Memorandum

Subject: What We Heard: Transit Study Round 2 Engagement Summary
To: Michelle Delorme, Town of Cochrane
From: Left Turn Right Turn Ltd.
Date: September 24, 2024

The following memorandum is submitted to the Town of Cochrane to summarise the results of our second round of engagement.

Introduction

In 2024, the Town embarked on a study of the existing transit system, Cochrane On-demand Local Transit, or COLT. Launched in 2019, the service has seen monumental growth in ridership over the past five years. COLT began operation with eight buses that provided service to thousands of Cochranites between designated stops throughout the town. Operating between 5:30 a.m. and 8:30 p.m. on weekdays and between 8:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. on Saturdays, the transit service has amounted over 68,000 annual rides and an impressive average utilization of nearly five passengers per revenue vehicle-hour in 2023.

The service is not without its issues, however. Chiefly among them is a significant lack of capacity to book trips. Preliminary analysis indicates that over 40% of transit riders have experienced a situation in which they were unable to book a ride. Overall, over ¼ of requested trips go unfulfilled as a result of capacity constraints.

As part of this study, the Town hired public transportation consultants from Left Turn Right Turn Ltd., to prepare comprehensive public engagement and conduct detailed analysis of the current COLT services. This will support the design of alternative service strategies for 2025 and beyond, with the goal of improving the efficiency, sustainability and availability of the transit service.

The current study into the COLT service hopes to identify changes to the transit system that can improve the capacity and quality of service for current and potential users for 2025. Additionally, this study hopes to identify options for future enhancements that will extend beyond the next five years.

The public engagement related to the transit study, focused on the catchphrase “Your town, your transit”. The first round of engagement, earlier this year, concluded with over 1000 touchpoints. The second round of engagement built upon the previous engagement and resulted in over 200 touchpoints with residents. This report summarizes the activities and findings from the second round of public engagement.

Who we heard from

Building on the successful first round of engagement, a virtual focus group and public survey were delivered as part of the second round of engagement. These engagements were publicized through numerous avenues and designed to be as inclusive as possible. Additionally, the Town hired a recruitment firm, Advanis, to recruit a diverse group of residents for the focus group. An honorarium of $50 was offered to focus group participants to both incentivize participation and to thank them for their time. Through these engagements, town staff and the consultants engaged with over 200 members of the public. Our schedule of engagement events is outlined in Table 1, below.

Table 1: Summary of engagement activities completed during Round 2

Event Description	Date	Who Participated
Public Survey: Delivered online via Let's Talk Cochrane and on paper copies made available at Town sites and various community organizations.	September 4 to 17, 2024	165 registered participants online and 20 paper copies received.
Virtual Focus Group: Facilitated via zoom.	September 4, 2024	40 participants attended.

By advertising the engagement through different avenues, we tried to engage with a diverse set of Cochranites. The Advanis recruitment also emphasized diversity among participants. Figure 1 highlights some key demographic information about people who responded to the survey.

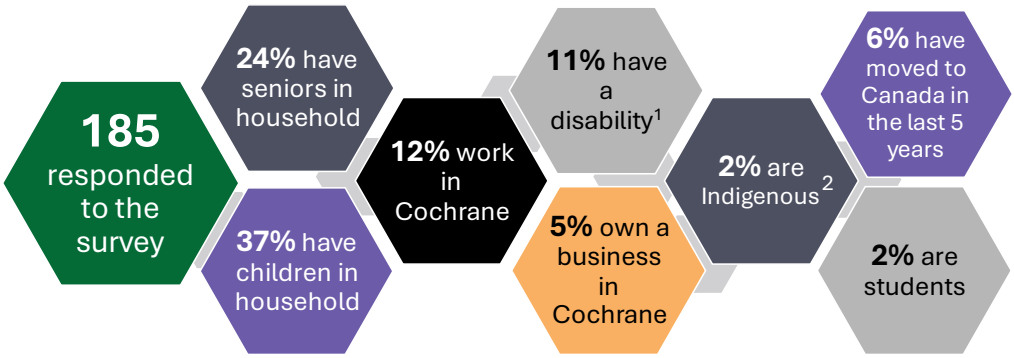


Figure 1:Snapshot of who we heard from in the survey[1,2]

What we heard: survey findings

This second round of engagement was designed around several key objectives. These were intended to build on the findings from the first round of engagement and dive deeper into residents' priorities and appetites when it comes to transit investment. The findings are therefore reported aligned with the three key objectives:

1. Defining a successful transit service
2. Prioritizing service principles
3. Transit funding and financial sustainability

The following sections summarize the key findings from the survey.

Defining a successful transit service

Findings from the first round of engagement were consolidated into five key themes to define the goals of a successful transit service in Cochrane. These themes are presented below in Figure 2.

[1] 6% of survey respondents reported that either they themselves had a disability or someone in their household did.
[2] Specifically respondents identified as Indigenous, Aboriginal, First Nations, Metis, Inuk (Inuit).



Figure 2: Five engagement themes

Survey respondents were asked to rank the five themes in order of importance for a successful transit service. As shown in Figure 3 below, 70% of respondents identified "Improve the reliability and usefulness of the transit service so that all Cochranites can depend on it when they need it" was the most important. The theme related to financial sustainability was selected as the most important by 15% of respondents. 37% of respondents identified that the theme "Support safe, age-friendly, and accessible travel through Cochrane" was the second-most important.

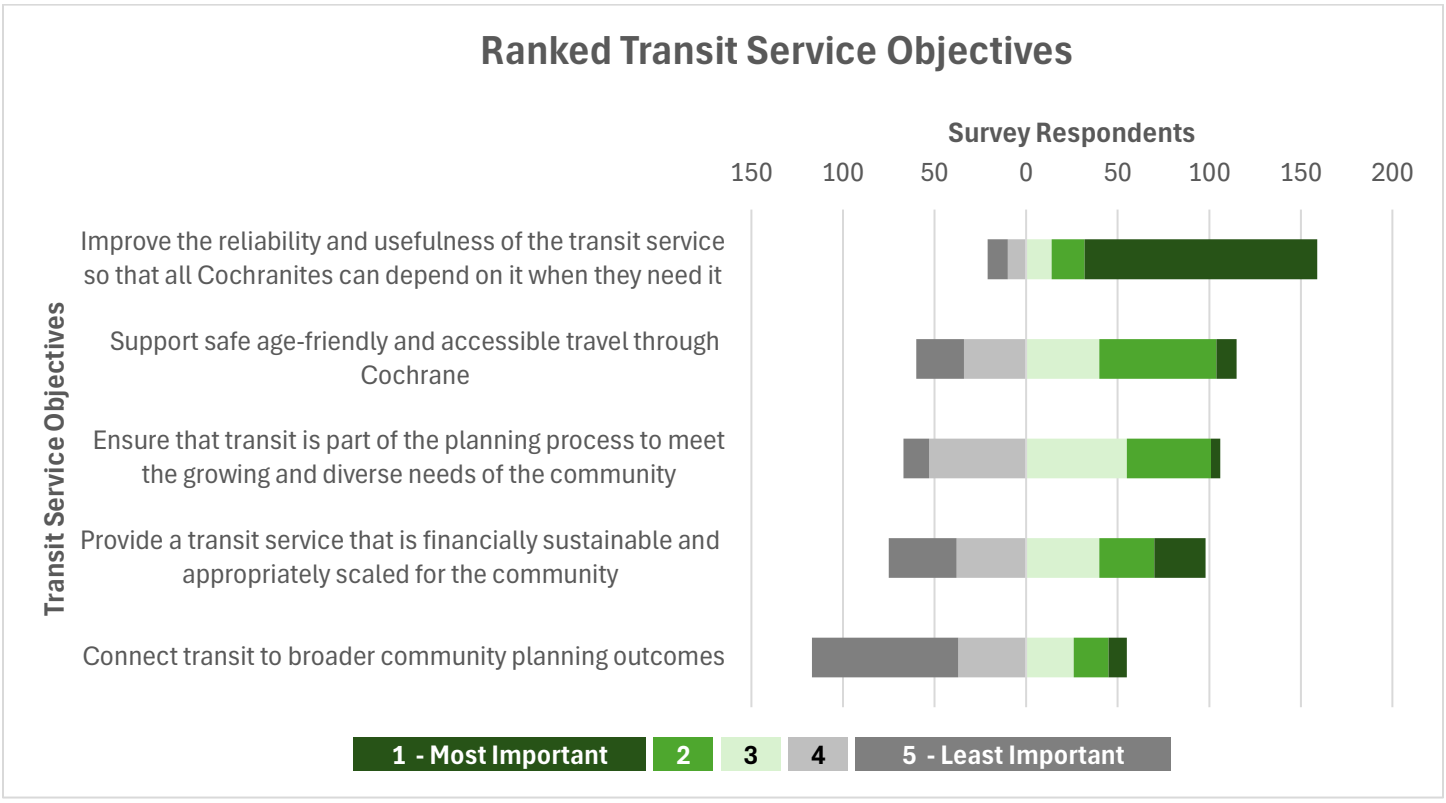


Figure 3: Summary of survey results ranking the most important transit service objective[3]

[3] The survey asked respondents to: "Rank the objectives in terms of their importance to you. With 1 being the MOST important and 5 being the LEAST important."

The transit service objectives related to reliability and an age-friendly service complement one another as the unpredictability and the need to prebook rides present challenges for the aging population. Through the open-ended comments, the main piece of feedback received was a desire for fixed routes (mentioned by 26 respondents). While this is not a transit objective in and of itself, the prominent nature of this suggestion highlights residents' belief that a fixed route service will make transit more reliable overall. Another common suggestion was to connect more regularly to Calgary (mentioned by 13 respondents). Additionally, respondents used the open-ended comment to highlight current challenges with the service including unpredictable service causing challenges for commuters, and concerns of being stranded without a reliable roundtrip.



"Using the app is difficult for seniors. Having to plan a route to your destination but also try to see when you can take transit back is difficult - eg want to go to spray lakes but need to plan my departure according to what is available for return trip. Important to just have a schedule that someone can quickly look up"

– Survey Respondent

When asked about what elements of the current COLT service they would like to see maintained, respondents included the following elements:

- Nothing, with some adding the context that they do not have a good opinion of the current service
- Smartphone app to see transit information, track buses, and receive alerts
- Bus stop locations are convenient
- Reasonable and affordable fares
- On-demand for times or areas of low demand

Prioritizing Service Principles

Transit services are designed to meet different needs for riders. Changes to a transit service can either be made through modifying the network design (e.g., the physical layout of the service) or through the service design (e.g., operations). As a result, different prioritization of transit service principles can lead to various network and service designs. Understanding how the community perceives the importance of these principles in relation to each other can inform the final recommendations. The service principles of frequency, coverage, and span are defined as:

- **Frequency:** Frequency measures how often buses arrive at stops. Higher frequency means shorter wait times, with buses arriving more frequently. This principle impacts network design.
- **Coverage:** Measures the extent of the area served by the transit system. Greater coverage means more neighbourhoods and areas are accessible. This principle impacts network design.
- **Span:** Span measures the total hours of operation of a transit service. A longer span means the service is available for more hours, including evening and Sunday. This principle impacts service design.

Survey respondents were asked to rank these principles in order of preference. Almost half of the respondents identified frequency as their most preferred (45%) and span as their least preferred service principle (43%). The prioritization of frequency over the other two service principles was consistent across all the different user groups (i.e., current users, past users, non-users who want to try COLT, and non-users who do not intend to use the service). Frequent service enables residents to use transit service to access their destinations when they need and have greater flexibility in their daily lives. When asked to describe why respondents ranked the principles as they did, respondents largely cited their current challenges with service unreliability and unavailability of rides. Due to the unavailability of rides, current users

experience long wait times. During peak travel times, users had to resort to other transportation modes to get to their destinations. Without frequent and available service, survey respondents indicated they are unable to benefit from service coverage of the existing COLT system.

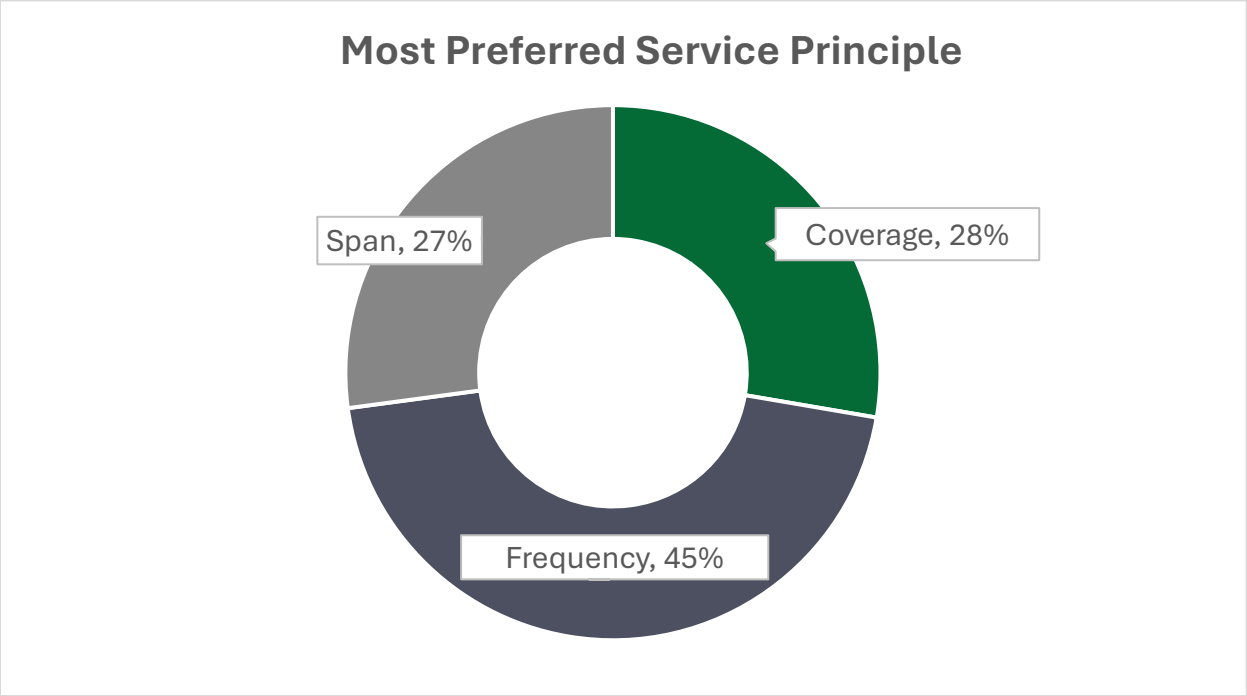


Figure 4: Summary of survey results for the most preferred service principle[4]

Transit Funding and Financial Sustainability

Across Canada, public transportation is funded by property taxes and rider transit fares. COLT is no exception to this funding model. As a result, any changes made to the COLT service have financial implications on both service users and non-users residing within the community. To gauge the community's reception to increased costs, survey respondents were asked a series of questions about a modest increase to their property taxes (e.g., $5 per property which translates to 0.2% increase) and rider fares (e.g., $1 per trip, which translates to a 33% fare increase), and how they would like these funds invested into the service. Overall, 71% of survey respondents are in support of the moderate increase to property taxes and 71% are in support of the moderate increase to fares to invest in improvements to the transit system. The community recognizes the need for transit and are willing to invest in the service.

Property Taxes

Currently, COLT is largely funded by property taxes. The Town of Cochrane spends 1.4% of its budget on public transportation, including COLT and Rocky View Paratransit. The public transit budget represents approximately $56 per year of property taxes on the average home in Cochrane, of which approximately $41 funds COLT services directly.

When asked whether they would support a modest increase to their annual property taxes (e.g., $5 per property, or a 0.2% increase), 71% indicated their support. Most importantly, property owners within Cochrane were supportive of the modest increase. 88% of the survey respondents shared that they owned property in Cochrane, of which 81%[5] were

[4] The survey asked respondents to "Rank the service principles in terms of their preference to you, with 1 being the MOST preferred and 3 being the LEAST preferred"

[5] This is a correction to the Council Presentation on September 23, 2024, where this was reported as 71% of property owners are in support of a modest increase to their property taxes. Property owners make up 71% of all survey respondents who are supportive of a modest property tax increase.

supportive of a modest property tax increase. Across current, past, and potential COLT riders, the majority were supportive of an increased property tax. Looking more closely at those who do not use the service and do not plan to use it, a slight majority of respondents were not supportive, with 54% saying they were not supportive and 46% saying they were supportive. General support was found across respondents who have regular access to a vehicle for the trips they make, as well as those who do not. This can be interpreted as a desire for more transportation options, even if people have access to a private vehicle.

Survey respondents were also asked about their willingness to pay a little more in property taxes in relation to the service principles of **frequency, coverage, and span**. Respondents were most supportive of the additional property taxes being invested into improving frequency, which aligns with current users' challenges related to reliability availability of rides. Those that had indicated they were willing to pay moderately higher property taxes were further asked to rank how they would like their investment to be spend from the following options:

- Add one bus in service during peak times on weekdays (around 8 a.m.).
- Add one bus in of service midday on weekdays (around 3 p.m.).
- Add one bus in service on Saturdays and extend service until 7:30 p.m.
- Add service on Sundays (same service as Saturday).
- Reduce the cost of rider fares for COLT proportionately; and
- Extend service until 10 p.m. with two buses on weekday evenings.

40% of service respondents ranked "add one bus in service during peak times on weekdays (around 8 a.m.)" as their first or second choice. Meanwhile 66% of respondents identified that using increase funding to "reduce the cost of rider fares for COLT proportionately" was the least important.

Rider Fares

Rider fares also fund public transit in Cochrane; however, they fund a smaller portion of the service compared to property tax. Currently, the fare for a single ride on the COLT service $2.50, or $50 for an adult monthly pass. A modest increase in rider fares could look like an additional $1 per trip, which translates to approximately a 33% fare increase. When asked about their willingness to support a modest increase in rider fares, 71% of survey respondents indicated their support. While support was generally shared among the different user groups (i.e., current users, past users, non-users who want to try COLT, and non-users who do not intend to use the service), fare increases was slightly less preferred compared to property tax increases for current, past, and potential users. Those who do not plan on using COLT were more supportive of the rider fare increases compared to property tax increases. When asked about their willingness to pay a little more in rider fares in relation the service principles, 59% of respondents agreed or definitely agreed when it would result in improved frequency. Similar to the property tax increases, survey respondents were most interested in seeing investments from rider fares spent to "add one bus in service during peak times on weekdays (around 8 a.m.)". Contrastingly, they were least interested in the option to "add one bus in service on Saturdays and extend service until 7:30 p.m.)". Respondents' investment priorities suggest that the challenges experienced with service unreliability during the peak hours is a more pressing issue than the need to extend service span on weekends.

Additionally, respondents were asked to what extent they agreed with the following statements about the current fares:

- "The fare price to ride COLT is reasonable and should remain the same."
    - 52% of respondents stated that they definitely or somewhat agree
    - 27% of respondents stated that they definitely or somewhat disagree
- "The fare price to ride COLT is costly and should be lowered."
    - 10% of respondents stated that they definitely or somewhat agree
    - 67% of respondents stated that they definitely or somewhat disagree

Reflecting on the results of both statements, the majority of respondents think the current $2.50 is a reasonable fare.

What we heard: focus group findings

The focus group was designed to engage a diverse group of Cochranites and understand their priorities and preferences as it related to the future of public transit in Cochrane. The two-hour focus group that was hosted virtually on Zoom from 6-8 p.m. had the following agenda:

- Project Overview
- Current State Key Findings
- Transit Objectives and Service Principles
- Service Design Charette
- Roundtable Discussion
- Making Transit Sustainable

The majority of the focus group focused on active participation through responding to polls and voting questions, as well as collaboratively designing fixed route transit in Cochrane. The findings from the various activities are summarized in the subsections below.

Current COLT Service

Participants were glad that there was a service and highlighted positive elements of the existing service, including the safety and mostly positive experiences with the drivers. However, the current challenges and frustrations with the current service were the predominant theme of the roundtable discussion, with participants highlighting the following challenges:

- **Difficulty securing a trip**. Participants noted having to book in advance, having to request slightly different trips several times in a row to secure one.
- **The lack of "on-demand" rides.** Because it is challenging to book rides, participants were not confident that they could book rides when they need it in the moment.
- **Challenges with the app.** Some participants highlighted that the app and the booking process were not intuitive and may especially be challenging for seniors or people visiting Cochrane.
- **Perceptions of low ridership**. Participants noted that they see the COLT bus riding with very few passengers and are therefore more unsure of why they cannot secure rides. Participants also highlighted this point to emphasise the need for either smaller vehicles or a more efficient service, such as a fixed route.
- **Replace on-demand with at least some fixed-route transit**. While it was not brought up by the facilitators, many participants highlighted that they thought a fixed-route transit system would be more efficient and a better use of investments into transit. At the same time, participants thought that on-demand should still be available for people with mobility challenges, for example, to get door-to-door service.
- **Expanded service and service span.** In addition to asking for additional capacity, participants noted that they would like to use transit later in the evenings as well as on Sundays.

Transit Objectives and Service Principles

From the first round of public engagement, five key objectives for transit in Cochrane were identified (see Figure 2). We asked focus group participants to choose which objective was most important to them (results in Figure 5 below), and the overwhelming majority of participants selected improving reliability and usefulness. Safe and age-friendly service and financially sustainable service were tied for the next most important objective, with 9% of participants selecting each.

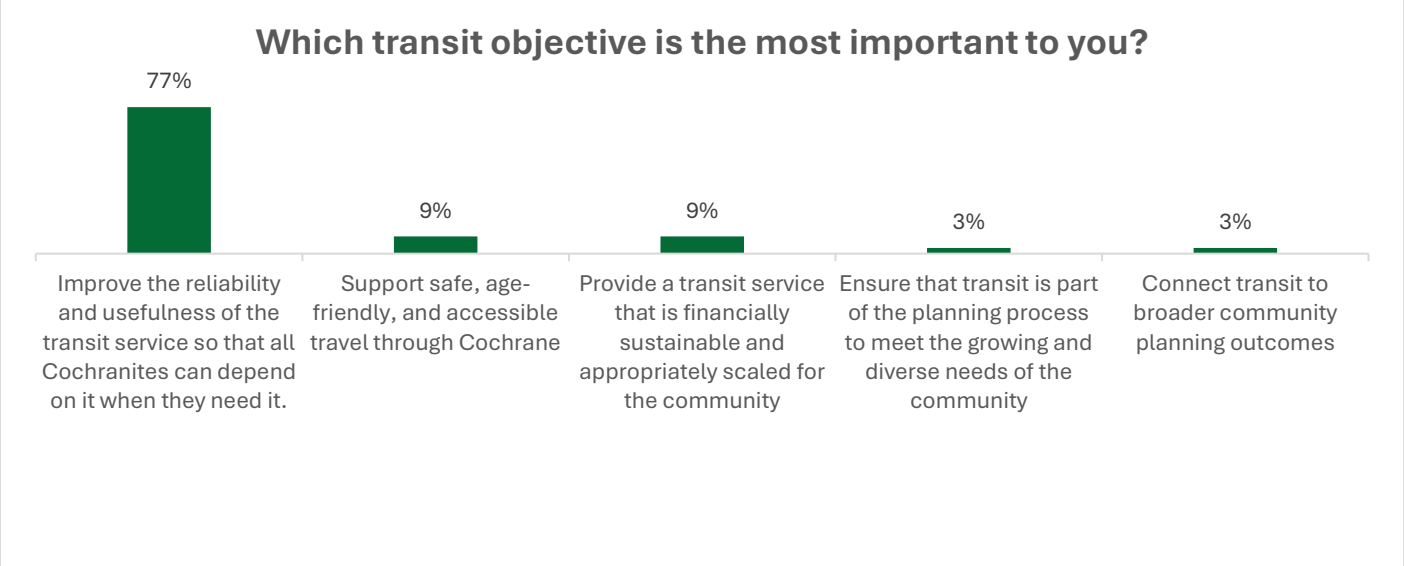


Figure 5: The results of the poll asking participants which transit objective is most important

Another key point that was raised at this point of the focus group was the importance of a **regular connection to Calgary**. While this is not within the scope of the project, many participants highlighted how important the connection is and that it should be considered when designing a local transit service.

The next part of the focus group focused on the three identified service principles of **frequency, coverage,** and **span.** We asked participants to indicate on a spectrum between frequency and coverage the relative importance of each (i.e., either extreme meant a strong inclination to one or the other, and somewhere in between meant a preference for both). This highlighted the relationship between both of these principles as key service design elements and that working with constrained funds requires a trade-off between the two. Figure 6 below shows the results from the exercise. An average rating of 2.8 shows that participants, on average, value both frequency and coverage, nearly equally. The light blue part of the results highlight the distribution of individual responses, and reveals that some respondents were inclined towards frequency.

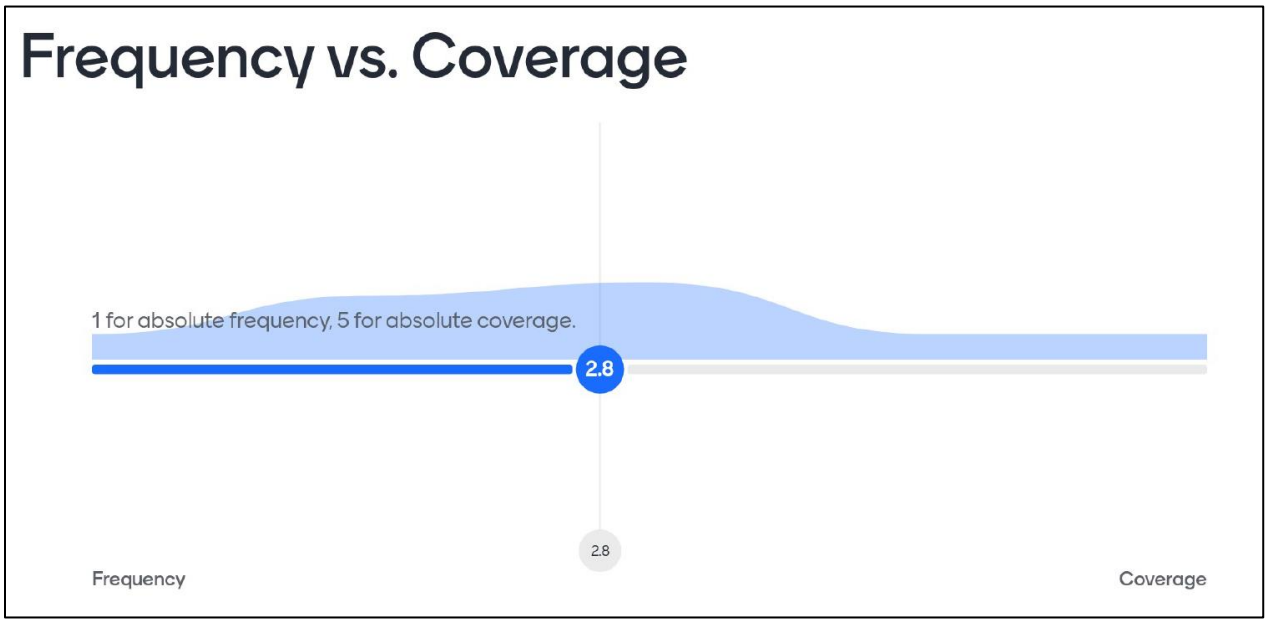


Figure 6: Results from the frequency vs coverage trade-off

The next discussion focused on what participants' priorities would be if service span were to be expanded. The options presented to participants were:

- Add one bus in service during peak times on weekdays (around 8am).
- Add one bus in of service midday on weekdays (around 3pm).
- Add service on Sundays (same service as Saturday).
- Extend service until 10 p.m. with two buses on weekday evenings.
- Add one bus in service on Saturdays and extend service until 7:30 p.m.

The discussion was lively and participants were not converging on a specific option. Some wanted later Saturday and Sunday service, some later weekday service, and some additional service to support the weekday commute. Another key sentiment came from participants who could not choose and wanted significant transit investment to enable all options. A couple of participants did not see value in extending service given the challenges and perceived inefficiencies of the current service.

Service Design Charette

The last activity that we had time to complete with the focus group was collaboratively designing transit for Cochrane, including on-demand zones and possible fixed routes. The group split up into four breakout rooms and the facilitator guided the group through the multi-step activity that included identifying key destinations and drawing routes on a map. Certain constraints and information were presented to participants, including the top 10 travel patterns observed in the current COLT service and how many buses are required to run a specific route length and frequency. Across the four different breakout rooms, several ideas came up:

- Downtown Cochrane is a key location and could serve as a connection point/transfer point for multiple routes.
- A hub and spoke model of routes, with Downtown Cochrane at the centre, could work well and provide good access to all the neighbourhoods.
- Participants were concerned that a frequent fixed-route would remove access for parts of the community. They would like to see the maintenance of some on-demand transit to make sure no one loses access to transit.
- The service should remain accessible.

Next steps

Through the engagement thus far, the public has communicated a strong desire to see continued investment in public transit in Cochrane and making the COLT service more efficient. This study will investigate a new hybrid transit service design for implementation in 2025. The new service design is intended to guide budget discussions for 2025. In the study report, a longer-term strategy will be developed to guide further enhancements beyond 2025. The second round of engagement results will feed into the 2025 new service design, before they are presented to Council with the final study report.