SASKATOON BUS USE AND INFLUENCING FACTORS

INTERACT COHORT

INTERACT collected data from 316 adults from Saskatoon in the fall of 2018*. Eligible participants lived within 800m of the proposed Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) network or rode the bus at least once a month. There were **178** participants living within the 800m buffer and **138** living outside of the area. We examined differences in perceptions about the bus between people who lived inside and outside of the 800m buffer. Here we highlight key similarities and differences between the groups.

BRT AWARENESS

Only about half of the 2018 participants had heard about the BRT. People who lived closer to it were more aware of it (58% vs. 50%). In 2020, almost 70% of participants had heard about the BRT; only 10% who lived within the 800m buffer were unaware of the BRT project.

BUS USE

Participants who **lived further** than 800m from the proposed BRT network took on average **198 transit trips** per year.

Participants who **lived within** 800m of the proposed BRT network took on average **183 transit trips** per year.

Public transit use varies by season, with summer having the lowest frequency of use (33.1 days) compared to fall, winter, and spring which have higher frequencies of use (52.8, 55.7, and 48.0 days respectively).

PERCEPTIONS

In 2018, participants reported that traveling by bus in Saskatoon was generally safe, reliable, clean and affordable, but lacked convenience. People living closer to the transit network reported wanting to travel by bus in Saskatoon more: 77% of those living near the BRT compared to 66% of those living further away want to take the bus more.

	Further than 800m from BRT	Within 800m of BRT
Safe	84%	81%
Reliable	56.4%	61.6%
Convenient	46%	43.6%
Clean	74%	68%
Affordable	63%	51%

MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS IN INFLUENCING THE DECISION TO TAKE THE BUS

1. Bus on the main part of route ran every 10 minutes or less
2. Buses are on time and transfers are more reliable
3. Bus route took them closer to their destination

* The 2018 data is used in this fact sheet to represent normal bus usage and influencing factors. The 2020 data shows similar trends to the 2018 data, however, it is strongly influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic (see Fact Sheet - Impacts of COVID-19 on Saskatoon Transit), and is therefore less representative of typical bus usage and influencing factors.

IMPLICATIONS

- **Those who live within the 800m buffer of the BRT use the bus slightly less than those who live further away and have a less positive perception of its features.** They are perhaps captive riders. Those living further from the network perceive the bus as more safe, convenient, reliable, and affordable than those residents living in closer proximity.

- **Greater frequency of bus service is the most important factor** in deciding to use the bus and ranks above having bus stops closer to destinations; this supports the city's approach of focusing on frequency over coverage in its BRT plans.

- **Cost will always be a factor**. While just over half of participants reported that transit is affordable, 68% also indicated that they would be more likely to take public transit more if the cost of bus passes or fares was lower.

- **There are opportunities for increased ridership over the summer.** Bus use in Saskatoon is highly dependent on seasonal factors like weather and school semesters. Students represent a significant proportion of transit users in the fall, winter, and spring; being aware of their school and non-school-related needs is important to keep in mind when planning for transit services, especially in summer months.

- **Public transit amenities and infrastructure designed to protect users from inclement weather, like heated bus shelters at every stop, would increase the likelihood of using public transit more,** according to respondents. Bus use is greater in the fall and winter months, in part due to seasonal commuting patterns (e.g. students are less likely to have a daily commute during non-school months, residents are more likely to take vacation during non-winter months), and in part due to inclement weather making other modes less attractive (e.g. undesirable driving conditions). A study in Berlin, Germany found that the number of occasional transit users (i.e., not pass holders) increased on weekdays from 5%-30% as a result of rainy weather or cold temperatures (< -5°C) respectively, due to people switching from other modes of transportation, like walking and cycling. Bus stops that protect users from inclement weather or precipitation is a key feature in making bus riding more attractive. Attention should be paid to high quality, 4-season bus stop design.

- **The city's efforts in increasing awareness of the BRT is working:** more INTERACT respondents are aware of the BRT in 2020/2021, than they were in 2018/2019.

INTERACT

The INTErventions, Research, and Action in Cities Team (INTERACT) is a pan-Canadian collaboration of scientists, urban planners, and citizens uncovering the impact of urban changes on health and equity.