

Saint John Urban Transportation Initiative

A community-based approach to
assessing and improving transportation access



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- Sustainable Development Consultant
 - Project management for non-profits
 - Community programming development
 - “Complete Community” design
 - Corporate social responsibility programme development
 - Professional certification from Simon Fraser University, Centre for Sustainable Community Development



Project Purpose & Target Audience

“The discovery and advancement of sustainable urban transportation solutions which will increase the accessibility of public transit to **low-income residents** in Saint John, with a focus on the 'working poor', single-parents and residents accessing community services.”



Project Partners

- Vibrant Communities Saint John (lead agency)
- City of Saint John (sanctioned by Common Council)
- Saint John Transit
- Business Community Anti-poverty Initiative (BCAPI)
- Saint John Board of Trade
- UNB Saint John
- Priority Neighbourhoods (resident representation)



The Saint John Urban Transportation Initiative

- Time-frame: January – April 2012
- Public transit focus, but not the only form of transportation explored
- Regional media engagement very strong – transportation is a key issue among Atlantic Canadians



Unique Qualities of The Initiative

- Multi-sectoral approach – all stakeholders involved
- Recruited low-income residents for project team – enhancing employability of target audience
- Conducted in a volatile climate:
 - Acadia Coach Lines on strike
 - Metro Transit (Halifax) on strike
 - Codiac Transpo (Moncton) poised to strike
 - Recent reductions in Saint John Transit funding, leading to reductions in service



Project Goals

- To gain an understanding of the experience of current public transit users – what's working well and what needs improvement
- To explore the **perceptions and experiences** of potential-riders to:
 - a. understand why they are not using transit today
 - b. identify ways to make transit more accessible, particularly to target stakeholders (low-income residents)



Project Goals

- To identify innovative approaches, policies and practices that can lead to more sustainable solutions for transportation.
- Target 300 resident surveys / interviews.



Project Team

- Community Interviewers – *conducted face-to-face surveys and focus groups with residents*
- Information Manager – *compiled survey response data; ensured consistency of data; assisted with data analysis*
- UNB Research Group – *researched promising practices in “comparable communities”*
- Steering Committee – *provided support as needed*



Research Design

- Definition of “accessible transportation” is subjective – the survey should allow respondents to define and evaluate public transit through their personal context;
- Survey should be designed to collect information on multiple respondents living in the same household (family data);
- **Key destinations** – the survey should identify key areas of the city where our target audience access necessities of life.



Research Design (cont'd)

- In what ways is transportation not accessible to our target audience?
- What could be done to make transportation more accessible to our target audience?
- What are the existing strengths of the system that should be preserved?
- What would be the impact to our target audience if recommended changes were made?



Research Strategy

Part 1: Direct interviews (surveys) with residents,
wherever possible ensuring target audience participation

- On the bus & at shelters / bus stops
- Online
- Local employers
- Education institutions
- Community service providers
- Central locations in the Priority Neighbourhoods



Research Strategy (cont'd)

Part 2: Focus Groups with survey respondents (opted-in at time of initial interview)

- Priority Neighbourhoods (x2)
- Families
- New immigrants
- Non-riders (typically personal vehicle use)
- Transit drivers
- Community Interviewer team

Part 3: Promising practices research, informed by initial survey responses



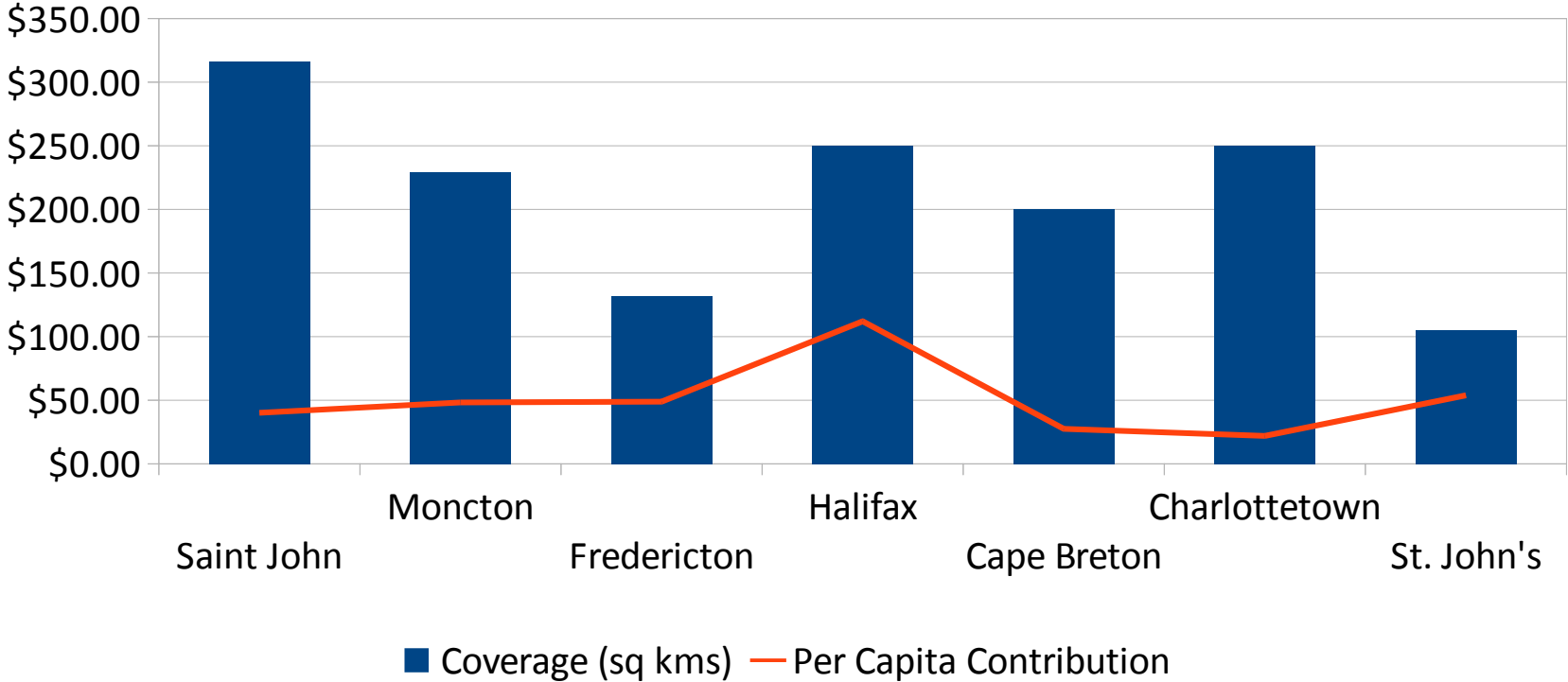
Results

- 525 surveys conducted (original target of 300)
- 73% riders; 27% non-riders
- 328 self-identified as low-income residents, of those:
 - 188 working
 - 49 attending school
 - 63 attending community programming
 - 59 single-parents



Funding vs. Service Coverage

Transit Area Coverage vs. Municipal Budget Contribution (per capita)

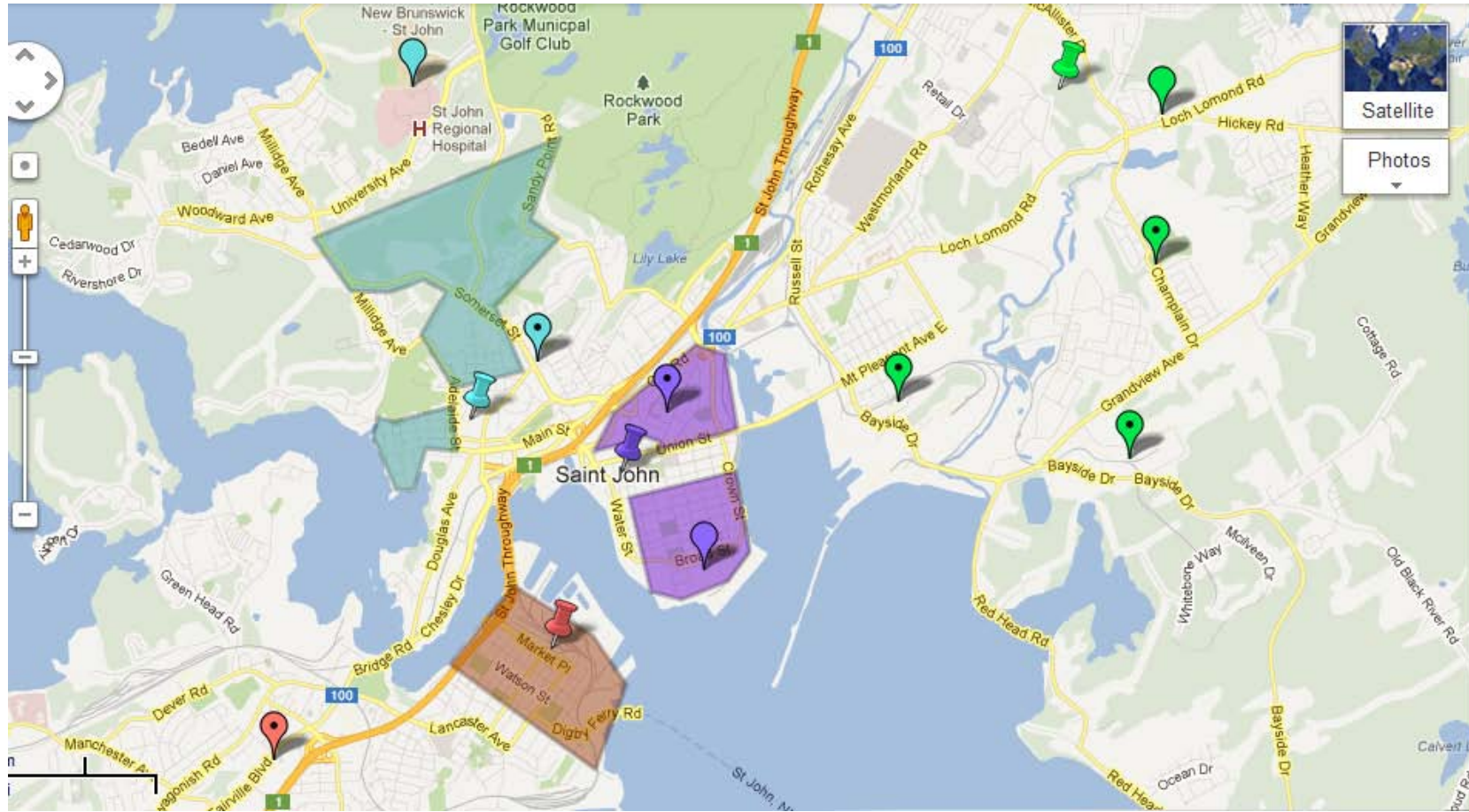


Surprising Findings

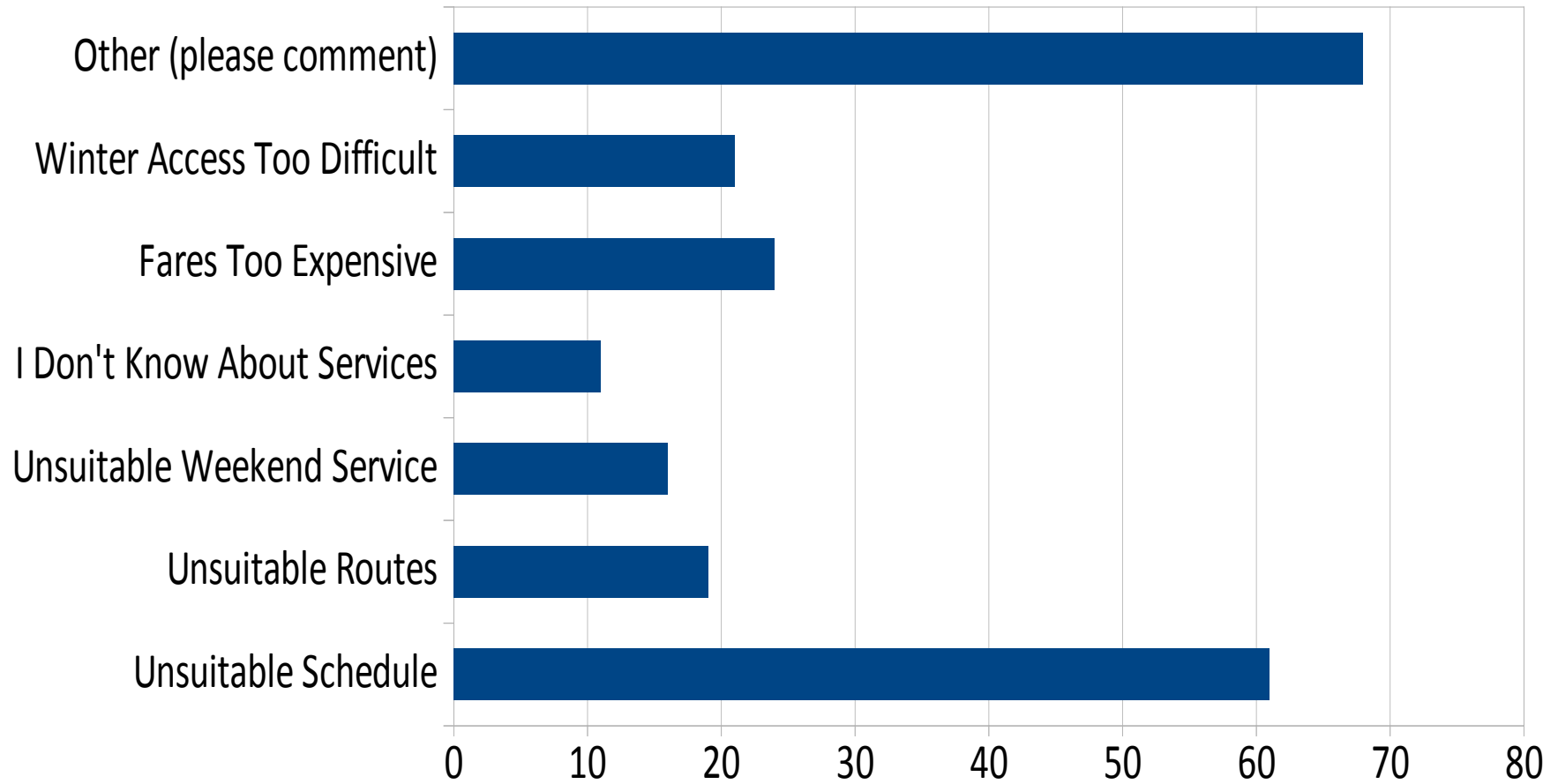
- \$ amount (transit cash fare) not considered an affordability issue
- “Affordability” = flexibility in service & the ability to accommodate the individuals *lifestyle*
 - Work / school schedule
 - Family travel
 - Multi-stop trips & parcel accommodation



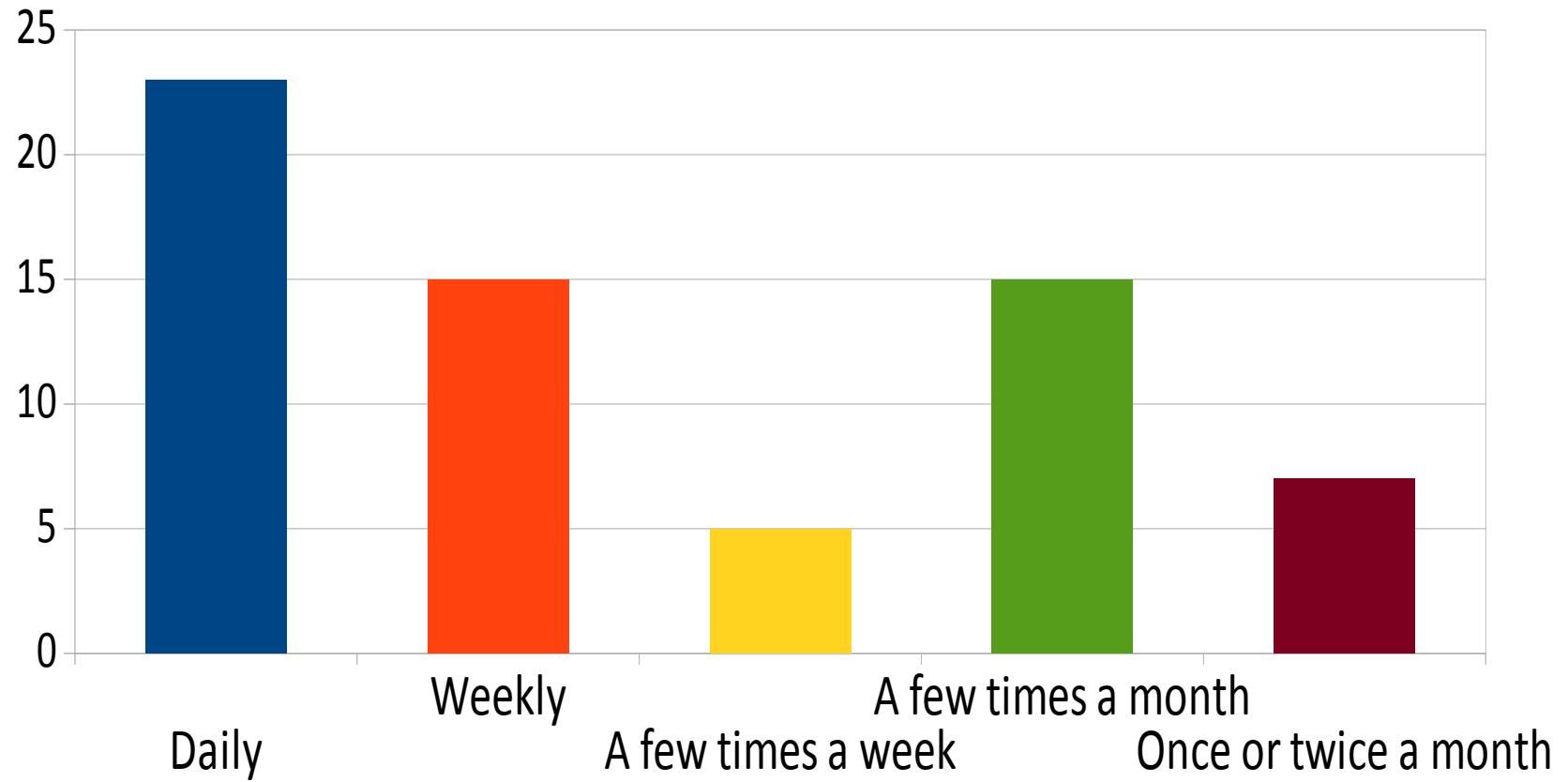
Key Destinations - sample



Reasons for Low Utilization - Non-riders



Utilization Increase - Non-riders



Impact of Changes

Improved ability to “get out of the house” (77% of rider and 29% of non-rider):

- better access to employment, education, social networks and activities;
- leading to better quality of life and reduced stress / improved mental health;
- a significant portion (15%) specifically noted an improved ability to find employment and / or access education.



Impact of Changes

Improvement in personal finances (33% riders, 50% non-riders):

ability to pay off debt

ability to access education

ability to save for child's education

using savings for vacation, social activities, hobbies, etc.



Recommendations

- Funding & policy support for public transit
- Supports for low-income residents
- Municipal planning & operations
- Information & Communication
- Long-term direction



Role of Stakeholders

- Transit Operators – *ensure all citizens are benefiting from public transit, and openly and regularly communicate with stakeholders for this purpose*
- Government – *prioritize forms of transportation that are affordable and accessible, and resource appropriately*



Role of Stakeholders

- Business Community – *favour affordable and sustainable transportation over others (participate in bulk-buying programs, abandon parking subsidies, etc.)*
- Community groups / residents – *work in partnership with transit operators; lobby government to ensure accessible / affordable transportation is a priority*



What happens next?

- Final Report “Getting Around When You're Just Getting By: Poverty, Policy & Public Transit” currently being shared with internal partners
- Expected to be published in late July 2012
- Possible Phase 2 – select recommendations adopted for execution (resource dependent)



Questions?

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