Memorandum

Subject: What We Heard: Transit Study Round 1 Engagement Summary
To: Michelle Delorme, and Yuchen Tang, Town of Cochrane
From: Left Turn Right Turn Ltd.
Date: June 20, 2024

The following memorandum is submitted to the Town of Cochrane to summarise the results of our first round of engagement. This findings from this memorandum will be incorporated into a presentation to the Council Committee of the Whole on July 2nd, 2024.

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.

As of June 10, 2024, the first round of public engagement, focused on the catchphrase “Your Town, Your Transit,” concluded with over 1013 touchpoints with residents and community partners. This report summarizes the activities and findings from the first round of public engagement. Note that at the time of writing, some of the paper survey responses may not have been analysed.

Who we met with

Significant efforts were made to engage with and reach as diverse and as many Cochranites as possible. In our first round of engagement, we engaged with the public and key community partners during two public pop-up engagement events, one community partner workshop, and one public survey. These engagements were publicized through numerous avenues and designed to be as inclusive as possible. For example, there was a mix of in-person and online engagement opportunities, pop-ups took place during the week and on the weekend, and engagement was had with the public directly as well as with representatives from organizations that serve Cochranites. Through these engagements,

town staff and the consultants engaged with over 1000 members of the public and individuals representing eight community organizations. Our schedule of engagement events is outlined in Table 1, below.

Table 1: Summary of engagement activities completed during Round 1

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.	May 17 to June 8, 2024	503 registered participants online and 100 paper copies received.
Public Pop-Up Engagements: Delivered in the public foyer at The Station as well as outside the SLS Centre during the weekly Farmers' Market.	May 30th, 2024 – The Station June 1st, 2024 – SLS Centre	Over 400 individual conversations, with individuals, families and community members.
Community Partner Workshop: A short presentation followed by activities and round-table discussion to discuss transportation and mobility challenges	May 31st, 2024 – Cochrane Public Library	8 individuals representing the following organizations: Indigenous Centre, Cochrane Immigrant Service Committee, Big Hill Haven, Chamber of Commerce, Cochrane Youth Program, Filipino Canadian Association of Cochrane, Seniors on the Bow, Cochrane Family & Community Support Services

By advertising the engagement through different avenues, we tried to engage with a diverse set of Cochranites. Figure 1 highlights some key demographic information about people who responded to the survey.

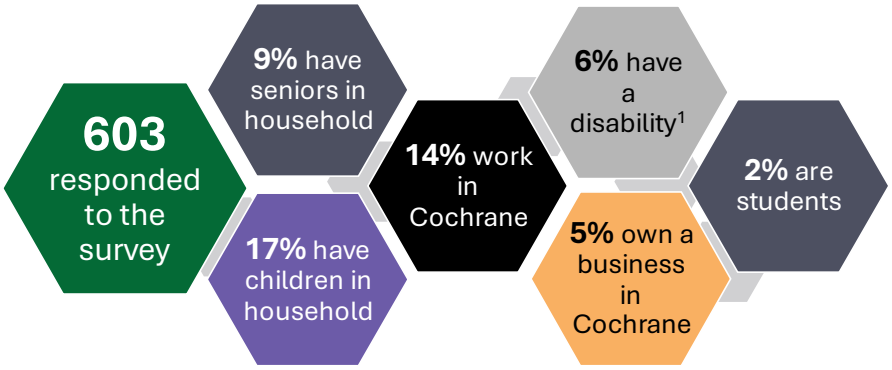


Figure 1:Snapshot of who we heard from in the survey[1]

What we heard: preliminary engagement themes

Five key themes that were captured during the various engagement events are presented below in Figure 2. Each theme is delved into and where applicable, direct quotations were captured and paraphrased as accurately as possible.

[1] 6% of survey respondents reported that either they themselves had a disability or someone in their household did.



Figure 2: Five engagement themes

Theme 1: Improve the **reliability and usefulness** of the transit service so that all Cochranites can depend on it when they need it

Cochrane residents have expressed a strong need for more reliable and useful transit services. The number one concern raised in open-ended responses was about transit being consistently unreliable, making it difficult to rely on for daily commutes. Many residents shared that they are unable to book rides when they need to, or that if they are successful to book a trip in one direction, they have or are worried about being stranded for the trip back. This lack of reliability may have contributed to the desire of residents for regular and predictable routes and times, so that the service would be available when needed. 74% of the survey responses indicated that 'Regular service I don't need to book in advance' is their most-wanted change to the current transit system. They believe that having fixed, scheduled routes would significantly enhance the dependability of the service, allowing them to better integrate public transit into their routines.

> *"Make it available. To get a ride I need to book at least two days in advance and sometimes more. This makes it mostly useless."* – Survey Respondent
>
> – Survey Respondent

Long and inaccurate wait times for buses are a major issue, with survey respondents experiencing inaccurate wait times communicated through the COLT app. Residents have highlighted that shorter wait times would significantly improve the convenience of the service. Additionally, at least 39% of the respondents indicated that extended service hours were one of their top three priorities for transit improvements[2]. Many residents suggested that the service should start

[2] There were several transit improvement priorities that respondents ranked related to increasing service span. Focusing on those that were the top three priorities, 39% selected 'Service after 3:30pm on Saturdays', 30% selected 'Service after 8 pm on weekdays', and 23% selected 'Service on Sundays'.

earlier in the morning, continue later into the evening, and provide Sunday services to better accommodate varied schedules.

Some users additionally found the service confusing and difficult to use. They believed that clearer instructions and better accessibility options are needed to help everyone, including those with disabilities. Alongside this, hygiene concerns were raised by a few survey respondents, with residents requesting measures to ensure clean and risk-free travel.



"I am so concerned for seniors. Demanding that they use a cell phone, long wait times, a demand that they know exactly where they are wanting to go and know the stop number is very confusing."
– Survey Respondent

Theme 2: Support **safe**, **age-friendly**, and **accessible** travel through Cochrane

This theme focuses on the importance of safety in transit and the role transit plays in creating an age-friendly and accessible Cochrane. From the survey, equitable transportation (meaning providing transportation options for people without access to a vehicle, affordable transportation options, and accessible transportation options) was the most agreed upon benefit of having transit in Cochrane, indicated by 78% of survey respondents. This theme also came up as a current concern in some of the engagement events, with attendees indicating that they have concerns about the safety of transit as it interacts with other road users and concerns about safe sidewalks that connect to stops, especially with icy conditions in the winter. Some survey respondents emphasized the need for accessible transit and dedicated spaces for wheelchairs on the vehicles. A small but significant number of survey respondents (6%) indicated they or someone in their household has a disability.



"Make it more handicapped accessible. I love the fact that, if necessary, it can come to your doorstep. I cannot wait in the cold weather for any length of time. COPD makes it challenging for me to get around in the winter, even with a vehicle." – Survey Respondent

Of the survey respondents who shared their ages, 18% were 65 years old and older. Overall, most survey respondents (87%) have access to a vehicle as a driver or passenger. As the aging population in Cochrane increases and seniors stop driving, transit can support their transportation needs and help them live independently and age in place.



"Right now, it is not necessary for me, but knowing it is there, is a great comfort."
– Survey Respondent

Theme 3: Provide a transit service that is **financially sustainable and scalable** in the long-term

Two contrasting perspectives we heard from engagement come together in this theme: on one hand, people want to see the service adjusted and sometimes increased so that it is more useful and on the other hand, people want to see the cost of transit aligned with the benefit. Participants in the engagement events, including the public pop-ups and the community partner workshop, all recognized that the service needs to scale with the needs of the growing community. However, there was a recognition that it needs to be "right-sized" in order to balance the needs of residents with the cost to the community as a whole.



"We need to accept that the needs of our community as well as our tax base has grown. Continuous urban sprawl will place more strain on our services. Public transit has to be part of that solution." – Paraphrased from Community Partner Workshop Participant

For a small portion of survey respondents (6%), they did not see a benefit of having transit in Cochrane. While their concerns are important to consider going forward, this represents a very small proportion of respondents. Less than 1% of attendees of the public engagement pop-ups (2 individuals from over 200 residents) indicated similar concerns.



"It's [too] inconvenient and way [too] costly! Our taxes are too high already for the services we receive." – Survey Respondent

These sentiments emphasize the need for transit to be financially sustainable and provide tangible benefits to residents. Having a transit system that is flexible and scalable can ensure improved long-term sustainability.

Theme 4: Ensure that transit can meet the **growing and diverse** needs of the community

Cochrane residents have emphasized the importance of a transit system that can adapt to the town's growth and the diverse needs of its community. As Cochrane continues to expand, the transit system must evolve to keep pace with increasing demand and changing demographics. Residents have noted that the current system often falls short in

meeting the varying needs of different population groups, including families, seniors, and individuals with disabilities. In addition to accessibility concerns (related to Theme 2), respondents also highlighted that the current limitations of the service to high schools limits youth using the service to get to part-time jobs for example.

"Youth in the community have trouble accessing our programming. Sometimes they can get to our programs, but often have to find they own way home or to evening employment opportunities."

– Paraphrased from Community Partner Workshop Participant

The results from the dot-mocracy engagement activity (where participants could place a sticker on where their priorities lie regarding various trade-offs) in Figure 3 shows both how Cochranites agree and disagree on what is important for transit.

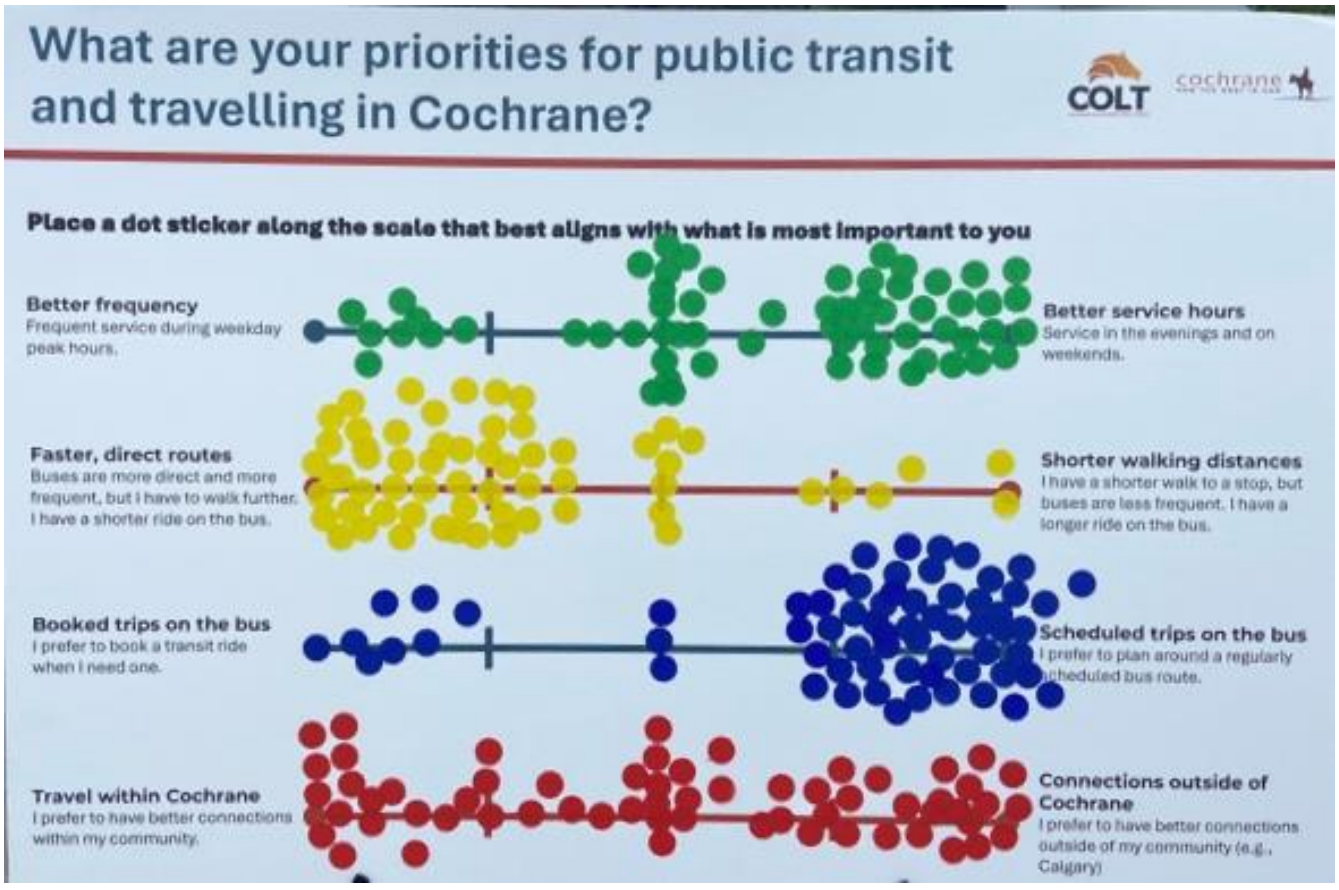


Figure 3: Results from the dot-mocracy engagement activity

In addition to the transportation needs within Cochrane, participants heavily emphasized the importance of connecting to Calgary as seen in Figure 3 and with 37% of survey respondents indicating it is one of their top three transit improvement priorities. Respondents have specifically mentioned their need for direct routes to the Calgary train station and the downtown area, emphasizing the importance of this desired route.

"This corridor [Cochrane to Calgary] should be priority #1 for Cochrane. Having reliable, frequent, safe, and rapid transit from Cochrane into Calgary will drive adoption of the entire Cochrane transit network." – Survey Respondent

Theme 5: Connect transit to broader **community planning** outcomes

Transit can play an important role in contributing to broader community objectives. From the survey, almost all respondents (94%) indicated that they see key benefits to transit, aligned with some strategic goals for the town, as shown in the figure below.

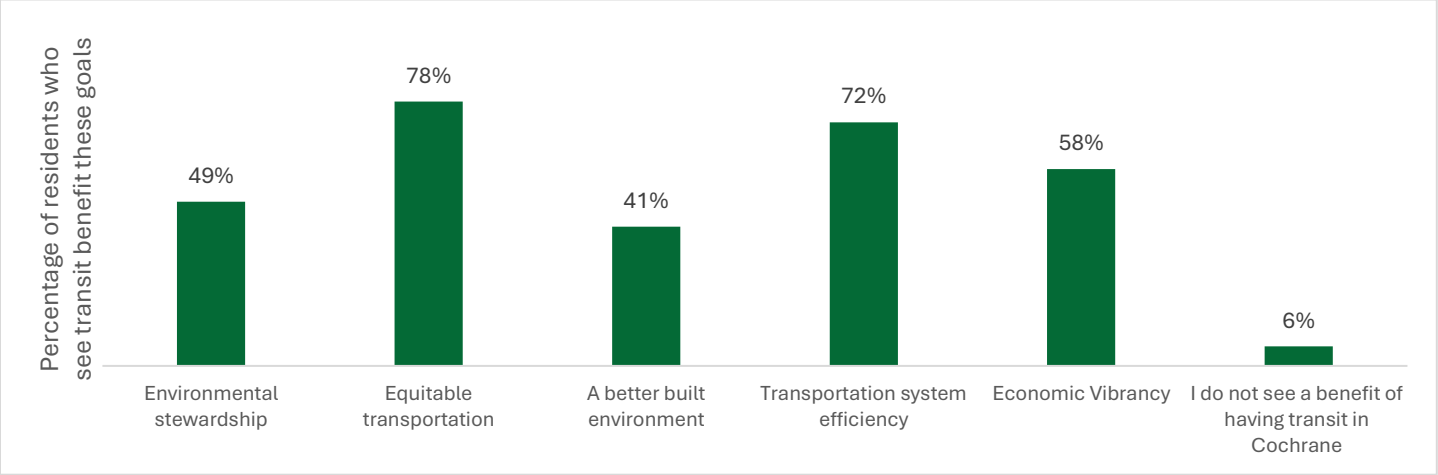


Figure 4: Percentage of responses to the question "What do you see as the key benefits to having transit in Cochrane, now and in the future? Select all that apply."

In addition to key benefits for the transportation system, respondents identified that transit could benefit the economy (through improved access to employment for example), environmental stewardship, and a better built environment. Only 6% of respondents did not see a benefit of transit in Cochrane. In addition to this survey question, participants in engagement emphasized how transit can help address affordability issues more broadly and especially in housing. Furthermore, there are potential opportunities for efficiencies within transit delivery and town operations, for example through sharing certain facilities.

Next steps

Through our first round of engagement, it is clear that the public has a strong appreciation for the existing COLT service, as it provides an affordable transportation alternative for those who may not be able to drive or have reliable access to a vehicle. However, there are some significant challenges in using the current service that create barriers to mobility and a belief that the service could be more efficient.

This study will investigate service performance in order to qualify these concerns as well as identify potential operational issues that are exacerbating these concerns. Following this analysis, this study will investigate a variety of alternatives for service improvements. These alternatives are intended to guide budget discussions for 2025. Additionally, a longer-term strategy will be developed to guide further enhancements beyond 2025.

Prior to Council reviewing these alternatives and selecting a preferred way-forward for 2025, the public will have an opportunity to review and influence their design. Council will also be invited to share their perspectives through an additional survey. Key timelines for engagement include:

- **Round 2 Public Engagement: Transit for the Future** – A second round of engagement will take place in the early fall to collect thoughts on alternatives for the future. Town staff and the consultants will prepare a series of alternatives for COLT and local transit in Cochrane. These will be presented to the public and key community partners to solicit feedback and refine the alternatives.
  Timeline for Engagement: Late summer 2024
- **Final report and presentation to Council** – The final alternatives will be presented to council. They will include options for 2025 service levels, as well as longer-term directions for public transit with varying levels of investment.
  Timeline for Engagement: Late fall 2024