

Results of the Year-Long “Rate Your Ride” Survey
Report on Public Transportation in Erie and Niagara Counties

By: Columbia Law School, Lawyering in the Digital Age Clinic
Jean Choi and Brandon Rosenberg, Legal Interns, under the supervision of
Prof. Conrad A. Johnson

Introduction

Public transportation is a way of life for many people in Erie and Niagara Counties. 94,000 residents¹ use the public transit system each day to get to their jobs and medical appointments, visit family and friends, and shop for necessities. Predictably, there is a mixture of satisfaction and frustration with the current state of affairs. Many in the community have complained of subpar accessibility, service, and safety in the region’s transit system exclusively provided by the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA). This issue is exacerbated for those who require paratransit services.

To gather the public’s opinion on the matter and hear their individual voices the “Rate Your Ride”² survey was created by Columbia Law School’s Lawyering in the Digital Age Clinic free of charge as a public service, and launched under the direction of Western New York Law Center (WNYLC), with the full cooperation and assistance Erie County Clerk Michael P. Kearns and his able staff. Through this survey, we gathered information from over 2,300 respondents in the area, and now present the results in this report to show first-hand how the community feels about its own transit system.

¹ <https://metro.nfta.com/about/history-of-metro>

² https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/?sm=VZhRCnrg93yWDirWYk8B_2B_2B_2F04fr1bOQIkJuLB55EFBk_3D

The survey had a web version, accessible by an online link, and a hard-copy version, distributed by staff at the Erie County Clerk's Office and the Western New York Law Center to residents in the area. A total of 2,305 responses were collected from 78 zip codes in Erie and Niagara Counties. The survey asked riders about their level of satisfaction with the general public transportation system. In addition, the survey gathered responses from those who use or are familiar with the Paratransit Access Line (PAL). 98.24% of respondents responded that they have used public transportation in the past six months, and responded to questions regarding their experience on public transportation. About 12% of the respondents, (a total of 280 respondents), indicated that they or someone they knew used paratransit, and responded to questions pertaining to the paratransit system.

This report will explore the results of the survey and showcase the public's sentiment about the transit system in the area. The first section will introduce the regional transit system, including the paratransit system. The second section will discuss the survey and its results, including the cross-references of the results with census data and narrative responses to the survey. The third section will suggest improvements that can be made to the transit system. The fourth section concludes the report.

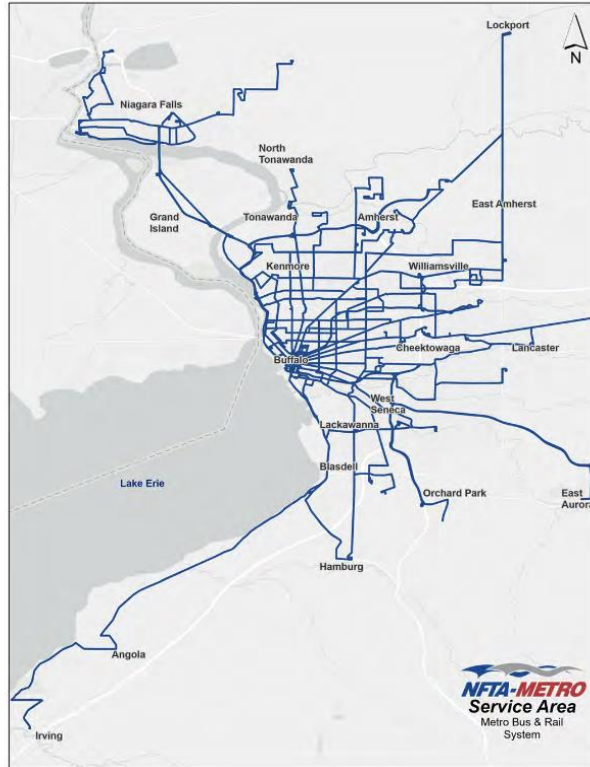
I. NFTA Public Transit System

A. General Public Transportation System

The Niagara Frontier Transit Authority, (NFTA), was created by the New York State Legislature in 1967 and has operated the public transit system in Erie and Niagara counties since

its founding. As of 2023, it serves 94,000 passengers a day, with over 14 million boardings a year.³ The following map shows the service areas and routes of NFTA.

NFTA-METRO SERVICE AREA
The NFTA-Metro service area covers portions of both Erie and Niagara Counties.



The NFTA’s mission is, “[T]o enhance the quality of life of residents and visitors by providing the highest level of safe, clean, affordable responsive and reliable public transportation through a coordinated and convenient bus and rail system.”⁴ To achieve this, the NFTA has set out to adopt a fully accessible bus and rail system.⁵

The fares for a single ride on either the bus or the metro rail is \$2 for the regular fare. The reduced fare of \$1 is offered to those who are 65 years or older, have a disability, or part of the Community Care Program. Those who are eligible need to obtain the reduced fare card

³ <https://metro.nfta.com/about/history-of-metro> and 2023 NFTA Performance Report, page 11

⁴ <https://metro.nfta.com/about/metro-info>

⁵ 2023 NFTA Performance Report, page 25

separately if they do not have a Medicare card, which can act in place of the reduced fare card. The application can be submitted online, and “permanent” cards are valid for four years, after which a renewal is required. As of November 2023, cash is only accepted for full-fare single ride passes on buses. Riders need to use a pre-loaded Metgo card or use an app on their phones for any other instance of payment. In order to load a Metgo card, the rider must go to a rail station or a downtown bus station.

The schedules for buses and rails are laid out in charts on the NFTA website. Real-time information regarding bus service is available on the NFTA website, but rail data is often not available. According to the NFTA, in FYE 2023, 82.5% of its buses and 88.4% of metro rail were on time.⁶ An arrival is considered ‘on time’ if it is less than two minutes early and less than four minutes late. However, the NFTA also reported the highest number of complaints for schedule failure.⁷

B. Paratransit

The NFTA also operates a paratransit system, a shared ride service designed to provide origin-to-destination transportation for paratransit eligible individuals under the Americans with Disabilities Act. The Paratransit Access Line (PAL) currently has 75 vehicles and 100 operators. There was a total of 219,169 riders in FYE 2023, with a daily average trip of 803 rides. There are currently 4,548 active paratransit registrations.⁸ Paratransit rides provide a 30-minute window to arrive, and busses do not wait more than five minutes once they have arrived.⁹

⁶ 2023 NFTA Performance Report, page 13

⁷ Id., at page 65

⁸ Id., at pages 26-27

⁹ <https://metro.nfta.com/special-services/pal-direct-information/pal-help>

C. Complaints and Feedback Reported by the NFTA

The NFTA publishes its own Performance Review each year. This includes operation information, financials, and customer relations. Within customer relations, the NFTA publishes Customer Satisfaction Survey results that are conducted by The American Bus Benchmarking Group (ABBG) and the Group of North American Light Rail Systems (GOAL). The results are presented in graphs.¹⁰ The NFTA does not disclose the methodology, the number of respondents, or the numerical values of the responses.

The NFTA also released a Paratransit Report in 2021. From what can be interpreted based on the shared data, they list satisfaction of paratransit riders between 4 and 4.5 out of 5. They additionally rate the performance of their services and report high satisfaction results for trip times, fare payment and ride comfort. The worst performance reviews came regarding call center staff, mobility device securement, and journey time. It is unclear what the difference is between trip times and journey times. The NFTA claims that 68% of Buffalo paratransit users would recommend the service to a friend.

The NFTA has a call center and a walk-in customer service center for questions and complaints. They also have an email address to which customers can ask questions. PAL has a direct email address for feedback. In FYE 2023, the NFTA reported receiving 117 commendations and 373 complaints.¹¹

II. The “Rate Your Ride” Survey

A. Method

¹⁰ Id. at page 66

¹¹ Id. at page 64

The “Rate Your Ride” survey was conducted from November 2022 to November 2023. There was a total of 2,305 respondents when combining hard-copy and online survey respondents. Both versions of the survey were distributed to make sure that we could reach a large range of public transportation users. The online version of the survey included more optional questions including demographic information, but that information generally was not provided and therefore not included in our analysis.

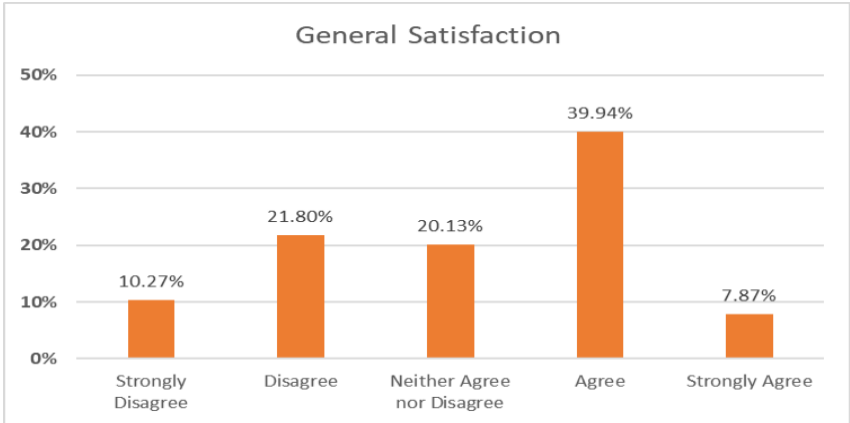
The survey results are presented in the next section in three parts. The first part deals with the general survey results including satisfaction levels, cleanliness, and safety. The second part deals with the cross-referencing of these results with census data using zip codes to determine the extent to which there is any correlation between demographic data in each zip code and the responses for that area. The third part deals with survey responses to paratransit questions.

B. “Rate Your Ride” Survey Results

1. General

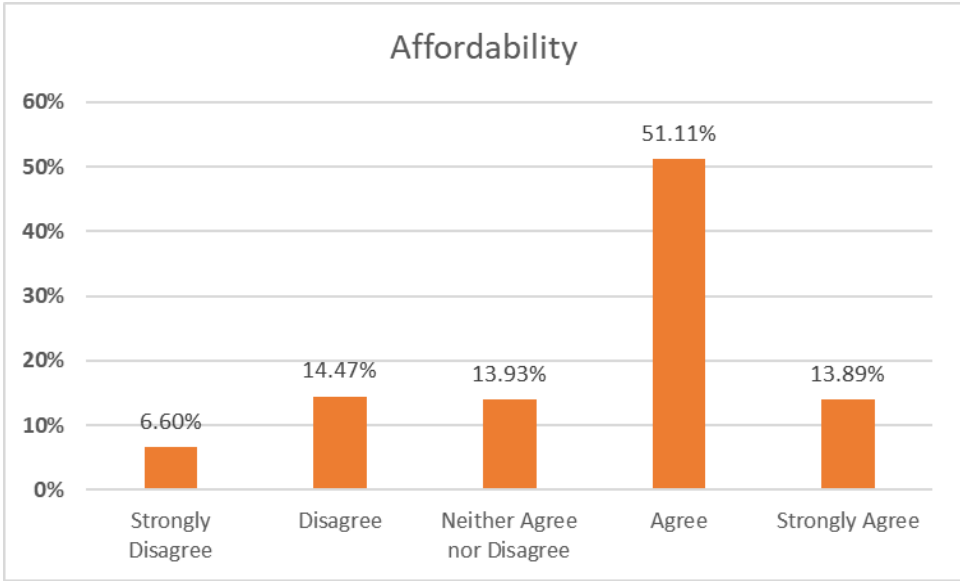
There was a total of 14 questions regarding the public transit system. This report shows results for four questions - general satisfaction, affordability, cleanliness, and perceived safety and comfort. The results for other questions were highly similar to the results for general satisfaction.

Q: I am *generally satisfied* with my public transportation experience.



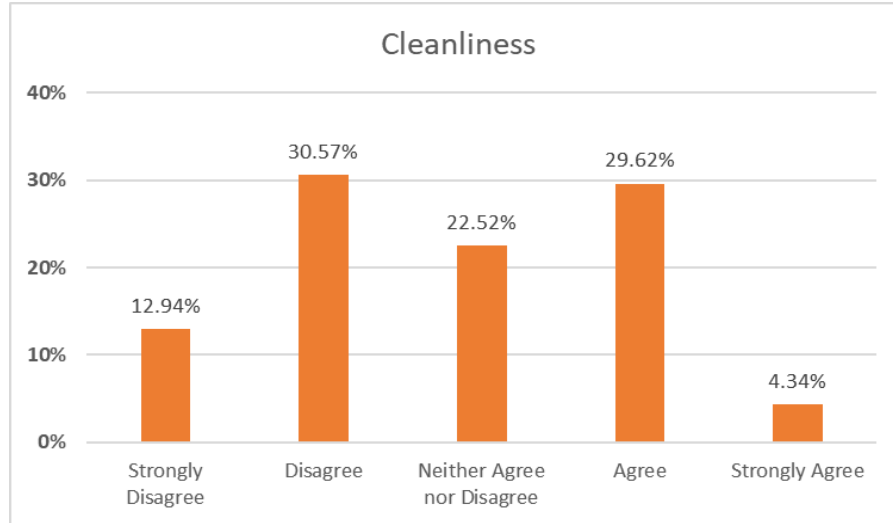
The results for this question showed that nearly **one third of respondents, more than 32%, were either strongly dissatisfied or dissatisfied** with their public transportation experience. About **48% of the total respondents were strongly satisfied or satisfied** with their experience.

Q: Public transportation is *affordable*



The highest level of satisfaction concerned affordability. **Nearly two-thirds of respondents answered that they either agreed or strongly agreed** with the statement that public transportation is affordable.

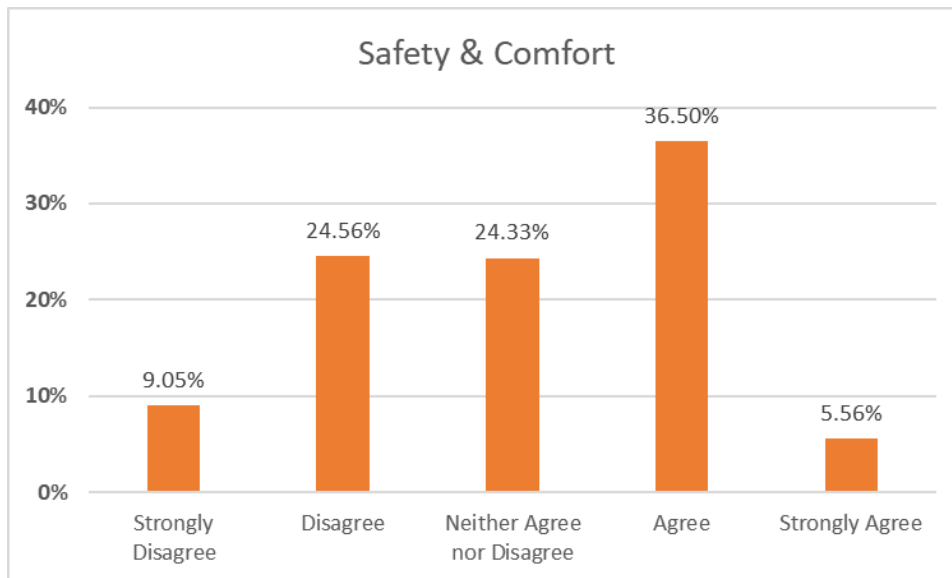
Q: Public transportation is *clean*



The highest percentage of dissatisfaction concerned cleanliness. **Over 43% of total respondents responded that they “disagree” or “strongly disagree” that public transportation is clean.**

Only one-third of respondents agreed that public transportation is clean.

Q: I feel safe and comfortable using public transportation.



Safety and comfort were also areas of higher dissatisfaction. **More than one-third of respondents indicated that they do not feel safe and comfortable when using public transportation.** Many of the narrative responses referred to this issue, especially comments from

older respondents, who mentioning feeling unsafe on the bus around drug sellers and rude children. This result is also highlighted in certain zip codes, as will be discussed in the next section.

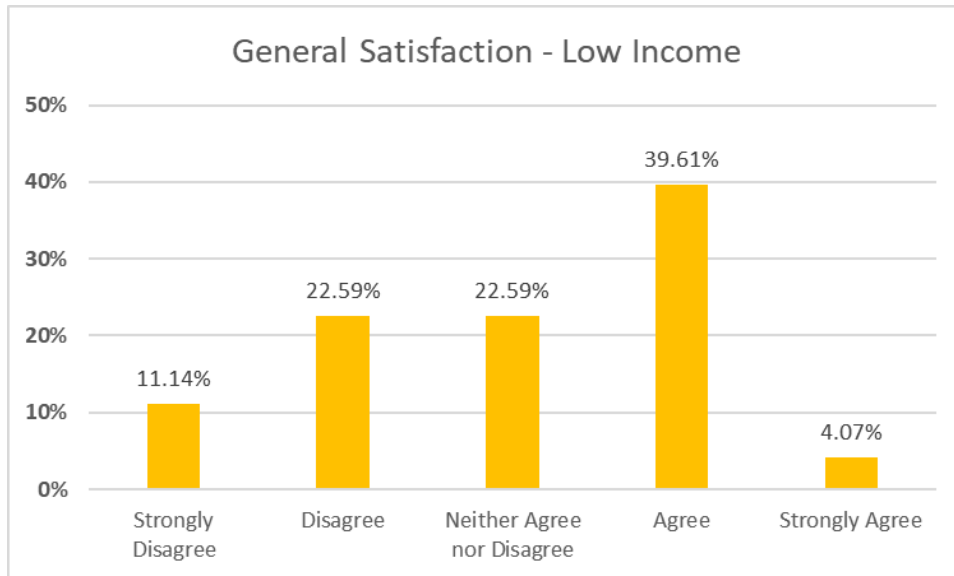
2. Correlating survey responses with United States Census Data

In gauging the sentiment of the community, we also wanted to observe whether some communities were more dissatisfied than others. The survey did not require respondents to divulge demographic information. However, nearly all respondents included the zip code of their residence. This information allowed us to cross-reference zip code data with Census data to reveal a more refined sense of geographic areas where greater dissatisfaction emerged. This section discusses the results of the cross-references to the official United States Census data from 2021 for each zip code and the responses from respondents of those zip codes. For increased accuracy, only zip codes with more than 30 respondents were used for the cross-sectional analysis.

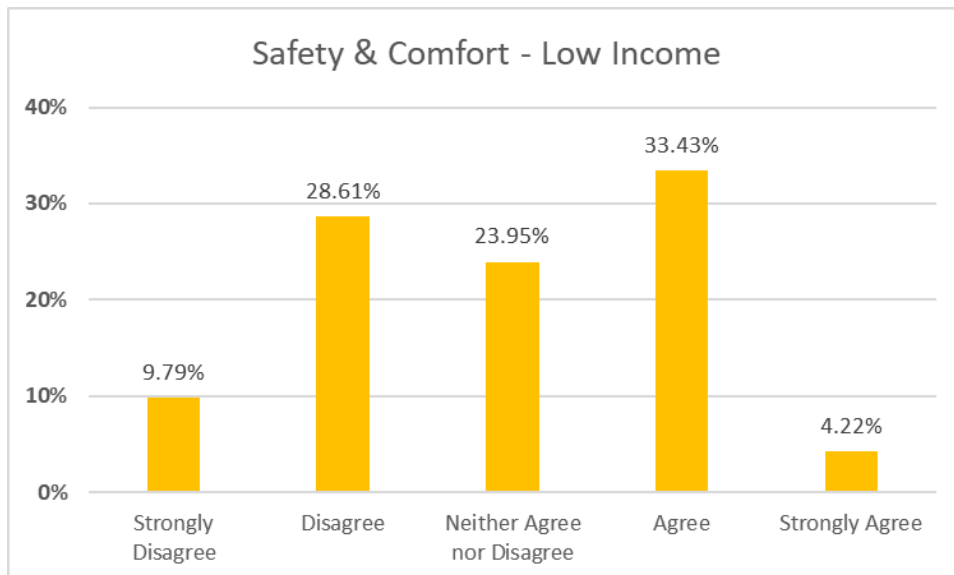
a) Income

The first factor that we observed was income. The 2021 household median income data for each zip code was sourced from the American Community Survey results published on the U.S. Census website. **On average, respondents that reside in zip codes with lower income levels tended to be more dissatisfied with public transportation in the region, and feel especially unsafe and uncomfortable in using public transportation.**

This chart below displays the results of the general satisfaction question filtered by the five zip codes of the lowest median income (14204, 14211, 14212, 14201, 14207).



Compared to the general satisfaction responses for all respondents, the percentage of people that strongly agree that they are satisfied is lower by 3.8%. The percentage of those that replied “strongly disagree” or “disagree” is higher by 1.7%, indicating a slightly higher dissatisfaction among respondents that reside in lower-income zip codes.

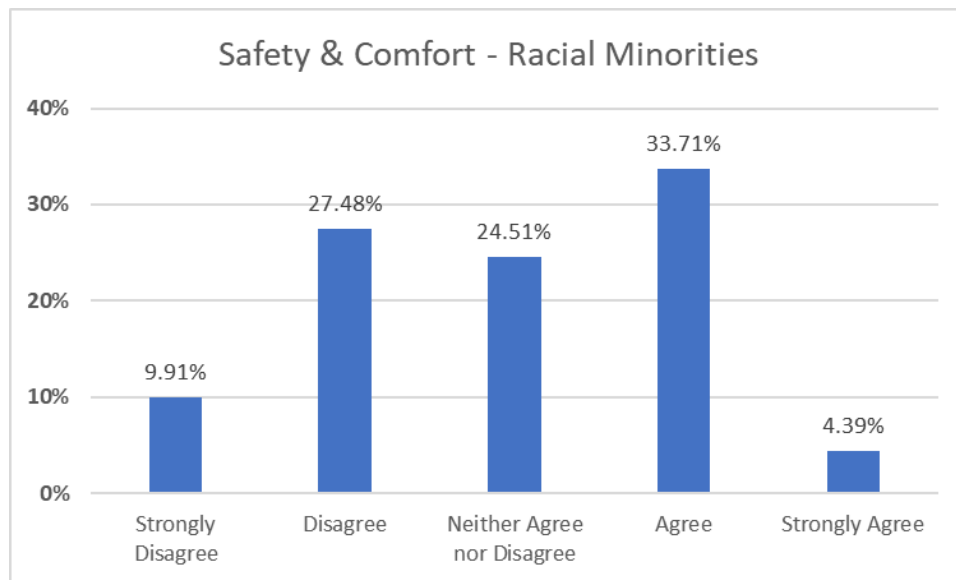


As predicted by the correlation number, this disparity is more prominent in responses to the question about safety and comfort question. The percentage of people that either “strongly

disagree” or “disagree” that they feel safe and comfortable using public transportation increases by nearly 5% when filtered by the lower-income zip codes. This showcases that **a higher percentage of respondents living in lower-income zip codes may feel less comfortable or safe in using public transportation.**

b) Race

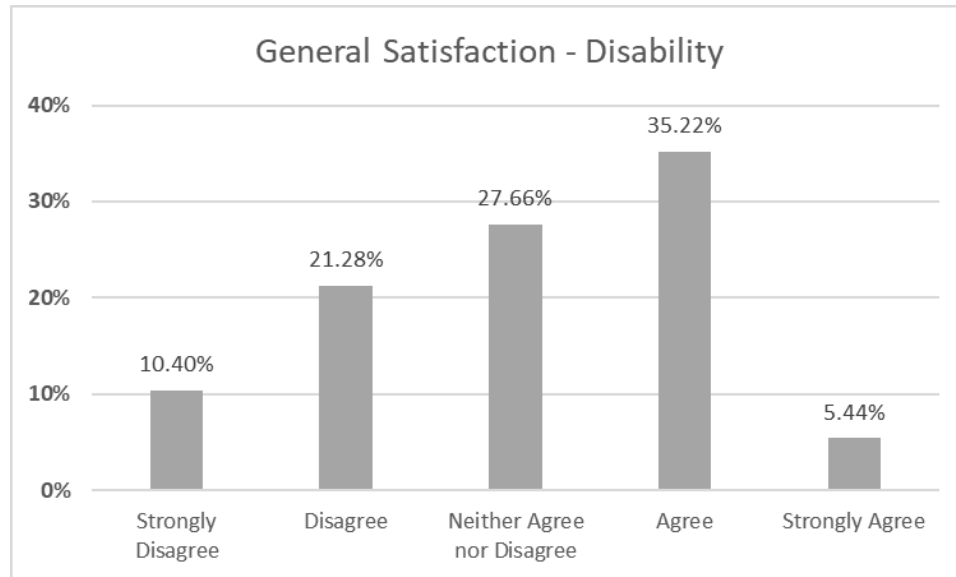
For race, the 2021 Census data on the percentage of racial minorities was used for analysis. Once again, **there was a higher correlation between race and general dissatisfaction, as well as in the areas of safety and comfort** of using public transportation.



This graph shows the responses for safety and comfort when filtered by the six zip codes (14208, 14215, 14211, 14204, 14203, 14212) with a majority racial minority population. Compared to the total respondents, 4% more of the respondents for these zip codes replied that they did not feel safe or comfortable using public transportation.

c) Disability

Disability statistics were gathered from the American Community Survey results on the US Census website. The percentage of people with a disability in each zip code had low to moderate correlation with both general satisfaction and safety and comfort question responses.



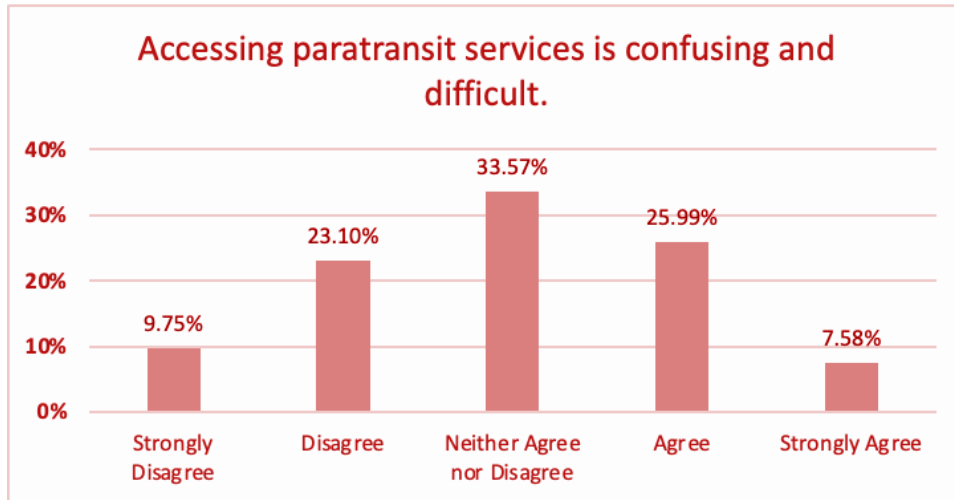
When filtered by the five zip codes (14204, 14210, 14201, 14212, 14209) with the highest level of those with a disability, the **percentage of those that “agree” or “strongly agree” that they are satisfied are lower by 4.7% and 2.4% respectively compared to the whole respondent group.** Because this question was for general public transportation, opinions regarding paratransit for those who use it are presented in the next section.

3. Paratransit

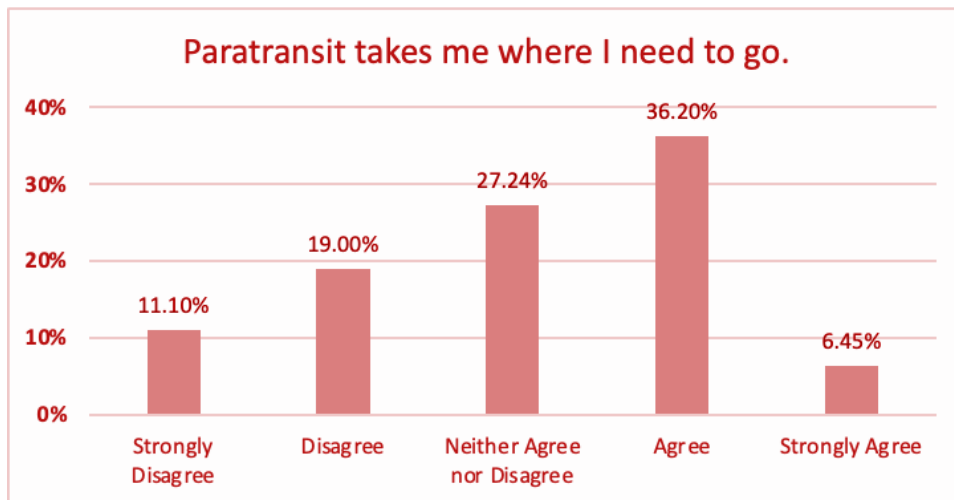
Many responses pointed to a shortage of paratransit drivers. This was supported by the recommendations provided by consultants to the NFTA. Elsewhere in the same report¹² the NFTA points out their paratransit service exceeds ADA minimum requirements.

¹² NFTA-Metro ParaTransit Study, funded through a \$750,000 grant obtained by NYS Senator Timothy Kennedy (D-Buffalo), chairman of the Senate's Transportation Committee.

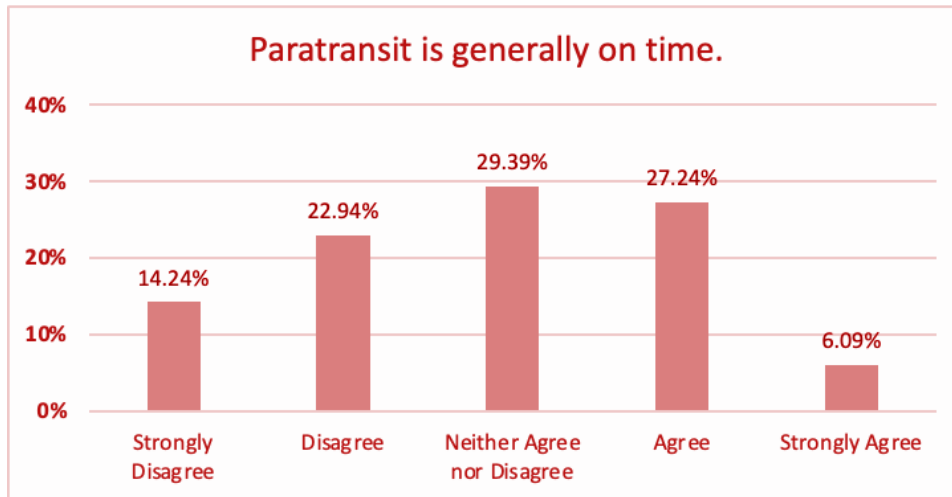
Nonetheless, responses to the “Rate Your Ride” survey show meaningful levels of dissatisfaction with paratransit services. Below is a summary of the responses of 280 riders who reported that they or someone they know uses paratransit:



This graph indicates that **more than one third of paratransit users survey found paratransit services confusing and difficult.**



Only approximately **43% of paratransit respondents felt that the PAL system takes them where they need to go.**



This final response is most interesting considering the NFTA reported that paratransit performs on-time 82% of the time.¹³ This is starkly different from our findings that **only a third of respondents either agree or strongly agree that paratransit is generally on time.**

III. Comments by Riders

While data is helpful for gaining an understanding of the system from a birds-eye view, hyper-focusing on numbers can be dehumanizing. It is important to remember that each data point is a person who relies on public transportation to go about their lives. A negative answer may be written off as a slight dip in overall satisfaction, but could mean that someone’s life has been strongly and negatively impacted by the current NFTA system. While we realize that it is impossible to please everyone, the NFTA’s stated goal is to provide, “...the highest level of safe, clean, affordable, responsive, and reliable public transportation.”¹⁴ To help more fully understand the experience of transit users on a personal level, we provided respondents space to describe their interactions with public transportation.

¹³ NFTA-Metro ParaTransit Study, funded through a \$750,000 grant obtained by NYS Senator Timothy Kennedy (D-Buffalo), chairman of the Senate’s Transportation Committee.

¹⁴ <https://metro.nfta.com/about/metro-info>

It could be helpful to note that **most of the written narrative responses we received from riders were overwhelmingly negative.** These responses detailed a variety of concerns that expanded on answers to our multiple-choice questions. We received and considered more than 700 written narrative responses. After personally reviewing all responses, and with the added assistance of AI (artificial intelligence), we highlight here a considerable number of responses, categorized by subject matter. Our analysis is provided below, separated by category.

Safety and Cleanliness

Passengers reported instances of aggressive behavior and threats, including verbal abuse, physical and sexual assault, and even a situation where a driver reportedly attacked passengers. There have also been cases of theft, with victims receiving little to no help from transportation staff in retrieving their stolen items. Certain stations have become notorious for drug use and sales, contributing to an overall unsafe atmosphere. The Utica station was particularly noted to be dangerous, causing many riders to avoid the station. Lastly, a significant number of riders complained about boisterous and unruly behavior on behalf of unaccompanied children and teens.

Hygiene has also been a major issue, with reports of lice infestations, bugs on buses, and individuals urinating on tracks, raising serious public health concerns. The lack of adequate security measures such as cameras and turnstiles at rail stations has been noted.

Detours / Lack of Available Routes

Several riders noted that many destinations are inaccessible without taking long detours, leading to significant time delays. Several riders highlighted difficulties in commuting to work,

with one individual expressing the struggle to catch a bus from the east side to Hertel for work, and another citing terrible service when using the bus on weekends to get to a job in Amherst. Comments also addressed a shortage of late night and weekend service, causing severe hardships in those relying on the services to go about their lives. One respondent reported they “feel like a prisoner on the weekends.” This aspect will be addressed later in this document via the “Trip Examples”.

Winter / Dangers Caused by Lack of Snow Removal

Winter weather exacerbates the challenges in using public transportation in the region. Riders complained about the lack of sheltered bus stops. This is supported by the NFTA’s finding in 2019 that of **4,500 bus stops, only 250 were sheltered**.¹⁵ The NFTA’s stated goal was to add 120 additional shelters over the next three years. It is unclear if this was accomplished. Assuming the NFTA was able to add 120 additional shelters that would leave more than 4,000 stops without shelter for NFTA riders.

Others noted having to climb over slippery snowbanks to get to the bus or wait in the street for buses to arrive. This is particularly challenging for riders with small children, the elderly and physically challenged. One rider emphasized the importance of keeping bus stairs clear to prevent accidents. Additionally, the lack of heating during winter months causes discomfort for passengers. Another rider with osteoarthritis highlighted the potential hazards of uneven bus stops and icy conditions, emphasizing the need for better snow removal and maintenance.

¹⁵ https://www.nfta.com/media/4263/2019-transit_development_plan.pdf

Bus Drivers

Issues with bus drivers were also raised, including instances where drivers did not wait for transferring passengers at main intersections. Riders additionally complained of being simply ignored by bus drivers who would pass them by while they waited for the bus. One comment highlights the frustration of this experience, considering the length of time between buses. “The bus drove right past me when I was standing by the bus stop and waved the bus down. I was ten minutes early for a bus and the bus had already gone by. I had to wait another hour and a half in the wind and rain for the next bus.”

While some drivers were commended for their helpfulness during snow-related problems, others were criticized for not lowering the bus to accommodate passengers with disabilities, as well as those using strollers. As one rider noted, “[i]t is difficult to fold up a stroller and have my children seated safely before the bus takes off from a stop. My daughter once flew off the seat when the driver hit the brakes and she was significantly hurt on the seat in front of her.”

Accessibility

Survey respondents pointed out various accessibility concerns, including the absence of notices when elevators are out of service at metro stations, creating difficulties for individuals with mobility challenges. The lack of accessibility for individuals with diverse needs was a recurring theme. The removal of bus service in the village of Sloan was particularly criticized for disproportionately affecting elderly and blind individuals.

Others expressed frustration with the reinstatement process for those with disabilities, calling it "ridiculous." This process requires applicants to complete a Reduced-Fare application

for a “Permanent card” every 4 years¹⁶. As will be discussed further below, this ignores the permanent nature of many riders’ disabilities.

A case manager in Buffalo working with clients highlighted the difficulties in teaching them to use the bus due to a lack of shelters, infrequent service, and limited routes. The inadequacy of the regional transit system, particularly with only one bus running every two hours from Amherst to Buffalo, significantly impacts clients' ability to carry out daily activities, especially during the winter when buses are late or fail to show up, leaving individuals stranded in the snow without shelters.

Suggestions for improvement, provided by the respondents themselves, included more frequent bus service, addressing funding cuts, and ensuring better water drainage at ADA ramps to prevent winter-related accidents. The survey also highlighted concerns about scheduling for paratransit services, with riders proposing multiple bus stations to optimize service and reduce delays.

Reliability and Information Availability

Riders consistently expressed frustration with the current state of information dissemination within Buffalo's public transit system. There was a considerable desire for a more robust and reliable system for providing bus schedules and updates, especially during inclement weather. One rider emphasized the challenge, asking, "[t]he problem I have is in bad weather, how do we know when the bus will be late?" Reliability issues were noted by several riders citing instances of buses arriving early or late without adequate notice, making it challenging to plan commutes effectively.

¹⁶ <https://metro.nfta.com/media/1697/reduced-fare-application.pdf>

Lastly, the lack of easily accessible information for Paratransit services was also highlighted, with riders expressing frustration over the need to repeatedly search for necessary details such as pass purchases and service boundaries. One rider was stranded at the airport in their wheelchair because of a delayed flight causing scheduling issues with Paratransit, which reportedly does not offer same day travel.

Customer Service

Many riders reported difficulties in providing feedback to the NFTA. Some found calling to be helpful, but some reported apathetic and rude customer service personnel.

Positive Comments

Although most of the comments we received were negative, several positive experiences with the NFTA are highlighted by riders, emphasizing the beneficial role the transit system plays in their lives. One rider expressed gratitude to the NFTA for getting them through school by utilizing park and ride services. Another recalls a significant memory of a bus driver's kindness when faced with a fare payment issue, which ultimately allowed them to attend a job interview and succeed. Additional positive encounters include a driver going above and beyond on a bitterly cold day, pulling up closer to the desired destination and ensuring a safe exit point. Another rider shared a commendable experience during a family medical emergency, praising the PAL office staff for their flexibility in accommodating a late change in vehicle, pickup, and drop-off points. The Token Transit app and Park & Ride services are specifically highlighted as convenient and affordable options. Beyond the efficiency of the service, a rider appreciates the personal interactions with bus drivers, enjoying conversations and updates about their day.

Memorable experiences include drivers accommodating late arrivals and going the extra mile to locate riders at entrances, providing crucial assistance in unfamiliar locations.

IV. Effect on Employment

To expand our understanding of the impact public transportation was having in the Buffalo economy, we reached out to major employers in the region, chambers of commerce, and worker training programs. We had difficulty eliciting responses from employers; one of whom expressed concern in damaging their relationship with the NFTA. We were able, however, to speak at length with the Northland Workforce Training Center. The Center's stated mission is "to advance the economic well-being of Western New York by developing and maintaining a skilled and diverse workforce to meet the needs of the advanced manufacturing and energy sectors, while providing opportunities to job seekers as well as pathways to gainful employment, career advancement and economic sustainability."¹⁷

Dr. Carolyn Storms-Stoltman, Vice President of Enrollment & Organizational Advancement at the Center, discussed the importance of public transportation on the professional careers of workers in Buffalo. She expressed that Buffalo is one of the most segregated cities in the country and that it is particularly difficult for those living on the East side to access public transportation. Dr. Storms relayed that most of the jobs the Center places workers at are located in the suburbs such as East Aurora, Niagara Falls, and West Seneca. She pointed out that these locations can be particularly difficult to reach without a car. This drastically cuts workers' options for employment, as manufacturing and energy jobs have been historically located outside of public transportation routes. The Center has tried to work around this, including sending a van

¹⁷ <https://northlandwtc.org/about/>

to take someone to their job for two months. The Center is additionally making a great effort in getting driver's licenses for their students, as 31% of them do not possess one. Dr. Storms also highlighted the difficulties of working mothers who rely on the bus to take their children to childcare, and pointed out the problem of unshoveled sidewalks causing issues with strollers in the snow. This echoed survey responses we received.

III. Trip Examples

Below are some examples of trips on public transportation within the Buffalo area based on where a typical rider may travel. The purpose of providing this is to demonstrate how certain routes can be inefficient causing public transportation to take far longer than the actual driving distance.

A. Amherst to Erie County Courthouse

This Monday morning trip would be taken by someone who needs to get to the court by 9am. According to Google Maps, the trip would take 56 minutes on public transportation. The rider would first need to walk 15 minutes, then take the 44A bus eleven stops, transfer at Main Street University Station to the number 8 bus downtown, ride for 42 stops, then walk an additional three minutes. Driving, this trip would take approximately 16 minutes.

B. Martha P. Mitchell Community Center to the Outer Harbor

This Monday morning trip may be taken by someone who needs to get to work in the Harbor's developing area. This trip would take approximately 75 minutes on public transportation. The rider would need to walk seven minutes to the 19 bus stop at Bailey-

Oakmont, ride for 33 stops then transfer to the 16H. After 13 more stops they would need to walk two minutes to transfer again to the 42, at which point they'd have to walk to their destination. This trip would also take 16 minutes in a car.

C. Kensington to East Seneca

This Monday morning trip may be taken by someone, such as a Workforce Training Center student, who needs to get to their new manufacturing job. The trip would take roughly 90 minutes on public transportation. The rider would first need to walk to the Bailey Avenue Kensington Avenue stop and take the 19 bus towards Bailey-Abbott. After 30 stops, they would transfer to the 2 bus towards Appletree at Clinton Street and Bailey Avenue East. Finally, after an 18 stop ride on the 2 bus, they would need to walk up to a half hour to get to their place of employment. Driving, this trip would take 18 minutes.

V. Recommendations for improvement

Through the responses we received, we were able to pinpoint some actions that the NFTA can take to improve the quality of their service. Some of these are simple changes that we hope could be implemented quickly. Others are more substantial, requiring a larger devotion of resources. Given the more than 2300 survey responses, all recommendations are meaningful to the public. We raise these recommendations below, starting with those that might be easiest to implement.

A. Make “permanent” fare reduction for seniors/disability permanent

Perhaps the simplest change the NFTA can make to ease the lives of some of the community's most vulnerable individuals is by making the “permanent” fare reduction

application truly permanent. At the moment, the “permanent” pass is valid for just four years. For elderly and many disabled riders, having to reapply every four years for fare reduction is an unnecessarily cumbersome task, the elderly will not be getting any younger over the four-year eligibility period and most disabled riders are dealing with a permanent condition. Simply redefining the permanent pass process would provide a meaningful and immediate improvement.

B. Clean the stations and the vehicles

Cleanliness is a serious concern for public transit riders, as indicated by the dissatisfaction levels from our survey and narrative responses. We recommend the NFTA look into cost-efficient means of cleaning their buses and trains on a more frequent basis.

C. Devote resources to safety

A concerning trend found in the survey was a feeling by many riders that public transportation is unsafe, which was further highlighted among respondents who reside in lower-income areas and communities of color. While we understand that it is impossible to monitor each station and bus stop effectively, certain measures can be taken to make riders feel safer and comfortable getting to their destination. The NFTA should strengthen efforts to work in conjunction with local law enforcement to cut down on violent crime at strategic problem sites, such as the Utica train station.

D. Live tracking of buses and paratransit in new NFTA MetGo App

The new NFTA MetGo app can be a positive step. It would be helpful if the app includes a means of live tracking buses and paratransit vehicles. This has been implemented in other

transportation systems, such as the MTA, and allows riders to know where and when to expect their bus/train to arrive and make it easier to determine travel plans. One of the main concerns riders had with these transportation options was the uncertainty of when the bus/paratransit would arrive. Riders reported waiting the better part of an hour after their vehicles were scheduled to arrive. During this time, riders could have stayed inside and warm, or found alternate transportation if available. While it is understandable that transportation often falls off schedule due to various complications that may occur during a route (traffic, detours, etc.), riders should be made aware of the status of their ride. At the moment riders must rely on emails of route alerts, which are reportedly sparse, as the text alert service is inactive as of this report. This service, as well as a built-in feedback input could be added to the new NFTA MetGo app to allow riders to have one app to track, pay and rate their ride. The app currently only supports a means of paying for the NFTA transportation, and a link to their contact information. Our survey received hundreds of written responses that we are unable to include fully in this report. A streamlined feedback platform would allow for the NFTA to hear from its riders directly and more consistently in real time.

Conclusion

Our goal in this project, which was not funded by any taxpayer money, was to shed light on how riders in Erie and Niagara counties truly feel about their public transportation system. As such, we offer the above suggestions as a free, public service. We do so in the belief that the NFTA truly intends to live up to its goal of providing the highest level of service to its customers. The importance of an effective public transportation system cannot be overstated, given its impact on the employment, health, safety and enjoyment of the community.