

# Getting public transit right:

A complete community survey guide and template.

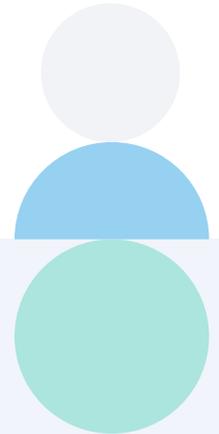


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Cities have a once in a generation opportunity to fundamentally change the way public transportation serves their communities. But in order to create a transit network that residents regularly rely on, they have to have a say in its conceptualization.

Use this easy guide – including a proven questionnaire template – to learn how to accurately survey your constituents and gain invaluable insight into what residents do (and don't) need in their ideal transit network of tomorrow.



**Need help carrying out a public transportation survey in your community?**

Don't be a stranger! Via's Vice President of Community Affairs, Gabby McCaig, can help your team pull it off without a hitch.



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# Table of Contents

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<b>Understanding the basics</b> .....	4
Why now? .....	4
Three steps to collecting survey results .....	5
Some quick considerations .....	6
<b>Distributing your survey online</b> .....	7
<b>Collecting survey results in person</b> .....	8
<b>Conducting town hall meetings</b> .....	9
<b>Public transportation survey template</b> .....	10

# Understanding the basics: why now?

Despite the global health crisis dramatically impacting the use of public transportation, city leaders around the world are seeing what comes next not as an obstacle, but as an opportunity to fundamentally change the way their residents move.

Just think: the way public transit has operated over the past century really hasn't evolved too much, has it? Despite new mobile apps that might estimate when the next bus is supposed to arrive, the rest has pretty much remained the same. Trains and buses operate on a fixed route and schedule, and either it's convenient for residents to ride – or not.

But today, there are so many different ways transit networks are developing and improving. It's time for cities to take back the power of public transit, and residents should have a say in what they do (and don't) want in order to ride. Thankfully, asking them is pretty easy.



# Three steps to collecting survey results.

We get it. City leaders and public servants are consistently strapped for time and resources. But while you technically could spend a year or more conducting a full-scale scientific survey, it truly isn't necessary to go overboard in order to collect the information you need.

It only requires three basic steps:



## 1. Online survey

This is the easiest and fastest way to collect the responses and results you'll need in order to make informed decisions.



## 2. In-person questionnaires

Not everyone who relies on public transportation has a computer or easy access to the internet. For the sake of collecting a balanced and wide array of opinions, you'll need a small team of people to get responses in person at bus stops or grocery stores, especially in disadvantaged neighborhoods.



## 3. Town hall meetings

For most city leaders, this may seem obvious, but be sure to publicize one or two dates for a town hall meeting where residents can visit in-person to voice their opinions. (Tip: During the health crisis, we've seen cities host highly effective and successful town hall meetings.)

# Some quick considerations before you get started.

Beyond collecting survey results in a number of different ways, keep in mind these considerations before we walk through our recommendations.

✓ **Writing questions that work.**

Writing the survey questions is usually half the battle. They have to be clear, affirmative, and ensure that results can be easily inferred. That's why we crowdsourced successful transit surveys from across the nation, boiling down the questions into a basic template. We've provided you some example questions at the end of this guide.

✓ **Consider a beta test.**

The questions in this guide are proven to work, but we know that public transit needs in every community are complex and different. Distributing the survey to a select number of beta testers is a good first step to ensure no topics are confusing or overlooked.

✓ **Getting responses from a diverse population.**

English is likely not the only language spoken in your community. Consider translating your questionnaire into different languages, along with any flyers publicizing town hall meetings.

✓ **Sweetening the deal.**

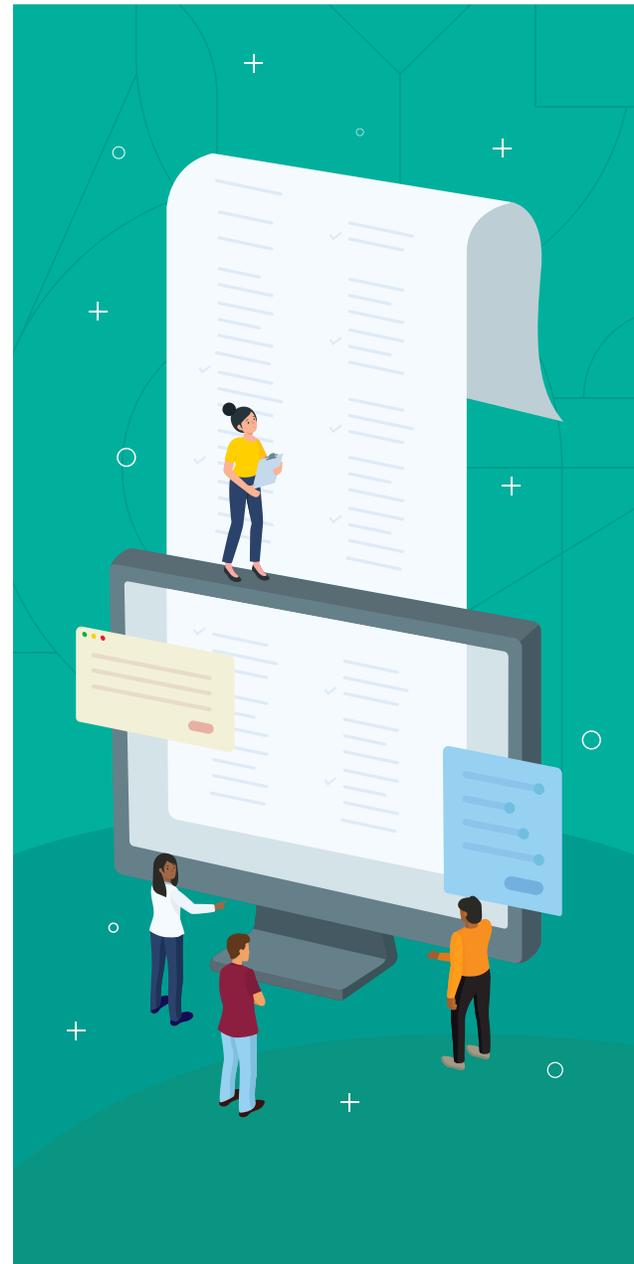
Afraid you may not get enough responses to make an informed decision? Incentives can go a long way. That might mean a \$5 or \$10 gift card to local businesses in your community, or the opportunity to enter a raffle for a prize.

# Distributing your survey online.

It's easy, it's quick, and it works. The most popular method of collecting feedback about the future of public transportation in your community is via an online survey. It allows city leaders to distribute and promote the survey to the largest number of residents, verify the person providing responses actually lives within the city limits, and track the results in real time.

While some cities have their own preferred online survey platform, some of the most popular include SurveyMonkey, PollFish, and Qualtrics. They are inexpensive and easy to use.

Distributing an online survey about public transportation is also easy. Cast your net wide. Promote it in newsletters, on social media, and through partner organizations like chambers of commerce, senior centers, and local sports leagues in order to gather as many opinions about public transit as possible.





## Collecting survey results in person.

Public transportation often serves a large variety of passengers, not just those who own a smartphone or computer and have access to the internet. Transit is often a lifeline for older residents, and those who live in disadvantaged communities.

In order to be fair and equitable, it's important to collect survey responses in person, or safely over the phone. And this step doesn't have to be overly complicated, or involve too much shoe leather. Have a small group of people start by collecting responses at local hot spots around the city. A good starting point is at popular bus stops or transit hubs. While maintaining a safe distance, conduct the survey in the identical fashion as someone would take it online —

reading the questions from a printed copy and completing the survey in real time on paper or a digital device.

While this team is out on the town, work smarter by having them post flyers at local coffee shops, transit hubs, hospitals, and community centers about the scheduled town hall meetings. This will ensure all public forums are well attended, whether in person or online (during times when communities are avoiding large public gatherings).

Lastly, also consider surveying residents about their public transit preferences over the phone, especially when speaking with seniors or other populations more at risk of contracting COVID-19.

# Conducting town hall meetings.



The third and final step of gathering feedback about how public transportation should evolve in your city is via a public forum, like a town hall meeting. Whether hosted safely in person or streamed online, don't just use this gathering as another way to ask the same questions as the survey – use the opportunity to share preliminary results and hear from the community at large.

Begin by presenting a summary of results. How are people using public transportation? What would incentivize them to leave their personal vehicles at home, and instead use a shared mode of transit? What are the most popular destinations, and which neighborhoods seemingly need greater access to public transit than others?

This isn't a final report from the city, but rather prompts for discussion to confirm that the initial results gleaned from the questionnaire are on track. Combining the quantitative data from the transit survey with the qualitative feedback from community feedback during the town hall meetings will allow city leaders to make an informed decision about the future of public transit infrastructure in their final report, where they can start recommending some changes.

That's when the real fun begins.

# Public transportation survey template.

## Transit behavior questions.

**How do you primarily travel within [CITY NAME]?**

- Personal vehicle
- Public transit (bus, train, light rail, etc.)
- Bike
- Walk
- For-hire vehicle (e.g. Taxi, Uber, Lyft)
- Other (please specify)

**How often do you use public transportation?**

- 1 – Never
- 2 – Rarely (1-2 times a month)
- 3 – Occasionally (A few times per month)
- 4 – A moderate amount (2-4 times per week)
- 5 – A great deal (5 or more times per week)

**Think about your most recent trip (work, school, grocery store, or other regular destination).**

**How did you get to your destination?**

- Carpool
- Bicycle
- Drove alone
- Public transit (bus, train, light rail, etc.)
- For-hire vehicle (Taxi, Uber, Lyft)
- Walked
- Other (please specify)

**How long was your trip? (in minutes)**

- [Open ended answer]

**How likely are you to use public transit for your next trip?**

- 1 – Extremely unlikely
- 2 – Unlikely
- 3 – Unsure
- 4 – Likely
- 5 – Extremely likely

**On a scale of 1-5, how satisfied are you with existing public transportation options in [CITY NAME]?**

- 1 – Very dissatisfied
- 2 – Dissatisfied
- 3 – Unsure
- 4 – Satisfied
- 5 – Very satisfied

**If you don't currently use public transportation in [CITY NAME], what are some of the reasons why? (select all that apply)**

- The pickup locations are not convenient for me
- The bus/train comes too infrequently
- The travel times are too long
- I don't feel comfortable following the COVID-19 pandemic
- Other (please specify)

**How likely would you be to use public transit for your next trip if you were guaranteed to walk less than 2 minutes, wait less than 10 minutes, and reserve a socially distanced seat?**

- 1 – Extremely unlikely
- 2 – Unlikely
- 3 – Unsure
- 4 – Likely
- 5 – Extremely likely

## Background.

An on-demand transit service is being considered by [CITY NAME].

Here's how it would work:

- You can request a ride using a smartphone app, phone call, or text message.
- You would wait for a shuttle to come and pick you up nearby (you might have to walk a couple of minutes to meet the vehicle).
- If you have a smartphone, you can watch your vehicle approaching on your phone.
- You would usually wait between 10-20 minutes to be picked up after requesting a ride.
- The vehicle would stop to pick up other passengers along the way.
- Fares would be consistent with current TRANSIT MODE fares.

## Question.

How often would you take public transportation if [CITY NAME] invested in an on-demand model?

- 1 – Never
- 2 – Rarely, in less than 10% of the chances when I could have
- 3 – Occasionally, in about 30% of the chances when I could have
- 4 – Sometimes, in about 50% of the chances when I could have
- 5 – Frequently, in about 70% of the chances when I could have
- 6 – Usually, in about 90% of the chances I could have.
- 7 – Every time

## Demographics (Optional).

### What is your gender?

- Woman
- Man
- Genderqueer or non-binary
- Agender
- Prefer not to say
- [Write in option]

### What is your age?

- 13-18
- 19-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-65
- 65-74
- 75+

### What is your preferred language?

- [Open ended answer]

### What is your ethnicity?

- Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin
- Not Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin
- Prefer not to say

### What is your race?

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Multiracial
- Prefer not to say

### What is your employment status?

- Working full-time or part-time
- Full-time or part-time student
- Looking after family/home
- Not working
- Retired
- Other
- Prefer not to say

### What is your annual income?

- Under \$25K
- \$25-\$50K
- \$50K-\$100K
- \$100K-\$200K
- \$200K+
- Prefer not to say

### Do you have any long-term physical or mental disabilities which affect your use of XXX service?

- No
- Yes
  - Mobility impairment
  - Mental health condition
  - Respiratory problems
  - Serious long term illness
  - Hearing impairment
  - Visual impairment
  - Learning disability
  - Other (please specify)
- Prefer not to say

### Do you have a personal car that you can use to commute or run errands?

- Yes
- No

### What is your zip code?

- [Open ended answer]

### Will you be using this service with children (e.g., bringing a child to school)?

- Yes
- No

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