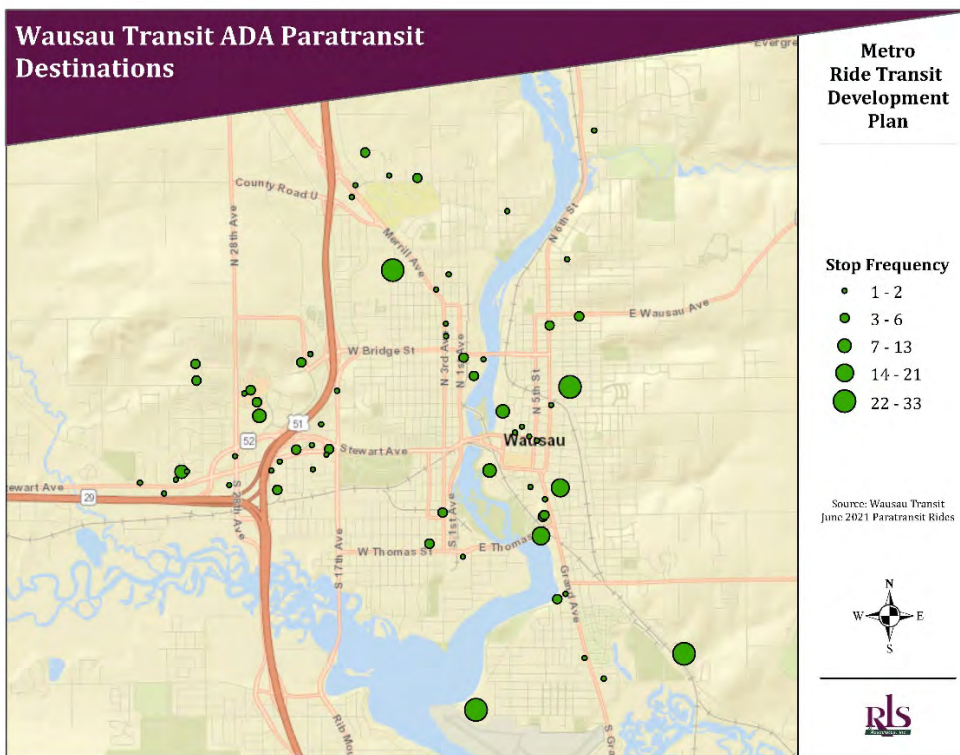


Figure 17: ADA Paratransit Destinations, June 2021





### **ADA Paratransit Scheduling**

Trip request are scheduled by hand within the Trapeze Simpli software which produces a driver manifest or schedule. For recurring rides with the same origin and destination on a set schedule, passengers may request a subscription be created. 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 and must call in the day before to schedule future reservations.

### **NEXT STEPS**

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Technical Memorandum 2 will include a summary of outreach activities and input received through the rider survey, key stakeholder interviews, public meetings, and focus group sessions. Subsequent reports will include recommendations and a five-year implementation plan and budget.



**Metro Ride  
Active Fleet Vehicles**

Fleet #	Year	Make	Model	Model Number	Mileage 11/24/20	Rebuilt	Identification Number	License Number	Seats Standees	A/C	Kneel	Lift/Ramp	Projected Replacement	Acquisition Cost
121	2012	Chev/Glavel	Titan II	G4500	46,848	No	1GB6G5BL3C1125202	84168	8/24	Yes	No	Lift	2024	\$61,970
122	2012	Chev/Glavel	Titan II	G4500	47,652	No	1GB6G5BL0C1124718	84164	8/24	Yes	No	Lift	2024	\$61,970
123	2012	Chev/Glavel	Titan II	G4500	51,407	No	1GB6G5BL8C1124272	84163	8/24	Yes	No	Lift	2024	\$61,970
124	2012	Chev/Glavel	Titan II	G4500	46,649	No	1GB6G5BL1C1124999	84165	8/24	Yes	No	Lift	2024	\$61,970
142	2004	Gillig	Low Floor	G29B102N4	507,881	No	15GGB291741072855	C11801	32/56	Yes	Yes	Ramp	2022	\$1,500
145	2004	Gillig	Low Floor	G29B102N4	498,015	No	15GGB291241072858	C11800	32/56	Yes	Yes	Ramp	2022	\$1,500
148	2004	Gillig	Low Floor	G29B102N4	522,582	No	15GGB291241072861	C11825	32/56	Yes	Yes	Ramp	2022	\$1,500
1000	2002	Gillig	Low Floor	G18D102N4	571,658	No	15GGD181421072850	89241	38/47	Yes	Yes	Ramp	2021	\$3,500
1001	2002	Gillig	Low Floor	G18D102N4	593,412	No	15GGD181621072851	89238	38/47	Yes	Yes	Ramp	2021	\$3,500
1002	2002	Gillig	Low Floor	G18D102N4	593,846	No	15GGD181821072852	89239	38/47	Yes	Yes	Ramp	2021	\$3,500
1003	2002	Gillig	Low Floor	G18D102N4	564,270	No	15GGD181X21072853	89240	38/47	Yes	Yes	Ramp	2021	\$3,500
901	2009	Gillig	Low Floor	G27B102N4	272,613	No	15GGB271691176070	96591	32/53	Yes	Yes	Ramp	2024	\$334,218
902	2009	Gillig	Low Floor	G27B102N4	266,682	No	15GGB271891176071	76662	32/53	Yes	Yes	Ramp	2024	\$334,218
903	2009	Gillig	Low Floor	G27B102N4	271,124	No	15GGB271X91176072	76661	32/53	Yes	Yes	Ramp	2024	\$334,218
904	2009	Gillig	Low Floor	G27B102N4	265,716	No	15GGB271191176073	76660	32/53	Yes	Yes	Ramp	2024	\$334,218
905	2009	Gillig	Low Floor	G27B102N4	269,807	No	15GGB271391176074	96741	32/53	Yes	Yes	Ramp	2024	\$334,218
906	2009	Gillig	Low Floor	G27B102N4	313,339	No	15GGB271591176075	76658	32/53	Yes	Yes	Ramp	2024	\$334,218
907	2009	Gillig	Low Floor	G27B102N4	278,954	No	15GGB271791176076	76657	32/53	Yes	Yes	Ramp	2024	\$334,218
908	2009	Gillig	Low Floor	G27B102N4	300,535	No	15GGB271991176077	96588	32/53	Yes	Yes	Ramp	2024	\$334,218
909	2009	Gillig	Low Floor	G27B102N4	276,021	No	15GGB271091176078	76655	32/53	Yes	Yes	Ramp	2024	\$334,218
111	2011	Gillig	Low Floor	G27B102N4	296,807	No	15GGB2715B1179323	96593	31/57	Yes	Yes	Ramp	2026	\$363,086
112	2011	Gillig	Low Floor	G27B102N4	292,185	No	15GGB2717B1179324	96586	31/57	Yes	Yes	Ramp	2026	\$363,086
113	2011	Gillig	Low Floor	G27B102N4	294,656	No	15GGB2719B1179325	96590	31/57	Yes	Yes	Ramp	2026	\$363,086
114	2011	Gillig	Low Floor	G27B102N4	294,155	No	15GGB2710B1179326	96587	31/57	Yes	Yes	Ramp	2026	\$363,086
115	2011	Gillig	Low Floor	G27B102N4	299,659	No	15GGB2712B1179327	96592	31/57	Yes	Yes	Ramp	2026	\$363,086
116	2011	Gillig	Low Floor	G27B102N4	292,224	No	15GGB2714B1179328	96589	31/57	Yes	Yes	Ramp	2026	\$363,086
56	1997	Ford	F-Superduty		NA	NA	1FDLF47G1VEB84294	49822	NA	No	NA	NA	2012	\$5,000
96	2005	Dodge	Caravan	Minivan	NA	NA	1D4GP24R65B427874	69017	NA	Yes	NA	NA	2020	\$5,000
104	1998	Chevy	Cheyenne	3500	NA	NA	1GCHK34F5WF038827	51135	NA	No	NA	NA	2018	\$12,000
105	2011	Ford	---	F450	NA	NA	1FDUF4HT5BEB90644	81427	NA	Yes	NA	NA	2026	\$35,000
5765	2008	Ford	---	F150	83,746	NA	1FTBF12238KD62768	7531	NA	Yes	NA	NA	2023	\$5,000
181	2008	Chrysler	Town & Country	LX	58,631	NA	2A8HR44HX8R743677	14011	NA	Yes	NA	NA	2023	\$6,000

\$5,520,858

Spare Ratio (FRB):

Active Vehicles	22
Peak Vehicles	18
Spares	4
Spare Ratio	22%

**Total Fleet**

Total Peak Vehicles:			Bus	Paratransit	Total
Transit Bus	18	Active	22	4	26
Paratransit Bus	2	Reserve	0	0	0
	20	Total	22	4	26

# Transit Development Plan Draft Technical Memorandum 2

January 2022

Prepared for the Wausau Metropolitan Planning Organization  
&  
Metro Ride



Submitted by: RLS & Associates, Inc. |  
with Yaffe Mobility Consulting | Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service

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**METRO RIDE TRANSPORTATION DEVELOPMENT PLAN  
DRAFT TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM 2**

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# METRO RIDE TRANSPORTATION DEVELOPMENT PLAN

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## INTRODUCTION

The Transportation Development Plan (TDP) is overseen by the Wausau Metropolitan Planning Organization and Marathon County with Metro Ride Transit System. Local officials, nonprofit agencies, employers, and the general public have assisted with the data collection documented in this technical memorandum.

The decision to conduct the TDP was derived from the local assessment that transit performance had not improved since the last planning effort, and the transit system needed evaluation for service and technology improvements. This planning process includes an assessment of existing services and community transportation needs, followed by a five-year plan for securing necessary funding and implementing changes to improve transit service performance.

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

Primary activities for the TDP include:

- 1) Interviews with staff, local officials, and other community stakeholders
- 2) Focus groups with existing and potential transit users
- 3) Public meetings and multiple engagements with local decision-making bodies
- 4) Public and transit rider surveys
- 5) Evaluation of latent demand
- 6) Detailed service evaluation
- 7) Detailed technology evaluation and recommendations for improvements
- 8) Major service recommendations based on findings of previous tasks
- 9) A cost analysis with a five-year financial plan

The following chapters outline the public and stakeholder input received through interviews, public meetings, focus groups, and the rider survey. Additional public input received through the public survey will be included in subsequent reports because the survey has not yet been started and is scheduled for February 2022.

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## TRANSPORTATION NEEDS

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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
- ◆ Marathon County Health Department
- ◆ Marshfield Clinic
- ◆ Metro Ride
- ◆ Northern Valley Industries
- ◆ United Way of Marathon County
- ◆ Veterans Services Office
- ◆ Wausau MPO

Interview summaries are provided in the following paragraphs.

### INTERVIEW SUMMARIES

#### Aspirus Health

Representatives from Aspirus Health included the Systemwide Sustainability Coordinator, Social Work Supervisor Wausau Dialysis, Assistant Director of Human Resources, Director of Community Health Improvement, Interim Executive Director of Aspirus Health Foundation, Care Coordination Manager, and Assistant Supervisor of Ambulatory Care.

Aspirus representatives stated that the bus does not stop close enough to the dialysis facility, especially for patients who may be weak after completing treatment. It is not safe for patients to walk to the nearest bus stop. Aspirus is aware of the ADA paratransit service but stated that most people do not ride it. Also, Family House is located on West Hill Drive. People who are out-of-town visitors stay at the house and need a ride to the medical campus proper. Aspirus operates an on-campus courtesy shuttle but the hours-of-service end early and the service area is very limited.

Finally, Aspirus representatives indicated that there is a gap in access to transportation between 2:00 AM and 6:00 AM when some emergency room patients want to go home. Taxis are not an option late at night.

Aspirus indicated that healthcare is their focus and transportation is part of community health. Transportation for patients is a top need at all of their 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 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.; 10:30 a.m. to 2:45 p.m.; and, 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. 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 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.; 3:00 p.m. to 11:30 p.m.; and, 11:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. 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.

### **Hmong American Center**

The RLS team met with Hmong American Center to discuss transportation needs and challenges. The Hmong American Center is in Wausau and clients are referred to Metro Ride when they have transportation challenges. Some volunteers and members ride Metro Ride to and from the center.

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.

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. Most members of the Hmong community who rely on family members and friends for transportation would be likely to ride transit on weekdays during the day while their family members are at work.

## **Rib Mountain**

The discussion about Rib Mountain focused primarily on land use and economic development changes that are happening throughout the community. Rib Mountain is a community with residential areas as well as local and national businesses. There are several businesses in Rib Mountain but they are disconnected and no longer have a business association.

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.

Rib Mountain formed their own Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district about a year ago. The area behind Culver's restaurant is included in the district. Plans include some more dense residential development.

Rib Mountain is incorporated. It shares some services with other local area governments including a Joint Fire Department with the Village of Weston and a contract with Marathon County for Police services.

Transportation options other than driving or riding with a friend or family member include Uber and Lyft. 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. 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.

## **Rothschild**

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.

Rothschild does not have a major commercial district. Residential areas are mixed with young and older home owners living in small homes. The real estate market is flipping toward young residents who are moving into their first homes.

When the Veterans Clinic moves in to the old Shop Co, it is speculated that people will come to the area and spend the night. Visitors to the clinic may also shop and patronize the local restaurants and The Pavilion while they are in town.



### **Schofield**

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. The interviewee also felt that Rib Mountain was a destination that needs transit service the most. Rib Mountain has many retail box stores, restaurant chains, and Walmart. Other major trip generators could include Marshfield Clinic and the schools within D.C. Everest school district.

She indicated that 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.

### **Wausau**

The City of Wausau representative indicated that Metro Ride provides a valuable service to the community. There are areas of the city that are not served by the existing routes and those areas include employment destinations west of downtown. The City would like to see Metro Ride consider service changes that will help people get to work and to places where they can access 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 p.m.

Metro Ride service needs to be meaningful and serve the area's major destinations. Many of the desirable destinations are within Wausau but others are in Rib Mountain. The service needs to be practical and user friendly.

### **Marshfield Clinic**

The Chief Administrative Officer of the Wausau/Weston Region participated in an interview for this study. Marshfield Foundation is a non-profit 501 (c) (3) that has earmarked money for patient transportation.

Marshfield is a major employer in the area. Shifts start at 7:00 a.m., 3:00 p.m., and 11:00 p.m. There was 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.

The Clinic's patients also need transportation on occasion. Some patients qualify for Medicaid and may be eligible for non-emergency medical transportation.

## United Way

The representative from United Way recollected having good experiences riding the bus. However, he is aware of several gaps in service, as follows:

Metro Ride should serve destinations in Rib Mountain. The demographic who needs transit is the working poor and 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, not just the higher-priced stores that are currently served.

Service is needed to the West Wausau Industrial Park. These employers have 24/7 operations, of which the second shift weekdays are the most critical. Lack of transportation to jobs at the industrial park will be a critical issue when the community welcomes 80 or more refugees. Distribution Center jobs are entry-level and appropriate for people moving to the area and starting new.

It was also indicated that the area's largest food bank, Neighbors Place, is six blocks from the nearest bus stop. They give groceries in boxes and six blocks is a long way to carry a box of groceries.

Seventy Street corridor has the lowest income housing available. Wausau East 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.

It was also suggested that Metro Ride update its website and use apps for trip planning on-line.

Metro Ride hours of operation should be extended beyond 10:30 p.m. on weekdays to cover second shift workers. United Way is of the opinion that longer weekday hours is more important than weekend service.

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.

Finally, 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 is limited and the fee is generally at least \$15 for a local ride. Northwoods Taxi makes some shared rides available to jobs at assisted living sites, but even those rides are more expensive than public transit. If transportation providers had an account-based payment, perhaps subsidies could be added for qualifying riders.

## 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:

- ◆ Meeting participants encouraged the planning team to talk with local community leaders and business contacts. It was also recommended that the Chamber of Commerce engage in the outreach effort to engage businesses.
- ◆ Participants are hopeful that the plan will result in implementation of changes and improvements in service. They have participated in prior planning efforts that did not yield measurable results.
- ◆ The group indicated that a significant barrier to progress has been the State Legislature. They feel that they have created good ideas but until the State legislation is changed in support of 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.
- ◆ Metro Ride is a valuable service and without it many people would not be able to participate in the community. Everybody should be concerned about public transit in their community.
- ◆ Ramp Up marathon County is active in the Wausau Community and would be a good resource for information for this plan.
- ◆ 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 p.m. does not cover shift start and end times. If a shift ends at 10:30 p.m., the employee needs to ask for a ride home or pay for a taxi.
- ◆ Agencies and businesses located on a bus route should promote public transit on their websites so people know that they are accessible by transit.
- ◆ 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
- 
- ◆ There is an issue with snow removal that must be addressed for rider safety. Snow plows put piles of snow in front of bus stops and at shelters. As a result, passengers wait in the street.
  - ◆ Public transit service is important for the school district. Without public transit, the schools would likely pay significantly more for student transportation.

## **PUBLIC SURVEY**

A public survey will be posted online as an effort to gather additional public input about transportation needs and how service could be improved. The survey will be widely advertised through local media outlets and social media as well as through newsletters and posted flyers. Survey results will be included in the needs assessment.

## **FOCUS GROUPS**

The Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service (WIPPS) Research Partners<sup>1</sup> conducted three focus groups to gather feedback and information to help inform the larger transportation development plan. The focus group insights will 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

Typically focus group discussions are small groups and this level of participation is in line with expectations.<sup>2</sup> 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 in terms of creating access, fostering independence, and providing a clean and safe alternative to other transportation options like taxis and ride services 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, etc.) and elsewhere in terms of recognizing the value of transit in making a community an attractive place to live and work, especially among younger demographics. In other communities, public transit is a part of the fabric of the community and is broadly seen as an alternative to cars and is used 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 with public transit and have first-hand appreciate for how it can add to community life.

**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

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

- socialize with friends.
- Lack of Saturday service.

3

Among the other limitations noted by focus group participants are: in some cases, long distances to walk to the closest available bus stop [one participant noted the closest bus stop to their house is 2 miles] and the need for more technology on busses, 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 who are facing a demand for workers and could potentially benefit from bus access in terms of helping to fill open positions.
- Expand routes or hours to better support access to jobs, including first shift at work (for example, the 72<sup>nd</sup> Street Industrial Park) and more grocery stores on a bus route.
- 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 smaller vehicles and whether there is a potential 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 the bus not going where people need or want to go and that when adding routes or improvements, there should be enough time allowed for people to “catch on” to the new services and for there to be adequate promotion and building 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. In one group, a previous pilot initiative to offer a Friday bus to Rib Mountain was noted as an example of a service that was not promoted and therefore it was not surprising that it did not succeed.

6

Participants noted that there is a significant need to rebrand the value of transit in the community and that there are 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.” There is a need to change misperceptions and stigma surrounding the image of “who rides the bus.”

7

Participants noted that there are existing perceptions that the current transit is largely a student bus

service within the city or a social service that only economically disadvantaged and/or differently-abled members of the community use. The participants felt strongly that transit needs to be framed as an economic development and workforce development issue and the business community would be central to the successful implementation of any actionable plans. Whether the business community would be willing to help contribute to the funding of expanded services to help meet workforce needs could be explored, including providing employers opportunities 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 that 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 the decision by Weston to not continue bus service and the divisiveness of the discussions at the time. 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 and there is hope that communities could come together on the issue of transit. All noted that funding and turf battles surrounding funding are always a barrier.

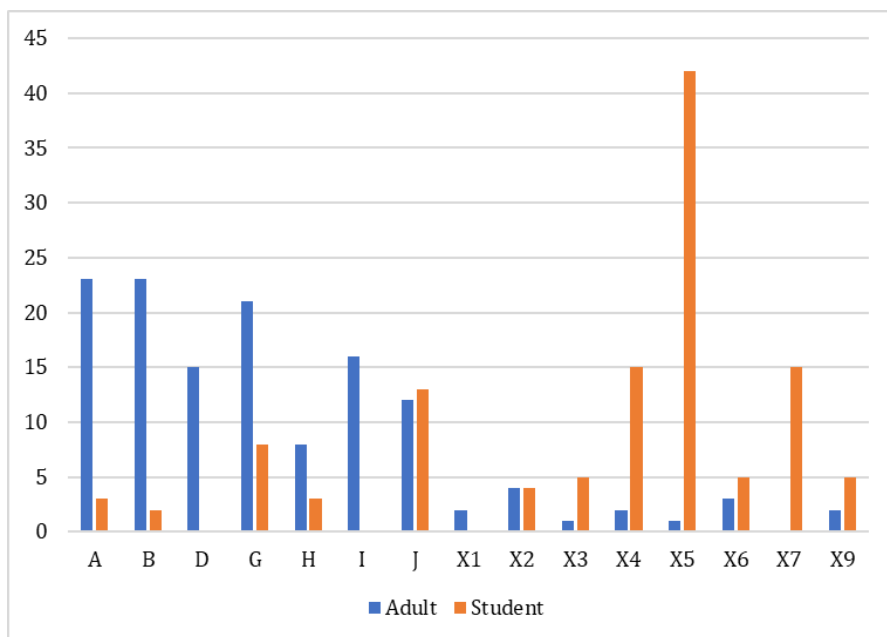


## PASSENGER SURVEY

### OVERVIEW

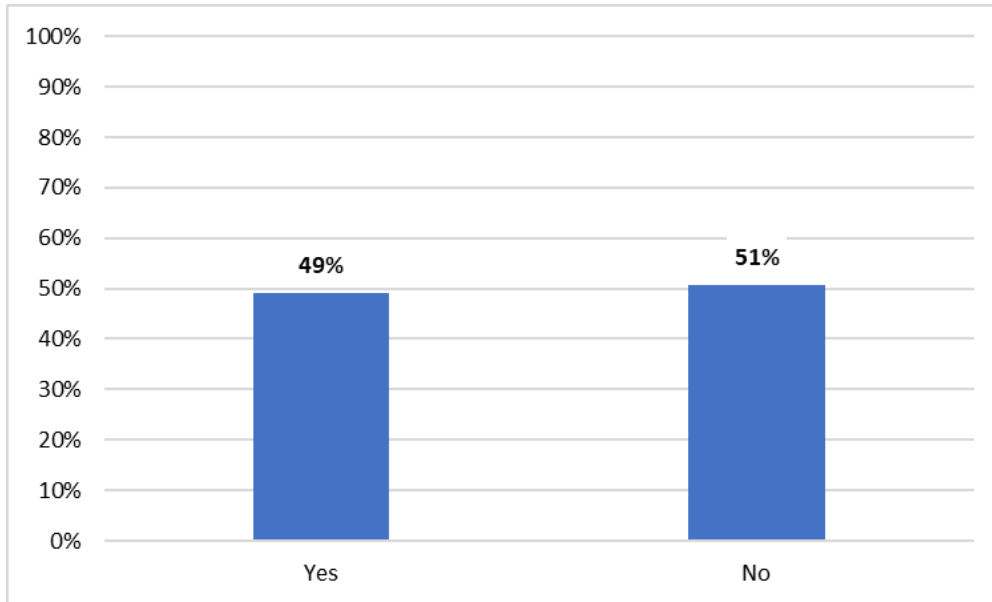
During the span of four days in October, 2021, RLS & Associates, Inc. conducted an onboard rider survey of Metro Rider fixed route riders. The purpose of this survey was to collect feedback from current Metro Ride riders to determine areas for improvement and future changes. The riders were also questioned regarding demographics, frequency of bus usage, trip purpose, and travel needs outside of Wausau. During distribution, the survey was provided in variations, one for adults and one for students to be handed out on the school tripper routes. The surveys were also available in large print and Hmong. Over the four days of the survey period (October 18<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup>), a total of 253 surveys were collected with 133 being adults and 120 being students. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of responses collected by route and survey type.

Figure 1: Survey Responses



To help understand Metro Ride’s fare structure through how riders use it, respondents were asked what type of fare they used on their surveyed trip and whether or not it was a reduced cost fare. Figure 2 then shows that almost half of the respondents (126 people) rode Metro Ride on a reduced face.

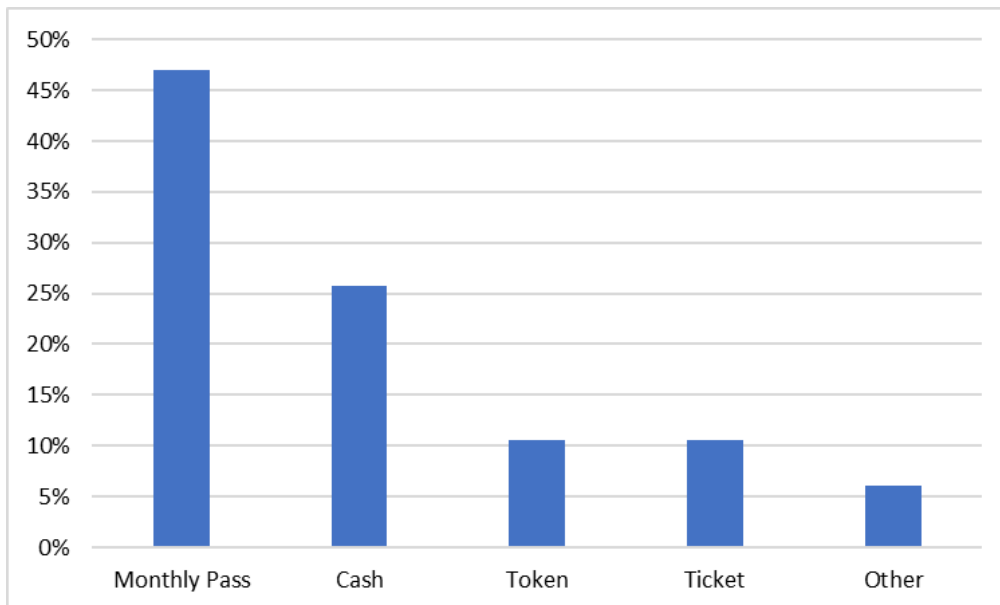
Figure 2: Reduced Fare



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

Figure 3 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 3: Fare Type



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

## RIDER SATISFACTION

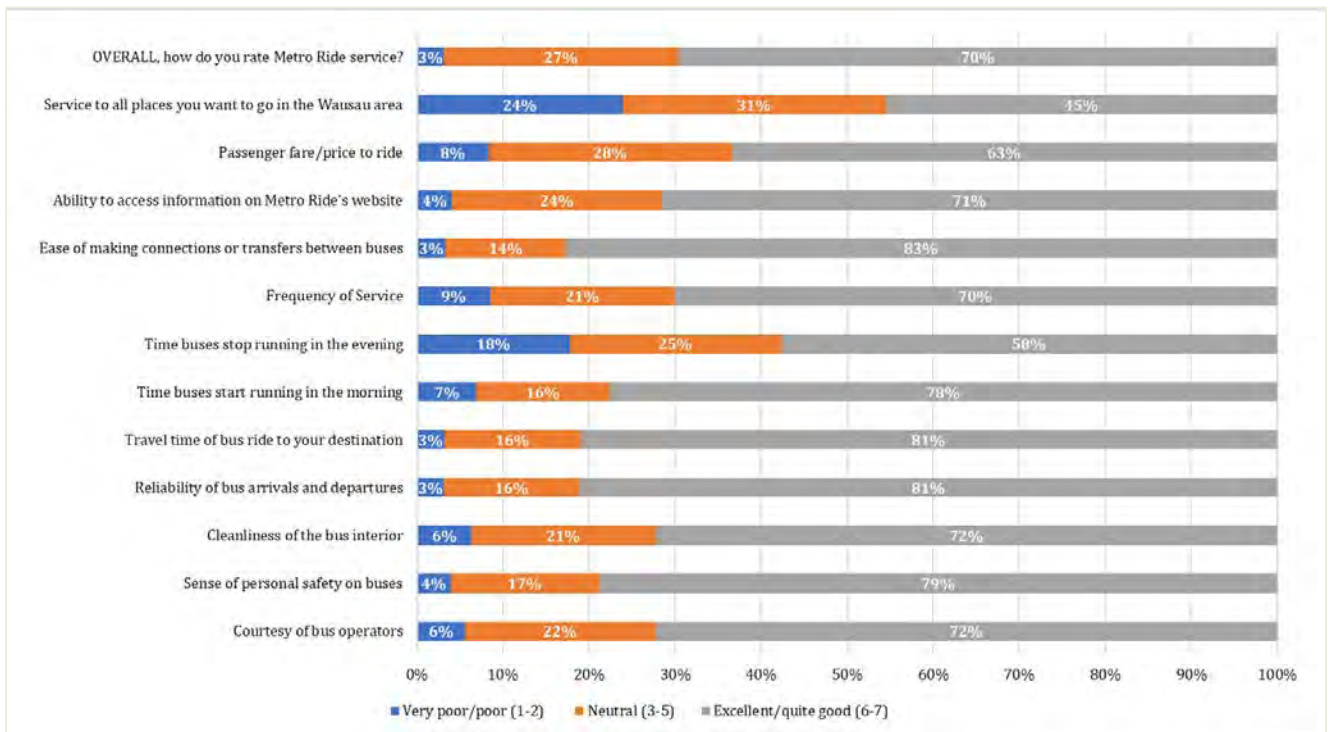
Riders were asked to rate their satisfaction of Metro Ride through 13 different questions by ranking them 1-7 (1=Very Poor and 7=Excellent). Figure 4 shows the satisfaction rating questions used in the survey.

Figure 4: Satisfaction Survey Questions

<i>In the past 30 days, how would you rate Metro Ride services...</i>								Excellent	Very poor	Don't Know/ Don't use
10. Courtesy of bus operators	7	6	5	4	3	2	1			<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Sense of personal safety on buses	7	6	5	4	3	2	1			<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Cleanliness of the bus interior	7	6	5	4	3	2	1			<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Reliability of bus arrivals and departures	7	6	5	4	3	2	1			<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Travel time of bus ride to your destination	7	6	5	4	3	2	1			<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Time buses start running in the morning	7	6	5	4	3	2	1			<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Time buses stop running in the evening	7	6	5	4	3	2	1			<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Frequency of Service	7	6	5	4	3	2	1			<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Ease of making connections or transfers between buses	7	6	5	4	3	2	1			<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Ability to access information on Metro Ride's website	7	6	5	4	3	2	1			<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Passenger fare/price to ride	7	6	5	4	3	2	1			<input type="checkbox"/>
21. Service to all the places you want to go in the Wausau area	7	6	5	4	3	2	1			<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>22. OVERALL, how do you rate Metro Ride service?</b>										
Excellent							Very Poor			
7	6	5	4	3	2	1				

Figure 5 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 5: Metro Ride Satisfaction



Out of the 13 questions asked, 12 of them were rated positively by over half of the riders who responded. The one question that had a majority neutral or negative responses “Service to all places you want to go in the Wausau area,” which shows that riders would like to see Metro Ride service areas they don’t currently serve now.

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. Questions included how many days per week they rode Metro Ride, the time it takes for them to get from home to a bus stop, and how many bus transfers they used on their current trip. Figure 6 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 6: Average Days per Week Riding Metro Ride

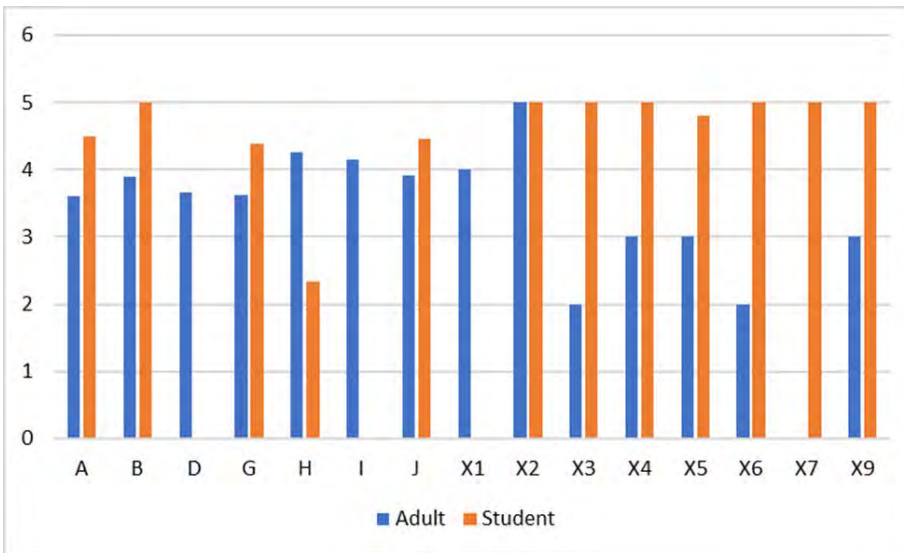
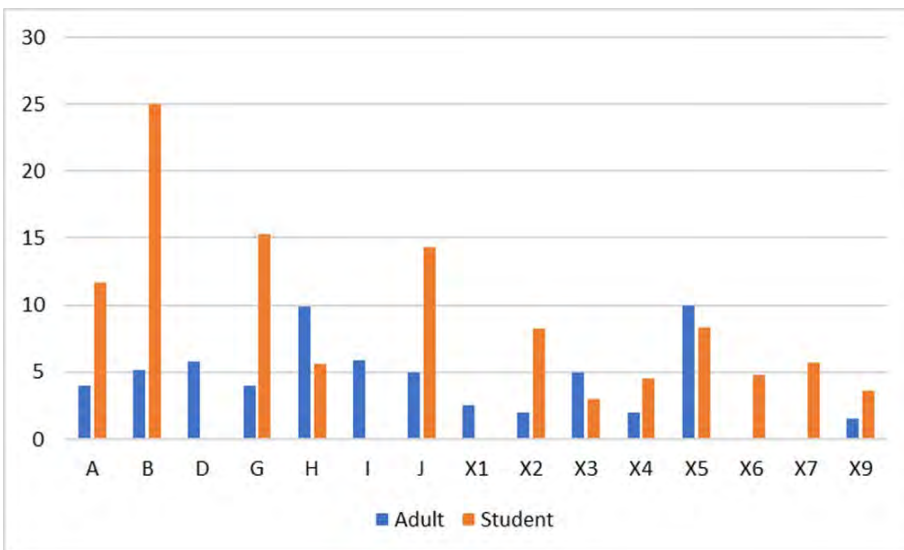


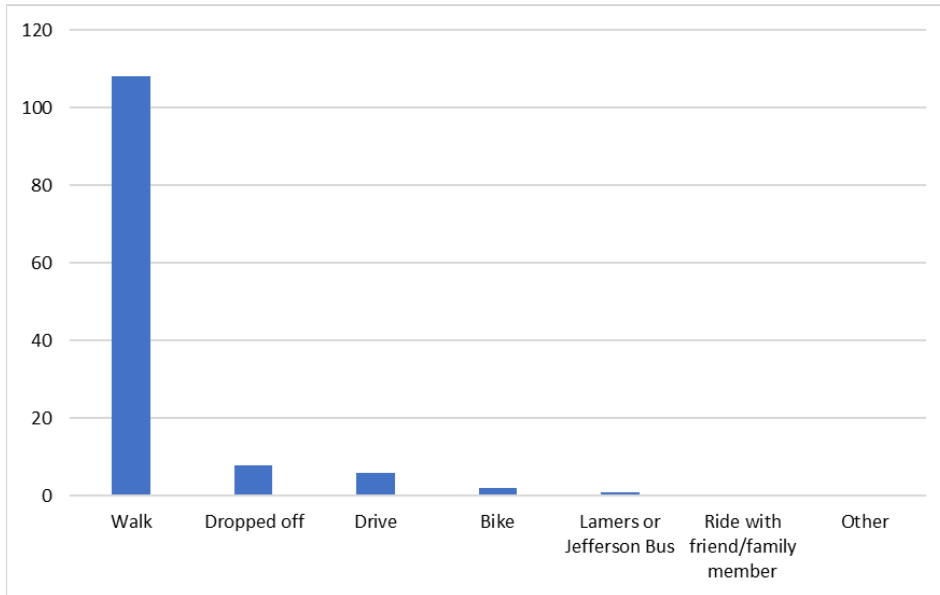
Figure 7 shows the average amount of time that respondents take to get from their home to a bus stop. Students and adults averaged between five and ten minutes, with few exceptions. One exception is the student response to Route B. Only one student indicated that it takes 25 minutes to walk to a bus stop. That length of time is an outlier compared to the majority of survey results.

Figure 7: Average Minutes to get to Bus Stop from Home



To provide more background into how riders get to their bus stops from home, respondents were also asked how they most often get from home to their bus, where Figure 8 shows walking to be the method of most respondents.

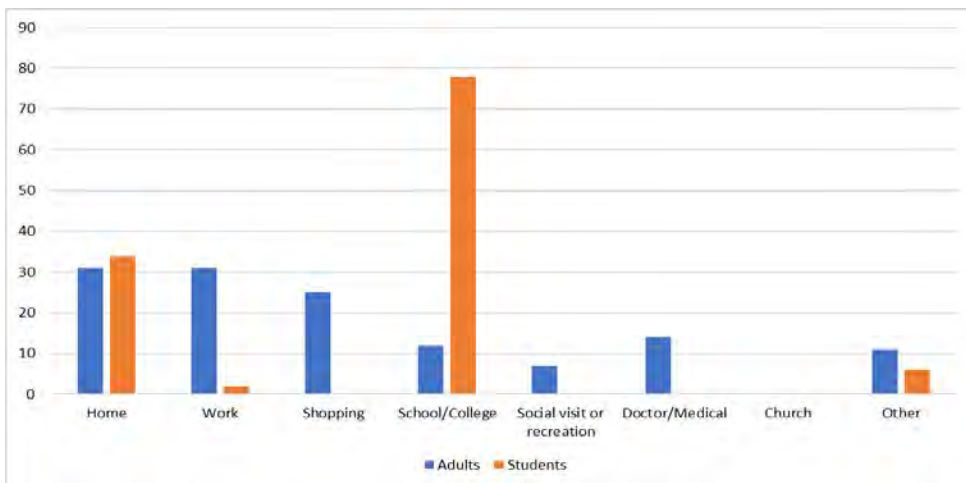
Figure 8: Getting from Home to the Bus Stop



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

Respondents were also asked where they were going on the trip in which they were surveyed. In Figure 9, it 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 9: Trip Destination



Tables 1 and 2 show the percentage of respondents, by route, who had to transfer buses during the trip that they answered the survey. Of all adults surveyed, 68 percent of them transferred buses during their surveyed trip. However, for students, only 36 percent made a transfer during their surveyed trip

Table 1: 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%

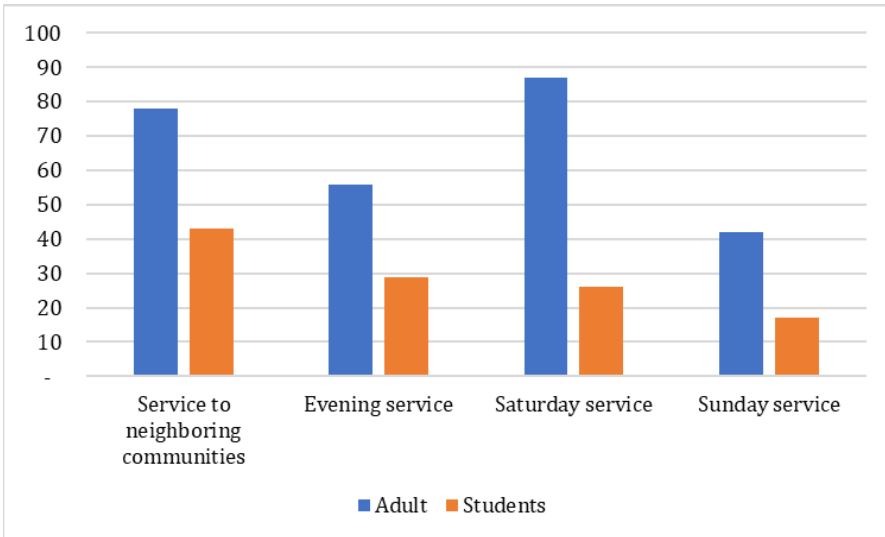
Table 2: Student Bus Transfers

Students	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%

Other important questions that riders were asked included services Metro Ride should offer, how often the respondent needs travels outside of Wausau and doesn't have a ride, and how many times they have utilized Metro Ride. Figure 10 shows that, of the riders who answered the question, most would like to see Metro Ride expand its service into neighboring communities and have Saturday service.



Figure 10: Services Metro Ride Should Offer



As shown in Figure 11, over 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 11: Need to Travel Outside Wausau and not having a Ride

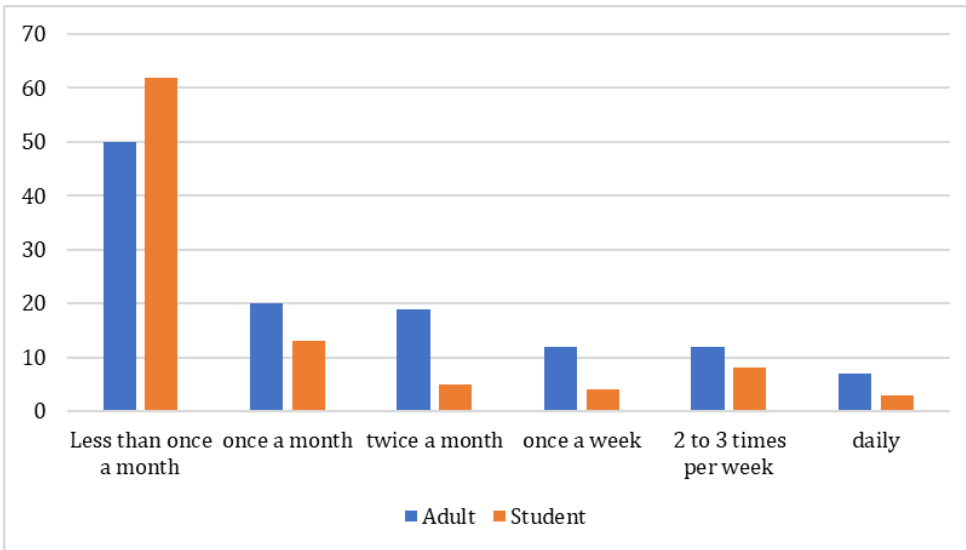
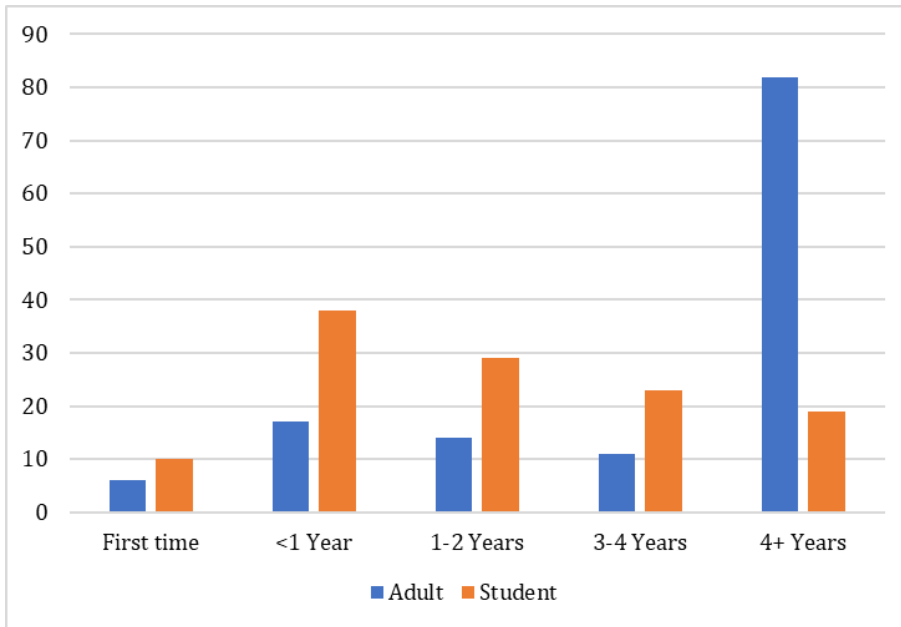


Figure 12 shows that a vast majority of adult riders have ridden Metro Ride more than four years, while student riders were more diverse in their answers, with a plurality of students having ridden less than one year.

Figure 12: Years Riding Metro Ride



## RIDER DEMOGRAPHICS

A variety of basic demographic information was asked of riders in the survey, which included information such as age, race, available household vehicles, and if they had a driver's license. A breakdown of these demographic topics can be found below.

Figure 13: Rider Age Groups

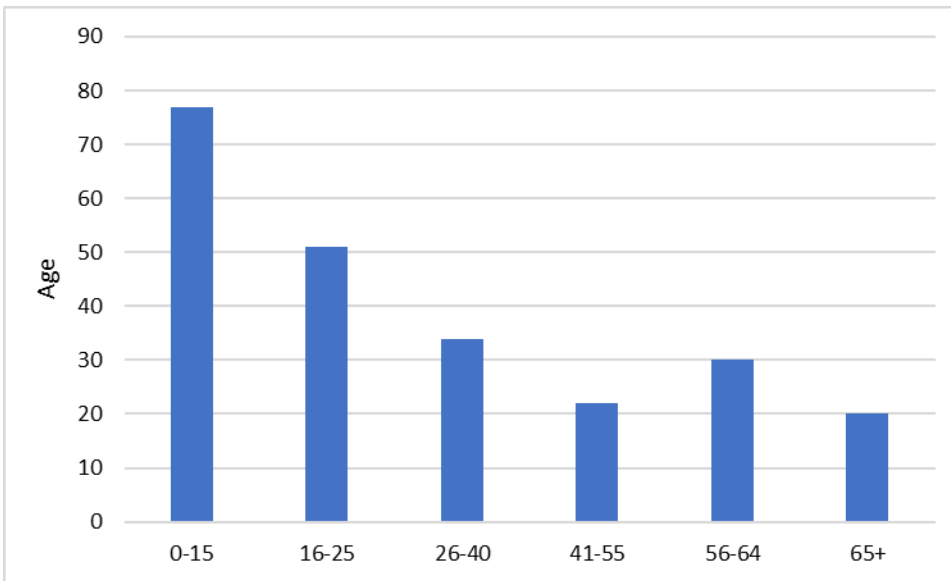


Figure 14: Race

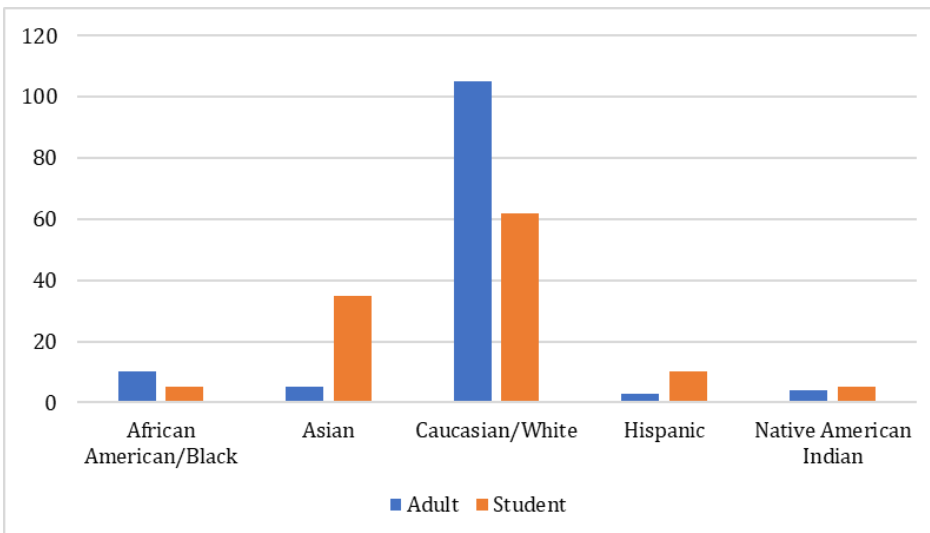
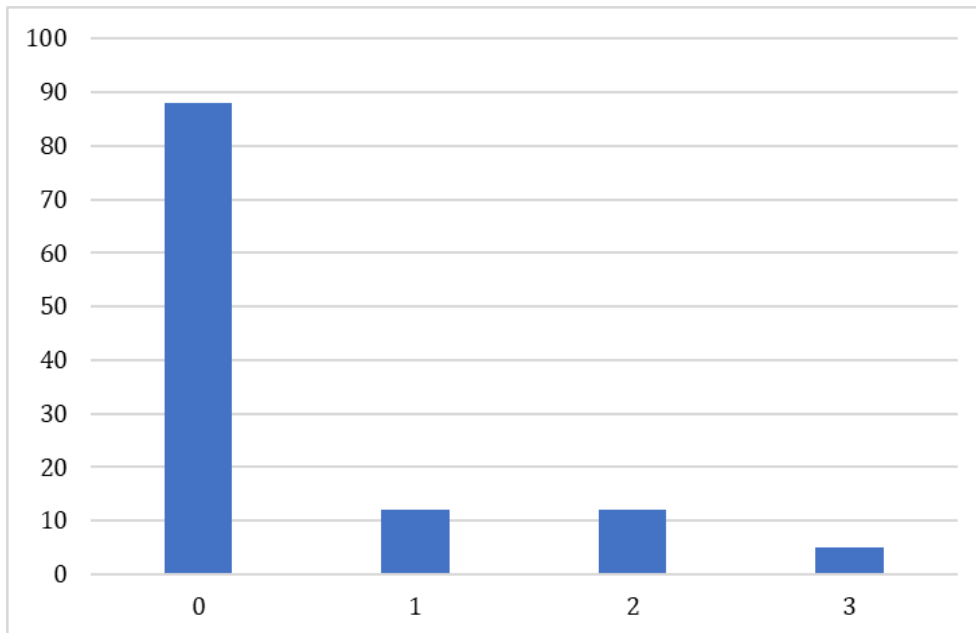
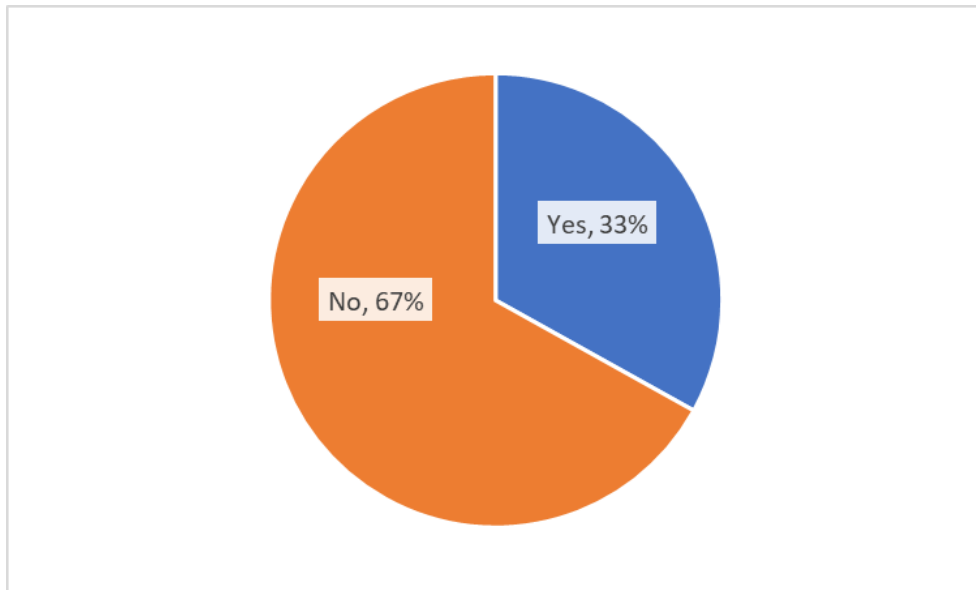


Figure 15: Available Vehicles by Household



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

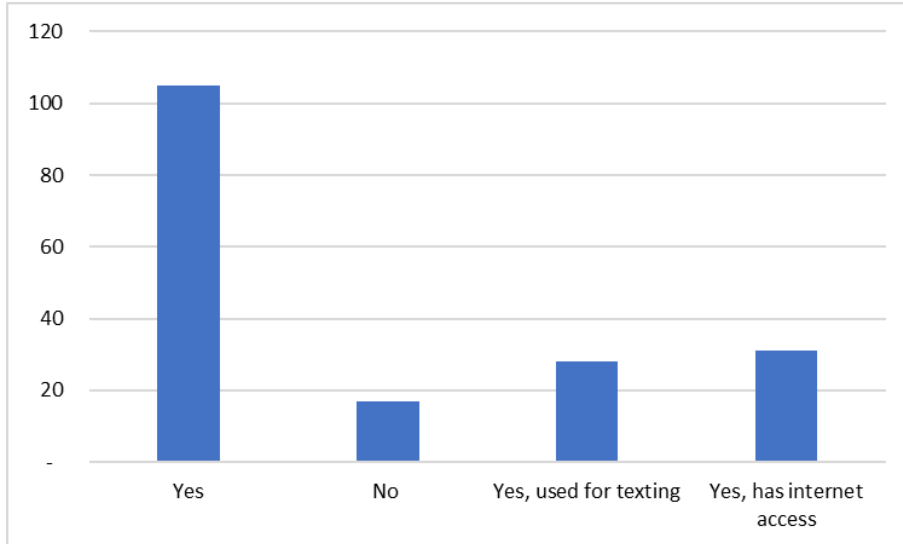
Figure 2: Valid Driver's License



Respondents were also asked some more in-depth demographic question, such as whether or not they had a cell phone and how they could use it, they employment status, and what language they spoke at home. Figure 19 shows that a vast majority of the respondents had cell phones. However, at most, only

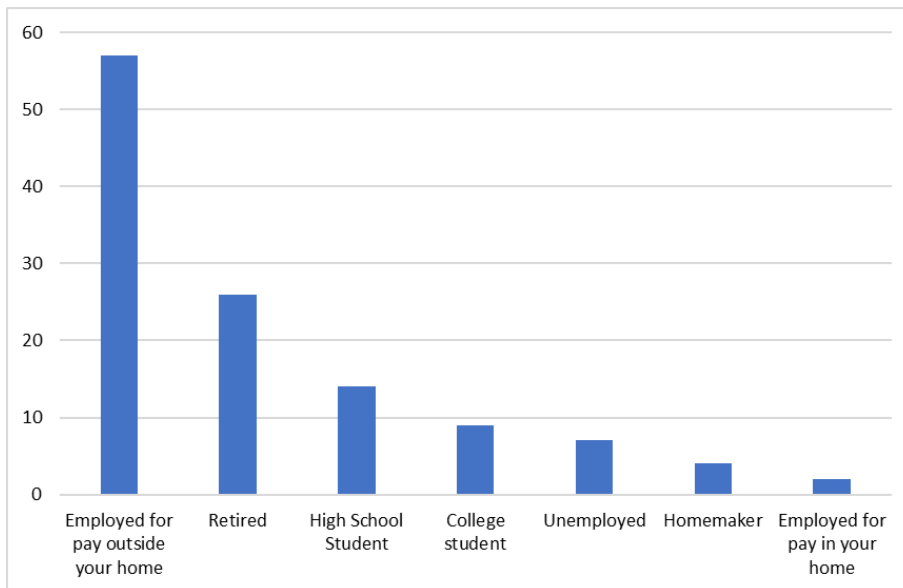
about 50 percent of those who have cell phones stated they used their cell phone of texting or that it had internet access.

Figure 17: Cell Phones



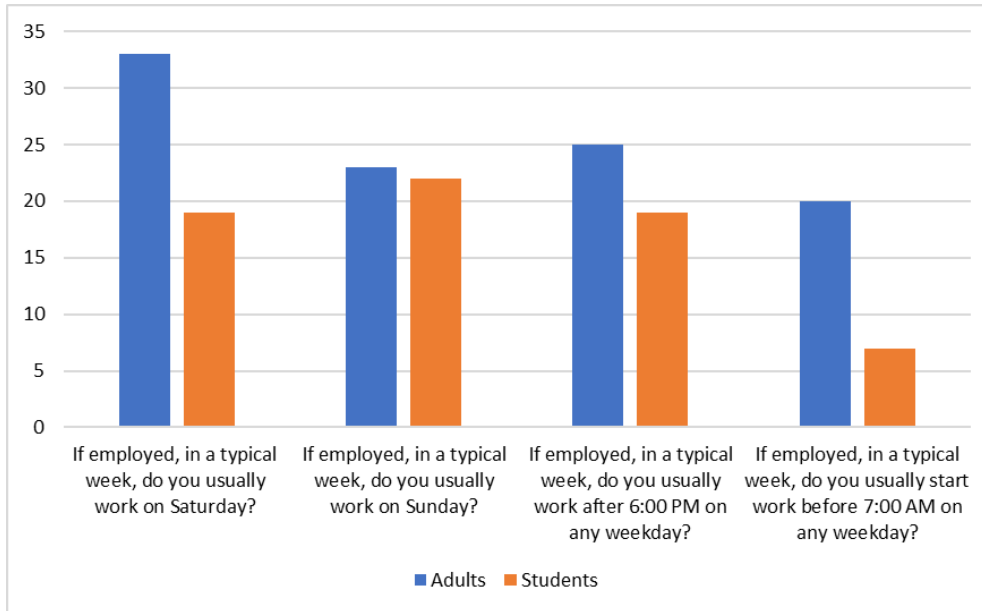
When asked about their employment status, Figure 18 shows a total of 50 percent of the questions respondents stated that they were employed, with 48 percent of them being employed outside their home. Out of the rest of the respondents, 20 percent stated that they were high school or college students and six percent stated that they were unemployed.

Figure 18: Employment Status



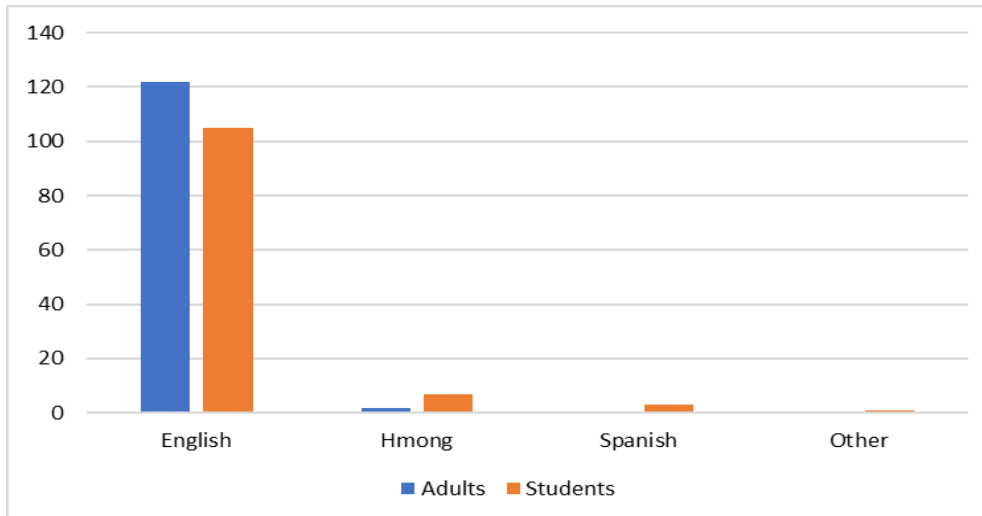
Following the question on employment, those who were employed were asked what times they worked in a typical week outside normal business hours. The two most common answers, shown in Figure 19, were respondents working on Saturdays and Sundays.

Figure 19: Times Working Outside Normal Business Hours



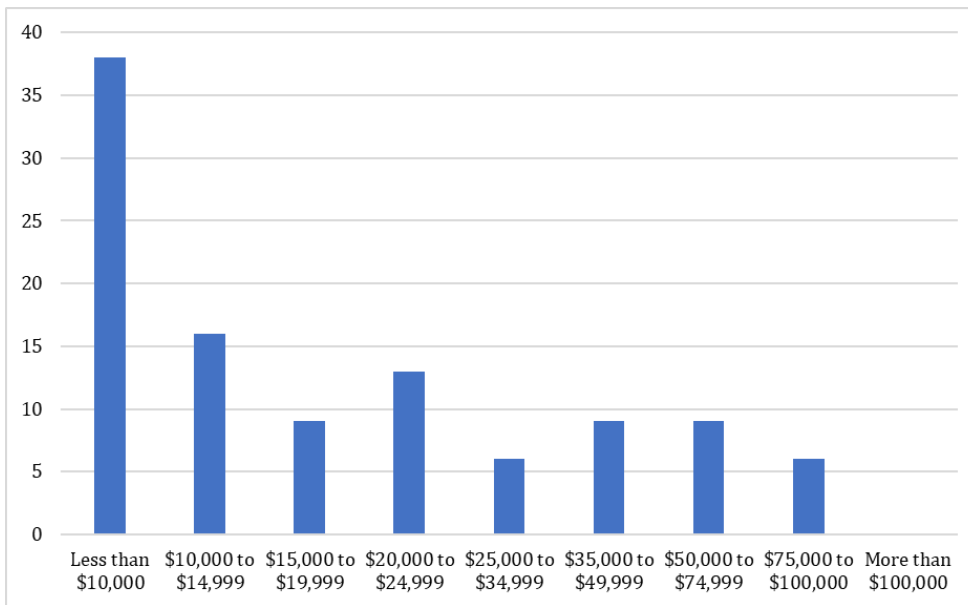
Respondents were asked what language they spoke at home. Figure 20 shows the most common language answered was English, with Hmong being the second most common. One answer was written in with “Other,” being Korean.

Figure 20: Language Spoken at Home



RLS compared responses from the number of people per household and the annual household income provided 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 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. Along with that, another 17 respondents are potentially living in households under the Federal Poverty Level however, due to the income ranges used for the survey, those respondents could be above the threshold.

Figure 21: Household Income



## NEXT STEPS

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The public survey will be distributed and results compiled into the next technical memorandum to complete the needs assessment process. Based on research and input from stakeholders, the planning team will develop preliminary alternatives for Metro Ride service changes and present them to the MPO and Metro Ride for consideration.



4. Do any of the following apply to you? (Select one option that applies the most to you.)
- I represent a local employer with employees that use Metro Ride
  - I represent business or medical office with customers that use Metro Ride
  - I represent a local business that is not within Wausau City Limits
  - I represent a local government within Marathon County but outside of Wausau
  - I represent an organization serving people who need to use Metro Ride and may have no, or few, transportation options
  - I am a Metro Ride employee
  - None of the above

Did you know?

**Metro Ride provided more than 460,000 rides during 2019?**

Also, throughout the COVID pandemic Metro Ride has remained on the front lines serving as an important transportation resource for Wausau and providing over 407,000 rides per year in 2020 and 2021.

**Metro Ride passenger fare is only \$1.75 (adults), \$0.85 (age 65+ and individuals with a disability), and \$1.50 (students).**

**For even more savings, monthly passes can be purchased for frequent riders.**

That cost of operating Metro Ride is shared between the City of Wausau, State, and Federal Transit Administration. Approximately 28% of the operating budget comes from local sources and passenger fares make up about 11%.

5. Are you aware of Metro Ride's schedule and fare structure?
- Yes
  - No
6. Do you currently use Metro Ride once a week or more often?
- Yes
  - No
7. Which of the following statements best describes your use and/or awareness of Metro Ride? (Select all that apply.)
- I rely on Metro Ride for all or most of my transportation
  - I ride Metro Ride for some of my transportation needs and it is an important part of my budget and life
  - My child/children ride to and from school or afterschool activities
  - I rarely ride but would like to ride more often

- I don't ride Metro Ride but like knowing it is an option if I need it someday
  - I have a car or other means of transportation and don't ever think about using Metro Ride
  - I know about Metro Ride but I do not regularly use it
8. What would you change to make your public transportation service options more appealing to you? (Select all that apply)
- Provide service to/in Weston/Schofield/Rothschild
  - Provide service to/in Rib Mountain
  - Provide service after 6:30 PM during the week
  - Provide service before 6:30 AM during the week
  - Have service available on Saturdays
  - Serve more areas of Wausau
  - If I could schedule a driver to pick me up at my house and take me to where I am going/ shared rides with others in a car, van, or small bus
  - Offer a trip reservation app or website to schedule transportation
  - Other (please specify)
9. What service changes do you prefer most?
- More routes to more places in Wausau
  - More frequent service (less wait time between buses)
  - Transit service to more places in the region (i.e., Rib Mountain, Weston, Schofield, Rothschild)
  - Start a shared-ride demand response service so I can schedule a pick up and drop off at my desired locations
  - Longer hours of service on existing routes
  - More bus shelters
10. Which type of public transit is most appealing to you?
- Fixed Route: Busses ride along pre-determined routes and stops with assigned times that they arrive at certain locations
  - Shared Ride Demand Response: You schedule a bus/van to pick you up and it takes you where you need to go, sharing rides with a few other people in the same vehicle
  - A combination of the two above options
  - Neither
  - Other

11. 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? (Select all that apply.)
- I use it now and will continue to ride
  - I would use it regularly
  - I would use it occasionally
  - I am not at all likely to use it
  - I would let my clients, constituents, or employees know about using Metro Ride

12. If Metro Ride was fare-free, would you be more likely to ride?
- I would be more likely to ride
  - I would ride the same amount
  - I would not be more likely to ride

**Public transit provides people with access to work, grocery and other shopping, medical appointments, and social and recreational activities. It can be a helpful way to get youth to activities or jobs. And, it can also be a valuable alternative to adults who do not drive or do not wish to drive their cars.**

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

	Yes	No	Maybe
Employment/Work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Medical offices, clinics, or hospitals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mental health care	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dental care	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pharmacy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Shopping	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Human service agencies or government offices	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other trip purposes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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

- Public transit
- Taxi/Uber/Lyft
- Friends/family
- Walking/Bicycle
- Other (please specify):

15. 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?

- Extremely concerned
- Concerned
- Slightly Concerned
- Not Concerned

16. Would you support your local community government spending money in the annual budget to pay for public transit services that would operate in your community? (Note that currently, Metro Ride only operates within the City of Wausau)

- Yes
- No

17. If you would support your local government spending money to pay for public transit services what kind of service do you prefer?

- Fixed Route: Busses ride along pre-determined routes and stops with assigned times that they arrive at certain locations
- Shared Ride Demand Response: You schedule a bus/van to pick you up and it takes you where you need to go, sharing rides with a few other people in the same vehicle
- A combination of the two above options
- Neither
- Other

18. If Metro Ride hours of operation or days of service could be expanded to start before 6:30 AM or end after 6:30 PM, would you support your community decreasing spending in one area of its budget in order to help fund the additional hours?

- Yes
- No

19. If no additional funding is available to your local government, would you support your community decreasing spending in one area of its budget in order to help fund transit services that would operate in your community?

- Yes
- No

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

- Up to \$50 more in taxes per year
- \$51 to \$100 more in taxes per year
- I would not be likely to support a tax increase for transit in the community where I live

**Transportation is a necessary part of most personal budgets for Americans. Metro Ride passengers who buy a monthly pass each month spend \$504 per year on Metro Ride. In Wausau, these passengers may also need to include taxi/Uber/Lyft fares or reimburse family and friends if the bus service is not available to meet all of their needs (i.e. evening trips to the grocery store or early shifts at work).**

21. 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?

- My household spends more than the U.S. household average
- My household spends less than the U.S. household average

22. What kinds of transportation expenses did you include in your estimate above? (Please select all that apply.)

- Metro Ride bus passes/fare
- Car payment/value
- Automobile insurance
- Fuel for the car
- Taxi/Uber/Lyft fares for local trips
- Parking
- Other (Please specify):

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

- Yes
- No
- Yes, I am already a rider and I would save more money if I could use Metro Ride for more purposes.

24. Do you have any other comments about transit services in the Wausau area?