

Metrobus



What We Heard

Metrobus Accessibility Plan Survey

June 2023

Disclaimer

- ▶ This document provides a summary of what we heard through our recent Metrobus Accessibility Plan Survey. It is not meant to provide specific details of survey submissions, word-for-word, but rather to communicate key findings. The full scope of responses will be used by staff and members of the Metrobus Accessibility Advisory Committee to assist with evaluation and decision-making.
- ▶ The purpose of the survey was to understand the barriers faced by people with disabilities who use public transit. It should be acknowledged that for almost all questions, most respondents did not experience barriers to accessing the various elements of service. However, this document will focus on those responses where barriers were identified so that we may better understand the needs of our customers and work towards removing and preventing barriers.

Introduction

- ▶ In December 2021, the provincial government enacted the Accessible NL Act, an enabling legislation to ensure accessibility and inclusion for individuals with disabilities in Newfoundland & Labrador.
- ▶ One of the expectations stemming from the Act is for public bodies to develop Accessibility Plans to describe how they will work to identify, prevent and remove barriers faced by people with disabilities. The plans are to be completed by December 2023 with a 3-year scope and renewed at least every 3 years thereafter.
- ▶ The St. John's Transportation Commission has long been committed to responding to the needs of the community, including persons with disabilities, and continually reviews services to identify efficiencies and improvements to ensure all passengers receive the highest quality of service.

Metrobus Accessibility Plan Advisory Committee

- ▶ In March 2023, Metrobus did a public call for expressions of interest from transit riders who have disabilities to form an advisory committee. The committee's mandate is to support the development of Metrobus' Accessibility Plan. The committee brings many perspectives to the conversation and is representative of a variety of disabilities. Our first meeting was held on May 1, 2023.
- ▶ On May 10th, a survey was released to gather input from riders about any barriers they face in accessing transit. The survey was available online and in paper copy (on GoBus and the Community Bus). It was advertised by email, posters, and social media. Invitations to complete the survey were sent to many disability/community organizations.

Who Completed the Survey - General

- ▶ 456 survey responses were received – 417 online and 39 in print
- ▶ Of the 417 online submissions, not all were fully completed. Overall, 144 responses were received within the Metrobus section and 170 within the GoBus section.
- ▶ 27 people completed the Community Bus section. For the purposes of this document, commentary on the Community Bus is omitted since no barriers were identified.

Who Completed the Survey – Disability Info

- ▶ 63.5% of respondents identified as having a disability; a further 12.5% were advocates or support people for someone with a disability.
- ▶ 22% said they do not have a disability (These people were directed to the end of the survey to provide general commentary, since we were specifically interested in hearing directly from people with disabilities.)
- ▶ The top 2 disability categories identified were physical (218) and mental health (115), both far ahead of other categories listed.
- ▶ Most survey respondents indicated they do not use any mobility aids.

Service Used

- ▶ 170 respondents use GoBus; 144 use Metrobus; 13 identified they do not use public transit.
- ▶ Among those who do not use public transit, responses indicated they either have their own transportation, Metrobus do not service their area, it's not convenient, or there are disability related concerns that prevent it.
- ▶ For people who use both services, we asked what makes them decide one service over the other. For most, it depends on where they are going, how far they must walk and the weather. Disability related concerns also play a role, as well as snow clearing.

Travel Training

- ▶ Most people (81%) were not interested in learning more about Metrobus' Travel Training program
- ▶ 19% said they would be interested. Among those, many already use Metrobus.
- ▶ 39 people provided their contact information for follow up about future travel training opportunities.

What We Heard

Metrobus Highlights

- ▶ Customers' most noted barriers to riding Metrobus included:
 - ▶ Buses not kneeling to the curb
 - ▶ Courtesy seating not available
 - ▶ Buses pulling away from the curb before the customer is seated
 - ▶ Inadequate snow clearing on sidewalks and at bus stops/shelters
 - ▶ Buses not sensory friendly
 - ▶ On-time performance and accuracy of ETA information create unreliability
 - ▶ Availability of information about detours and temporary stops
- ▶ Most people feel stop announcements would be helpful to many but may pose challenges for others.
- ▶ Most people would be open to utilizing mobile technology more to enhance accessibility.
- ▶ Website and mobile app should be reviewed for compliance with accessibility standards

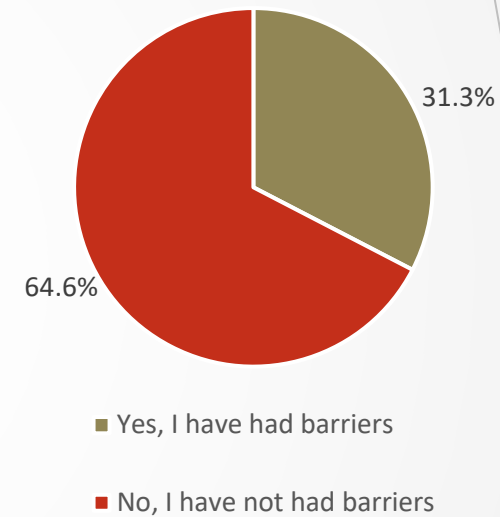
What We Heard

GoBus Highlights

- ▶ Customers' most noted barriers to riding GoBus included:
 - ▶ Difficulty booking a trip due to long phone wait times
 - ▶ Difficulty using the app
 - ▶ Poor on time performance create unreliability
 - ▶ Inadequate door-to-door support, particularly from taxi drivers
 - ▶ Trip notifications with estimated time of arrival are often inaccurate and unreliable
 - ▶ Lack of disability awareness/sensitivity training among taxi drivers
- ▶ Customers feel improvement is needed from a customer service and accountability perspective at all levels (management and staff) and from all providers (Metrobus, Tok Transit, and Newfound Cabs).
- ▶ There is some concern related to availability and fear of customers not being able to get where they need to go (particularly work and medical appointments).

What We Heard – Barriers to Boarding Metrobus

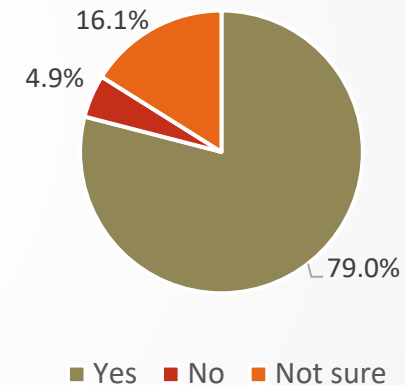
- ▶ Timeliness of boarding using ramp
- ▶ Other customers occupying seating in wheelchair spaces
- ▶ Unable to get to the bus stop when snow clearing is not done or not adequate
- ▶ Ambulatory customers commented that:
 - ▶ Courtesy seating often occupied
 - ▶ Difficult to exit through the back (navigating aisle)
 - ▶ Drivers don't always wait for customers to be seated before pulling away from the stop
 - ▶ Buses do not always kneel to the curb



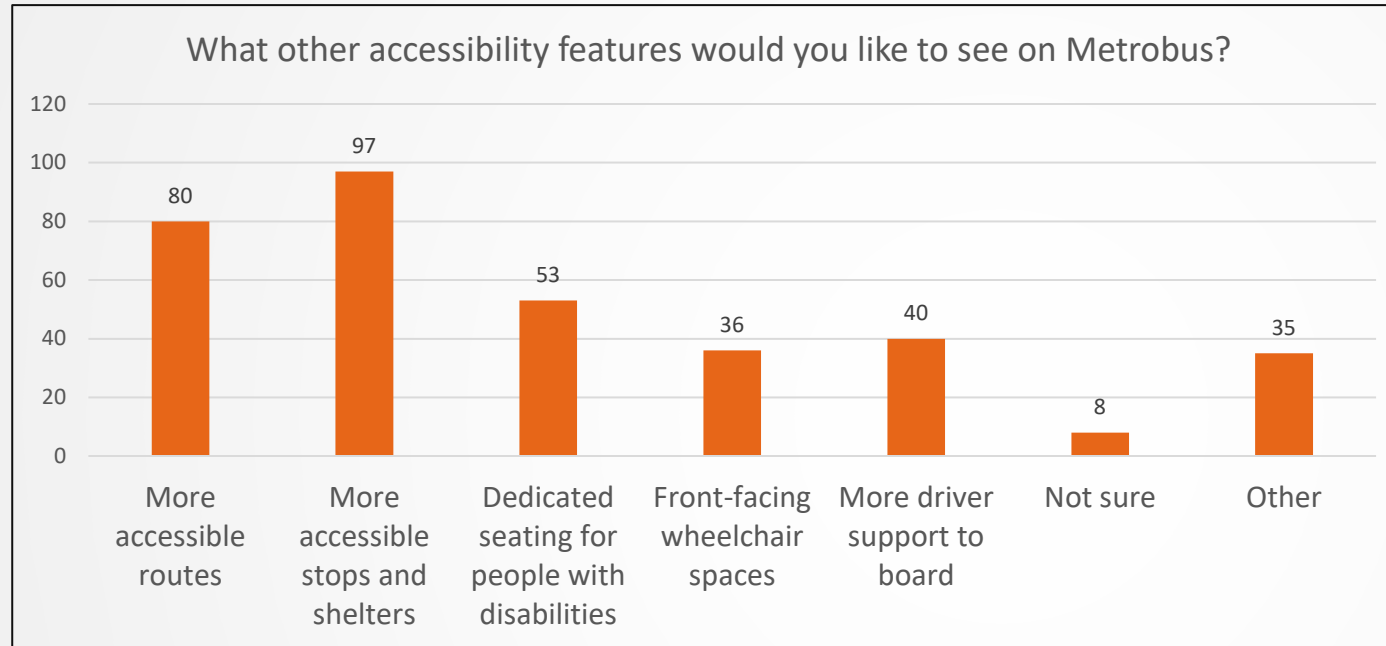
What We Heard – Stop Announcements

- ▶ Most customers felt that stop announcements would help reduce barriers for many groups of riders with and without disabilities.
- ▶ Some customers expressed that stop announcements could also create barriers, particularly from a sensory perspective. A couple of responses indicated that constant audible notices would become “too much”. Noise levels within the bus were also noted as a barrier in several other sections of the survey.

Do you believe stop announcements would be helpful?



What We Heard – Other Accessibility Features



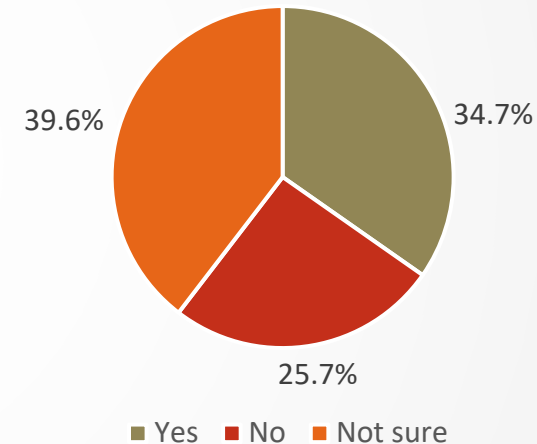
Other:

- ▶ Expanded service area and hours of operation
- ▶ More sensory friendly buses
- ▶ Seating at every stop
- ▶ Electronic fare options
- ▶ A better way to identify buses at major transfer points, and a better way to identify bus stops than a sign on a telephone pole

What We Heard – Barriers from Metrobus Policies/Procedures

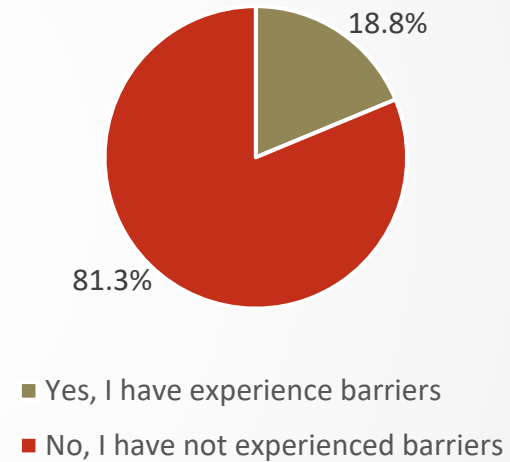
Customer comments included:

- ▶ Requirement to disembark through the rear door creates difficulty in navigating the aisle and stepping down from the bus to the curb if the bus is not kneeled.
- ▶ Strong scents are problematic, and the scent policy needs better enforcement
- ▶ The texting system does not include information about temporary stops
- ▶ It can be difficult for people with disabilities to stand when buses are crowded and courtesy seating is all occupied
- ▶ Drivers do not assist people to board



What We Heard – Metrobus Customer Service

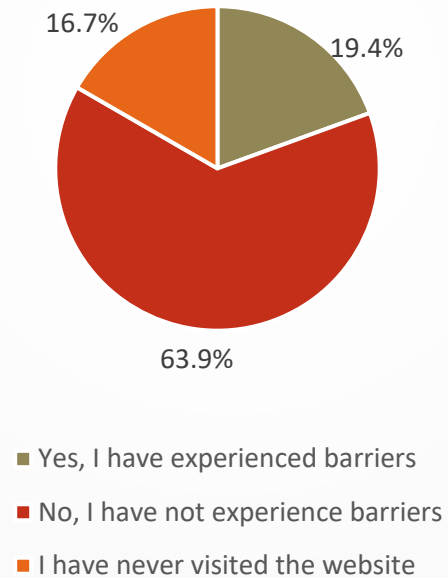
- ▶ Some customers expressed concern with not being able to speak with anyone in customer service after hours to know if buses are delayed.
- ▶ A couple of people indicated it took a long time to get a response.



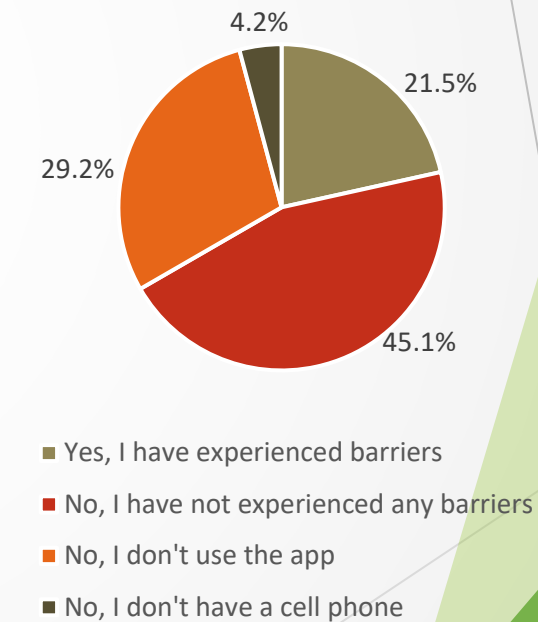
What We Heard – Metrobus Online Tools

- ▶ Some customers had trouble navigating the website
- ▶ Some expressed difficulty using the online schedules, particularly to determine transfer points.
- ▶ Website and app both need to be reviewed for compliance with WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) standards.

Website:

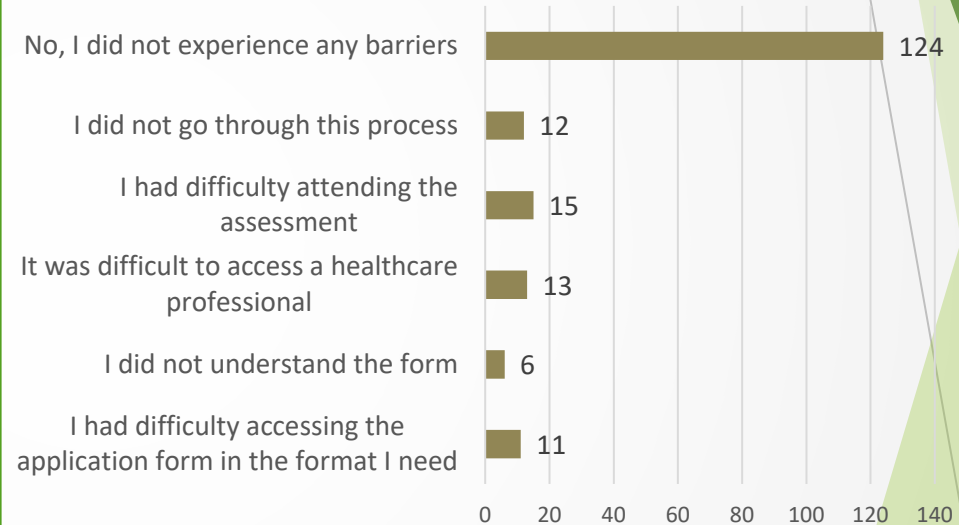


Mobile App:



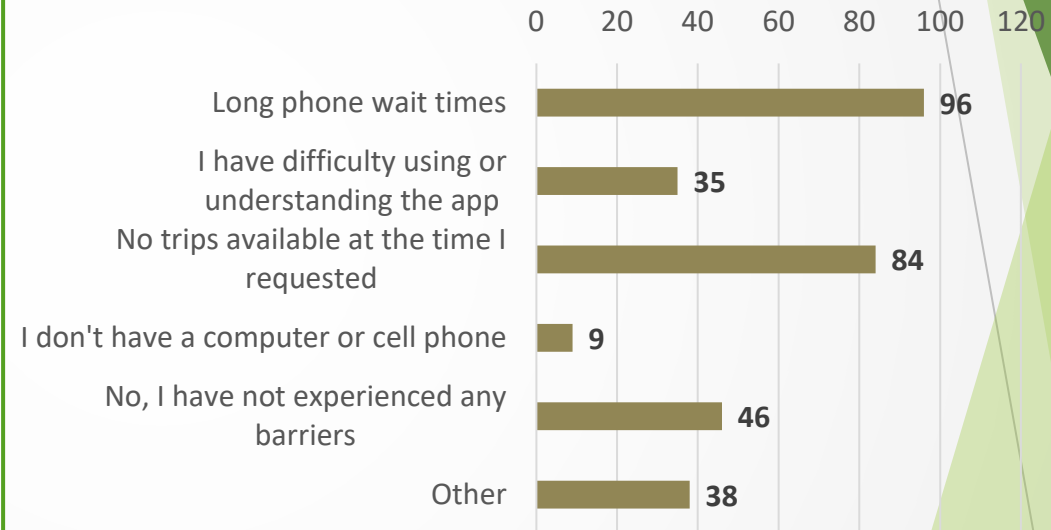
What We Heard – GoBus Application Process

- ▶ Some customers had difficulty seeing the print and understanding the content of the application form.
- ▶ Some commented that they have long waits with their doctors to have the medical portion of the form completed.
- ▶ One person noted the cost charged by their healthcare professional to complete the form was a barrier.
- ▶ There was some concern about how a person's private/medical information would be protected.



What We Heard – Booking a Trip

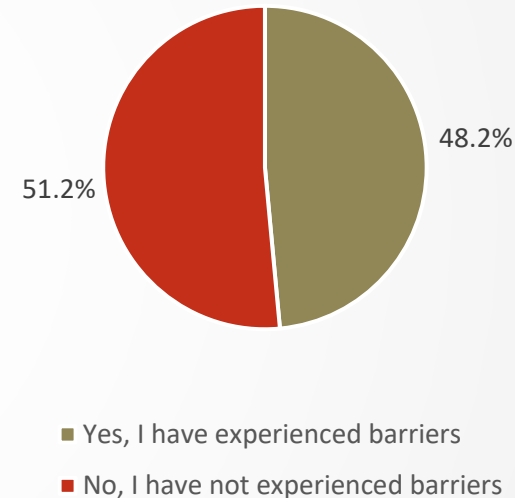
- ▶ Many customers commented that it is difficult to schedule a return trip after a medical appointment (known as “will-calls”) due to long waits (to get through by phone and/or to wait for an available vehicle).
- ▶ Some expressed concern about having rides cancelled without notice.
- ▶ Some people commented that the ability to book spontaneous travel is very limited.
- ▶ Some customers experienced difficulty using or understanding the app.



What We Heard – Riding GoBus

Customer comments identified several challenges related to taking a trip on GoBus:

- ▶ Challenges getting in/out of various types of vehicles (buses, sedans, SUVs, mini-vans) – a “one size fits all” approach will not work.
- ▶ Bus-specific issues – step height, handrails, and seatbelts are problematic
- ▶ Poor on-time performance
- ▶ Door-to-door support from taxi drivers can be inadequate or absent altogether. This was particularly concerning from a safety perspective for people with vision loss.
- ▶ Lack of clarity around which entrance to use for some buildings can create confusion and result in no-shows.
- ▶ Trip notifications not always available (offline taxis) and not always reliable
- ▶ For people with scent sensitivities, riding in taxis was noted as problematic
- ▶ Poor communication between GoBus dispatch and taxi dispatch can lead to errors, missed pickups and long waits for customers.

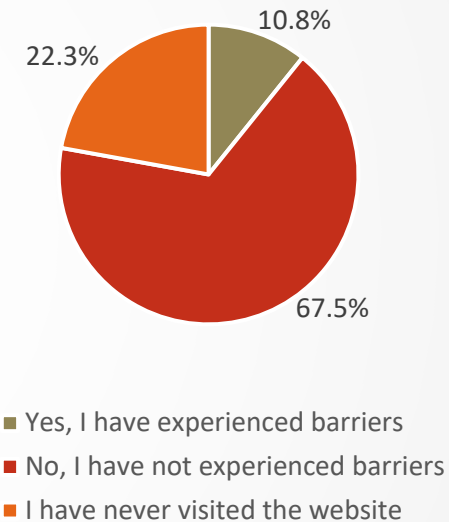


What We Heard – GoBus Policies/Procedures

- ▶ Many people expressed concern about the impacts of the new waitlist feature (which is meant to prevent overbooking).
- ▶ Customers want improvements to the no-show policy to account for no-shows that resulted from errors made by GoBus or taxis.
- ▶ Customers feel more disability awareness/sensitivity training among taxi drivers is required.
- ▶ Some people want expanded hours of operation (in particular, New Year's Eve was noted).
- ▶ Some would like an alternative to having to wait an hour for a return trip when they only need to be at their destination for a short period of time.
- ▶ A few customers believe that priority should be given to work or medical appointments.
- ▶ Many expressed that communication and messaging from management, dispatchers and taxis can be inconsistent and problematic.

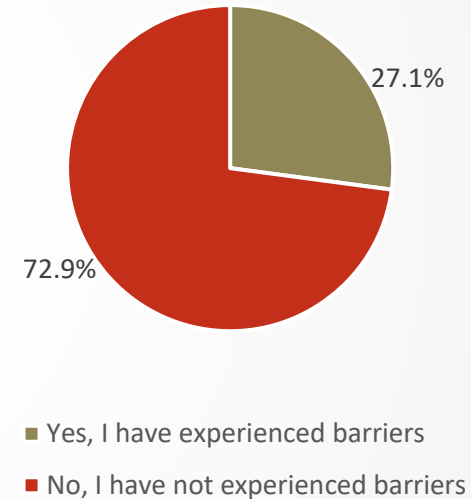
What We Heard – GoBus Website

- ▶ One customer specified problems with utilizing Voiceover to navigate the site.
- ▶ Some people had difficulty using the website to reload their Go-Cards.
- ▶ Some noted that the print size makes it hard to read.
- ▶ Website must be reviewed for compliance with WCAG(Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) standards



What We Heard – GoBus Complaints/Feedback Process

- ▶ Many customers expressed feeling a lack of confidence that filing complaints will result in issues being addressed.
- ▶ Some commented they fear that they'll be penalized for complaining.
- ▶ A couple of people said they see it as a conflict of interest for the service provider to investigate complaints against themselves.
- ▶ Some customers felt there is a lack of ownership of mistakes by dispatchers and drivers (both GoBus and taxis).



What We Heard – Additional Information

- ▶ We asked if people would be open to using mobile technology to increase accessibility:
 - ▶ 78% of Metrobus riders were in favour and 72% of GoBus riders were in favour
 - ▶ It will be important to consult with users in advance and to offer training opportunities for any new technology solutions.
 - ▶ We must not rely on mobile technology as a sole solution since not everyone has access.
- ▶ Comments from people who do not have disabilities echoed many of the same issues already identified, such as the need for better snow clearing, more accessible routes/shelters, and an expanded service area.