



# The Cost of Getting Around:

The Transportation Burdens of Lower-Income Residents in Western Massachusetts

***Submitted to: The Massachusetts Department of Transportation***



Our mission is to deliver excellent customer service to people traveling in the Commonwealth by providing transportation infrastructure which is safe, reliable, robust and resilient. We work to provide a transportation system which can strengthen the state's economy and improve the quality of life for all.

***Prepared by: The MassINC Polling Group***



The MassINC Polling Group (MPG) is a nonpartisan public opinion research firm serving public, private, and social-sector clients. MPG elevates the public's voice with cutting edge methods and rigorous analysis. Based in Boston, MPG serves a nationwide client base.

***In collaboration with: Way Finders***



Way Finders is a nonprofit community development corporation, headquartered in Springfield, MA, working to strengthen housing stability and economic mobility and build thriving neighborhoods throughout western Massachusetts. Way Finders is the largest nonprofit housing developer in the region and has created over 800 units of affordable housing in Hampden and Hampshire Counties. Way Finders also offers first time homebuyer classes, resident leadership training, family homeless shelters, fair housing counseling, and much more. Visit [www.wayfinders.org](http://www.wayfinders.org) to learn more.

## Acknowledgements

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## Executive Summary

In 2024, The MassINC Polling Group (MPG) and Way Finders partnered on the People and Transportation project, sponsored by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), to understand the transportation challenges facing Way Finders clients and lower-income residents of Western Massachusetts.

A major focus of the research was on Way Finders clients, defined as individuals who had received services from Way Finders since January 2023. Way Finders provides a wide range of housing and economic support services, mostly in Hampden and Hampshire counties. The majority of Way Finders clients, and the majority of clients who participated in the project, receive housing assistance. This report offers a frontline perspective on Massachusetts's ongoing housing crisis, highlighting how transportation challenges are exacerbating the situation for many residents.

Over 1,600 Way Finders clients participated in a survey about their transportation behavior and challenges. Way Finders clients also participated in eight focus groups: four prior to the survey to inform the survey design, and four after the survey to better understand the results. In addition, MPG conducted the same survey with 601 residents of Hampden and Hampshire counties with household incomes below \$75,000. The resident survey was targeted and weighted to population parameters for that lower-income cohort, while the Way Finders survey was unweighted. A fuller discussion of how the research was conducted is in the [Methods](#) section of this report.

Below are some highlights in brief. More detailed discussion is available in the [Findings in Detail](#) section of this report.

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***This report offers a frontline perspective on Massachusetts's ongoing housing crisis, highlighting how transportation challenges are exacerbating the situation for many residents.***

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## Key Findings

**Transportation is a financial burden for lower-income residents.** Half (51%) of lower-income residents in the region and 80% of Way Finders clients report that the amount they spend on transportation monthly is at least somewhat of a burden. Half (49%) of Way Finders clients call it a “very big burden”. Majorities of Way Finders clients report not being able to pay other bills in the past year due to transportation expenses (62%) and not being able to get somewhere they needed to due to a lack of funds (75%). Regional residents were much less likely to report these problems (17% and 24%, respectively).

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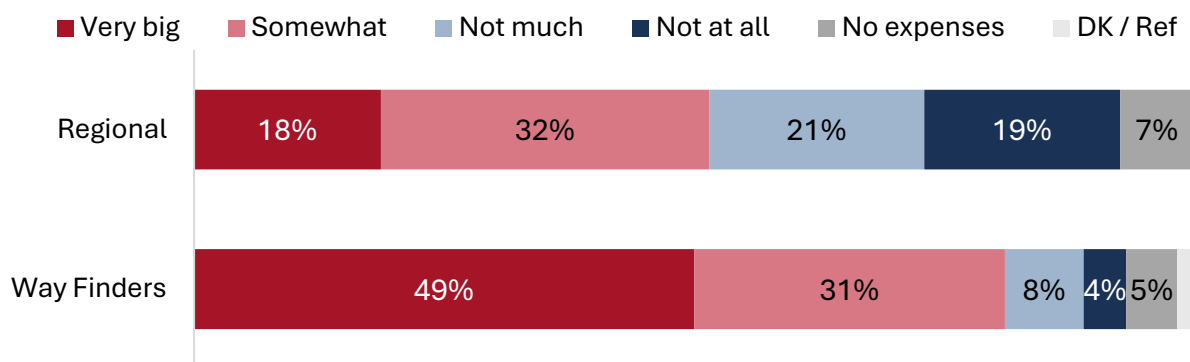
*The Way Finders survey is unique and unprecedented, offering insight into the transportation experiences of some of the most economically disadvantaged residents in Western Massachusetts.*

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These differences between Way Finders clients and the broader resident survey reflect patterns seen throughout the findings. The Way Finders survey is unique and unprecedented, offering insight into the transportation experiences of some of the most economically disadvantaged residents in Western Massachusetts. Regional residents whose demographics align more closely with Way Finders clients face considerable transportation challenges, but they still do not face the level of difficulty Way Finders clients experience.

**Figure ES-1: Transportation is a financial burden, especially for Way Finders clients**

% who say their transportation expenses are \_\_\_\_\_ of a burden

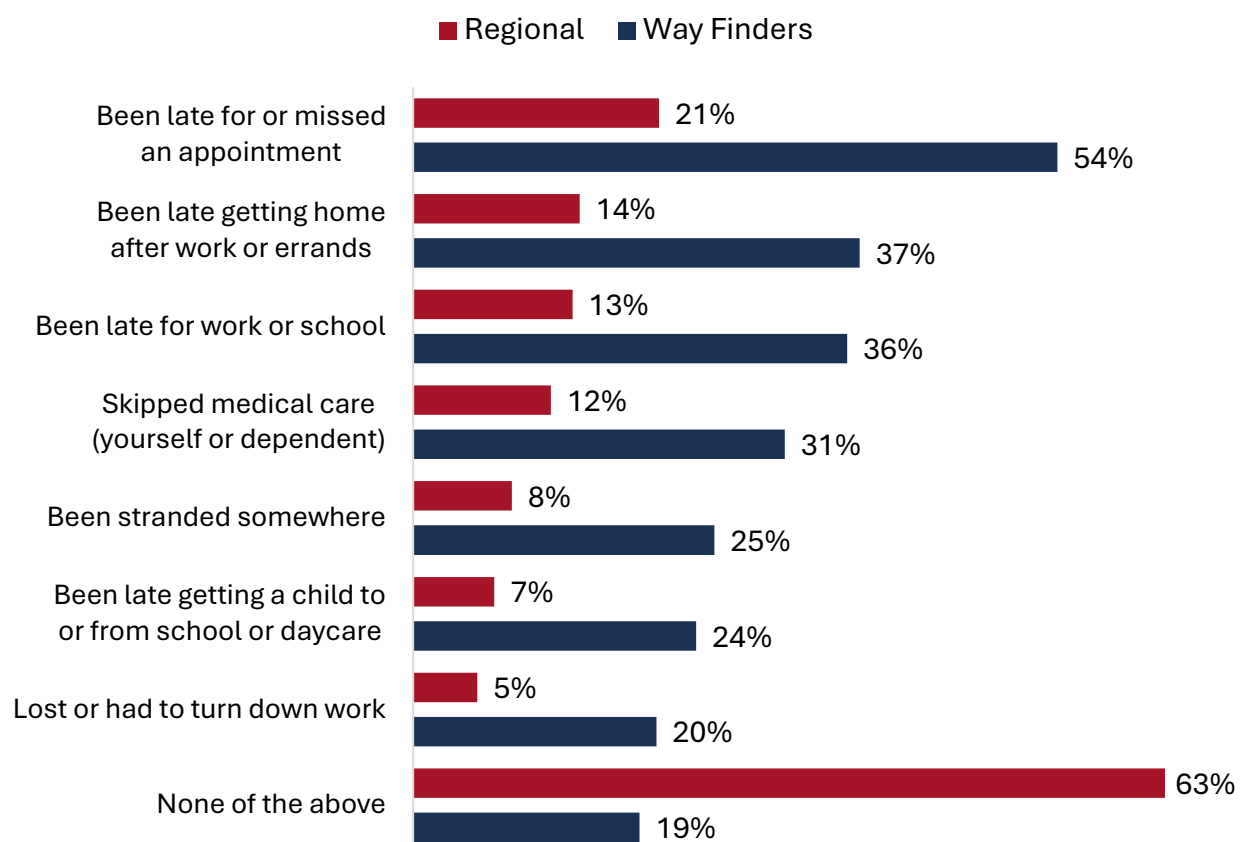


Q: In a typical month would you say that the amount you spend on transportation, including car payments, gas and maintenance, bus fares, Uber, Lyft, and taxis, is...

**Way Finders clients report adverse impacts from transportation.** Difficulty with transportation is having a real impact on Way Finders clients' daily lives. Nearly four out of five clients (78%) report at least one impact resulting from trouble getting around, including being late for work, school, or daycare; missing appointments; skipping medical appointments altogether; or even being stranded places. The impacts are even more pronounced among subgroups. A majority of workers in the Way Finders survey report being late to work due to transportation problems. Transportation also poses a challenge to accessing health care services for some, and especially those who report health conditions that impair their mobility.

**Figure ES-2: Way Finders clients report everyday challenges from transportation**

*% who say they have experienced each problem in the last year due to transportation issues*



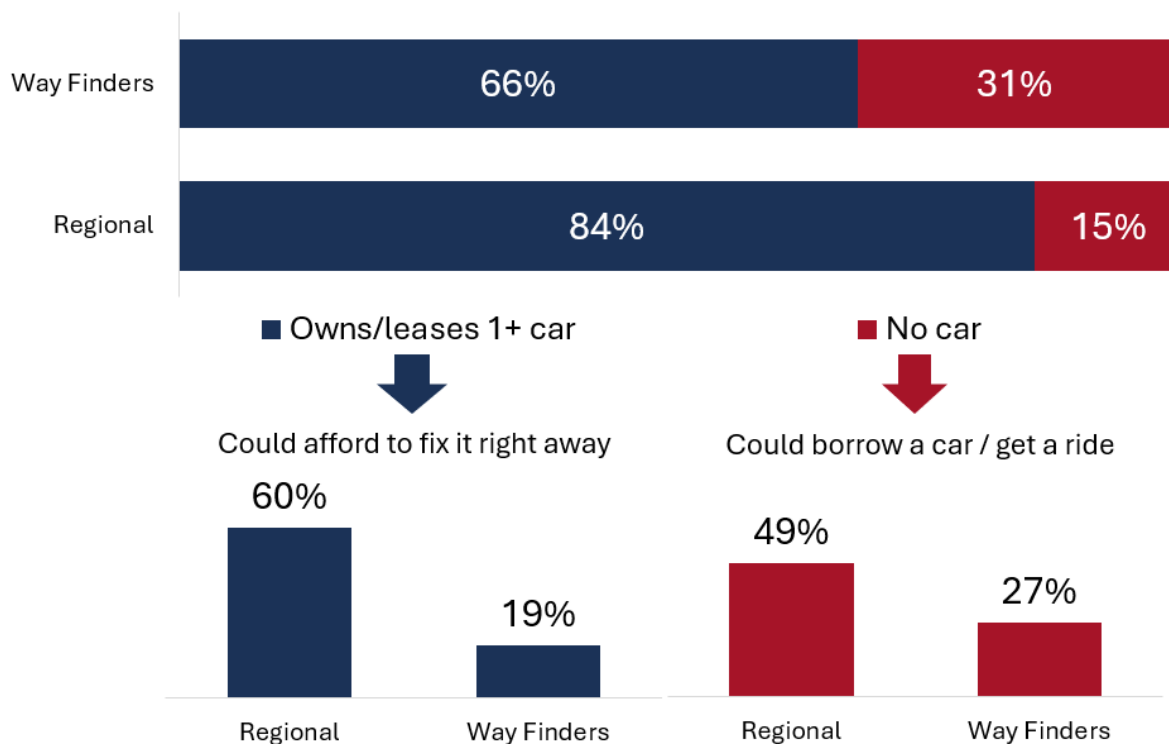
*Q: In the past year, have any of the following happened to you as a result of a problem getting where you needed to go? **Select all that apply.***



**Despite the costs, residents rely on cars – driven by themselves or others – to get around.** One finding common to both surveys is the dominance of personal vehicles as a way of getting around. That may be a result of the geography of the Valley, in which large cities give way quickly to rural communities. Majorities in both groups report driving themselves and name driving as their primary mode. Getting a ride from friends, family, or neighbors is the second most common mode. Owning or leasing a car produces much of the financial burden of transportation for Way Finders clients, and their access to a vehicle is much more precarious than other lower-income residents. Way Finders clients are less likely to own or lease their own car, and the vast majority of those that do only have a single car in their household. Way Finders clients also tend to have larger household sizes, meaning that a single car is being shared among more drivers and passengers. Only 19% of these car owners could afford to fix a major repair right away if needed, and only 27% of those who lack a car could borrow one or get a ride.

**Figure ES-3: Way Finders clients are less likely to have access to cars, afford repairs**

*% who own a car, could afford to fix it right away, who don't own a car, could borrow one/ get a ride*



*Q: How many cars does your household own or lease?*

*Asked if owns/leases car: If your car needed a major repair (flat tire, body work, engine repair) could you afford to fix it right away?*

*Asked if not: Could you borrow a car or get a ride if you needed to get somewhere by car?*

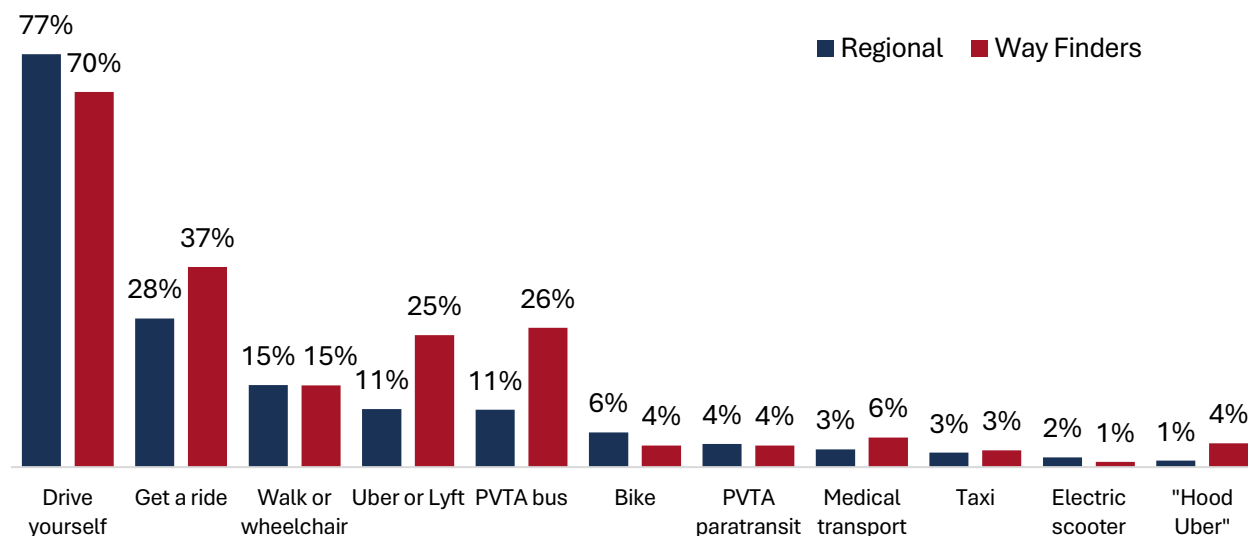


**Other modes of transportation pose challenges including speed, access, cost, and safety.**

Given that their access to cars is less secure, Way Finders clients are more likely than other lower-income residents to use other ways of getting around, including PVTa bus service, ride-hailing apps, taxis, and informal paid rides arranged via social media. These so-called “Hood Ubers” came up in the pre-survey client focus groups as a more affordable but less secure option. Not having a car is the top reason for turning to ride-hailing in both surveys, while the cost of Uber and Lyft is the top obstacle for those who do not use them. An equal 15% in each survey report walking as a way of getting around. Residents and clients alike cite reckless or speeding drivers as their top concern while walking, followed by a lack of sidewalks in good condition.

**Figure ES-4: Driving is dominant, but Way Finders clients are more likely to use other modes**

*% who say they have used \_\_\_\_\_ mode of transportation to get around over the past year*



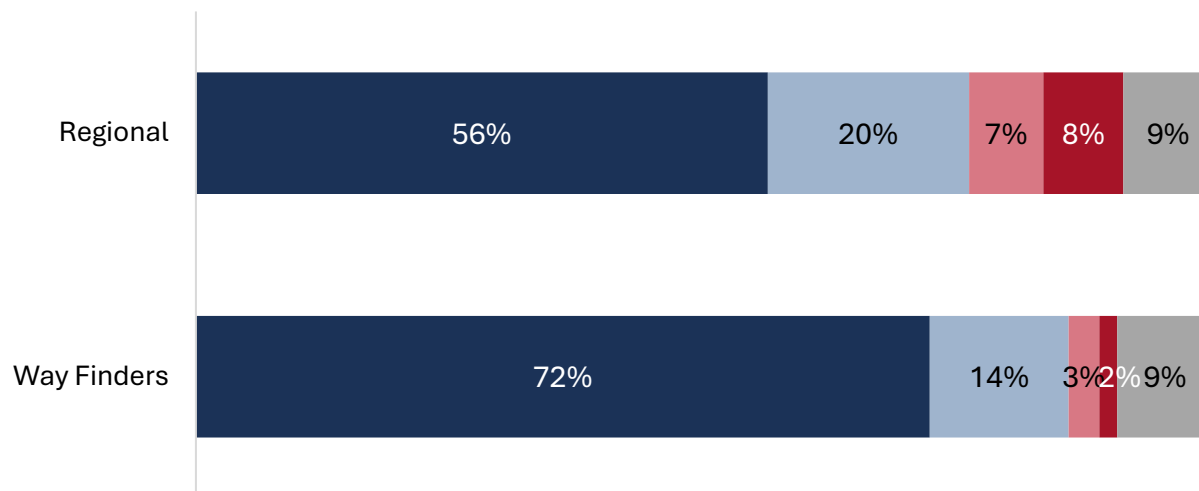
*Q: To start, over the past year, which of the following types of transportation have you used to get around? **Select all that apply.***

**Riders and non-riders want PVTA service to be more frequent, faster, and free.** Overall, 26% of Way Finders clients use the PVTA bus service, and 13% list some PVTA service as their primary way of getting around. Both of these figures are much higher than among all lower-income residents. Clients and residents overall are split on whether PVTA service is good enough to rely on for all their trips, although PVTA riders tend to have more positive views. Transit riders in both surveys would like to see service improvements, including more frequent, reliable buses and shorter trip times, followed by changes to bus routes to service different locations. Extending fare-free buses on the PVTA is popular among clients and residents alike, although more Way Finders clients say they would be likely to use the PVTA if it were free to ride. Focus group participants liked that free fares would speed up bus service by eliminating time-consuming onboard fare collection, helping lower-income residents get around more quickly. (Since November 1, 2024, the PVTA has been free to ride. This research was conducted prior to that date.)

**Figure ES-5: Strong support for free PVTA service**

% who say they \_\_\_\_ making PVTA free to ride

■ Strongly support ■ Somewhat support ■ Somewhat oppose ■ Strongly oppose ■ DK / Ref

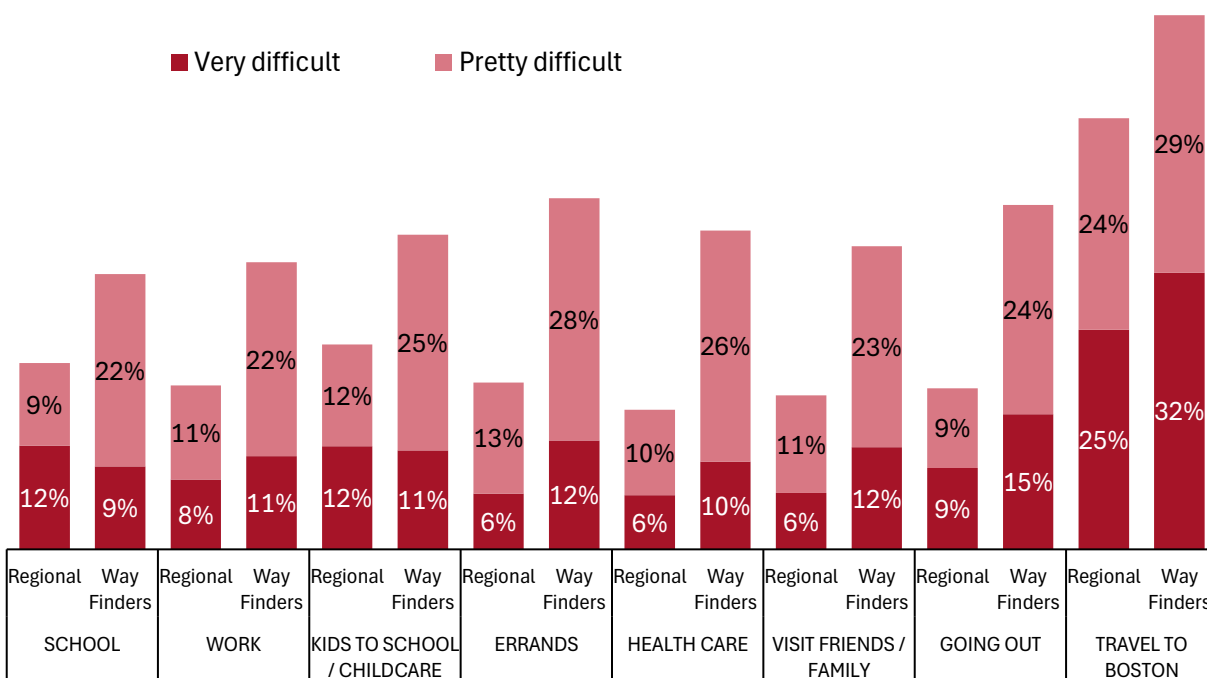


*Q: In some other parts of the state, public buses are free to ride. The PVTA buses and paratransit have been free to ride at certain times of the year as well. How much would you support or oppose making the PVTA buses and paratransit service free to ride all year round?*

**Getting to Boston is a major challenge; there is latent demand for West-East Rail.** While most clients and residents report making most common trips without much difficulty, getting to Boston stands out as a real challenge. Many in the focus groups spoke of needing to get to Boston for medical appointments, highlighting a health care access challenge. A majority in both surveys say they would likely ride West-East Rail when it starts running, although some focus group participants expressed skepticism that the project would happen and were worried about the cost of a ticket.

**Figure ES-6: Way Finders report more difficulty making various types of trips**

*% of Way Finders clients who say it is \_\_\_\_\_ to make each kind of trip, excluding those who said “do not make this trip”*

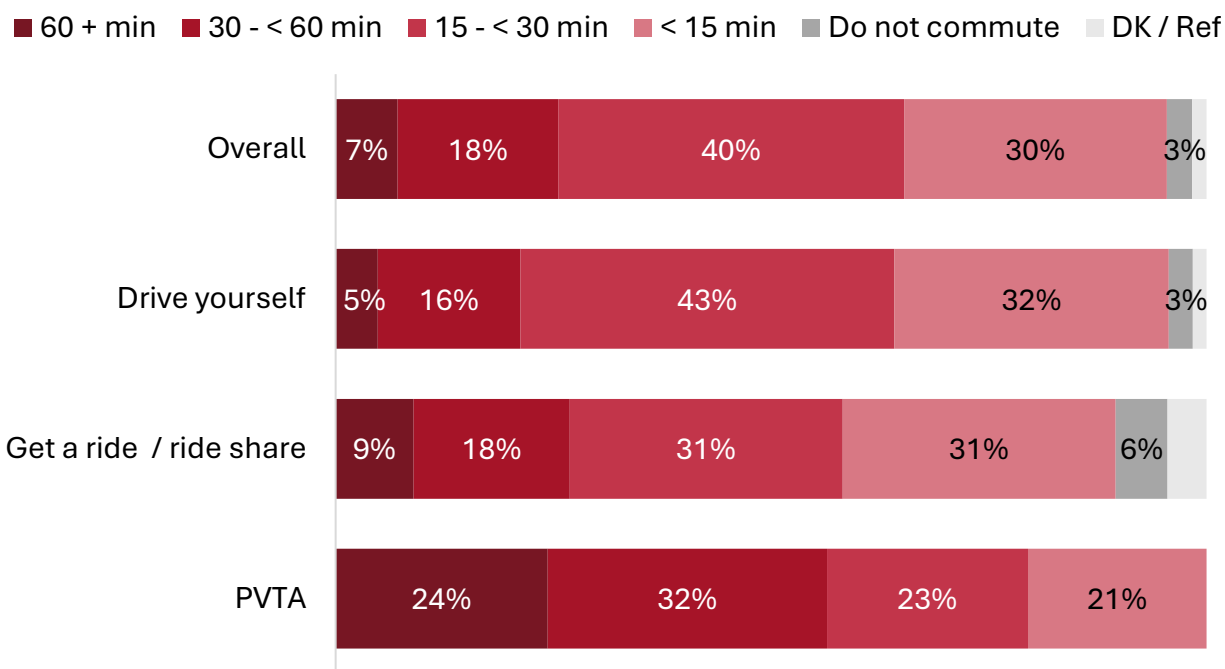


*Q: How easy or difficult is it for you to make each of the following types of trips?*

**Work patterns are not equitably distributed; more early-morning transit service could help those working early or late shifts.** A roughly equal percentage of Way Finders clients and lower-income residents are working either full or part-time. Among these, there are clear divides in both surveys by education and income as to who can work from home, who works a 9-to-5 schedule, and who works second and third shifts. While most workers report reasonable commute lengths, Way Finders clients who rely on the PVTA are much more likely to have longer commutes. PVTA riders are also more likely to report working early, late, and overnight shifts. This suggests that expanding service at these times could help them get to work.

**Figure ES-7: Way Finders clients have longer commutes by PVTA than other modes**

*Commute times among Way Finders clients who work full or part time*



Q: On a typical day when you have to commute to work, how long does it take you to get to work?

# Introduction

Conversations about transportation in Massachusetts are often focused on Eastern Massachusetts. Whether it's traffic jams getting in and out of Boston, the physical and fiscal challenges facing the MBTA, or the looming legacy of the Big Dig, there is much to focus on back east. But each region of the Commonwealth has its own transportation challenges. And different as those regions may be, a difficult universal truth is that residents at the lower end of the economic scale feel the challenges for getting around more acutely.

The People and Transportation project, funded by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, set out to document the challenges facing lower-income residents in a part of the state that sometimes does not get as much attention. Starting in the spring of 2024 and running through the fall, The MassINC Polling Group and Way Finders, a nonprofit community development corporation headquartered in Springfield, collaborated on a multi-faceted research program to understand the transportation challenges facing lower-income residents in Western Massachusetts: residents of Hampden and Hampshire counties in general, and Way Finders clients in particular.

The project comprised eight focus groups (four conducted before the surveys and four after), a survey of over 1,600 Way Finders clients, and a survey of 601 other residents of the two counties with household incomes of less than \$75,000. The [Methods](#) section of this report goes into detail about how the focus groups and surveys were designed, recruited, and conducted. Way Finders staff were actively involved at every stage of the research: brainstorming focus group and survey questions, moderating groups, helping to test and distribute the survey, and analyzing the results. The full results of this research, including a focus group memo and summaries and the topline results of the two surveys, are attached as appendices to this report.

The results of this research, as detailed below, show that transportation creates a significant financial burden on a group of residents facing other severe financial challenges. Way Finders provides many services, but chief among them is housing support, including shelter services, affordable housing, and rental assistance. At a time when the cost of living, including housing costs, is a top concern for residents and policy makers alike, this research details how the cost of getting around makes matters worse for those who can least afford it.

# Findings in Detail

## Demographics and Travel Modes

### *Way Finders clients are younger, more diverse, and have lower incomes*

The two surveys conducted as part of this project found some common concerns, but also areas where the two populations diverged. These differences are in part due to the demographic differences between the residents who responded to the regional survey and the clients who responded to the Way Finders survey (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> Keeping these differences in mind will provide helpful context when interpreting differences on the substantive questions in the survey.

Residents in the regional survey range from those who are struggling to those who are getting by. Half of regional residents (50%) report household incomes of \$35,000 or more. About half are working full or part-time, and about a third (33%) are retired. Retirement is the biggest reason for not working, while medical conditions keep 16% out of the labor force. (Respondents were allowed to select multiple options, so there is some overlap between retirees and those with medical conditions.) The high proportion of retirees also means the regional population tends to be older. Overall, the regional low-income population is therefore split between largely white retirees and a multiracial working class, many of whom have children or older parents at home.

The demographics of Way Finders clients reveal a picture that is different in kind, not just degree. The racial breakdown among Way Finders clients moves from majority-white to plurality-Latino. Even more striking is the gender split of the Way Finders sample, which is 80% women. This is consistent with the gender split among Way Finders clients as a whole. Way Finders clients also report lower incomes: only 23% make \$35,000 or more, and 33% make less than \$15,000. A majority (56%) of clients have children in their households, twice as many as in the regional survey (28%).

Related to these differences, Way Finders clients are more likely to report care responsibilities at home. They are also more likely to report a medical condition in their household that makes it hard to get around (48% versus 34% in the regional survey) or that prevents them from working (24% versus 16%). While about the same proportion report having full or part-time work in both samples, the sharp differences in the proportion of retirees suggests a higher rate of working-age

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<sup>1</sup> The regional survey was weighted to population parameters for residents making less than \$75,000 in household income in Hampden and Hampshire counties. The Way Finders data was not weighted, but comparisons to known demographics for Way Finders clients suggests results are close to the sample population.

unemployment among Way Finders clients. The differences in age and retirement also shed light on educational levels: Way Finders clients are more likely to have some college education (and to currently be students), while regional residents are more likely either to have a BA or to have a high school diploma or less.

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***The level of detail afforded by the Way Finders survey – over 1,600 responses, over 800 from Springfield alone – gives an unprecedented look at the real-life concerns of some of the Commonwealth’s most vulnerable residents.***

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In summary, Way Finders clients are younger and more racially diverse than lower-income residents region-wide. They have slightly lower levels of educational attainment and much lower household income. A majority (56%) have children in their households. Just about half (51%) are working, in line with the regional figures, while balancing dependent care, medical conditions, and going to school. All these factors suggest that Way Finders clients are uniquely burdened, even when compared to other lower-income residents of the region.

That translates into some significant differences in the responses to the substantive questions in the survey. These gaps are somewhat smaller when comparing the Way Finders clients to respondents in the regional survey that are closer to them demographically. Regional lower-income residents who are non-white, younger, and with lower levels of education and income tend to report more challenges with affordability and mobility. These challenges do not rise to the same level as among Way Finders clients, but they suggest a continuity between the two surveys.

One way to think of the relationship between the two surveys is as a map with an inlay zooming in on one part of a larger terrain to provide more detail. The regional survey is the overview map of the needs of lower-income residents in Hampden and Hampshire counties. The Way Finders survey zooms in on an even more burdened subset of that population. The focus groups go into even further detail, asking a subset of Way Finders clients to explain their transportation challenges in their own words.

The level of detail afforded by the Way Finders survey – over 1,600 responses, over 800 from Springfield alone – gives an unprecedented look at the real-life concerns of some of the Commonwealth’s most vulnerable residents. This is a population that would be a subgroup even in a survey of low-income residents. The sample size of the Way Finders survey allows for a uniquely detailed analysis of the needs and challenges of some of the state’s lowest-income residents.



**Figure 1: Differences in Survey Demographics**

*Demographics of respondents to each survey*

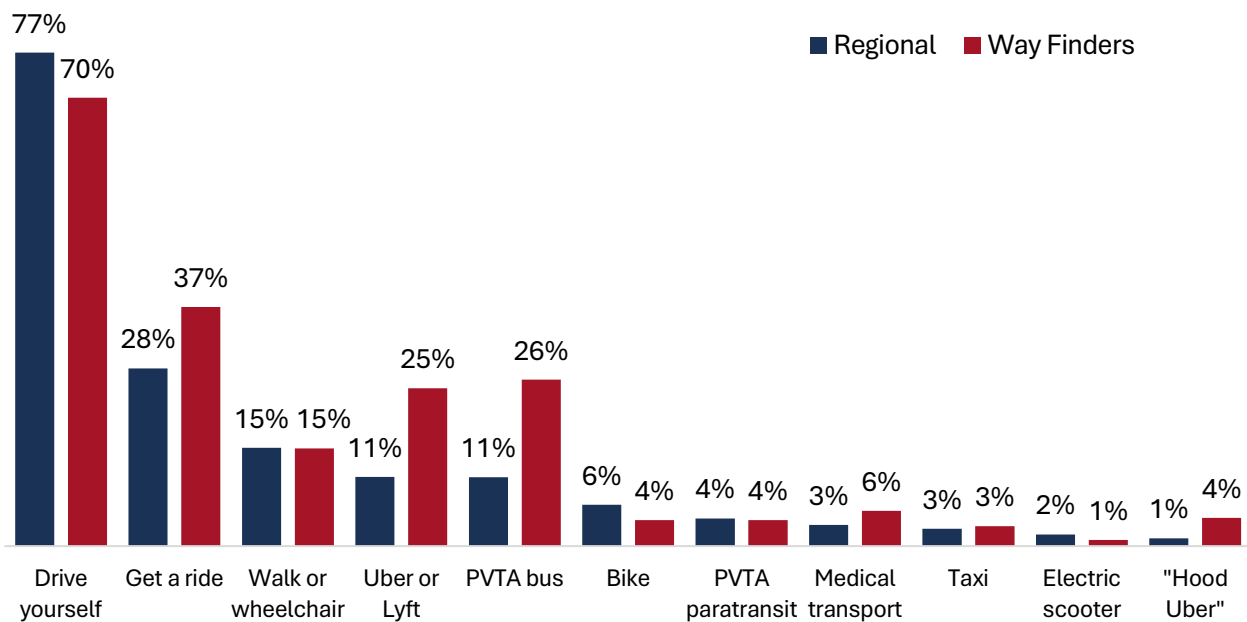
		<b>Regional (weighted)*</b>	<b>Way Finders (unweighted)*</b>
AGE	18-29	7%	14%
	30-44	26%	47%
	45-59	17%	26%
	60-74	27%	11%
	75+	20%	1%
	DK / Ref	3%	<1%
GENDER	Man	47%	17%
	Woman	51%	80%
	Non-binary	1%	1%
	Some other way	<1%	<1%
	DK / Ref	1%	2%
RACE	White	61%	24%
	Black	8%	18%
	Latino	25%	47%
	AAPL	<1%	1%
	Other	3%	3%
	DK / Ref	2%	7%
EDUCATION	<HS	13%	14%
	HS grad	37%	30%
	Some college	18%	25%
	Associate	10%	10%
	BA+	22%	15%
	DK / Ref	<1%	7%
INCOME	< \$15k	19%	33%
	\$15k - < \$35k	30%	36%
	\$35k +	50%	23%
	DK / Ref	0%	8%
CHILDREN IN HH?	Yes	28%	56%
REGION	Springfield	31%	54%
	Holyoke	8%	11%
	Other Hampden	40%	23%
	Hampshire	22%	12%
MEDICAL CONDITION IN HH-DIFFICULT TO GET AROUND	Yes	34%	48%
EMPLOYMENT	Work a full-time job	38%	34%
	Work one or more part-time jobs	13%	17%
	Go to school	4%	11%
	Take care of children or other dependents	7%	24%
	Retired	33%	7%
	Unable to work due to a medical condition	16%	24%
	Not working for other reasons	4%	12%
	None of the above	3%	4%
	DK / Ref	1%	5%

\* Regional survey results are shown weighted to the known demographic parameters while Way Finders data is not weighted as specific demographics are not known.

## ***Travel by car is dominant for Way Finders clients and lower-income residents generally***

Despite these demographic differences, there is one factor that unites most lower-income residents and Way Finders clients: the automobile. Driving is far and away the most common way that respondents get around in both surveys (Figure 2). Three-quarters of regional residents (77%) and slightly fewer Way Finders clients (70%) drive themselves. Driving is also the top primary mode of transportation for both groups (74% regional, 62% Way Finders). The next most common primary mode is also car-based: getting a ride from friends, family, or neighbors (28% regional, 37% Way Finders). Driving oneself is five times more common than walking, the most used non-vehicular mode of travel. Some of this is driven by the car-dependent environment of the Western Massachusetts region, which is rural outside of the major cities and spread out with significant distances between many destinations and communities.

**Figure 2: Driving is dominant, but Way Finders are more likely to also use other modes**  
% who say they have used \_\_\_\_\_ mode of transportation to get around over the past year



Q: To start, over the past year, which of the following types of transportation have you used to get around? **Select all that apply.**

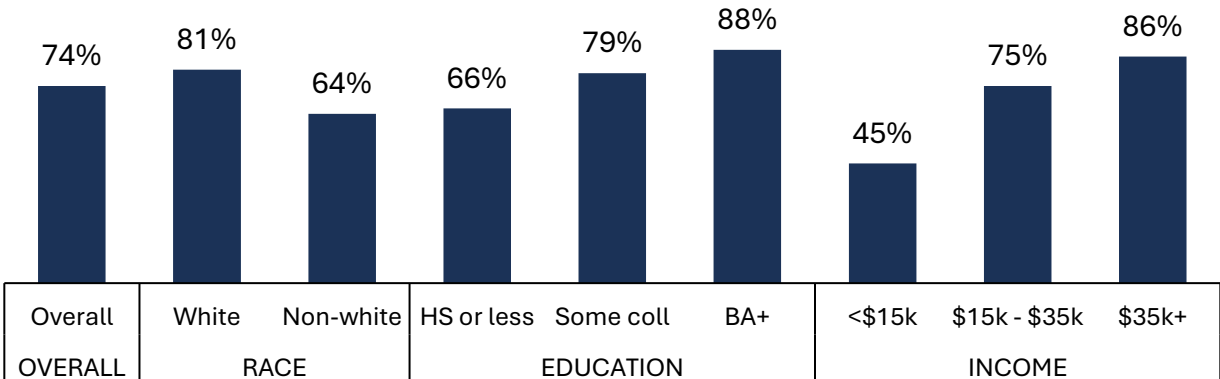
Among all lower-income residents, there are clear disparities in driving by race and socioeconomic status (Figure 3). Among white residents, 81% list driving themselves as their primary mode, compared to 64% of non-white residents. There is also a clear increase in driving as education and income level increase: 66% of those with a high school diploma or less education drive as their primary mode, compared to 79% among those with some college education and 88% among those with a Bachelor’s or advanced degree. The divide by income is even more stark. Only 45% of residents making less than \$15,000 drive themselves as their primary mode, compared to 86% of those making \$35,000 or more.

*Despite these demographic differences, there is one factor that unites most lower-income residents and Way Finders clients: the automobile.*

All these differences suggest that lower-income residents that are closer to Way Finders clients, demographically, have travel behaviors that more closely match up with those seen in the Way Finders survey. Among all income levels, most report driving. But affordability challenges play a role in restricting auto access for the lowest income residents.

**Figure 3: Driving varies by race and socioeconomics**

% of lower-income regional residents overall and by subgroup who drive as their primary mode of travel



Q: And which of these would you say is the main way you get around?

### ***Access to a car is common, but more precarious, for Way Finders clients***

Consistent with the dominance of driving as a mode, access to a personal vehicle is widespread in both populations. In the regional survey, it is nearly universal: 84% of regional lower-income residents own or lease at least one car. Half of those (42% of the total) own multiple cars. Access is not quite a given in the Way Finders survey, but still common, as 66% of Way Finders clients report owning or leasing a car. The bulk of these, however, have only a single car. Only 13% of Way Finders clients own or lease multiple cars.

This is especially notable given that Way Finders clients also report larger household sizes than other lower-income residents in the region. That means that among Way Finders households, more people are relying on fewer cars. Among Way Finders respondents, 56% report children in the household, compared to 28% in the regional survey. During focus groups, participants described an added layer of transportation complexity when children are present.

Way Finders clients are also less likely to have access to someone else's car if needed (Figure 4). Only 27% of clients who do not own or lease a car say they could borrow a vehicle from a friend, family, or neighbor if needed. That is much lower than the 49% among non-car owners regionally. And only 19% of Way Finders clients who do have a car say that, if their car needed a major repair, they could afford to fix it right away. Again, that's far lower than the 60% figure for regional lower-income car owners.

These three findings – that most Way Finders clients own a single car, do not have the ability to borrow another, and largely could not afford a major car repair – illustrate just how precarious clients' mobility is. If a client's single car breaks down, they often find themselves and other members of their household without access to another vehicle for an extended period of time.

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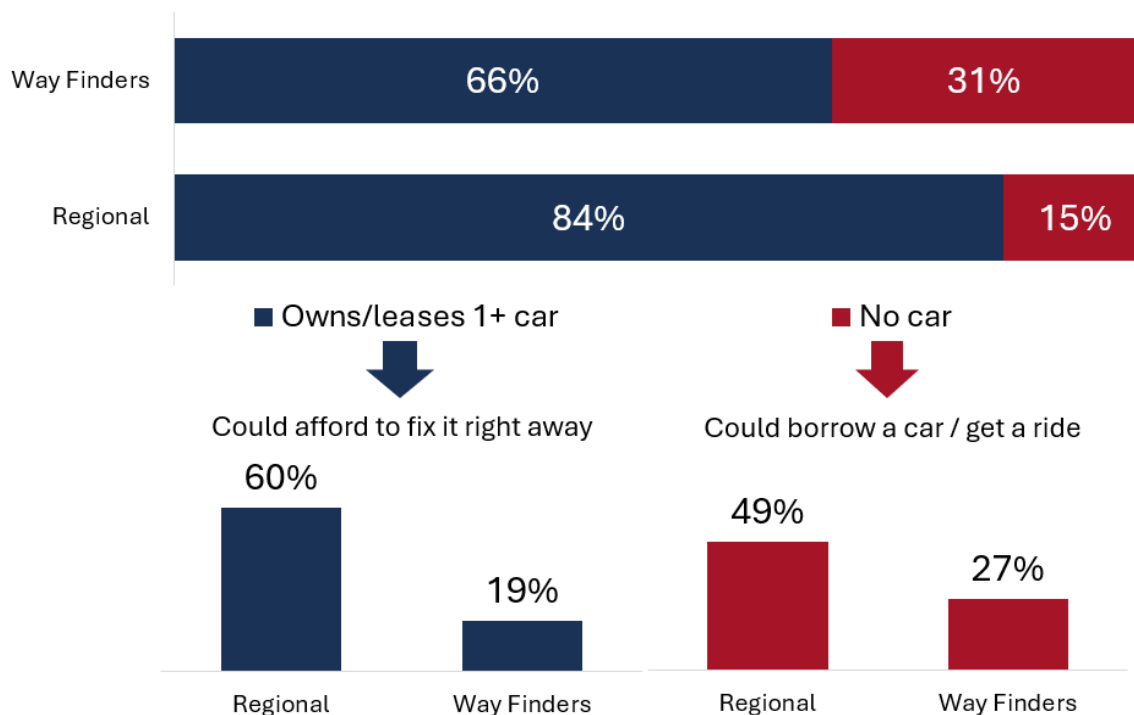
***“For me, what it has done is put a significant dent in my ability to create wealth for me and my children. Because every time I think I have savings I have to turn around and spend it on fixing the car.”***

***- Focus Group Participant***

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**Figure 4: Way Finders clients are less likely to access cars, afford repairs**

*% who own a car, could afford to fix it right away, who don't own a car, could borrow one/ get a ride*



*Q: How many cars does your household own or lease?*

*Asked if owns/leases car: If your car needed a major repair (flat tire, body work, engine repair) could you afford to fix it right away?*

*Asked if not: Could you borrow a car or get a ride if you needed to get somewhere by car?*

This situation came up several times during the focus groups conducted with Way Finders clients before and after the surveys. As one participant put it: “You never know when the unknown’s coming, and car needs a tire, you get a flat or you need this. And how many of us really have money to just be like, okay, well, if my engine broke right now, I have \$600 or \$1,000 to fix that? And then you’re left without a car.”

For another participant, car repairs were preventing them from saving to improve their economic situation: “For me, what it has done is put a significant dent in my ability to create wealth for me and my children. Because every time I think I have savings I have to turn around and spend it on fixing the car.”

These challenges are also more prevalent among non-white and lower-income residents in the regional survey, but to a lesser degree than in the Way Finders survey. Among non-white residents, 20% report not owning or leasing a car, compared to just 11% among white residents. And 38% of those making less than \$15,000 do not own or lease a car. Only 42% of non-white residents say they could afford a major car repair, compared to 70% among white residents.

### *Transit, rideshare rise in importance among those who lack a vehicle*

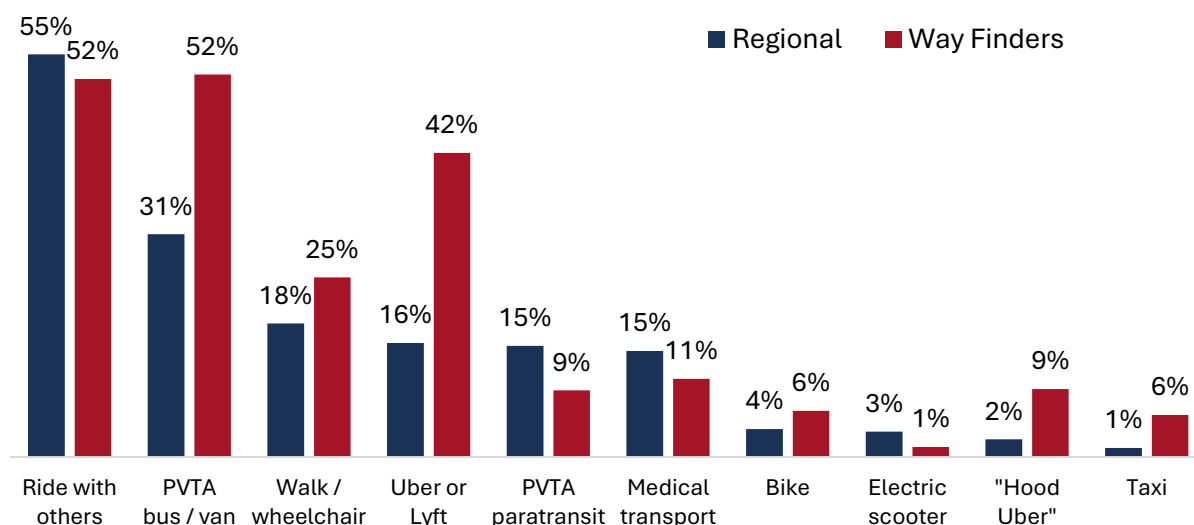
While driving is Way Finders clients' most common mode of travel, it is not quite as universal as it is among other lower-income residents in the region. And since most Way Finders households report access to a single car at most, that car may be shared among multiple adults or older children. This may explain why Way Finders clients are more likely to rely on other means of transportation. These include getting a ride from someone else (37% versus 28% regionally), taking an Uber or Lyft (25% versus 11%), and taking the PVTA (26% versus 11%).

As with driving, there are divides in the regional survey that mimic, to a lesser degree, some of the patterns in the Way Finders survey. Regional residents making less than \$15,000 are more likely to get rides from others (39% versus 28% overall) and to take the PVTA (19% versus 11% overall).

These other modes are much more important and prevalent to those who do not have access to a car (Figure 5). In both surveys, a majority of those who do not own or lease a vehicle report getting rides from others (52% regional, 55% Way Finders). An equal 52% of Way Finders clients without a car use the PVTA, and 42% use Uber or Lyft. These figures are both much higher than among regional lower-income residents who lack a car (31%, 16%). Among Way Finders clients who do not have a car, 25% say they walk for transportation, 10 points higher than the overall figure in that survey.

**Figure 5: PVTA, rideshare use rises among those without access to a car**

*% who do not own / lease a car who use each mode of travel*



Q: To start, over the past year, which of the following types of transportation have you used to get around? **Select all that apply.**

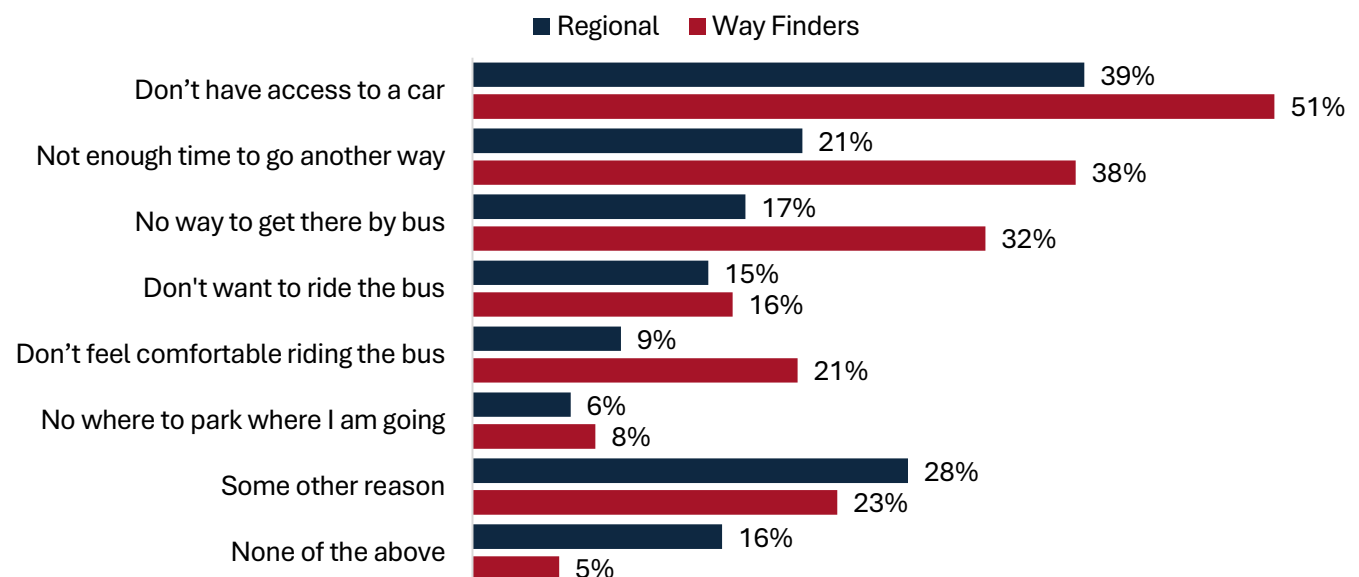
## *Ride-hailing is filling gaps in driving, transit – for those who can afford it*

The use of ride-hailing apps is very much connected to the lack of other modes. The top reason given for using ride-hailing is lack of access to a car (Figure 6). About half (51%) of Way Finders clients and 39% of lower-income residents cite that as a reason for using those services. Way Finders clients also say they use these alternatives when they do not have enough time to go another way (38%) and when there is no way to get there via bus (32%). Clients who use the PVTa are more likely than drivers to cite a lack of time or bus routes as a reason to use ride-hailing. This suggests that there are some bus riders who are using more expensive options for some of their trips. Time appears to be a key factor in these decisions. Multiple focus group participants noted that trips that would take minutes by car took far longer by bus. One participant in a Spanish-language group said a 15-minute car trip would take him 2 hours by bus.

If time is driving some to ride-hailing, cost is the main deterrent. Nearly half (47%) of non-users in the Way Finders survey and 15% in the regional survey say they avoid Uber and Lyft because they cost too much. Concerns about cost are elevated among the lowest-income bracket in the regional survey (20% among those making \$15,000 or less), but nowhere near the level of the Way Finders survey.

**Figure 6: Ride-hailing use driven by a lack of access to a vehicle, transit**

% who say they use Uber, Lyft, taxi, or “Hood Uber” because \_\_\_\_\_



Q: You mentioned that you have ridden in an Uber, Lyft, taxi, or a “Hood Uber” in the past year. Which of the following are reasons why you use these to get around? **Select all that apply.**



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***“I've tried to get an Uber or a Lyft from Easthampton, and you could be sitting waiting for 45 minutes, an hour before you even have anyone that might be able to come pick you up. So that's not an option.”***

***- Focus Group Participant***

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In the focus groups, discussions of the cost of these services centered mostly on the variability of the price. Several participants mentioned being charged a much higher rate for a return trip at a busier time of day. They seemed willing to use these services but frustrated that a trip could cost them three or four times more depending on when they took it. Participants who lived in Hampshire County also complained that there are far fewer Uber and Lyft rides available in their part of the region: “I've tried to get an Uber or a Lyft from Easthampton, and you could be sitting waiting for 45 minutes, an hour before you even have anyone that might be able to come pick you up. So that's not an option.”

### ***“Hood Uber” emerges as a low cost but risky option***

Participants in the pre-survey focus group introduced us to a Facebook group called “413 Hood Uber,” which currently has 13,000 members. Members of the group can request a ride and work out an arrangement with other members willing to provide the trip. This is not a widespread option: 4% of Way Finders clients say they use this option in the survey, about as many ride a bike or use the PVTa paratransit service. In the regional survey, only 1% of lower-income residents report using this transportation option. Among Way Finders clients who do not own or lease a car, 9% say they have called a “Hood Uber.”

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***“If you do find an Uber on Facebook, they'll be cheaper than a regular Uber, but that comes with the safety thing. Not everybody is just trying to get you from point A to B.”***

***- Focus Group Participant***

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One woman in a pre-survey focus group summed up her harrowing experience with Hood Ubers:

*“If you do find an Uber on Facebook, they'll be cheaper than a regular Uber, but that comes with the safety thing. Not everybody is just trying to get you from point A to B. A lot of young people, they try to get with you or try to flirt with you. It's not like Uber where people have to go through a background check. It's just like strangers. So, I did it a couple times, but I wouldn't recommend it, especially being a girl, just because people are so creepy these days. And then when you do reject them it's like, ‘Oh, well, now your ride is 30 more dollars.’ You can't really say no because you're in their car. So yeah, I wouldn't really suggest Facebook.”*

Despite these dangers, the fact that this option exists in the region suggests an unmet demand for transportation that is more convenient than PVTa service but cheaper than ride-hailing services.

### ***PVTa ridership is highest among Way Finders clients***

The Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTa) is the largest of the Commonwealth's 15 Regional Transit Authorities, serving 24 communities and 580,000 residents. According to the 2023 National Transit Database, the PVTa carried over 7 million unlinked passenger trips, mostly via its 48 fixed bus routes.

PVTa ridership is more common among Way Finders clients than among other lower-income residents in the region. A quarter (26%) of Way Finders clients use the PVTa bus system, and 12% consider the PVTa bus their primary way of getting around. Both of these figures are more than double the percentages among regional lower-income residents (11%, 5%). The PVTa is particularly crucial to the 31% of Way Finders clients who do not have access to their own car. About half (52%) of these clients use the PVTa bus, and 9% use PVTa paratransit; 37% name the PVTa (bus or paratransit) as their primary mode of transportation. Similarly, among Way Finders clients who lack a driver's license, 54% ride the PVTa bus and 38% consider it their primary mode. Another factor is geography. Way Finders clients are concentrated in urban areas with PVTa service, with 54% living in Springfield. Perhaps related to this, Way Finders clients are slightly more likely to say they live near a PVTa stop than respondents to the regional survey (61% versus 52%).

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***“I have a regular doctor's appointment that I have to go down to Springfield for, and in my car I can get there in about 20 minutes. Taking the bus, it takes me like an hour and 10 minutes.”***

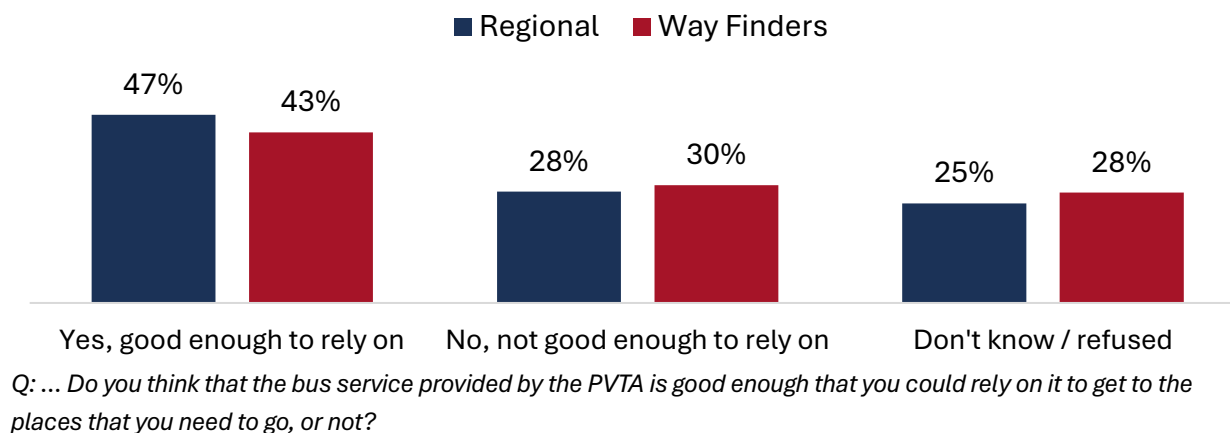
***- Focus Group Participant***

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Overall, Way Finders clients and lower-income residents in the region are somewhat split in their views of the PVTa (Figure 7). Pluralities in each sample say they think the PVTa is good enough to rely on for their trips. The rest are split about evenly between thinking that the service is not good enough or being unsure.

**Figure 7: Mixed views of the reliability of the PVTa**

% who say they think the PVTa is or is not good enough to rely on



PVTa riders have more positive views of the system. Three-quarters (74%) of PVTa riders in the regional lower-income survey think the service is good enough to rely on. So do a majority of Way Finders clients who ride the bus (54%), as well as 58% of those who name the PVTa as their primary mode. These higher numbers are driven in part by a lower share of these riders who are unsure (15%), given their direct experience with the system. But 31% of Way Finders bus riders think the service is *not* good enough for them to rely on for all their travel. This suggests they are having to supplement the PVTa with other modes for certain trips, or they are foregoing trips they would make otherwise because they cannot get there. Indeed, PVTa riders in both surveys are more likely to report difficulty making every type of trip included in the survey, as well as impacts like being late, missing appointments, and being stranded.

For focus group participants, the difference in travel time was a major factor, especially for time-sensitive appointments. One participant explained their thought process:

*"I have a regular doctor's appointment that I have to go down to Springfield for, and in my car I can get there in about 20 minutes. Taking the bus, it takes me like an hour and 10 minutes. It's a completely different experience, because it's taking the bus there and then walking. I have to switch buses, so sometimes it's just easier to walk, because then I don't have to wait as long to change the bus at Union Station."*

## ***PVTA riders want faster, more frequent service***

When asked an open-ended question as to what improvements to the PVTA service they would like to see, riders in both surveys focus on time: travel time, but also when and how often buses come (Figure 8). Riders want the buses to come more often and get them where they want to go more quickly. “They can run earlier on Sundays and later every day,” writes one Way Finders client. A regional resident suggests “earlier runs and more frequent runs.”

**Figure 8: PVTA riders want faster and more frequent service**

*% of riders who say \_\_\_\_\_ would make the PVTA work better for them*

	<b>Regional</b>	<b>Way Finders</b>
Reliability / Punctuality / Speed / Frequency	40%	47%
No Changes Necessary / Already Ride or Rode It a Lot	22%	15%
Location of Bus Stops / Routes	16%	25%
Driver Behavior / Customer Service / Lack of Information About Bus Routes	12%	13%
PVTA Conditions (Accessibility, Cleanliness, Crowds, Comfort, Infrastructure)	4%	11%
Cost of Transportation	4%	7%
Other	0%	4%
Unsure / Nothing / Not Applicable	17%	5%

*Q: You mentioned you ride a service provided by the PVTA. In a few words, what changes, if any, would make PVTA service work better for you?*

Another Way Finders client linked frequency to reliability: “If they had more consistent buses coming, like the buses that come every twenty minutes, so there isn’t such a big gap of time.” Compounding the inconvenience of waiting for a long time between buses is the prospect of waiting that long in bad weather and without shelter. One respondent who says, “I believe that more buses should be provided for every route at least every 15 minutes,” adds that “another issue is the lack of bus stop protection from the cold weather. I feel that bus stops should be updated and have some type of cover and heating during winter time.”

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***“I believe that more buses should be provided for every route at least every 15 minutes.”***

***– Focus Group Participant***

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A quarter (25%) of Way Finders riders want more convenient bus stops or routes—higher than 16% in the regional survey, despite more Way Finders clients living near stops. As with the respondents who specify that they would benefit from earlier or later service, they have specific trips in mind when asking for route changes. One Way Finders client wants “service that gets me to transfer hub and more bus service to the food coop and medical offices.”

### ***Non-riders offer fewer improvements, favor changes to stops and routes***

The survey also asked non-riders what changes would get them to consider the PVTa (Figure 9). While this open-ended question was designed to solicit practical changes to PVTa service, many responded with changes in their personal situation. A third (35%) of regional residents and 22% of Way Finders clients respond that they either have no need to ride the bus, or that they would only ride if they didn’t have access to a car or other mode of transportation.

**Figure 9: Non-PVTa riders offer fewer concrete improvements**

*% non-riders who say \_\_\_\_\_ would make them consider riding the PVTa*

	<b>Regional</b>	<b>Way Finders</b>
If No Car / No Other Choice or Mode of Transportation / No Need to Use	35%	22%
Location of Bus Stops / Routes	17%	17%
Reliability / Punctuality / Speed / Frequency	11%	13%
PVTa Conditions (Accessibility, Cleanliness, Crowds, Comfort, Infrastructure)	4%	9%
Physical Condition / Disability	4%	6%
Cost of Transportation	3%	5%
Safety	2%	3%
Lack of Information About Bus Routes / How to Use	1%	2%
Other	8%	7%
Unsure / Nothing / Not Applicable	25%	25%

*Q: You mentioned that you do not ride any services provided by the PVTa. In a few words, what changes, if any, would make you consider riding the PVTa?*

One Way Finders client, who sums up the changes that could get them to ride as “none,” elaborates that “I like my own personal vehicle, or at least a familiar one.” A regional resident who expresses more flexibility sees the PVRTA as an option “if I couldn’t drive,” instead of relying on others for rides. “Using that service would allow me that independence, not having to always call somebody for help.”

While these responses do not provide practical feedback for improving service, they nonetheless shed important light on how non-riders view the bus compared to other modes. A quarter of non-riders in both surveys offer no changes that would make them likely to ride. These responses highlight the steep challenge of converting non-riders to riders. This is by no means a challenge unique to the PVRTA. Many transit agencies have to grapple with attracting new riders to bus service in general. What is encouraging here is that respondents with direct experience with the PVRTA tend to have more positive views of it.

In terms of substantive improvements to the service, 17% of non-riders in both surveys say that changes to bus stops or routes might make them more likely to ride. “If there was a bus stop around my house I would take [it] every day,” says one regional respondent who lives in Longmeadow, a well-off suburb that borders Springfield and does have PVRTA bus service. Another, who lives in Southwick on the Connecticut border, says they would benefit from “expanding [the] coverage area” because there are “no bus stops in my town at all.” The PVRTA recently started fixed route and microtransit service in Southwick, but it is possible that this respondent was unaware of it at the time.

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***“If there was a bus stop around my house I would take [it] every day.”***

***– Survey Response***

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Changing stops and routes is followed by improvements in bus reliability, punctuality, speed, and frequency (11% regionally, 13% among Way Finders clients). Fewer than 10% mention conditions on board PVRTA buses or at stops, including cleanliness, safety, large crowds, and lighting or shelters at bus stops. On this front, 9% of Way Finders non-riders say they would consider riding if conditions improved, compared to 4% in the regional survey. This concern is much more common among Springfield, Holyoke, and Chicopee residents in both groups.

Safety is cited as a concern among only 2% of non-riders in the regional survey and 3% among Way Finders clients, but it came up with some frequency in the focus groups. One response highlights a number of recurring themes from these discussions:

*“I don't feel safe when I take the public bus. Like, I won't take it with my son. I'll find another means of transportation. By myself, when I used to go to Westfield, I would take the bus, but I would sit all the way in the back and like hide my face. People would just randomly come sit next to you or they'll just try to start a conversation, but not intellectual conversation. It's like a conversation about nonsense or drama, and I don't want to deal with it. And you just don't know what's going to happen, especially after what happened in Holyoke.”*

“What happened in Holyoke” refers to a shooting on a PVRTA bus in which a pregnant rider was shot and lost her unborn baby. This incident was mentioned in several focus groups and has clearly had an impact on perceptions of the safety of PVRTA service. Safety also came up repeatedly in connection with open drug use on buses. So did rude or upsetting behavior such as a “conversation about nonsense,” straddling a line between safety and comfort. This overall feeling of not having safety or control in the crowd made many participants reluctant to bring their children on board. Other parents said that the bus was not an option for their children because of medical or sensory issues, such as autism, that are triggered by the overstimulating environment of public transit.

It is worth noting that, in the time since this research was conducted, the PVRTA has rolled out service improvements with increased state funding. These include increased bus frequencies, expanded service, expanded weekend service, and two new routes. These improvements would not be reflected in these survey or focus group results, but they move service in the direction that respondents want to see.

With any public transit service there will always be a gap between perception and reality. Fixed route transit, by its nature, will never be as convenient or flexible as travel by a personal vehicle. Beyond service improvements, enhanced communications and marketing – by the PVRTA and other stakeholders – could help to lessen the gap between perception and reality to the point where more non-riders decide to give the bus a try.

### ***Reckless drivers are the top obstacle to walking***

Walking, like ride-hailing, is an occasional mode for a substantial minority of both low-income residents and Way Finders clients. In both surveys, 15% report walking as a means of transportation in the past year, but only 1-2% describe walking as their main way of getting around. Among Way Finders clients who don't own or lease a car, 25% are walking places, and 5% say walking is their primary mode. In both surveys, white respondents are more likely to report walking than non-white respondents. Way Finders are more likely to be walking places in Hampshire



County (29%) compared to Springfield (11%), Holyoke (20%), Chicopee (17%), and the rest of Hampden County (15%).

The surveys show the primary obstacles to walking or getting around in a wheelchair are drivers, the condition of sidewalks, and concerns about crime. Respondents to both surveys cite reckless drivers and speeding as their top obstacles – 38% of Way Finders clients and 23% of low-income residents. The Way Finders survey, with its larger sample size, allows for a breakdown by geography within the region (Figure 10). Reckless driving is the top concern across the region, but the order of other challenges varies by geography. In Hampshire County, which is more rural, 35% cite a lack of sidewalks, tying it with reckless driving as their top concern. In Springfield and Holyoke, only 22% cite a lack of sidewalks. In those cities, the second most common obstacle to walking is concern about crime. Crime is an obstacle to walking for 34% in Springfield and 40% in Holyoke. By contrast, just 17% in Hampshire County thought crime kept them from walking. Within Springfield, concern about crime is higher around Forest Park and in the “X” neighborhood (42%). The heightened concern about crime may explain why so few city residents are walking compared to those in the Upper Valley.

**Figure 10: Drivers are the top obstacle to walking; other problems vary by region**

*% of Way Finders clients who have encountered each obstacle when walking or using a wheelchair, overall and by region*

	Overall	Springfield	Holyoke	Chicopee	Other Hampden	Hampshire
Reckless or speeding drivers	38%	40%	42%	36%	31%	35%
None of the above	33%	33%	29%	36%	40%	31%
Sidewalks in poor condition	32%	32%	37%	32%	30%	34%
Concerns about crime	29%	34%	40%	25%	16%	17%
A lack of sidewalks	26%	22%	22%	26%	27%	35%
A lack of street lighting	20%	21%	16%	18%	20%	22%
A lack of crosswalks	19%	17%	18%	18%	20%	24%
A lack of stop signs or traffic lights	11%	12%	13%	9%	10%	10%
A lack of ramps for wheelchairs	10%	10%	11%	11%	9%	8%
Some other reason	6%	4%	6%	5%	5%	13%
Don't know / refused	6%	7%	7%	4%	6%	4%

*Q: Which of the following are challenges or obstacles that you have encountered when walking or getting around in a wheelchair? **Select all that apply.***

## Challenges, Burdens, and Impacts

### *Driving-related concerns dominate list of transportation issues*

Since most Way Finders clients and residents are driving or being driven for most trips, it's not surprising that driving-related concerns rise to the top of respondents' open-ended list of transportation challenges (Figure 11). Traffic congestion is the top issue in both surveys: 18% of comments in the regional survey and 21% of those in the Way Finders survey mention traffic in some way. This is followed by poor road conditions (16%, 18%), another driving-related problem. Those are the only two items that are included in more than 10% of comments in the regional survey. Way Finders clients tend to have more concerns, including construction and road work (16%) and the behavior of other drivers (15%). Similarly, 16% express challenges about transportation options not being available, accessible, or convenient to them, often because of the distance they would have to travel. While some of these comments are likely about public transit, only 8% of comments mention public transportation specifically.

**Figure 11: Traffic, roads top list of transportation challenges in both surveys**

*% who say \_\_\_\_ is the biggest challenge they face when trying to get around their area*

	<b>Regional</b>	<b>Way Finders</b>
Traffic and Congestion	18%	21%
Poor Road Conditions	16%	18%
Accessibility / Availability / Distance / Convenience	9%	16%
Construction and Road Work	7%	16%
Behavior of Other Drivers	8%	15%
Poor Road Design (Lack of Crosswalks, Poor Lighting, Parking etc.)	6%	10%
Public Transportation Issues (Punctuality, Range of Service)	5%	8%
Cost of Transportation (Gas, Fares, etc.)	5%	6%
Health Issues and Physical Limitations	4%	5%
Safety Concerns (Crime, Bad Neighborhoods)	2%	5%
Vehicle-Related Issues (Maintenance, Insurance, Theft)	1%	3%
Other	7%	5%
Unsure / Nothing / Not Applicable	29%	8%

*Q: In a few words, what are the biggest challenges you face when you are trying to get around your area?*

The focus groups provided a sounding board for Way Finders clients to go into detail about their challenges getting around in their own words. Traffic, albeit at certain times of the day, was a frequent concern. So was traffic related to the “Big E,” the annual Eastern States Exposition held in West Springfield, which was taking place during the post-survey groups.

Problems with road conditions, including potholes damaging vehicles, came up in every focus group. Consistent with the survey results, losing a vehicle to damage was a major issue for many participants, and there were issues with a lack of reputable repair shops in the region as well. Road construction to address these problems was largely seen as inefficient and ineffective, snarling traffic and needing to be repeated year after year. Several participants mentioned Springfield’s system for reporting road damage for repair. “I put a couple of tickets about Worthington [Street] having a lot of potholes. Liberty, Armory, and Worthington were areas that I had to tell them about the potholes,” said one post-survey focus group participant. “And they fixed them, but they didn’t fix them correctly. Everything’s bumpy. So, you’re having a roller coaster ride everywhere you go. I don’t like that.”

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***“Why are we repaving and unpaving and repaving and unpaving?”***

***– Focus Group Participant***

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Another participant noted that her town of South Hadley seemed to be doing much better with the roads than neighboring Chicopee:

*“When they got a road to fix, they turn it around quickly. They ain’t leaving no rubble. They don’t leave any nails on the floor. It was done in a hop, skip, and a jump, and I just see the difference. You go right around the corner in Chicopee, they done paved this one road that’s still not done like 2 or 3 times. So, then they’re going to have to pull it up again to fix it again. And I’m like, so why are we repaving and unpaving and repaving and unpaving? And you still got to put the big thing that’s on the side of the road [to go] underneath the ground. I have no idea what they’re doing other than wasting my tax dollars.”*

The widespread perception that road improvements are poorly managed bled over into cynicism about the government’s ability to tackle larger or more ambitious transportation improvements, including West-East rail.

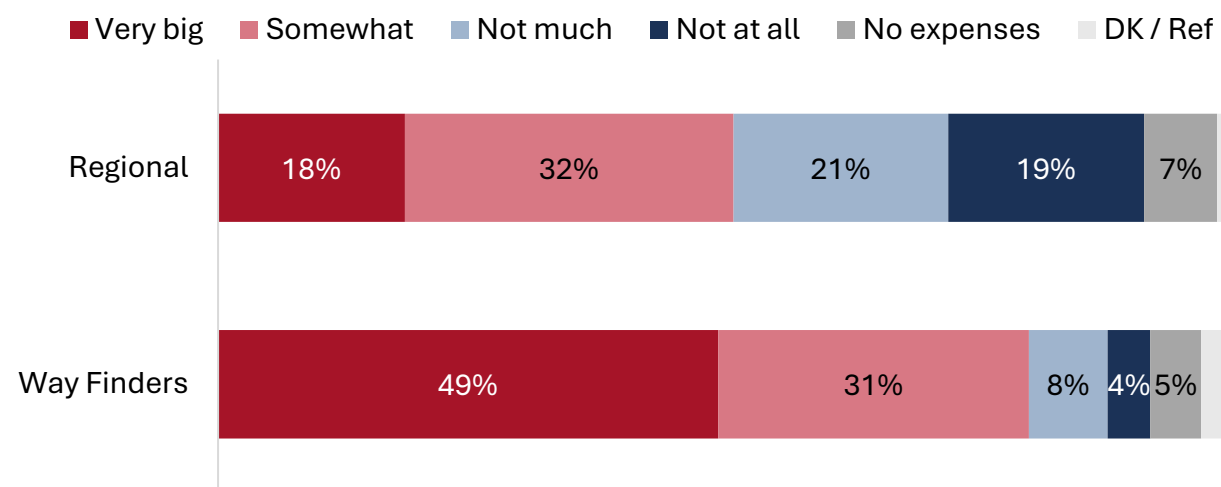
## ***Transportation is taking a financial toll on lower-income residents, and especially Way Finders clients***

As we've seen, different transportation modes present different challenges. For lower-income residents generally and Way Finders clients in particular, the biggest challenge is simply the cost of getting around. Lower-income drivers must deal with the costs of car ownership, including the cost of fixing damage caused by poor road conditions. Cost is also a factor for those without a car who have to pay for Uber or Lyft. While it is perhaps less of a factor for those taking public transit or walking, those modes come with significant tradeoffs in terms of comfort, travel time, reliability, and access to destinations. In short, there is a cost to low-cost travel as well.

Almost all low-income residents in the region face significant transportation burdens, but Way Finders clients are especially burdened, and in a greater variety of ways. Across transportation modes, they face a higher financial burden, greater difficulty making trips, lower access to amenities, and more negative impacts from all these challenges. The most striking finding is the financial burden of transportation, which is very substantial for regional residents and overwhelming for Way Finders clients. Half of regional respondents describe the cost of transportation as “somewhat” or a “very big” burden. But a full 80% of Way Finders clients say transportation expenses are a financial burden, including 49% who say they are a very big burden.

**Figure 12: Transportation is a financial burden, especially for Way Finders clients**

*% who say their transportation expenses are \_\_\_\_\_ of a burden*



*Q: In a typical month would you say that the amount you spend on transportation, including car payments, gas and maintenance, bus fares, Uber, Lyft, and taxis, is...*

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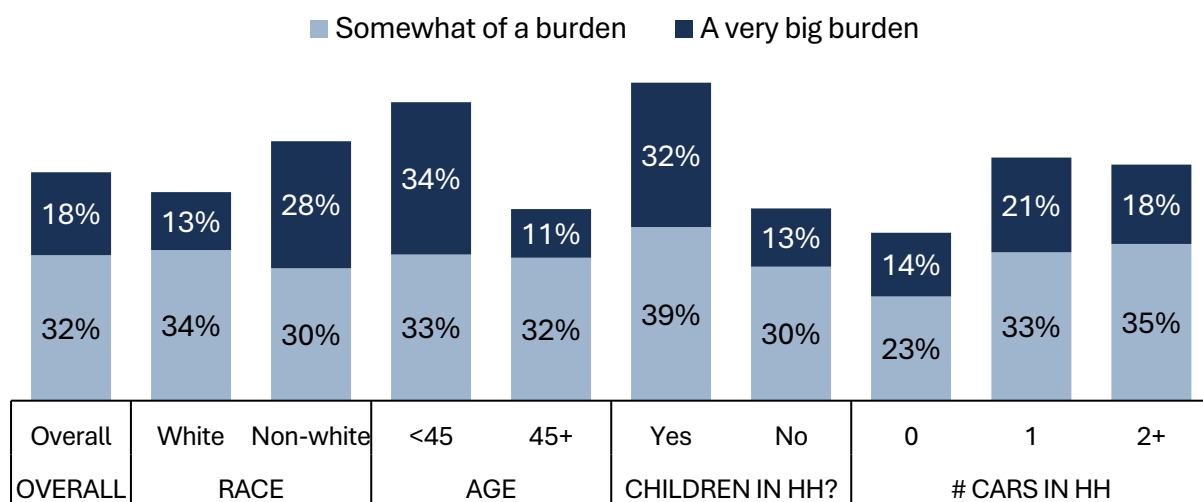
***A full 80% of Way Finders clients say transportation expenses are a financial burden, including 49% who say they are a very big burden.***

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As with other questions in the survey, zooming in on the regional residents who are demographically closer to Way Finders clients reduces the gap in survey response somewhat but not fully. Two-thirds (67%) of residents under age 45 in the regional survey say that transportation expenses are a financial burden, as do 58% of non-white residents. Parents (71%) are also more likely to feel the pinch. There is less of an expected pattern by income, but this may be explained by the fact that residents who own a car are more likely to feel a financial burden than those who don't. Car ownership is a major expense in itself, one that is out of reach for those with the lowest income among these regional residents. Way Finders clients exhibit a similar pattern: 76% of those who don't own or lease a car say their transportation expenses are a burden, compared to 84% of those who own a single vehicle.

**Figure 13: Regional residents who are younger, non-white, and parents are more financially burdened by transportation costs**

*% of regional residents overall and by demographic who say their transportation expenses are \_\_\_\_\_ of a burden*

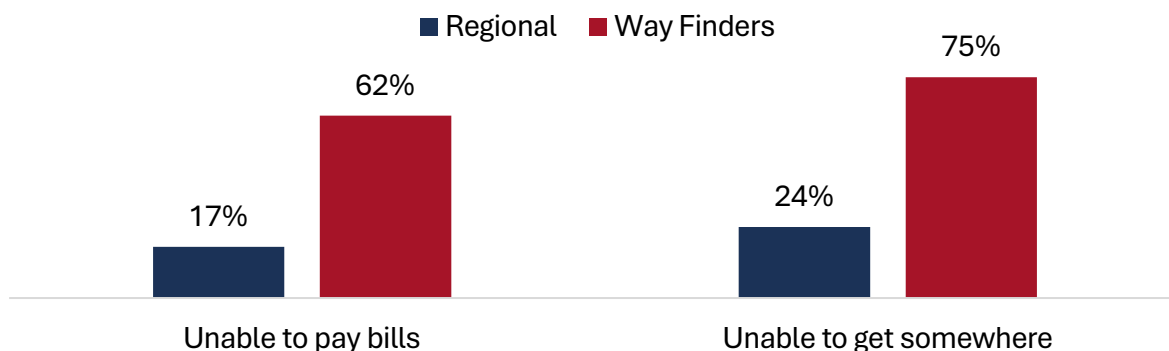


*Q: In a typical month would you say that the amount you spend on transportation, including car payments, gas and maintenance, bus fares, Uber, Lyft, and taxis, is...*

This financial burden has a real impact on Way Finders clients (Figure 14), with 62% reporting they have been unable to pay other bills because of transportation costs in the past year. Additionally, 75% say they have been unable to go somewhere they needed to due to a lack of funds. In each case, they are more than three times as likely to have these experiences than regional respondents, who still face them at concerning rates of 17% and 24%. As with car ownership, Way Finders clients are reporting that they are in a much more precarious position in terms of transportation and their overall finances.

**Figure 14: Way Finders clients have much more trouble paying bills, getting places due to transportation costs**

*% who report each impact*



*Q: At any point in the past year, have you been unable to pay your rent, mortgage, or other bills, or buy food or other necessities, because you had to pay for transportation?*

*Q: At any point in the past year, have you been unable to get somewhere you needed to go due to a lack of funds?*

While these two problems are clearly much more prominent among Way Finders clients, there are groups in the regional survey that are feeling the strain more than others. Non-white residents are much more likely than white residents to report trouble paying bills (28% versus 11%) and not being able to get places due to a lack of funds (38% versus 16%). A similar pattern is seen with residents under age 45 compared to those 45 or older. Again, the regional residents that are demographically closer to Way Finders clients are more likely to experience these difficulties, albeit at a much lower incidence.

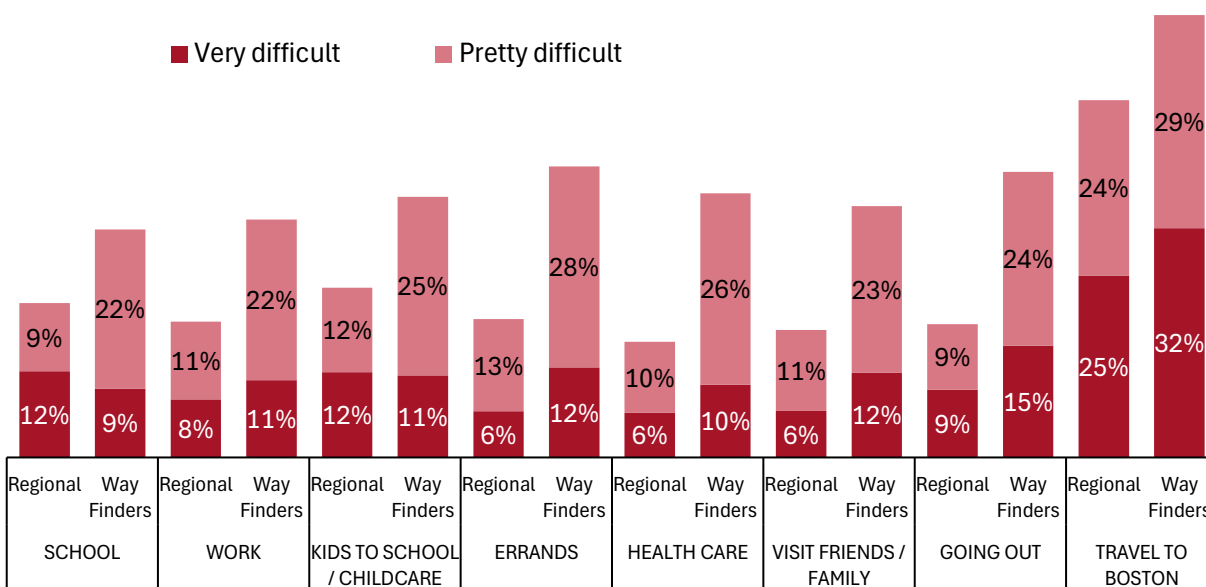
## Way Finders clients report more trouble making most types of trips

While the financial burden of transportation stands out as the biggest problem in the survey, a substantial number of respondents in both surveys report difficulty making various types of trips as well (Figure 15). Consistently, Way Finders clients report more difficulty than regional residents. Excluding those who do not make a certain trip, 30% or more of Way Finders clients report some level of difficulty commuting to school and work, running errands, getting to health care appointments, going out, visiting friends and family, and bringing kids to day care. Among regional respondents, between 16% and 24% report difficulty.

Regional residents who are non-white report more difficulty than white residents making most types of trips, as do residents under age 45 compared to older residents. Meanwhile, those that drive themselves as their main way of getting around report much less difficulty than those who rely on other modes. For example, only 13% of drivers say that shopping or errands are difficult, compared to 42% among those that rely on another mode. The same pattern holds among Way Finders clients: only 27% of drivers report trouble running errands, compared with 54% of those that rely on the PVTa as their main travel mode and 67% of those that rely on others or a ride-hailing service to get around.

**Figure 15: Way Finders clients report more difficulty making various types of trip**

% of Way Finders clients who say it is \_\_\_\_\_ to make each kind of trip, excluding those who said “do not make this trip”



Q: How easy or difficult is it for you to make each of the following types of trips? (Respondents who did make a trip are excluded from these percentages.)



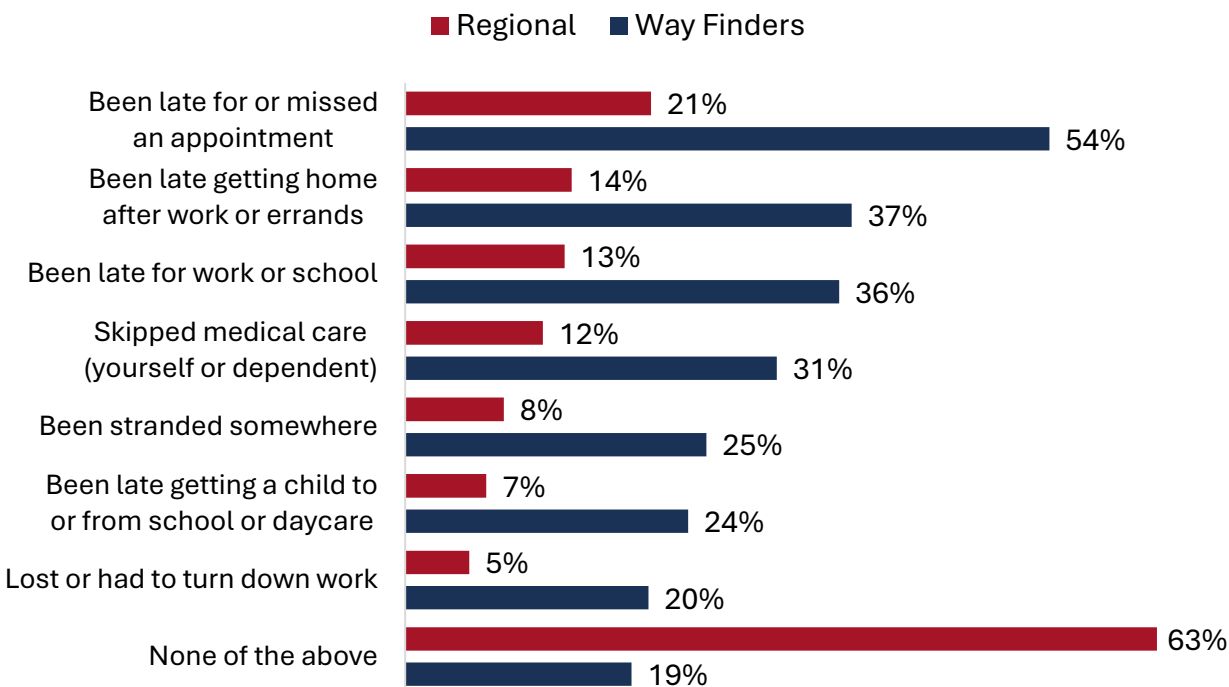
## Way Finders clients struggle getting places on time

The difficulties that residents and clients report have real-life consequences: missed appointments, being late for work, skipped medical care. Way Finders clients, who report more difficulty making trips, are also much more likely to report these sorts of impacts (Figure 16). A majority (54%) of Way Finders clients have been late for or missed an appointment due to a problem with transportation. A third or more have been late to or from work, school, or errands, and 31% have skipped medical care for themselves or others. A quarter have been stranded somewhere.

All respondents were asked about these negative impacts. Drilling down reveals they are particularly prevalent among key subgroups. A majority (54%) of workers in the Way Finders survey report being late for work, and 60% of students have been late for school. (In the regional survey, 24% of workers have been late for work, higher than the 14% overall.) Way Finders clients who are using Way Finders employment services are much more likely to report losing work due to transportation challenges (38% versus 20% overall).

**Figure 16: Way Finders clients report everyday challenges from transportation**

*% who say they have experienced each problem in the last year due to transportation issues*



*Q: In the past year, have any of the following happened to you as a result of a problem getting where you needed to go? **Select all that apply.***

### ***Parents are feeling transportation challenges acutely***

Parents are a key group reporting more transportation impacts. Among Way Finders clients with kids at home, 36% report having been late getting to or from school or daycare. Perhaps relatedly, 44% have been late to school or work. Parents are also more likely to report financial challenges related to transportation: 54% say transportation costs are a “very big burden,” 80% have been unable to get somewhere they need to due to a lack of money, and 69% have been unable to pay other bills due to transportation costs. All these percentages are 10 or more percentage points higher than among Way Finders clients without kids.

One parent from the focus group described the struggle of juggling work and multiple kids’ appointments with a single car in the household:

*“There have been plenty of times when my fiancée has to go to work and one of the kids has to be at school. The times are within 15 minutes apart, and the child’s appointment is here in Holyoke, and she works in Springfield. So now, in order for me to take the vehicle, we have to pick up another child. And all the times and the deadlines are so close. You’re hoping the doctor sees you because you’re 10 minutes late, maybe 15 tops, because I know they all have different times they allow. But yeah, I’ve had it happen multiple times.”*

Another parent described the challenge of getting her child to school without a car:

*“Because I live in one section of the city and my son goes to school all the way at the other end of the city, it’s about 20 to 30 minutes away. And I have to sit there and try to figure out, okay, who can I get to pick me up? Or I can walk home, but what about my son? My son’s only 11 years old. I need somebody there for him. I can’t get there for him. Trying to take the bus to get there will take about an hour to two hours. So, I’m literally wasting half of my day trying to find a way to go get my child, or to go be with my child in order to bring them where I need to go when I don’t have a vehicle.”*

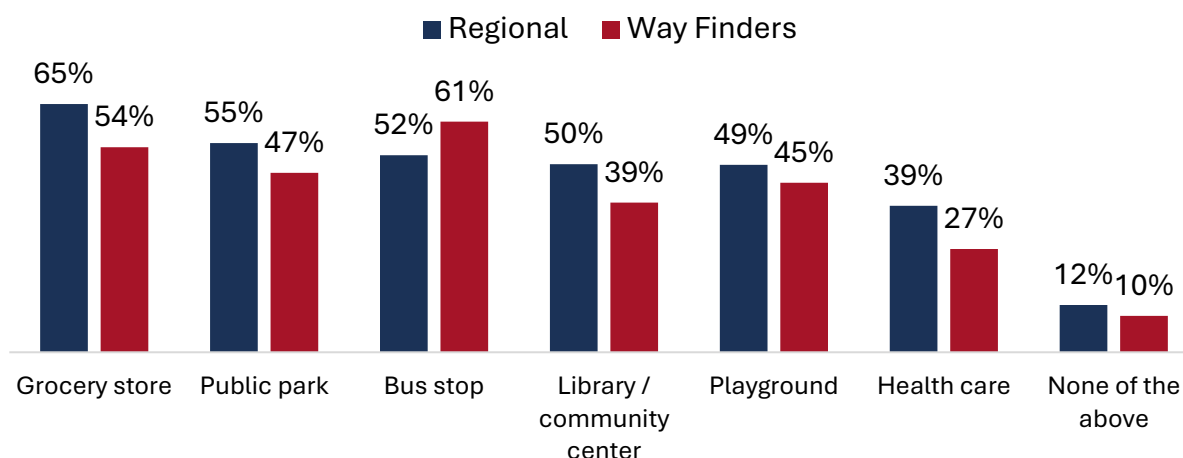
## Way Finders clients are less likely to live near key amenities

Making trips depends not only on one's mode of travel but how far one has to go. The survey found Way Finders clients are less likely to report living within a 5-minute drive or 10-minute walk of each local amenity included in the survey, except one: a PVTa bus stop (Figure 17). Living further away adds time, cost, and complexity to each trip for those least able to afford them.

The most accessible amenity is a grocery store. Among regional lower-income residents, 65% report living near one, compared to 54% of Way Finders clients. But that still leaves an alarming minority who live farther away from a food source. The same applies to other amenities: even if just over half of lower-income residents regionally live near a park (55%), bus stop (52%), or library (50%), that means nearly as many residents do not live near these amenities.

**Figure 17: Way Finders clients are less likely to live near many common amenities**

% who say \_\_\_\_ is within a 5-min drive or 10-min walk from their home



Q: Which of the following are within a 5-minute drive or 10-minute walk from your home? **Select all that apply.**

The large number of client responses allows for detailed analysis of the Way Finders survey by geography, and even to identify differences within areas of Springfield. As might be expected, urban residents have better access to the PVTa. Two-thirds of those living in Springfield (65%), Holyoke (64%), and Chicopee (67%) live near a bus stop, compared to 56% of those in Hampshire County and only 47% of those living in the rest of Hampden County. Within Springfield, client in the northeast neighborhoods (Indian Orchard, Boston Road, Sixteen Acres, and East Forest Park) report less access to the PVTa, public parks, and dramatically less access to health care. Only 16% of Way Finders clients in this part of Springfield live near a health care facility, compared to 24-28% throughout the rest of the city.

### ***Transportation access is health care access***

The amenity that the fewest number live near is a health care facility. Only 27% of Way Finders clients live near a health care facility. Proximity to health care is doubly important because health care is the one amenity where appointments are generally required. Being farther from one's doctor can make getting there on time that much harder. Indeed, 31% of Way Finders clients report having skipped medical care, for themselves or a dependent, due to a problem with transportation. Clients who report a medical condition in their household that limits their mobility are more likely to have been late for an appointment (63%), or to have skipped medical care altogether (41%). In other words, the clients who most need medical care are having the hardest time accessing it.

Further compounding the problem is a shortage of medical specialists in Western Massachusetts, forcing many to go to Boston for medical care. Getting to Boston was by far the most difficult trip for respondents in both surveys. "I go to [a cancer center in Boston], and maybe 3 months ago because I didn't have the transportation set up at that time, I missed that appointment and that was about 3 months ago, and I'm still waiting," said one focus group participant.

Focus group participants frequently complained about "PT-1" rides to medical appointments, referring to free transportation provided by MassHealth. Participants said that these rides were often overbooked, leading to long waits to be picked up and, sometimes, missed appointments. One participant described her frustration with the system:

*"So, I have a doctor's appointment, and they'll say, 'It'll get you there at 1:30.' [But then:] 'Oh, we're going to put the add-on.' And now I'm at my doctor's, and it's 2:15. 'I'm sorry, you only have a 15-minute window.' What am I supposed to do? Say, 'Forget it, I'm going to call, cancel my appointment. Just bring me home anyways?'"*

For some the difficulty of getting to the doctor has led them to stop going altogether: "There were some instances where I took a trip. It took me nearly an entire day to get from where I started to that point, waiting for the bus to get back, and all of the changes. And I just had to just abandon doctor's appointments."

## Transportation has an inequitable impact on commuting to work

For lower-income residents who are employed, reliable transportation to work is absolutely crucial. The percentage of respondents working a full or part-time job is similar in both surveys, although many more in the regional survey are retired. A majority (54%) of working Way Finders clients say they have been late to work due to transportation problems; 28% of part-time workers have had to turn down work because they haven't been able to get there.

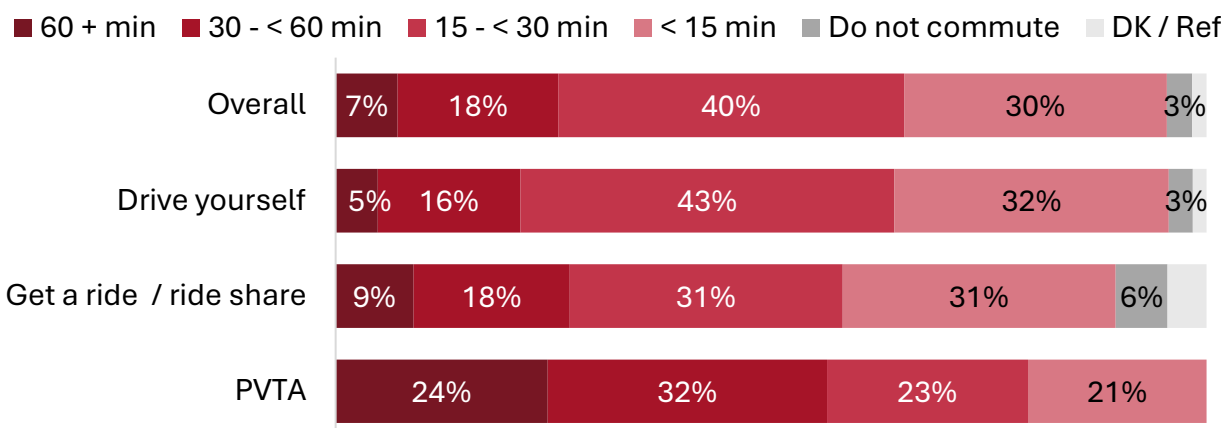
Among workers in both surveys, experiences with commuting to work can vary widely. Not everyone has a 9-to-5 workday, and some workers are able to work from home while others are not. These divisions are related to one another, and to race and education. White workers and those with higher levels of education are more likely to work 9-to-5 and to be able to work from home. Non-white workers and those with lower levels of education are less likely to work from home and more likely to work non-standard hours. These workers are also less likely to have access to a vehicle. Expanding early and late bus service would help them get to work.

## Commute times vary by travel mode

The majority of workers in both surveys report their commute to work is less than 30 minutes (70% Way Finders, 65% regional), but commute times vary widely by mode. This is seen most clearly in the Way Finders survey, which, due to its larger sample size and larger share of transit riders, has more workers who are not driving themselves to work. A majority of workers who say the PVTa is their primary travel mode have a ride of 30 minutes or longer, including 24% who are traveling an hour or more to get to work or school (Figure 18).

**Figure 18: Way Finders clients have longer commutes by PVTa than other modes**

*Commute times among Way Finders clients who work full or part time*



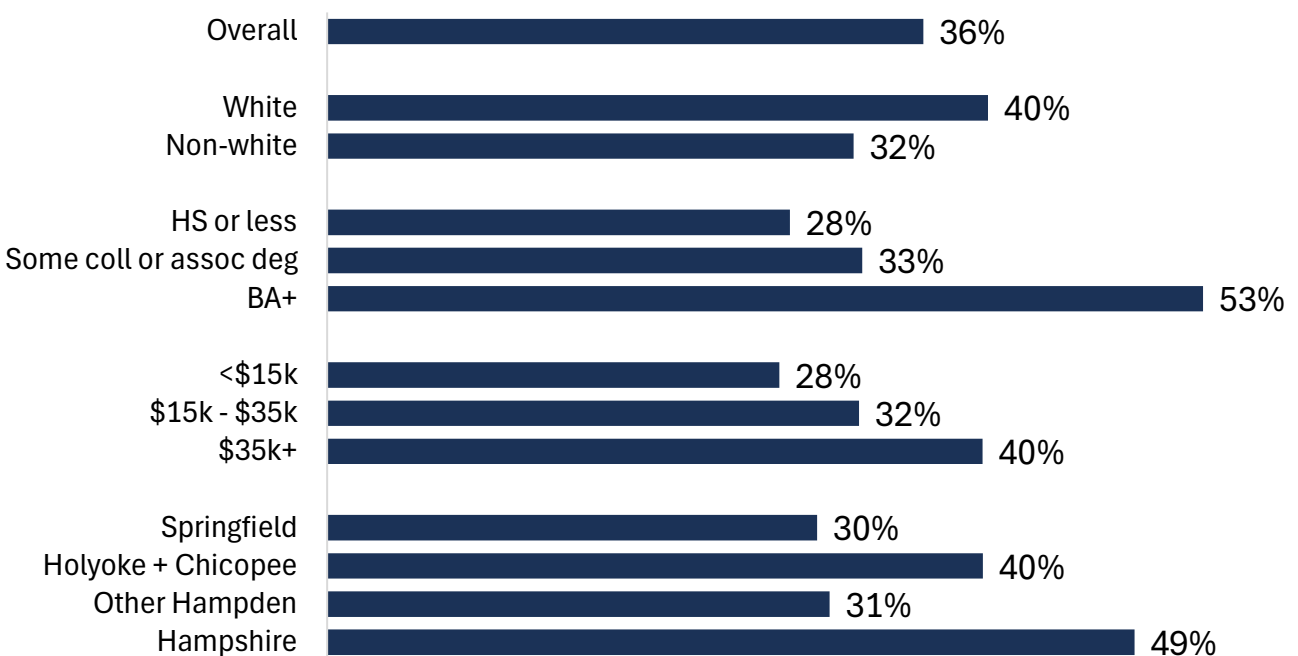
Q: On a typical day when you have to commute to work, how long does it take you to get to work?

## Remote work is not equitably distributed

About a third of workers in each survey (32% Way Finders, 36% regional) work from home with any frequency. The vast majority of those who do not work from home say that it is not an option for their job. There are differences by race and socioeconomic status in both surveys as to who can work from home. Focusing on the regional survey (Figure 19), white workers are more likely to work from home than non-white workers (40% versus 32%). Remote work is much more common among those with a Bachelor's degree or more education (53%) and those making \$35,000 a year or more (40%). It is also more common in Hampshire County, removed from the larger, more diverse cities of Springfield, Holyoke, and Chicopee. These same patterns by education, income, and geography are also seen among Way Finders clients. These divides became evident in statewide surveys early in the COVID-19 pandemic and have continued through to today.

**Figure 19: Regional workers with higher education and income are more likely to work from home**

*% of workers in the regional survey, overall and by demographic, who work at home with any frequency*



Q: How often do you work from home?

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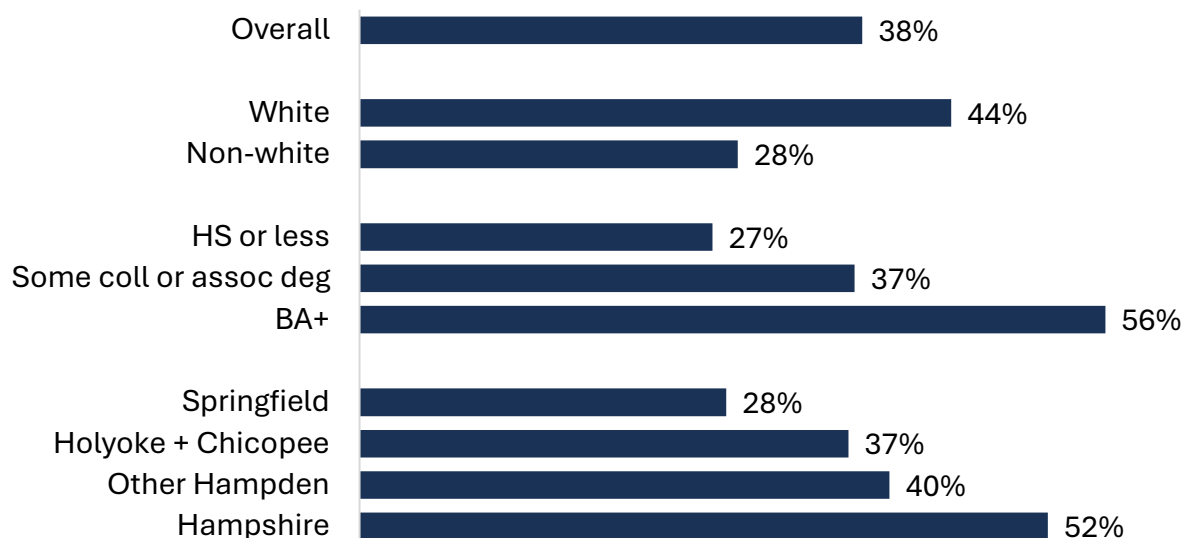
***Only 32% of those who use the PVTA as their primary mode are working 9-to-5, compared to 45% among drivers... running more early morning and late-night bus service could be of help to these shift workers.***

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The demographic patterns around work schedules are similar. About 4 in 10 workers report working a 9-to-5 shift (42% Way Finders, 38% regional). A third in each survey report working before 9am, with smaller percentages working later shifts, overnight, or another schedule. Looking again at the regional survey reveals the same disparities by race, education, and geography (Figure 20). Looking at the Way Finders survey confirms the education pattern and adds a new one. Only 32% of those who use the PVTA as their primary mode are working 9-to-5, compared to 45% among drivers. A third (33%) of PVTA users are working earlier than 9am, 23% are working later than 5pm, and 18% are working a late night or overnight shift. Again, PVTA users overall report much longer commutes than those using other modes. Taken together, these findings suggest that running more early morning and late-night bus service could be of help to these shift workers.

**Figure 20: Only 38% of workers work a 9-to-5 schedule**

*% from regional survey of employed residents, overall and by demographic, who work a 9am-5pm schedule*



Q: When do you work? Select all that apply.

## Policy Preferences

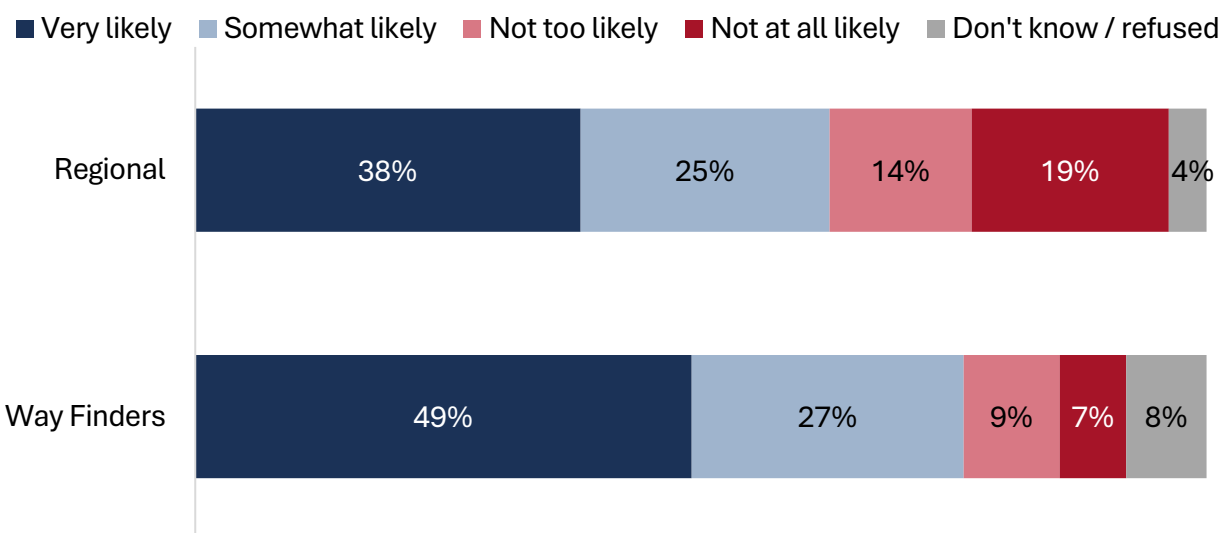
While the bulk of this research focused on lower-income residents' experience getting around, we did ask about two transportation-related policies proposed for the Pioneer Valley in the near future: free fares on the PVTA and West-East rail connecting Springfield to Boston.

### *Majorities say they would likely ride West-East rail*

A majority of regional lower-income residents (63%) and Way Finders clients (76%) say they would be at least “somewhat likely” to ride a planned West-East rail service to Boston when it comes online (Figure 21). Nearly half (49%) of Way Finders clients say they would “very likely” to get on board the new train. Among Way Finders clients, groups who are modestly more likely to ride cross-state rail are non-white and especially black clients, as well as younger clients.

**Figure 21: Residents likely to ride East-West Rail**

% who say they are \_\_\_\_ to ride the East-West rail



*Q: The Massachusetts state government is currently working on a plan to provide a passenger train service connecting Pittsfield and Springfield in Western Massachusetts to Worcester and Boston. How likely would you be to ride such a train service?*



Focus group participants were generally supportive of West-East rail, although some were skeptical that it would materialize. “I know our Senator Elizabeth Warren is all about getting East-West rail going,” said one participant. “It keeps getting into studies and this and that. Do something, you know?” Other participants feared that the rail service could end up being low-quality or expensive. One person worried about ticket prices if the train service ended up being run by Amtrak, while another said that lawmakers might simply “get together and pass this” without “a plan for how, and that’s how it becomes chaotic.”

### ***Getting to Boston is a particular pain point***

West-East rail would help with getting to Boston, the only trip that pluralities in both surveys report difficulty making. Just under half (49%) of regional residents report some difficulty getting to Boston, as do 61% of Way Finders clients. For clear majorities of non-drivers in both surveys, getting to the capital city is a challenge. “I have to go to Springfield just to take the Peter Pan to Worcester, just to take the train to Boston,” said one focus group participant from Holyoke. “So that’s a lot.”

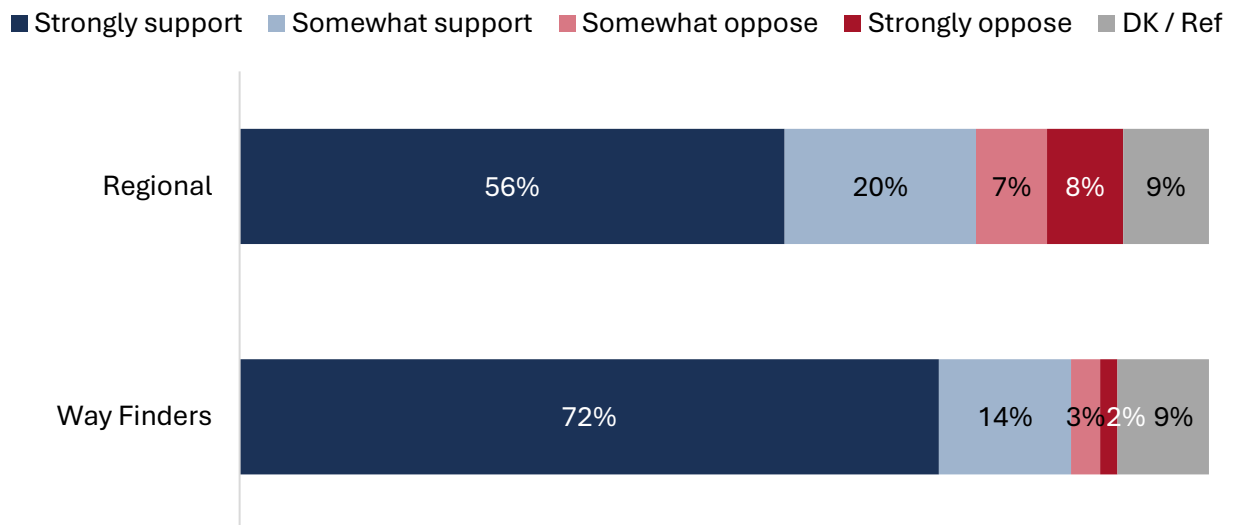
Challenges getting to Boston came up often in the focus groups, often connected to medical appointments in the city. One participant described the challenge as draining for their car and themselves. “I have 2 kids that go to Boston Hospital, and driving out there, alone with the cost of gas, it’s horrible. The wear and tear on your car is horrible, and then you have to try to find parking. It’s taxing for sure. And you have to make sure that you’re back in time for the [other] kids to get out of school. As a single parent, you have to take them out of school for the day.”

## Majorities support free PVTA fares, although fewer say they would ride

Consistent with other statewide and regional polling on the topic of fare free buses, majorities in both surveys strongly support making the PVTA bus service fare free (Figure 22). Overall, 56% of regional lower-income residents and 72% of Way Finders clients strongly support the move, both notably high levels of support. Non-white respondents in both surveys are slightly more supportive than white respondents, but majority support is consistent across all demographic groups.

**Figure 22: Strong support for free PVTA service**

% who say they \_\_\_\_ making PVTA free to ride

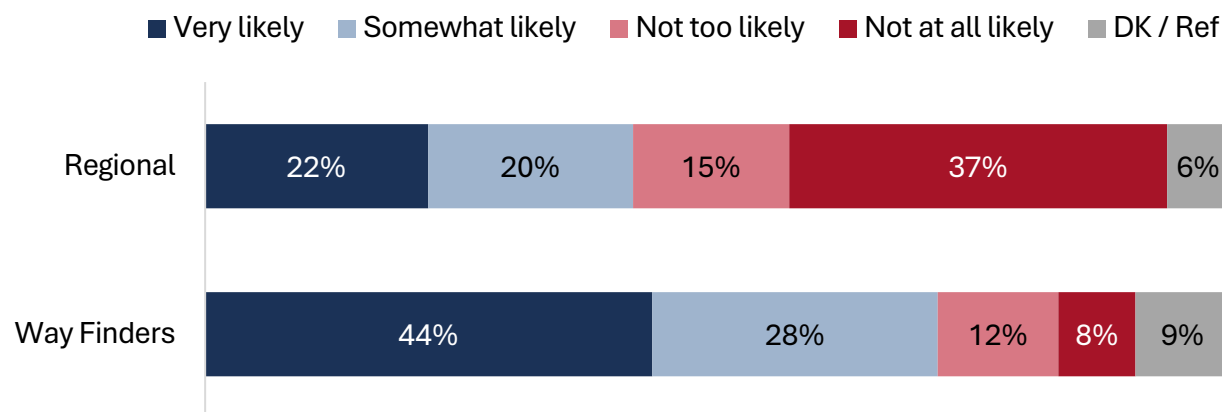


*Q: In some other parts of the state, public buses are free to ride. The PVTA buses and paratransit have been free to ride at certain times of the year as well. How much would you support or oppose making the PVTA buses and paratransit service free to ride all year round?*

There is more variation as to whether free fares would make respondents more likely to ride the bus (Figure 23). A majority (72%) of Way Finders clients would likely ride the PVTA if it were fare free, including 44% who would be “very likely” to ride. By contrast, just over half (52%) of regional lower-income residents say they would *not* be likely to ride the PVTA even if it were free. A plurality (37%) of regional residents say they are “not at all likely” to ride, highlighting the challenge of converting non-riders to the bus. Indeed, 79% of current PVTA riders in the regional survey say they would likely ride a free bus more than they do now, along with 62% of those who lack a car. But only 36% of drivers and less than half of car owners would consider riding.

**Figure 23: Gap in likelihood of riding free PVTA**

% who say they are \_\_\_\_ likely to ride the PVTA more if it were free



*Q: If the PVTA were free to ride, how likely would you be to ride it more than you do now?*

Focus group participants were similarly enthusiastic about making the PVTA free. One participant thought removing fares would make taking the bus a smoother experience by speeding up the boarding process: “Those times when the bus is free, it’s a lot easier to take the bus, because the hassle of people paying to get on the bus slows things down. And everyone gets angry with the bus drivers because they don’t let them get on.” On the other hand, another participant expressed concern about the buses becoming overcrowded when they have been free in the past.

Support for free fares was tested as a standalone policy and not as a tradeoff against other PVTA improvements. Smaller percentages of riders want improvements in bus frequency, speed, and reliability, while minorities of non-riders wanted changes to bus routes and stops. To the extent that making the bus free would take away from funding for these improvements, it might dampen support for the idea. That said, the levels of support for free fares are much higher than the percentage of respondents in either survey who suggested particular improvements to the service.

## Conclusion

For many of us, transportation is background noise, something we take for granted until the car breaks down, the road washes out, or the bus schedule changes. For most people, these are minor inconveniences. But for lower-income residents in the Pioneer Valley, and especially for Way Finders clients, a bump in the road can be catastrophic. For many at the lowest end of the income scale, getting around is a major financial burden, crowding out other bills or forcing choices between getting somewhere and saving money for other expenses.

While most have at least access to a car, that access is precarious: most Way Finders clients own a single vehicle and say they couldn't afford a major repair. For those without a car, most say they couldn't borrow one if they needed to. Those without access to a car have the option of pricey ride-hailing apps or more affordable but less convenient bus service. Some try to split the difference by hailing a "Hood Uber" from Facebook and hoping they don't get scammed or worse. Those who choose to walk have to worry about reckless and speeding drivers, sidewalks that are crumbling or non-existent, and crime. Even the lowest-cost travel has its own costs, meted out in time, convenience, comfort, and even personal safety. All these tradeoffs have real-world impacts, whether in terms of being late for work, school, or childcare, or missing medical appointments.

This research does suggest some potential solutions. Rail service to Boston would help those who need to travel east, often for medical appointments, and most say they would ride it if it becomes a reality. Making the PVTa permanently free would be a boon for current riders, and might even convince some non-riders to give the bus a try. Our eight focus groups solicited other ideas that could help: subsidized Uber and Lyft rides to Way Finders appointments, a directory of affordable and reputable mechanics, and classes on how to ride the PVTa. These are smaller-scale changes that could make big differences in the lives of some of the Commonwealth's most vulnerable residents.

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***Even the lowest-cost travel has its own costs, meted out in time, convenience, comfort, and even personal safety.***

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Given that this project is about elevating voices from the community, it's appropriate to give one of our focus group participants the last word. Perhaps the overarching theme that ran through all the research was simply the cost of getting around compounding the other high and rising costs. This participant makes a case for making transportation free as a way of helping with the rest of everyday life:

*"I think people that use public transportation would really benefit from having free transportation. Cities should be connected and interconnected, and it should be subsidized, so that way people are not struggling with getting to places. Especially if the social services system is expecting people to go to medical appointments, to show up to court hearings, to go to work, to bring their children to the hospital, to go to school, to go to college. All these things that require people moving from point A to point B require transportation. So, if you don't have a car, you don't have a career yet because you're just starting, that's challenging. The state could help people by providing transportation for everyone for free."*

# Methods

This project had four main components:

1. An initial set of four focus groups drawn from Way Finders clients
2. A survey of Way Finders clients
3. A survey of lower-income (\$<75k household income) Hampshire and Hampden county residents
4. A follow-up set of four focus groups drawn from respondents to the Way Finders client survey

The design of each of these components involved a process of iterative collaboration between MPG, Way Finders, and MassDOT. At each stage of designing and fielding, MPG, Way Finders, and MassDOT discussed results that informed the next stage of the process.

A key dimension of the project was capacity building within Way Finders. MPG worked with Way Finders at every stage of the process to deepen their skills in moderating focus groups, writing survey questions, and interpreting survey results.

## Focus Groups

MPG and Way Finders conducted eight focus groups, four prior to the surveys and four after. Moderator's guides for both sets of groups are included as Appendices F and G, and a summary memo is included as Appendix C. In addition to providing qualitative information about participants' experiences of transportation, these discussions informed the design of the surveys themselves and helped MPG and Way Finders interpret the survey results.

### *Pre-Survey Focus Groups*

Community input began with the design of the pre-survey focus groups, when Way Finders distributed a survey to its staff that included a sample moderator's guide and some broad questions to prompt staff knowledge about the transportation needs and challenges of clients. Based on the responses, MPG drafted a moderator's guide for the focus groups and presented it to Way Finders, discussing how survey responses informed it.

After revising the guide in response to additional staff feedback, MPG conducted training for eight Way Finders staff who served in pairs as moderators for the pre-survey focus groups. This training

was also open to other Way Finders staff who wanted training in focus group moderation, as a way to build capacity at Way Finders. A total of 16 Way Finders team members participated.

Participants in the pre-survey focus groups were recruited from among Way Finders clients. Here, too, Way Finders’ knowledge of their clients was important in managing recruitment. An invitation to participate, including a screener survey to assess eligibility and availability, was emailed to Way Finders clients on January 22, 2024 (Appendix H). The screener was translated into Spanish by Way Finders and sent to 1,400 clients, including 350 Spanish speakers. The screener included demographic questions, questions about modes of transportation, availability for the dates, times, and locations of groups being planned, and a question to screen for participant communication skills. In addition, it informed participants that they would receive a \$100 incentive for a 90-minute focus group, and that food would be served at the in-person sessions. The screeners also included general information about the survey, as well as contact information for Way Finders staff to answer further questions. The screener received 58 responses.

All four pre-survey focus groups followed the same format. A pair of Way Finders moderators asked questions about transportation experiences, needs, burdens, and desires. Conversation was structured in phases: what modes people used, what challenges they faced, what changes they would like to see to transportation in the next 5-10 years, and what Way Finders could do to help. The moderators were encouraged to probe responses for more information, and to close with an open-ended solicitation of final thoughts.

Focus groups were scheduled based on participant availability, with two in-person and two virtual sessions. One in-person session was conducted in Spanish. To account for unforeseen absences, 10-12 participants were recruited for each session. The in-person groups were held at Way Finders’ main office in Springfield. Food was provided with participants’ cultural sensitivities and dietary restrictions in mind. Rides via Uber to the Springfield office were offered by Way Finders for participants who could not access their own form of transportation. See the table below for date, time, language, type, and number of participants for each group.

Date	Time	Language	Type	Participants
March 1, 2024	12-1:30pm	English	In-person	5
March 5, 2024	12-1:30pm	Spanish	In-person	3
March 14, 2024	12-1:30pm	English	Virtual	8
March 15, 2024	12-1:30pm	English	Virtual	7

## ***Post-Survey Focus Groups:***

The post-survey focus group moderator's guide was developed by MPG, Way Finders, and MassDOT. The goal of the moderator's guide was to dig deeper into the responses from the survey (Appendix G).

The post-survey focus groups were recruited via the same screener survey used for the pre-survey focus groups. They were recruited from respondents to the Way Finders survey who indicated, via a question in the survey, that they would be interested in participating. The email invite to participate in a focus group was sent out on August 19, 2024. A total of 251 Way Finders clients responded to the screener.

All of the English focus groups were moderated by one Way Finders staff paired with one MPG staff. The Spanish focus group was moderated by two Way Finders staff, with an MPG staff observing in the room. MPG offered a training refresher for moderators, which 5 Way Finders staffers attended.

Focus groups were scheduled based on participant availability, with two in-person and two virtual sessions. One in-person session was conducted in Spanish. To account for unforeseen absences, 10-12 participants were recruited for each session. The in-person groups were held at Way Finders' main office in Springfield. Once again, food was provided from culturally appropriate local restaurants, taking into account participants' dietary restrictions. Rides via Uber to the Springfield office were offered by Way Finders for participants who could not access their own form of transportation. See the table below for date, time, language, type, and number of participants for each group.

Date	Time	Language	Type	Participants
September 17, 2024	5:30-7pm	English	In-person	11
September 24, 2024	5:30-7pm	Spanish	In-person	7
September 26, 2024	12-1:30pm	English	Virtual	9
October 2, 2024	12-1:30pm	English	Virtual	10

MPG staff were present at all eight of the focus groups. Way Finders distributed \$100 physical gift cards to all the in-person participants, and virtual gift cards to all the virtual participants. All the focus groups were recorded and transcribed. Way Finders translated the Spanish session transcripts into English. Based on these transcripts, MPG staff prepared summaries of the focus groups. The pre-survey group summaries included ideas for questions for the survey design (Appendix D). The post-survey group summaries highlighted key themes for the report and potential action items for Way Finders to help clients with their transportation challenges (Appendix E). These summaries were presented to Way Finders and to MassDOT. MPG also wrote a single memo covering major themes from all eight focus groups (Appendix C).



## Surveys

MPG conducted two nearly identical surveys for this study: a regional survey of 601 low-income residents of Hampshire and Hampden counties, and a survey of 1,632 Way Finders clients across Western Massachusetts. The only differences between the two survey questionnaires were that the Way Finders survey asked which services the client had received from Way Finders and included focus group recruitment and contact information for gift card distribution.

MPG, Way Finders, and MassDOT worked together to design the first draft of the survey based on the pre-survey focus group responses, and modified the survey based on the feedback received from a pre-test among Way Finders clients.

### *Survey Design*

#### **Focus Groups**

Pre-survey focus group responses were crucial in designing the questionnaire. Most fundamentally, they suggested a wider range of modes of transportation and reasons for using or not using particular modes than might have occurred to MPG or Way Finders staff alone. The first focus group, for example, surfaced the practice of informal paid ridesharing through social media, also known as “Hood Uber.” While it was not a common mode, participants in subsequent groups were generally aware of it. Similarly, focus groups highlighted the significance of medical appointments to people’s transportation burdens in Western Massachusetts.

#### **Pre-test**

MPG and Way Finders collected “pre-test” responses on the first draft of the People and Transportation project survey. The purpose of pre-testing is to identify and correct issues with the survey prior to full launch. These include questions that are difficult for respondents to understand and burdensome to complete; missing or non-exhaustive response options for questions; missing topics; and any other issues that might prevent respondents from successfully completing the survey. All pre-test participants were given a \$25 gift card for their time and opinion.

Way Finders identified two discrete populations among its client base for the pre-test: clients currently in shelters through their Housing Support Service (HSS) department and community members who participate in Way Finders events and trainings through its Community Building and Engagement department. MPG trained HSS staff on how to conduct the pre-test at a session at Way Finders on April 22, 2024. Staff then conducted pre-tests during their regularly scheduled check-in visits with shelter families from April 22 through April 26, 2024. Staff sat with clients as

they took the survey on their own devices and made note of general impressions as well as specific questions and concerns. All told, HSS outreach generated 9 pre-tests of the survey.

Pre-tests with volunteers through Community Building and Engagement took place at an event at Way Finders on April 29, 2024. After a brief introduction by MPG, volunteers took the survey on their own devices and noted any issues on a printed version of the survey. MPG staff were present to assist with technical issues and answer questions. Afterwards, MPG and Way Finders led a group discussion to go through general and specific concerns volunteers had identified. We collected 13 pre-tests from this session, for a total of 22.

MPG has compiled comments received from the pre-test worksheets in blue text (Appendix I). General comments appear below the introduction. Comments in quotations marks are taken directly from the pre-test worksheets; comments not in quotations are paraphrases of participants' comments and MPG notes on the follow-up discussion of the pre-test results. The survey questions on the worksheet reflect the version of the survey at the time of the pre-test.

As a result of the pre-test, MPG and Way Finders made several changes to the survey to reduce its overall length and complexity. These included removing a section of questions about satisfaction with Way Finders' services. These questions were asked in a separate survey to inform Way Finders' strategic plan later in the year. We also decided to increase the incentive for completing the survey from \$5 to \$10. These changes were in response to a general sense from the pre-testers that the survey was long and that the \$5 incentive would not be adequate. Removing questions also gave us room to include a question about pedestrian challenges, which was requested during the pre-test.

## ***Way Finders Survey***

Responses were collected between May 28–July 12, 2024. The survey was translated by Way Finders and offered in Arabic, Chinese (simplified), Haitian Creole, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese. A total of 1,534 clients took the survey in English, 4 in Haitian Creole, and 94 in Spanish. Results are presented unweighted, as representative demographic data was not available for this group (Appendix A).

### **Survey outreach**

As with focus group recruitment, MPG and Way Finders collaborated in designing survey outreach. Way Finders shared the number of their clients receiving each type of service they provide, as well as the best method of contacting each group based on the contact information Way Finders possessed (email, phone, or mailing address), and their understanding of their clients' preferred modes.

Invitations to the online survey were sent by email (Appendix J), text, mail (Appendix K), poster invitation (Appendix L), and direct staff distribution. One reminder email was sent to those that had not yet completed the survey, excluding those who opted out of emails. Way Finders sent both email invitations through their Constant Contact account. Way Finders printed the one-page mailer with a QR code link to the survey and sent it to any client for whom an email or phone number was unavailable. Way Finders also printed and hung posters in the 12 Way Finders housing developments that had Residential Services Coordinators (RSCs, on-site staff) and their Springfield Housing Center office. Those that resided in the 11 sites that are not served by staff received an invitation to take the survey by email, text, or mail. Way Finders shelter staff did direct outreach via text messages to their clients. The text message invite was sent by Metropolitan Research Services from local area codes and stated:

Take the Way Finders / MassDOT transportation survey! First 500 get a \$10 gift card.

LINK

Ref # SURVEYID

STOP 2 OPT OUT

A paper version of the survey was created, with 120 printed for the RSC offices across Way Finders' properties and 50 for the Northampton office for clients who may not be comfortable using a QR code or link (Appendix M). None of the paper copies were used. An FAQ was written for staff who may have had to field questions about the survey. Way Finders and MPG planned additional in-person outreach methods through Way Finders Community Building and Engagement and Housing Support Services teams. However, after an extremely positive response to the email and SMS outreach, it was decided that these additional outreach actions were not needed.

## Response rates

A total of 14,652 Way Finders clients were contacted directly. With 1,632 total responses, the response rate for this survey is 11.1%. Below is a breakdown of contact methods, dates, and response rates.

Method	Date	Contacted	Responded	Response rate
SMS (Metropolitan Research Services)	May 28, 2024	2,305	148	6.4%
Email (Way Finders Constant Contact)	May 28, 2024	11,722	1,287	10.9%
Mail (Way Finders)	May 29, 2024	625	27	4.3%
Poster in Springfield Way Finders office	May 28, 2024	N/A	3	N/A
Posters in Way Finders RSC lobbies	May 28, 2024	N/A	1	N/A
Email reminder (Way Finders Constant Contact)	June 11, 2024	10,353	160	1.5%
Text from Way Finders staff to shelter clients	June 21, 2024	N/A	6	N/A

## Duplicate protection

To be certain that respondents could not take the survey more than one time, a unique 5-digit number was appended to the end of each survey link sent out via email and text message. Each of these unique links led to an instance of the survey which could only be completed once. Those who had already completed the survey did not receive a reminder email. Those who received a mail invite to the survey had a unique 5-digit number located on the envelope of their letter and were prompted to enter the code into the survey. The text from Way Finders staff to shelter clients was targeted and sent only to people who had not yet taken the survey. This text also included a unique 5-digit number that the client entered into the survey. The four people who took the survey via poster were screened for duplicate survey responses based on the name and email address they provided at the end of the survey to receive an incentive.

## Incentives

The project originally budgeted a \$5 gift card for the first 1,000 responses. Based on feedback during the survey pre-test, the gift card amount was increased to \$10 for the first 500 respondents. Upon later evaluation, it was determined that providing a gift card to everyone who took the survey should be prioritized. The budget was re-worked to be able to provide everyone who completed the survey with a \$10 gift card. A \$10 virtual gift card was sent via Giftogram to all Way Finders survey participants who provided a valid email address at the end of the survey. A total of 1,367 gift cards were delivered on the dates provided in the table below. The number of gift cards was fewer than the total responses due to some clients providing invalid email addresses or no email address.

Date	Number of gift cards distributed
May 31, 2024	493
June 7, 2024	870
June 17, 2024	4

## Regional Survey

Responses to the regional survey were collected by text invitation into an online survey and by live interviews via landline and cell phones between July 1-13, 2024. Data collection for the online survey was conducted by Metropolitan Research Services and overseen by MPG. Results were weighted by race, age and gender, education, and geography to reflect known and estimated population parameters for the adult population of these counties from the most recent available 5-year American Community Survey. The margin of error for this survey is +/- 4.2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, inclusive of the design effect (Appendix B).

Respondents were screened for eligibility based on age, county of residence, income, and whether they had received services from Way Finders. Eligible respondents were adults living in Hampden or Hampshire County, who had not received services from Way Finders, and with a household income below \$75,000. Metropolitan screened out 120 respondents who had received services from Way Finders. This was done to avoid any duplicate responses between the Way Finders client survey and the regional survey.

There are several ways to define a “low-income” individual or household. Official definitions often vary by income cutoff based on the size of the household. After extensive analysis of the demographics within Hampden and Hampshire counties, the project team decided to set a single household income cutoff instead of using multiple cutoffs based on household size, in order to reduce survey burden and to have regular income intervals for analysis. The cutoff of \$75,000 is between 80% of the area median income (AMI) for a family of 2 (\$67,000) and a family of 3 (\$75,400). MPG arrived at that number by analyzing the demographics of residents in both counties

at various income levels. In the aggregate, the demographics of those making under \$75,000 are within 1-2 percentage points of those making less than 80% of AMI using the scale of income by family size. The final weighted demographics of the regional survey are within 1-2 percentage points of the weighting parameters for this population, as set out below.

Demographic	Target %	Weighted %
White Alone, not Hispanic	63%	61%
Black Alone	9%	8%
Latino	26%	25%
AAPI / Other	3%	3%
Men 18-44	16%	15%
Women 18-44	17%	16%
Men 45+	32%	31%
Women 45+	35%	33%
Springfield	31%	31%
Holyoke	8%	8%
Rest of Hampden County	40%	40%
Hampshire County	22%	22%
High school diploma or less education	50%	50%
Some college education (including Associate Degree)	28%	28%
Bachelor's Degree or more education	22%	22%

## Appendices

### Appendix A – Way Finders Client Survey Topline

#### The MassINC Polling Group Massachusetts Department of Transportation – Way Finders Survey

Survey of 1,632 Way Finders program recipients

Field dates: May 28 – July 12, 2024

We'd like to ask you about your experiences getting around your area. To start, over the past year, which of the following types of transportation have you used to get around? **Select all that apply.**

Drive yourself	70%
Get a ride with a friend, family, or neighbor	37%
Ride in an Uber or Lyft	25%
Ride in a taxi	3%
Get a ride from someone via social media, sometimes called a "Hood Uber"	4%
Ride a public bus or van provided by the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority, or PVTA	26%
Ride paratransit service provided by the PVTA	4%
Ride another type of medical transportation not provided by the PVTA	6%
Ride a bike or electric bike	4%
Ride an electric scooter	1%
Walk or get around in a wheelchair	15%
Some other way	2%
None of the above	<1%
Don't know / refused	1%

And which of these would you say is the main way you get around?

Drive yourself	62%
Get a ride with a friend, family, or neighbor	12%
Ride in an Uber or Lyft	5%
Ride in a taxi	<1%
Get a ride from someone offering on social media, sometimes called a “Hood Uber”	<1%
Ride a public bus or van provided by the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority, or PVTA	12%
Ride paratransit service provided by the PVTA	1%
Ride another type of medical transportation not provided by the PVTA	1%
Ride a bike or electric bike	<1%
Ride an electric scooter	<1%
Walk or get around in a wheelchair	2%
Some other way	1%
None of the above	0%
Don’t know / refused	3%



In a few words, what are the biggest challenges you face when you are trying to get around your area? **OPEN END, CODED INTO CATEGORIES.**

Traffic and Congestion	21%
Poor Road Conditions	18%
Accessibility / Availability / Distance / Convenience of Transportation Options	16%
Construction and Road Work	16%
Behavior of Other Drivers	15%
Poor Road Design (Lack of Crosswalks, Poor Lighting, Parking etc.)	10%
Public Transportation Issues (Punctuality, Range of Service)	8%
Cost of Transportation (Gas, Fares, etc.)	6%
Health Issues and Physical Limitations	5%
Safety Concerns (Crime, Bad Neighborhoods)	5%
Vehicle-Related Issues (Maintenance, Insurance, Theft)	3%
Other	5%
Unsure / Nothing / Not Applicable	8%

How easy or difficult is it for you to make each of the following types of trips?

	Very easy	Pretty easy	Pretty difficult	Very difficult	Do not make this trip	Don't know / refused
Going to school	11%	24%	13%	5%	43%	4%
Going to work	15%	31%	17%	8%	25%	4%
Bringing kids to school or childcare	12%	26%	16%	7%	34%	4%
Going shopping or running errands	15%	42%	27%	12%	2%	2%
Going to health care appointments	16%	45%	26%	10%	1%	2%
Visiting friends or family	14%	43%	21%	11%	8%	3%
Going out (dining / entertainment / nightlife)	13%	35%	20%	13%	16%	3%
Traveling to Boston	7%	16%	21%	22%	30%	4%

In the past year, have any of the following happened to you as a result of a problem getting where you needed to go? **Select all that apply.**

Been late for work or school	36%
Lost or had to turn down work	20%
Been late for or missed an appointment	54%
Skipped medical care (for yourself or a child or dependent)	31%
Been late getting home after work or errands	37%
Been late getting a child to or from school or daycare	24%
Been stranded somewhere	25%
None of the above	19%
Don't know / refused	3%

Which of the following are within a 5-minute drive or 10-minute walk from your home? **Select all that apply.**

A grocery store or other food market	54%
A PVTA or other bus stop	61%
A public park	47%
A playground	45%
Health care	27%
A library or community center	39%
None of the above	10%
Don't know / refused	2%

In a typical month would you say that the amount you spend on transportation, including car payments, gas and maintenance, bus fares, Uber, Lyft, and taxis, is...

Not a burden at all	4%
Not much of a burden	8%
Somewhat of a burden	31%
A very big burden	49%
I do not have any transportation expenses	5%
Don't know / refused	3%

At any point in the past year, have you been unable to pay your rent, mortgage, or other bills, or buy food or other necessities, because you had to pay for transportation?

Yes	62%
No	28%
Don't know / refused	10%

At any point in the past year, have you been unable to get somewhere you needed to go due to a lack of funds?

Yes	75%
No	19%
Don't know / refused	6%

Do you have or are you in the process of getting a driver's license?

I have a valid driver's license	76%
I have a driver's license, but it is currently suspended	3%
I am in the process of getting a driver's license (getting or have a permit)	8%
I do not have a driver's license and am not in the process of getting one	10%
Don't know / refused	3%

How many cars does your household own or lease?

None	31%
One	54%
Two	11%
Three or more	1%
Don't know / refused	3%

**ASK IF DOES NOT OWN OR LEASE ANY CARS**

Could you borrow a car or get a ride if you needed to get somewhere by car?

Yes	27%
No	52%
Don't know / refused	21%

**ASK IF OWNS OR LEASES ANY CARS**

If your car needed a major repair (flat tire, body work, engine repair) could you afford to fix it right away?

Yes	19%
No	71%
Don't know / refused	10%

### ASK IF USES RIDESHARE, TAXI, OR HOOD UBER

You mentioned that you have ridden in an Uber, Lyft, taxi, or a “Hood Uber” in the past year. Which of the following are reasons why you use these to get around? **Select all that apply.**

No way to get there by bus	32%
No where to park where I am going	8%
Not enough time to go another way	38%
Don't want to ride the bus	16%
Don't have access to a car	51%
Don't feel comfortable riding the bus	21%
Some other reason	23%
None of the above	5%
Don't know / refused	2%

### ASK IF USES RIDESHARE

How much does your typical one-way ride in an Uber or Lyft cost? If you take trips to multiple destinations, think about the trip you make most often.

Less than \$1 to less than \$5	3%
\$5 to less than \$10	8%
\$10 to less than \$20	50%
\$20 to less than \$30	22%
\$30 or more	14%
Don't know / refused	3%

### ASK IF DOES NOT USE RIDESHARE, TAXI, OR HOOD UBER

You mentioned that you have not used Uber, Lyft, taxi, or “Hood Uber” in the past year. Which of the following are reasons why you have not traveled in this way? **Select all that apply.**

Don't have a smartphone	2%
Don't know how to use the app	9%
Not enough drivers in my area	11%
Costs too much	47%
Don't trust the drivers	26%
Don't have a debit/credit card to pay	5%
Worried about getting sick	6%
Some other reason	13%
None of the above	19%
Don't know / refused	6%

Which of the following are challenges or obstacles that you have encountered when walking or getting around in a wheelchair? **Select all that apply.**

A lack of sidewalks	26%
A lack of crosswalks	19%
Reckless or speeding drivers	38%
Sidewalks in poor condition	32%
A lack of street lighting	20%
A lack of ramps for wheelchairs	10%
Concerns about crime	29%
A lack of stop signs or traffic lights	11%
Some other reason	6%
None of the above	33%
Don't know / refused	6%

The Pioneer Valley Transit Authority, or PVRTA, runs the public bus and van service in Hampden and Hampshire counties. Do you think that the bus service provided by the PVRTA is good enough that you could rely on it to get to the places that you need to go, or not?

Yes, good enough to rely on	43%
No, not good enough to rely on	30%
Don't know / refused	28%

#### ASK IF USES ANY PVRTA SERVICE

You mentioned you ride a service provided by the PVRTA. In a few words, what changes, if any, would make PVRTA service work better for you? **OPEN END, CODED INTO CATEGORIES.**

Reliability / Punctuality / Speed / Frequency	47%
Location of Bus Stops / Routes	25%
No Changes Necessary / Already Ride or Rode It a Lot	15%
Driver Behavior / Customer Service / Lack of Information About Bus Routes	13%
PVRTA Conditions (Accessibility, Cleanliness, Crowds, Comfort, Infrastructure)	11%
Cost of Transportation	7%
Other	4%
Unsure / Nothing / Not Applicable	5%
Reliability / Punctuality / Speed / Frequency	47%
Location of Bus Stops / Routes	25%
No Changes Necessary / Already Ride or Rode It a Lot	15%
Driver Behavior / Customer Service / Lack of Information About Bus Routes	13%
PVRTA Conditions (Accessibility, Cleanliness, Crowds, Comfort, Infrastructure)	11%

## ASK IF DOES NOT USE ANY PVTA SERVICE

You mentioned that you do not ride any services provided by the PVTA. In a few words, what changes, if any, would make you consider riding the PVTA? **OPEN END, CODED INTO CATEGORIES.**

If No Car / No Other Choice or Mode of Transportation / No Need to Use	22%
Location of Bus Stops / Routes	17%
Reliability / Punctuality / Speed / Frequency	13%
PVTA Conditions (Accessibility, Cleanliness, Crowds, Comfort, Infrastructure)	9%
Physical Condition / Disability	6%
Cost of Transportation	5%
Safety	3%
Lack of Information About Bus Routes / How to Use	2%
Other	7%
Unsure / Nothing / Not Applicable	25%
If No Car / No Other Choice or Mode of Transportation / No Need to Use	22%
Location of Bus Stops / Routes	17%
Reliability / Punctuality / Speed / Frequency	13%

In some other parts of the state, public buses are free to ride. The PVTA buses and paratransit have been free to ride at certain times of the year as well. How much would you support or oppose making the PVTA buses and paratransit service free to ride all year round?

Strongly support	72%
Somewhat support	14%
Somewhat oppose	3%
Strongly oppose	2%
Don't know / refused	9%



If the PVRTA were free to ride, how likely would you be to ride it more than you do now?

Very likely	44%
Somewhat likely	28%
Not too likely	12%
Not at all likely	8%
Don't know / refused	9%

The Massachusetts state government is currently working on a plan to provide a passenger train service connecting Pittsfield and Springfield in Western Massachusetts to Worcester and Boston. How likely would you be to ride such a train service?

Very likely	49%
Somewhat likely	27%
Not too likely	9%
Not at all likely	7%
Don't know / refused	8%

Have you received any of the following services from Way Finders? **Select all that apply.**

Help with paying rent	57%
Help paying other bills	28%
Help buying my first home	7%
Help becoming a landlord	3%
Help finding a job	5%
Live in Way Finders housing units	11%
Live in Way Finders shelter and/or receive HomeBase	5%
Receive a housing voucher from Way Finders	18%
Attending a resident training or workshop	9%
Attending community meetings	4%
None of the above	11%
Don't know / refused	5%

Including yourself, how many people live in your household?

One (live by myself)	25%
Two	26%
Three	21%
Four	15%
Five or more	11%
Don't know / refused	2%

How many children under the age of 18 live in your household?

None	42%
One	22%
Two	19%
Three	10%
Four or more	5%
Don't know / refused	2%

Do you or anyone in your household have any medical conditions (physical or mental) that make it difficult to get around?

Yes	48%
No	44%
Don't know / refused	8%

Do you have a smartphone?

Yes	88%
No	10%
Don't know / refused	3%

Which of the following describes you? **Select all that apply.**

I work a full-time job	34%
I work one or more part-time jobs	17%
I go to school	11%
I take care of children or other dependents at home	24%
I am retired	7%
I am unable to work due to a medical condition	24%
I am not working for other reasons	12%
None of the above	4%
Don't know / refused	5%

**ASK FOLLOWING 3 QUESTIONS IF EMPLOYED FULL OR PART TIME**

When do you work? **Select all that apply.**

9am to 5pm	42%
Early shift (before 9am)	33%
Late shifts (after 5pm)	16%
Late night or overnight	11%
Some other schedule	19%
Don't know / refused	4%

How often do you work from home?

Nearly every workday	15%
A few times a week	8%
A few times a month	4%
Less than once a month	5%
Never, I prefer not to work from home	6%
Never, this is not an option for my work	59%
Don't know / refused	4%

On a typical day when you have to commute to work, how long does it take you to get to work?

Less than 15 minutes	30%
15 to less than 30 minutes	40%
30 to less than 60 minutes	18%
60 minutes or more	7%
Do not commute to work	3%
Don't know / refused	2%

**Demographics:**

Gender:

Man	17%
Woman	80%
Non-binary	1%
Some other way	<1%
Don't know / refused	2%

Age:

18-29	14%
30-44	47%
45-59	26%
60+	12%
Don't know / refused	<1%

Race:

White	24%
Black	18%
Latino	47%
AAPI	1%
Other	3%
Don't know / refused	7%

Education:

High School or less	44%
Some college, no degree	35%
College graduate (BA/BS) +	15%
Don't know / refused	7%

Region:

Hampshire	12%
Springfield	54%
Holyoke	11%
Chicopee	11%
Rest of Hampden	12%

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**About the poll**

These results are based on a survey of 1,632 clients who have received Way Finders services from January 2023 onward. Responses were collected via online survey. Invitations to the survey were sent by email, text, mail, poster invitation, and direct staff distribution. Responses were collected between May 28 – July 12, 2024. The survey was offered in Arabic, Chinese (simplified), Haitian Creole, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese. Results are presented unweighted, as representative demographic data was not available for this group. This project was conducted by The MassINC Polling Group with input from Way Finders and sponsored by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation.

## Appendix B – Regional Survey Topline

### The MassINC Polling Group

#### Massachusetts Department of Transportation – Regional Survey

Survey of 601 residents of Hampden and Hampshire counties with household incomes under \$75,000

Field dates: July 1 - 13, 2024

We'd like to ask you about your experiences getting around your area. To start, over the past year, which of the following types of transportation have you used to get around? **Select all that apply.**

Drive yourself	77%
Get a ride with a friend, family, or neighbor	28%
Ride in an Uber or Lyft	11%
Ride in a taxi	3%
Get a ride from someone via social media, sometimes called a "Hood Uber"	1%
Ride a public bus or van provided by the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority, or PVRTA	11%
Ride paratransit service provided by the PVRTA	4%
Ride another type of medical transportation not provided by the PVRTA	3%
Ride a bike or electric bike	6%
Ride an electric scooter	2%
Walk or get around in a wheelchair	15%
Some other way	3%
None of the above	<1%
Don't know / refused	<1%

And which of these would you say is the main way you get around?

Drive yourself	74%
Get a ride with a friend, family, or neighbor	12%
Ride in an Uber or Lyft	2%
Ride in a taxi	0%
Get a ride from someone offering on social media, sometimes called a “Hood Uber”	0%
Ride a public bus or van provided by the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority, or PVRTA	5%
Ride paratransit service provided by the PVRTA	1%
Ride another type of medical transportation not provided by the PVRTA	1%
Ride a bike or electric bike	1%
Ride an electric scooter	<1%
Walk or get around in a wheelchair	1%
Some other way	1%
None of the above	<1%
Don’t know / refused	1%

In a few words, what are the biggest challenges you face when you are trying to get around your area? **OPEN END, CODED INTO CATEGORIES.**

Traffic and Congestion	18%
Poor Road Conditions	16%
Accessibility / Availability / Distance / Convenience of Transportation Options	9%
Construction and Road Work	7%
Behavior of Other Drivers	8%
Poor Road Design (Lack of Crosswalks, Poor Lighting, Parking etc.)	6%
Public Transportation Issues (Punctuality, Range of Service)	5%
Cost of Transportation (Gas, Fares, etc.)	5%
Health Issues and Physical Limitations	4%
Safety Concerns (Crime, Bad Neighborhoods)	2%
Vehicle-Related Issues (Maintenance, Insurance, Theft)	1%
Other	7%
Unsure / Nothing / Not Applicable	29%



How easy or difficult is it for you to make each of the following types of trips?

	Very easy	Pretty easy	Pretty difficult	Very difficult	Do not make this trip	Don't know / refused
Going to school	11%	8%	2%	3%	75%	1%
Going to work	26%	18%	6%	4%	44%	1%
Bringing kids to school or childcare	12%	12%	4%	4%	67%	1%
Going shopping or running errands	41%	36%	12%	6%	4%	1%
Going to health care appointments	42%	38%	9%	6%	3%	2%
Visiting friends or family	38%	34%	10%	6%	12%	1%
Going out (dining / entertainment / nightlife)	34%	29%	7%	7%	20%	1%
Traveling to Boston	12%	18%	15%	16%	37%	2%

In the past year, have any of the following happened to you as a result of a problem getting where you needed to go? **Select all that apply.**

Been late for work or school	13%
Lost or had to turn down work	5%
Been late for or missed an appointment	21%
Skipped medical care (for yourself or a child or dependent)	12%
Been late getting home after work or errands	14%
Been late getting a child to or from school or daycare	7%
Been stranded somewhere	8%
None of the above	63%
Don't know / refused	1%

Which of the following are within a 5-minute drive or 10-minute walk from your home? **Select all that apply.**

A grocery store or other food market	65%
A PVTA or other bus stop	52%
A public park	55%
A playground	49%
Health care	39%
A library or community center	50%
None of the above	12%
Don't know / refused	1%

In a typical month would you say that the amount you spend on transportation, including car payments, gas and maintenance, bus fares, Uber, Lyft, and taxis, is...

Not a burden at all	19%
Not much of a burden	21%
Somewhat of a burden	32%
A very big burden	18%
I do not have any transportation expenses	7%
Don't know / refused	1%

At any point in the past year, have you been unable to pay your rent, mortgage, or other bills, or buy food or other necessities, because you had to pay for transportation?

Yes	17%
No	81%
Don't know / refused	1%

At any point in the past year, have you been unable to get somewhere you needed to go due to a lack of funds?

Yes	24%
No	74%
Don't know / refused	2%

Do you have or are you in the process of getting a driver's license?

I have a valid driver's license	80%
I have a driver's license, but it is currently suspended	1%
I am in the process of getting a driver's license (getting or have a permit)	4%
I do not have a driver's license and am not in the process of getting one	14%
Don't know / refused	2%

How many cars does your household own or lease?

None	15%
One	42%
Two	28%
Three or more	14%
Don't know / refused	2%

**ASK IF DOES NOT OWN OR LEASE ANY CARS**

Could you borrow a car or get a ride if you needed to get somewhere by car?

Yes	49%
No	51%
Don't know / refused	0%

**ASK IF OWNS OR LEASES ANY CARS**

If your car needed a major repair (flat tire, body work, engine repair) could you afford to fix it right away?

Yes	60%
No	32%
Don't know / refused	7%

### ASK IF USES RIDESHARE, TAXI, OR HOOD UBER

You mentioned that you have ridden in an Uber, Lyft, taxi, or a “Hood Uber” in the past year. Which of the following are reasons why you use these to get around? **Select all that apply.**

No way to get there by bus	17%
No where to park where I am going	6%
Not enough time to go another way	21%
Don't want to ride the bus	15%
Don't have access to a car	39%
Don't feel comfortable riding the bus	9%
Some other reason	28%
None of the above	16%
Don't know / refused	0%

### ASK IF USES RIDESHARE

How much does your typical one-way ride in an Uber or Lyft cost? If you take trips to multiple destinations, think about the trip you make most often.

Less than \$1 to less than \$5	4%
\$5 to less than \$10	16%
\$10 to less than \$20	35%
\$20 to less than \$30	21%
\$30 or more	18%
Don't know / refused	6%

### ASK IF DOES NOT USE RIDESHARE, TAXI, OR HOOD UBER

You mentioned that you have not used Uber, Lyft, taxi, or “Hood Uber” in the past year. Which of the following are reasons why you have not traveled in this way? **Select all that apply.**

Don't have a smartphone	3%
Don't know how to use the app	6%
Not enough drivers in my area	6%
Costs too much	15%
Don't trust the drivers	8%
Don't have a debit/credit card to pay	3%
Worried about getting sick	2%
Some other reason	31%
None of the above	41%
Don't know / refused	1%

Which of the following are challenges or obstacles that you have encountered when walking or getting around in a wheelchair? **Select all that apply.**

A lack of sidewalks	20%
A lack of crosswalks	9%
Reckless or speeding drivers	23%
Sidewalks in poor condition	14%
A lack of street lighting	10%
A lack of ramps for wheelchairs	6%
Concerns about crime	12%
A lack of stop signs or traffic lights	4%
Some other reason	6%
None of the above	55%
Don't know / refused	1%

The Pioneer Valley Transit Authority, or PVRTA, runs the public bus and van service in Hampden and Hampshire counties. Do you think that the bus service provided by the PVRTA is good enough that you could rely on it to get to the places that you need to go, or not?

Yes, good enough to rely on	47%
No, not good enough to rely on	28%
Don't know / refused	25%

#### ASK IF USES ANY PVRTA SERVICE

You mentioned you ride a service provided by the PVRTA. In a few words, what changes, if any, would make PVRTA service work better for you? **OPEN END, CODED INTO CATEGORIES.**

Reliability / Punctuality / Speed / Frequency	40%
Location of Bus Stops / Routes	16%
No Changes Necessary / Already Ride or Rode It a Lot	22%
Driver Behavior / Customer Service / Lack of Information About Bus Routes	12%
PVRTA Conditions (Accessibility, Cleanliness, Crowds, Comfort, Infrastructure)	4%
Cost of Transportation	4%
Unsure / Not Applicable	17%

### ASK IF DOES NOT USE ANY PVTA SERVICE

You mentioned that you do not ride any services provided by the PVTA. In a few words, what changes, if any, would make you consider riding the PVTA? **OPEN END, CODED INTO CATEGORIES.**

If No Car / No Other Choice or Mode of Transportation / No Need to Use	35%
Location of Bus Stops / Routes	17%
Reliability / Punctuality / Speed / Frequency	11%
PVTA Conditions (Accessibility, Cleanliness, Crowds, Comfort, Infrastructure)	4%
Physical Condition / Disability	4%
Cost of Transportation	3%
Safety	2%
Lack of Information About Bus Routes / How to Use	1%
Other	8%
Unsure / Not Applicable	25%

In some other parts of the state, public buses are free to ride. The PVTA buses and paratransit have been free to ride at certain times of the year as well. How much would you support or oppose making the PVTA buses and paratransit service free to ride all year round?

Strongly support	56%
Somewhat support	20%
Somewhat oppose	7%
Strongly oppose	8%
Don't know / refused	9%

If the PVTA were free to ride, how likely would you be to ride it more than you do now?

Very likely	22%
Somewhat likely	20%
Not too likely	15%
Not at all likely	37%
Don't know / refused	6%

The Massachusetts state government is currently working on a plan to provide a passenger train service connecting Pittsfield and Springfield in Western Massachusetts to Worcester and Boston.

How likely would you be to ride such a train service?

Very likely	38%
Somewhat likely	25%
Not too likely	14%
Not at all likely	19%
Don't know / refused	4%

Including yourself, how many people live in your household?

One (live by myself)	31%
Two	30%
Three	16%
Four	11%
Five or more	11%
Don't know / refused	1%

How many children under the age of 18 live in your household?

None	71%
One	13%
Two	9%
Three	5%
Four or more	2%
Don't know / refused	1%



Do you or anyone in your household have any medical conditions (physical or mental) that make it difficult to get around?

Yes	34%
No	64%
Don't know / refused	2%

Do you have a smartphone?

Yes	85%
No	14%
Don't know / refused	1%

Which of the following describes you? **Select all that apply.**

I work a full-time job	38%
I work one or more part-time jobs	13%
I go to school	4%
I take care of children or other dependents at home	7%
I am retired	33%
I am unable to work due to a medical condition	16%
I am not working for other reasons	4%
None of the above	3%
Don't know / refused	1%

#### **ASK FOLLOWING 3 QUESTIONS IF EMPLOYED FULL OR PART TIME**

When do you work? **Select all that apply.**

9am to 5pm	38%
Early shift (before 9am)	32%
Late shifts (after 5pm)	9%
Late night or overnight	7%
Some other schedule	23%
Don't know / refused	3%

How often do you work from home?

Nearly every workday	12%
A few times a week	15%
A few times a month	5%
Less than once a month	4%
Never, I prefer not to work from home	5%
Never, this is not an option for my work	57%
Don't know / refused	2%

On a typical day when you have to commute to work, how long does it take you to get to work?

Less than 15 minutes	30%
15 to less than 30 minutes	34%
30 to less than 60 minutes	20%
60 minutes or more	7%
Do not commute to work	6%
Don't know / refused	2%

**Demographics:**

Age and Gender:

Men 18-44	15%
Women 18-44	16%
Men 45+	31%
Women 45+	33%
All other	5%

Race:

White	61%
Latino	25%
Black	8%
AAPI / other	3%
Don't know / refused	2%

Education:

High School or less	50%
Some college, no degree	28%
College graduate (BA/BS) +	22%
Don't know / refused	<1%

Region:

Hampshire	22%
Springfield	31%
Holyoke	8%
Rest of Hampden	40%

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**About the poll**

These results are based on a survey of 601 residents with household incomes under \$75,000 in Hampshire and Hampden, MA counties. Responses were collected by text invitation into an online survey and by live interviews via landline and cell phones July 1 - 13, 2024. Results were weighted by race, age and gender, education, and geography to reflect known and estimated population parameters for the adult population with household incomes under \$75,000 in these counties. The survey was offered in English and Spanish. The margin of error for this survey is +/- 4.2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, inclusive of the design effect. This project was conducted by The MassINC Polling Group with input from Way Finders and sponsored by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation.

## Appendix C – Focus Group Memo

### MassDOT Focus Group Memo Findings from eight focus groups on transportation November 2024

#### Methodology

Way Finders and The MassINC Polling Group (MPG) conducted a total of eight focus groups with Way Finders clients. Four of the groups were conducted in the spring of 2024, to inform the writing of the survey questionnaire. Four more were conducted after the survey fielded, to help better understand the major findings from the survey. During each period, two groups were held in person at Way Finders' offices in Springfield, and two were held online via Zoom. Two groups were conducted in Spanish, one pre-survey and one post-survey. All participants received a \$100 gift card from Way Finders for their time and for sharing their experiences.

#### Recruiting

The pre-survey focus groups were recruited via an email sent by Way Finders to a random 1,400 of their current clients, including the entire list of 350 clients known to speak Spanish. The post-survey focus groups were recruited from over 1,200 survey participants who expressed interest in participating in a focus group. Because they self-selected into focus groups via the survey, the post-survey recruitment resulted in more participants than the pre-survey recruitment. To compensate, Way Finders did some additional recruiting among its clients to fill in some of the pre-survey groups. Still, the number of participants in the pre-survey groups did tend to be smaller than for the post-survey groups.

Date	Language	# of Participants	Type
March 1, 2024	English	5	In-person
March 5, 2024	Spanish	3	In-person
March 14, 2024	English	8	Virtual
March 15, 2024	English	7	Virtual
September 17, 2024	English	11	In-person
September 24, 2024	Spanish	7	In-person
September 26, 2024	English	9	Virtual
October 2, 2024	English	10	Virtual

## *Moderation*

The moderator's guides for both sets of focus groups were drafted by MPG with feedback from Way Finders and MassDOT. The pre-survey focus groups were moderated by pairs of Way Finders staffers. The post-survey groups were conducted by one Way Finders staffer and one MPG staffer, except for the Spanish-language group, which was moderated by two Way Finders staffers. MPG conducted several 2-hour in-person and virtual training sessions with Way Finders staff prior to the pre-survey groups, and a 1-hour refresher training session before the post-survey groups.

MPG is grateful to Way Finders for all their help working on every aspect of the focus groups.

## Participant demographics

	Focus Groups	Survey
18-29	7%	14%
30-44	61%	47%
45-59	25%	26%
60+	7%	12%
Don't know / refused	0%	<1%
Man	20%	17%
Woman	77%	80%
Non-binary/other	4%	2%
Don't know / refused	0%	2%
White	38%	24%
Black	14%	18%
Latino	39%	47%
Other / more than one	7%	4%
Don't know / refused	2%	7%
High School or Less	39%	44%
Some college, no degree	36%	25%
Associates degree	8%	10%
Bachelor's degree +	15%	15%
Don't know /refused	2%	7%
Less than \$25k	54%	54%
\$25-50k	27%	27%
\$50k +	18%	10%
Don't know /refused	2%	8%

Focus groups are qualitative research and should not be thought of as a representative sample in the way that survey research can provide. That said, demographics of the focus groups broadly reflect the demographics observed in the Way Finders client survey, as seen in this table.

Focus group participants were mostly women and split between white and Latino/a. Two-thirds of participants are under the age of 45. Three-quarters lack a college degree, and 80% make less than \$50,000 annually.

Consistent with Way Finders' overall clientele and the survey responses, focus group participants tended to be from the major cities in the region: Springfield, Holyoke, Chicopee, and Westfield. A smaller number of participants were from Hampshire County (Northampton, Easthampton) and from more rural communities (Palmer, Wales). One overarching finding from the group was that there are sharp differences in mobility options between the urban and more rural parts of the region.

## Findings

MPG has provided the full transcripts of all eight groups, as well as summaries of the key findings for each. Both the pre-survey and post-survey focus groups revealed many similar themes. Below is a brief analysis of the most prominent of those themes. Any names have been changed to preserve anonymity.

### *Travel modes are driven by circumstance and opportunity*

As seen in the survey, focus group participants faced significant burdens getting around across all modes. These burdens pertained primarily to cost; quality of experience; and availability, reliability, or convenience. While there were tradeoffs among these considerations, choice of mode was largely dictated by circumstance.

Put simply, people drove if they could afford to own a car. If not, they relied on the PVRTA—if they lived near a route that worked for them. If neither of these was an option, then getting rides from friends or family, or paying for app-based drivers, was the best option for travelling longer than walking distance. But even those who used the PVRTA preferred to travel by car for important appointments.

The overall picture is not of people deciding between options, but people getting around however they can, often with limited or no alternatives to fall back on. There was only one single participant in all the groups who actively chose to live without a car and rely on public transit for most trips. For everyone else, public transit was seen as a lesser alternative.

### *For drivers, costs and road conditions are key*

While driving was the predominant mode and the one most people preferred, the costs of car ownership, poor state of road repair, and traffic were all mentioned as problems. Participants conceived of car ownership as something that required a steady income, and therefore a steady job. One participant, for example, said he would like to get a car but was worried that he would lose his health insurance if he worked enough work to afford one. This reticence, however, was not broadly shared. Most participants either drove a car or wished they could.

Take Sara, a single mother of four in West Springfield, as an example car driver. Sara makes between \$25-50,000 per year and accessed a program for emergency help paying rent and utilities through Way Finders. She had several complaints about the cost and experience of driving, including gas money, insurance, and repairs. “Having a car in general,” she explained, “it’s very expensive.” Having lived in another state recently, she pointed out that insurance and license renewal requirements were more expensive in Massachusetts. On top of those expenses, she worried about repairs. When asked if she decided against taking trips she wanted to, Sara said, “It really just depends on you know, the condition of your car, and whether or not you have the gas money, and if you know the roads well enough, because... there’s potholes the size of my tire.”

Given that only 20% of car drivers in the Way Finders survey said they could afford a major car repair if needed, caution about car and road conditions was a serious concern. It was also pervasive. When asked if there were particular roads that stood out as being in poor shape, two of the four post-survey focus groups responded, “all of them.”

Multiple groups cited the City of Springfield’s hotline for reporting potholes and damage resulting from them, suggesting this is a widespread concern. Specific streets in Springfield were mentioned as needing attention, including Liberty, Boston Road, and the rotary on Armory Street. But the answer “all of them” reveals both the scale of the problem and a broad pessimism about fixing it. Participants described local government as nonresponsive to concerns about road conditions and expressed little confidence in the likelihood of repairs taking place on a large enough scale to make a meaningful or lasting improvement.

One participant, a bus driver, complained, “They just fixed some potholes near my house. But they used that fake gravel that they just put in it. ... It’s really ridiculous because it takes one big vehicle and all that stuff comes out of the pothole. And I tell you, they’re not doing nothing about it.” Not only do potholes affect the quality of the driving experience, they affect the costs and risks of car ownership. And according to this bus driver, they were “destroying the work vehicle” as well.

Despite all those considerations, Sara was one of three participants in her group who, asked why they didn’t take the bus, immediately responded “convenience.” When encouraged to say more, she moved her emphasis from convenience to control:



*“You can control your own schedule. You have more control over when you arrive somewhere, when you leave for an appointment. You can’t always control traffic, but you can control the fact that you’re in your own vehicle and you know how to get there.”*

Having convenient and reliable transportation has benefits beyond access to necessary or desired amenities. It gives people a stronger sense of agency in their lives.

### *PVTA seen as a lesser alternative to driving*

PVTA buses were looked down on as an inferior mode. Participants described them as inconvenient, unsafe, unclean, and unreliable. Above all, time was a concern. The time spent waiting for buses, making connections, making stops, or walking to or from stations made the PVTA a much more cumbersome process than driving. One participant in the post-survey Spanish-language group noted that, with transfers, it takes 2 hours for him to make a trip by bus that he can make in 15 minutes driving.

This time cost was not only burdensome in itself, but it also made riders much more likely to miss appointments or be late for work. Canceled or delayed buses presented the same issue. Many bus riders reported using Uber/Lyft or more informal ride share alternatives to get around the limited schedule and unreliability of the PVTA. Participants from more rural communities complained that PVTA service is extremely limited in their communities, making it nearly impossible to use the bus as a primary means of transportation.

However, questions of convenience should not overshadow participants’ problems with the quality of the experience, which were pervasive and in some cases acute. Participants felt the buses themselves were run-down and unclean. Many complained about limits on the number of bags allowed on the bus and paratransit vans, which makes running errands or buying groceries inconvenient. Participants also complained about a lack of seating, lighting, and shelter at many bus stops. Many people were uncomfortable with the behavior of other riders, ranging from intrusive conversations to open drug use. Multiple participants across groups cited incidents or violence on the bus, including the bystander shooting of a pregnant passenger in Holyoke that resulted in the loss of their unborn child.

Parents, especially, reported reluctance to take their children on the bus. One special category, which came up for both children and adults, was mental health issues affecting their ability to be in crowds, such as social anxiety or autism. As one participant put it: “It’s more, for me, about the safety issues. There’s always something going around or happening and you just never know. You just always have to be aware. Situations like that make me not want to take any transportation that’s not my own vehicle.”

Another obstacle to riding the PVRTA is a lack of information about the service. Many participants didn't know where to get a bus near them or where that bus would take them. There were many complaints about the bus tracking apps having imperfect information, such as showing when a bus was coming to a stop but not indicating the direction that bus was traveling in. Sometimes a bus being tracked on the app would disappear or not show up as predicted. These technological and informational issues only make it harder to convince non-riders to use a mode that they also perceived as not optimal.

Notwithstanding the majority's aversion to the buses, there was a subset of regular bus riders, most of whom relied on the bus because it was the only affordable and available mode for their needs. These riders were willing to put up with unreliable schedules, long travel times, and multiple transfers, often planning hours of additional time into their days. The bus is barely meeting these riders' needs. Convincing non-riders to try the bus is even more challenging.

### *Ride-hailing services are filling a transit gap, but not without challenges*

Ride shares were in effect the opposite of the bus: too expensive to be relied on as the primary mode, but more convenient, and the clear winner for quality of experience. One participant in the Spanish post-survey group recounted spending \$1,000 on Uber during a month when her vehicle was in the shop. Another said taking more work shifts was not worth it because the cost of getting there would eat up most of their additional income. Others complained about variable pricing, with a trip in one direction costing much more if it occurs during a period of high demand. Still, ride-hailing apps were seen preferable to waiting for the bus, especially if participants were going to time sensitive appointments. Some participants did mention the "PT-1" system for rides to medical appointments specifically, but they said that these rides are often poorly managed and result in long waits getting to or from the doctor's office.

The availability of ride-hailing is inconsistent across the region. Hampshire county participants complained that there are far fewer drivers for Uber and Lyft in their area, leading to long waits for a ride, if any ride is available at all. This is another reminder that, outside the major cities, the Pioneer Valley becomes very rural very quickly.

One major discovery from the focus groups was the practice of informal paid ridesharing through social media platforms, referred to by some participants as "Hood Uber." While few people had used this mode, it was widely known. In some ways, it split the difference between app-based drivers, catching rides with friends, and taking the bus. While cheaper, it was also less safe, less reliable, and less pleasant. Participants were concerned about "Hood Uber" drivers being unlicensed or taking their money in advance via online payment apps and never showing up.

Despite these real concerns, the fact that this is a relatively well-known option suggests a demand for better transit options than are currently available in the region.

### *Walking is a necessary, if challenging, stop-gap*

Most focus group participants lived in an urban area, making walking a common mode for many people. As with the bus, it was often described as a fallback for times when a car or ride was unavailable—a regular circumstance for households sharing a single car. Consequently, walking was both a preferred way to get to nearby destinations, and an occasional necessity for longer distances. Participants described the condition of sidewalks as a concern, particularly in wintertime when they needed to be cleared regularly. Some participants expressed concerns about crime and safety walking in urban areas, although others felt more confident. Others, while comfortable walking themselves, were less comfortable with their children walking.

### *Travel to Boston is a major pain point*

Unlike getting around locally, inter-city travel did not have a clearly preferred transit mode, and everyone considered a trip to Boston to be an inconvenience. This exception was borne out in both surveys, where traveling to Boston was rated the most difficult category of trip: 49% of regional residents and 61% of Way Finders clients found it “pretty difficult” or “very difficult.” Distance made the cost of driving more apparent, as well as the inconvenience of spending long hours behind the wheel and the uncertainties of traffic and parking.

Those who regularly traveled to Boston typically did so for medical reasons. Sara, the mother of four in West Springfield, had two children with periodic medical appointments in Boston. She reported, “Driving out there alone with the cost of gas. It's horrible. The wear and tear on your car is horrible, and then you have to try to find parking. It's taxing for sure, and you have to make sure that you're back in time for the [other] kids to get out of school.”

However, bus routes and frequency remained inconvenient as well, so that traveling east to Worcester or Boston was not a simple trip for anyone. As one Holyoke resident without a car summed it up, “I have to go to Springfield just to take the Peter Pan to Worcester, just to take the train to Boston. So that's a lot.” Traveling north to Vermont or south to Connecticut via train was easier than traveling to Boston, albeit more expensive.

All told, inter-city travel was mostly reserved for occasional family visits and vacations, or else medical necessities such as specialist appointments. This discussion suggests that people are

foregoing desired inter-city travel within Massachusetts and facing significant burdens when that travel is necessary.

### *Participants are open to, but skeptical of, future improvements*

Moderators asked what changes participants would like to see in the next 5-10 years, and what changes would get people to use particular modes more. They also asked specifically about the prospect of train service from Springfield through Worcester to Boston, and about the prospect of fare-free PVTAs. In addition, they asked participants what Way Finders could do to help people with transportation needs.

While these questions did not reveal consensus, they did shed light on how people think about these issues, as well as on considerations that would be important in implementing any improvements. On the whole, participants were open to government projects to improve transportation, but cautious or skeptical about their quality, and with a few people expressing concerns about cost.

West-East rail was a familiar concept, but some wondered when it would happen. “I know our Senator Elizabeth Warren is all about getting East-West rail going,” said one participant. “It keeps getting into studies and this and that. Do something, you know?” But other participants feared that the rail service could end up being low-quality or expensive. One person worried about ticket prices if the train service ended up being run by Amtrak, while another said that lawmakers might simply “get together and pass this” without “a plan for how, and that’s how it becomes chaotic.” Another cautiously summed it up this way: “So long since [as it’s] organized correctly. I know nothing can be perfect. As long as it’s not like the PVTAs.”

Focus groups also discussed fare-free buses—what they thought of the idea and how Way Finders could help them with transit burdens. In both cases, the groups gravitated toward a means-tested system for people in certain categories, such as those below a poverty threshold, single mothers, or riders with medical needs. One group suggested a sobriety requirement. A few people did express support for fare-free buses. One group suggested that a fare-free bus would make the boarding process easier and therefore shorten rides. But others had questions about how fares were administered and accounted for. One participant said their mother had bought a monthly bus pass before realizing the PVTAs were free for the summer and was unable to get a refund. The shift from paid to free left the participant wondering about the financial underpinnings of the entire system.

Ideas for how Way Finders could help centered around providing some sort of subsidy or vouchers for transportation: a discounted bus pass, or gas cards, or a discount code for Uber rides to

appointments. There was also some discussion of direct financial support that could be applied for transportation-related improvements.

Another category of aid was informational: Way Finders could offer classes in how to navigate the PVTa system, for example, or a directory of reputable mechanics for dealing with expensive car repairs. Just knowing what options are available for transportation and how to help pay for it would be a welcome improvement for many participants.

## **Conclusion**

Both the pre-survey and post-survey focus groups provided vital insight into the mobility challenges of Way Finders clients. The pre-survey groups enabled us to write a survey that captured many of the economic challenges associated with travel in the region, and the post-survey groups helped us to understand the extent to which people's travel choices feel, in many cases, like no choice at all. Many participants in these groups do not view public transit options in the region as adequate. As a result, many residents, including some of very modest means, resort to driving themselves, getting rides from family or friends, or using ride-hailing services. These vehicular options all come with a significant cost: the cost of owning and maintaining a vehicle, the cost of ride-hailing, and the social cost of being dependent on others for transportation.

In the end, many of the challenges identified in these groups stem from underlying economic challenges these participants are facing. Hitting a pothole is an inconvenience for any driver, but if one cannot afford the repair, it can mean a significant loss of mobility and economic opportunity. Similarly, the perceived state of public transit is pushing residents to spend large sums on ride-hailing services, in some cases just to get to work on time.

While many participants would welcome fare-free transit, cost is not the main factor deterring folks from riding the bus. Making transit more reliable, time-efficient, cleaner, and safer would make a bigger difference in ridership than making it free. For many it would save them money in the long run, even if they are paying to ride the bus.

## **Survey Questions**

Below are ideas for survey questions that were generated from the pre-survey focus groups. Many of these did make it into the survey questionnaire. Some were not included due to space constraints.

- Ask about the use of ridesharing, both formally through apps and through more informal arrangements (ie “hood Uber”).

- Ask about cost - how much are folks spending on transportation? How much on Uber/Lyft? How much on “hood Uber”? For car owners, how much have they spent on car repairs (not oil changes/basic maintenance) in the past few years?
- Ask about perceptions of safety on public transit – several mentioned unsafe/inappropriate behaviors on the PVRTA buses.
- Ask about how folks plan their trips – websites? Apps? Bus schedules?
- Ask about medical issues that impair mobility.
- Ask about crime and safety as impediments to walking, biking, and riding transit/rideshare.
- Ask about driver’s license status to see how many Way Finders clients have needs.
- Ask about experience traveling outside the region (to New York, Boston, etc.) to gauge experience with bus and train service beyond the local area.
- Ask about road conditions with an open-ended question about specific locations that need work.
- When asking about work, ask whether folks work regular 9-5 or early or late shifts. This relates to transit availability for work commutes.
- Ask how important various factors are to one’s decisions of which mode they take (time, cost, destination, traveling with kids, traveling to shop, weather, etc.).
- Ask about fare free buses in a way that explores tradeoffs (free vs. clean, free vs. safe, free vs. frequent service).
- Ask about the dollar amount spent on ridesharing and car repairs (a transportation budget, perhaps).
- Ask about ride sharing in all its forms – friends and family, apps, social media.
- Ask whether non-PVRTA riders are open to using the system.
- Ask questions about medical transportation – how often have you been late to medical appointments due to problems with transportation? How often have you missed appointments altogether? Do you have access to any special transportation to get to medical appointments?
- Ask how many cars each household has access to. We heard from a couple single-car families that sharing a car can be a challenge with limited alternatives.

- Ask about apps or online tools that folks use to access information about public transportation.
- Ask about challenges with transfers between modes and while using public transportation.
- Ask about any physical or mental disabilities or impairments that might prevent someone from using public transportation. We had one woman with blindness and one with agoraphobia in this group, as well as a couple of seniors who preferred to get rides from family.

## Solutions

At the end of the post-survey focus groups, we asked for concrete solutions to the problems discussed that could be implemented, either by state or local government, or by Way Finders as a service provider.

- Longer, accordion-style buses to accommodate more PVTAs if the service is free.
- Incorporating a light at bus stops or a button in the apps to flag bus drivers to know to stop to pick up passengers at a given stop, especially at night.
- Way Finders to offer vouchers for Uber/Lyft rides.
- Monthly stipends from Way Finders for transportation, for example to pay for bus passes, similar to how Way Finders offers financial support for housing and other expenses.
- Improving the existing apps for tracking PVTAs would help participants use the bus.
- Having a class to teach folks how to use the PVTAs
- Change bus schedules to have more direct routes, and more express routes with fewer stops.
- More service to in-demand places (Holyoke Mall, Six Flags).
- Better road repairs that do not need to be redone so frequently; better snow and ice removal.
- Discounted Uber program, like the one at Salem State University (Salem Uber).
- Discounted transit for those on SSI and Social Security.
- Way Finders transportation vouchers to get to medical appointments.
- Gas cards to pay for gas.

- “Way Finders Uber.”
- Way Finders programs to help immigrants with insurance (health, car).
- More communication about Way Finders programs and services across different programs and departments.
- Making sure that road construction is done equitably and efficiently across different communities.
- Having a database of reputable mechanics to help with car repairs.
- Way Finders notifying clients when buses are free (one-pagers on doors for Way Finders housing residents).
- Way Finders providing free bus passes to clients without them having to ask – letting them know this resource (and other transportation resources) are available.
- Way Finders increasing the amount of money awarded to families / individuals every year.
- Better communication about the resources available through Way Finders.
- Cities and towns should post about road construction and impacts on their social media (Facebook) pages, not just on city websites that residents might not know to check.
- More senior transportation in rural areas, more than once a month.
- More PVRTA service to Palmer than the current schedule.
- More cleanliness on PVRTA buses to encourage use.
- Teaching about how to use public transit in school.
- Way Finders classes on how to use the PVRTA.



## **Appendix D – Pre-Survey Focus Groups Summary**

### **People and Transportation Pre-Survey Focus Group Summaries**

April 2024

#### **Methods**

The summaries below describe focus groups conducted in March 2024 by Way Finders and The MassINC Polling Group (MPG) as part of MassDOT’s People and Transportation project.

The groups were the first phase of a year-long research project to understand the transportation needs and challenges of Way Finders clients and other lower-income residents of Hampden and Hampshire counties.

We conducted 4 groups including 2 in-person (March 1 and 5, 2024) and 2 online via Zoom (March 14 and 15, 2024). Both in-person groups were held at Way Finders’ main offices in Springfield. The March 5 in-person group was conducted in Spanish.

Participants were recruited from among Way Finders service recipients. Way Finders emailed an invitation to a subset of its clients, directing them to a brief screening and scheduling survey designed by MPG. MPG then worked to schedule and confirm participants into focus group based on their availability. Way Finders conducted some additional targeted recruiting from its shelter and community-building and engagement programs to round out the groups.

The groups were moderated by pairs of Way Finders staff who were trained by MPG. The moderator’s guide was written by MPG based on a survey of Way Finders staff to help identify known issues that clients had expressed about transportation.

Key goals of this phase of the project were to understand participants’ current modes of travel, challenges they face getting around, and what changes they would like to see in the next 5 to 10 years. The groups also discussed what support Way Finders could provide to its clients to help with transportation.

Way Finders and MPG will use the findings from these groups to inform a survey questionnaire to be fielded among Way Finders clients during the summer of 2024. The same questionnaire will be used with a representative sample of lower-income residents of Hampden and Hampshire counties during the same time period.

The entire project is sponsored by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation.

## Group #1:

Date & Time: March 1, 2024. 12-1:30pm

Location: Way Finders offices – 1780 Main St., Springfield, MA

Language: English

Number of participants: 5

## Summary

This was a transportation-burdened and transit-dependent group. Only 2 of the participants had access to a vehicle, and 2 more had intermittent access to rides from friends and family. As such, the conversation largely focused on public transit and alternatives like ridesharing, both official and unofficial.

### In their own words...

*“I think people that use public transportation would really benefit from having free transportation ... so that way people are not struggling with getting to places. Especially if the social services system is expecting people to go to medical appointments, to show up to court hearings, to go to work, to bring their children to the hospital, to go to school, to go to college. All these things that require people moving from point A to point B, require transportation.”*

Despite their lack of personal vehicles, many in the group expressed frustrations with local bus service that prevented them from relying upon it. One participant, a mother of young children with sensory sensitivities, said that the noise and stimulation on the bus made it difficult for her to use with her son. Others complained about bad behavior, drugs, and crime on the buses. One participant spoke eloquently of the need for better transportation for the population that needs to get to social services, court dates, and medical appointments. Others mentioned that buses do not run late or early enough to accommodate all shift workers.

Some expressed that the bus could not be relied upon for making time-sensitive appointments, saying they would have to leave hours in advance to make sure they made it on time. Others were more positive about bus reliability but noted that passengers paying slowed down the buses considerably. Everyone was in favor of fare-free PVRTA buses, and several were aware that buses were free during the holidays and on weekends. Saving money was a major factor, but so were operational improvements (easier boarding and alighting, faster travel times).

There were mixed opinions about train service in the valley. Some had used train service to get to New York, although they noted that the CT Rail from New Haven was much less expensive than taking Amtrak from Springfield. Another felt that the train station in Holyoke was not utilized and had been used as a political prop by the prior city Mayor. Not everyone was aware of the plans for East-West rail service, and those who had heard of it were skeptical that it would ever materialize. But nearly everyone was interested in the opportunity to get to Worcester and Boston more directly than they can now, provided that it was affordable.

There was a brief discussion of road issues, with complaints about potholes and the expensive damage they can do to vehicles. “You call the city to complain, and they laugh at you.”

Participants thought that Way Finders could offer free bus vouchers to its clients to help them make appointments, although there was also a call for some sort of verification if such a service would be offered.

Perhaps the most interesting new information from the group was about “hood Ubers” that many rely on as a more affordable, but riskier alternative to ride hailing apps. Respondents reported that single trips on Uber were extremely expensive – \$30 to \$50. We pressed on why folks were willing to pay so much instead of using public transit. The amount of time and planning needed to take the bus was a major factor, along with a lack of knowledge of the transit system. Several said they used the PVTA website (not an app) to access bus schedules, trip planning, and locations. Not as many had used their native Maps app to plan transit. Not knowing when or whether a bus was actually coming was a major limiting factor.

## *Survey ideas*

- Ask about the use of ridesharing, both formally through apps and through more informal arrangements (ie “hood Uber”).
- Ask about cost: how much are folks spending on transportation? How much on Uber/Lyft? How much on “hood Uber”? For car owners, how much have they spent on car repairs (not oil changes/basic maintenance) in the past few years?
- Ask about perceptions of safety on public transit – several mentioned unsafe/inappropriate behaviors on the PVTB buses.
- Ask about how folks plan their trips – websites? Apps? Bus schedules?

## **Group #2:**

Date & Time: March 5, 2024. 12-1:30pm

Location: Way Finders offices – 1780 Main St., Springfield, MA

Language: Spanish

Number of participants: 3

## *Summary*

This was a relatively small group, with two drivers and one non-driver who relied on family or rideshare mostly for transportation. None of the group members were particularly enthusiastic or open to taking public transportation locally, although all of them recounted using buses or trains to travel outside of the region. The non-driver preferred the privacy of Uber compared to riding the public bus, although she also complained about the cost of rideshare. Problems with the bus included schedules not running early or late enough and difficulties riding with children or carrying back shopping items from errands. Concerns about crime and safety were also a factor in people avoiding the bus, especially at night.

**In their own words...**

*“The problem is not walking or biking, people have dogs, but they don’t walk them with a leash. Dogs attack people and I don’t like that, that’s why I talk so much about safety. Springfield should take note of our safety. People are afraid of walking because some people have bad intentions. Sometimes we’re afraid of walking at night, because of crimes. Even on the public transport, you never know who’s sitting next to you. You may be robbed.”*

There was some appetite for free PVT service, which two participants had had experience with in connection to the colleges in the area (UMass Amherst and Holyoke Community College). One non-rider said she would try the bus if it were free, although she was happy to pay if it kept the bus clean. The current rider said it would make a big difference given her other expenses. The other non-rider said she would only consider it in an emergency. Interestingly, a major reason both non-riders said they used the bus in the past was to avoid having to pay for parking.

There was greater interest, however, in a train to Boston, which all three participants said they would take. Potholes on local roads between Springfield and Chicopee were a major concern and source of humor. As one participant said, “The potholes here have names.” Liberty Street between Springfield and Chicopee was mentioned specifically as a road in poor shape, as was Route 5 in West Springfield near the shopping plazas.

In terms of future ideas, participants wanted to see more bus shelters and more paratransit service for the elderly and medical appointments. Everyone liked the idea of Way Finders providing bus and Uber subsidies and helping with paperwork to sign clients up for transportation benefits. One unique idea that emerged from this group was Way Finders offering driving classes to clients – the one non-driver did not know how to drive and expressed interest in learning. Finally, all three participants were excited about the idea of a downtown Springfield trolley. This was seen as distinctly different from the existing bus service.

## *Survey ideas*

- Ask about medical issues that impair mobility
- Ask about crime and safety as impediments to walking, biking, and riding transit/rideshare.
- Ask about driver's license status to see how many Way Finders clients have needs.
- Ask about experience traveling outside the region (to New York, Boston, etc) to gauge experience with bus and train service beyond the local area.
- Ask about road conditions with an open-ended question about specific locations that need work.
- When asking about work, ask whether folks work regular 9-5 or early or late shifts. This relates to transit availability for work commutes.

## **Group #3:**

Date & Time: March 14, 2024. 12-1:30pm

Location: Virtual - Zoom

Language: English

Number of participants: 8

## *Summary*

This was our largest and most geographically diverse group, with a couple of participants farther from Springfield/Holyoke/Chicopee (Northampton and South Deerfield). This group included several parents, who recounted the challenges of navigating public transit and ridesharing with multiple kids. For one mom living in a rural area with multiple kids, her mobility was extremely limited by not having a car or access to public transportation. She was forced to rely on rides from family for most travel. This was the only group to bring up the Valley Bike electric bike share. A few people noted its absence (it shut down for financial reasons last year).

For many, the cost of driving (gas, maintenance) was a factor preventing them from traveling more than they do, along with traffic at various points of the day. One participant said she was unable to take public transportation due to a domestic violence situation, and that using Ubers to get to work was expensive and unreliable. Ubers were also seen as very expensive – \$30-40 round trips to get to work or school. This group had also heard of informal ridesharing or “hood Ubers” but did not use them due to safety concerns.

### In their own words...

*“If you do find an Uber on Facebook, they’ll be cheaper than like a regular Uber. But that comes with the safety thing, like, okay, not everybody is just trying to get you from point A to B. A lot of like the young people, they try to get with you or like they try to like, flirt with you just because it’s not like real. It’s not like Uber where people have to go through a background check. It’s just like, you know, strangers.”*

There were relatively few bus riders in this group, and perceptions of the PVTa were not good; “ghetto” is what one participant said. One participant brought up a shooting that occurred on a PVTa bus earlier this year, which took the life of a woman’s unborn baby. Concerns about safety and cleanliness led some to worry that free buses would only make those problems worse. Some favored an entirely new separate free rail system to sidestep the problems with the PVTa. There was also support for East-West rail.

Participants thought Way Finders could help on transportation by providing subsidies or vouchers for beneficiaries using Uber or Lyft, especially single mothers (who were well represented in this group).

### Survey ideas

- Ask how important various factors are to one’s decisions of which mode they take (time, cost, destination, traveling with kids, traveling to shop, weather, etc.).
- Ask about fare free buses in a way that explores tradeoffs (free vs. clean, free vs. safe, free vs. frequent service).
- Ask about the dollar amount spent on ride sharing and car repairs (a transportation budget, perhaps).
- Ask about ride sharing in all its forms – friends and family, apps, social media.
- Ask whether non-PVTa riders are open to using the system.

## Group #4:

Date & Time: March 15, 2024. 12-1:30pm

Location: Virtual - Zoom

Language: English

Number of participants: 7

## Summary

As with the March 14 group, this was a group with some significant transportation burdens: some who are aging out of driving themselves, parents of multiple kids juggling appointments with a single car in the household, and residents with physical and mental health disabilities that make travelling challenging. One theme that has emerged from these groups is that public transportation in the region is simply not adequate to be a reliable option for many of these residents.

One woman whose car was stolen recounted the challenges of getting her son to medical appointments on the PVTa, saying that on many days she simply gave up and skipped the appointment. On the other hand, that same participant said she utilized “PT-1” medical transportation but had encountered scheduling and administrative problems there as well. Difficulty getting to medical appointments on time, regardless of mode, was a theme several participants brought up. One older woman mentioned that she takes care to schedule appointments during the middle of the day to avoid traffic in the morning or late afternoon.

Drivers complained about the cost of car ownership in Massachusetts compared to other states they had lived in, and especially about damage done by potholes. One participant recounted attempting to get the City of Springfield to reimburse her for damage done by a pothole, but ultimately giving up without a resolution. Route 5 between West Springfield and Holyoke and several streets in Springfield were mentioned as particularly bad in terms of potholes.

### In their own words...

*“Gas money is a big one. You never realize how much gas you consume. I mean, we have 7 kids in in my household. So, there's a lot of driving, and a lot of, one kid's doing this, and we're torn between going here and there and prioritizing things. And then another thing is vehicle maintenance. You never know when the unknown's coming, and car needs a tire, you get a flat or you need this. And how many of us really have money to just be like, okay, well, if my engine broke right now, I have 600 bucks or a thousand bucks to fix that? And then you're left without a car. So now you're figuring out everybody's situation.”*



As in other groups, ridesharing apps were seen as an alternative to public transit but were expensive – Uber more so than Lyft. One participant noted that unbanked individuals cannot use Uber or Lyft because they rely on credit or debit cards for payment. We also heard about geographic limitations to the service, as a woman from higher up the valley (Easthampton) complained that there were not enough rideshare drivers to make Uber or Lyft a viable option for her.

This group was somewhat divided on fare-free buses. Many would prefer to see more frequent service to make the PVTA a more viable option, even if it meant continuing to pay fares. One man was skeptical that other taxes would simply go up to pay for the free service. There was similar skepticism about East-West rail, which participants did not seem very familiar with. While most liked the idea, some were concerned about cost and the region's ability to expand train service beyond the relatively meager offerings it has now.

As in Group #3, this group landed some sort of transit or rideshare subsidy – a voucher or promo code – as a way for Way Finders to help its patrons with transportation challenged. The group also felt Way Finders could play an advocacy role in collecting stories such as theirs and bringing them to the attention of state and local governments to influence transportation funding decisions.

### *Survey ideas*

- Questions about medical transportation – how often have you been late to medical appointments due to problems with transportation? How often have you missed appointments altogether? Do you have access to any special transportation to get to medical appointments?
- Ask how many cars each household has access to. We heard from a couple single-car families that sharing a car can be a challenge with limited alternatives.
- Ask about apps or online tools that folks use to access information about public transportation.
- Transfers between modes of transportation were a source of friction in this group. Make sure to include that in any question about challenges using public transportation.
- Ask about any physical or mental disabilities or impairments that might prevent someone from using public transportation. We had one woman with blindness and one with agoraphobia in this group, as well as a couple of seniors who preferred to get rides from family.

## **Appendix E – Post-Survey Focus Groups Summary**

### **People and Transportation Post-Survey Focus Group Summaries October 2024**

#### **Methods**

The summaries below describe focus groups conducted in September and October 2024 by Way Finders and The MassINC Polling Group (MPG) as part of MassDOT’s People and Transportation project.

The groups were the final phase of a year-long research project to understand the transportation needs and challenges of Way Finders clients and other lower-income residents of Hampden and Hampshire counties.

We conducted 4 groups including 2 in-person (September 17 and 24, 2024) and 2 online via Zoom (September 26 and October 2, 2024). Both in-person groups were held at Way Finders’ main offices in Springfield. The September 24 in-person group was conducted in Spanish.

Participants were recruited from the survey of Way Finders clients conducted over the summer. Each group was led by a pair of moderators. The English language groups were led by an MPG staffer and a Way Finders staffer trained by MPG. The Spanish language group was led by two Way Finders staff fluent in Spanish. The moderator’s guide was written by MPG based on the results of the client survey, with input from Way Finders.

The goal of this phase of the project was to better understand some of the findings from the client survey, including the most common travel modes, challenges clients face getting around, and solutions they would like to see to address those problems.

With these focus groups complete, the data collection for this project is now finished.

The entire project is sponsored by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation.

## Group #1:

Date & Time: September 17, 2024, 5:30-7pm

Location: Way Finders offices – 1780 Main St., Springfield, MA

Language: English

Number of participants: 11

### Summary

This group had several PVTa bus and paratransit users, living in Springfield, West Springfield, and Holyoke, and drivers living in Westfield and other communities. Drivers complained about potholes leading to costly repairs to their cars. Traffic gridlock was an issue in Springfield during the afternoon rush hour. Drivers also noted that aggressive panhandlers and reckless cyclists were causing safety issues and contributing to traffic.

Transit riders in the groups complained about unreliable schedules, long wait times, and the need for multiple transfers. Some complained about a lack of bus shelters, saying they had gotten caught in bad weather waiting for the bus.

One participant works for a program that helps young adults facing homelessness and noted that teaching clients how to use the PVTa is a challenge. Existing apps that explain schedules are too difficult for this population to understand.

Among the transit riders, one gentleman stood out for living in a more suburban area (West Springfield) and for choosing to go without a car and to rely on transit, despite the bus taking much longer for his typical trips than driving in a car would. Other bus riders did so because they didn't have access to a car. They also complained about schedules, long trip times, and unreliability.

#### In their own words...

*"Because I'm handicapped, ... with the handicapped van, you're technically only supposed to bring on X amount of bags. I think it's three bags. I've seen them give people hard, hard times about it. But the driver has to get out and lift, you know, so it changes. Also, when you don't have fixed transportation, you feel like a hoarder, because when I go to the store, if I find something, I better get it now because it's cost per trip everywhere you go. So I can't do like the old days: "Oh, meat's on sale at Shaw's!" Go over here and then go to six different grocery stores."*

Participants were generally in favor of making the PVRTA free, but some were concerned about crowding on the buses if they were open to all.

The unreliability of buses pushes some people to take Uber or Lyft. The varied cost of these trips based on time of day was a source of frustration. Some participants worried about safety, noting they had “creepy” drivers. Some who lived farther from Springfield noted that there are fewer drivers and getting a ride can be a challenge at certain times. There was a brief discussion of this year’s ballot question on driver unionization, with one participant opining that a union would be bad for drivers and cause service to suffer.

There were mixed views on walking, with some participants saying they did not feel safe walking due to crime and a lack of street lighting. But others who lived near Downtown Springfield said the relatively active nightlife made them feel safe walking around.

Participants noted challenges getting to appointments on time using transit and the cost of getting to medical appointments in Boston and New York. A participant who relies on the PVRTA paratransit noted that restrictions on the number of bags allowed on the vans made shopping a particular challenge.

Participants mentioned both local and state government as being responsible for fixing transportation, with both Mayor Sarno of Springfield and the governor being singled out. There was discussion of a Springfield city program that reimbursed drivers for damage due to potholes if they are reported. Folks were generally supportive of free PVRTA fares but wondered how it would be paid for. Participants did not think money for transportation was being spent efficiently, citing road construction and paving projects needing to be redone repeatedly.

## *Solutions*

- Longer, accordion-style buses to accommodate more PVRTA riders if the service is free.
- Incorporating a light at bus stops or a button in the apps to flag bus drivers to know to stop to pick up passengers at a given stop, especially at night.
- Way Finders to offer vouchers for Uber/Lyft rides.
- Monthly stipends from Way Finders for transportation, for example to pay for bus passes, similar to how Way Finders offers financial support for housing and other expenses.
- Improving the existing apps for tracking PVRTA buses would help participants use the bus.
- Having a class to teach folks how to use the PVRTA.

## Group #2:

Date & Time: September 24, 2024, 5-7:30pm

Location: Way Finders offices – 170 Main St., Springfield, MA

Language: Spanish

Number of participants: 7

### *Summary*

Most of the participants in the Spanish-speaking group drove; 5 lived near PVTAs, and 4 of them used it occasionally. For drivers, the road conditions and the damage done to their cars was the chief complaint. Particular streets in Springfield (Liberty, the Armory Street rotary) were cited as being in particularly bad shape. As noted in other groups, participants were aware that the city had a hotline for reporting potholes and a process for being reimbursed for car repairs due to poor roads. The cost of car maintenance, as well as insurance and fuel, was a concern. One participant, unable to afford a repair to her car, ended up spending \$1,000 on Uber trips over the course of a month. The time-variable cost of Uber and Lyft came up in this group, as in others, as a complaint, especially when many turn to ride hailing because public transit is seen as unreliable.

The Big E was happening the night of the event, an annual event that generates heavy traffic in Springfield, West Springfield, and Agawam. One participant who lives near the fairgrounds complained that it's hard just to get out of his driveway when the fair is happening.

The PVTAs were seen as not a reliable source of transportation for most, with infrequent buses, unreliable schedules, long travel times, and overcrowded buses. A lack of direct or express routes was a common refrain, with participants talking about hour-long, multi-bus trips to go somewhere they could drive in minutes. Some also complained about shopping on the PVTAs and limits on the number of bags they were permitted on the buses. Medical appointments were also a challenge, with one participant saying they lost an appointment with a cancer specialist due to a lack of transportation.

#### *In their own words...*

*"A 15-minute drive takes 2 hours by bus."*

Safety on the PVTAs was also a concern, with one woman citing the shooting of a pregnant woman on a PVTAs bus in Holyoke. Another said they witnessed drug use on the PVTAs buses when traveling with their grandchild. Safety was a concern on other modes of transportation as well, including unlicensed "Hood Ubers" advertising on Facebook, distracted drivers, and crime on the street.

preventing some from walking in certain neighborhoods. Participants appreciated the potential cost savings from a free PVTa service, but they were split on whether they would ride it more if it were free.

Participants did not think the state needed more money for transportation as much as it needed to spend it more efficiently.

### *Solutions*

- Change bus schedules to have more direct routes, and more express routes with fewer stops.
- More service to on-demand place (Holyoke Mall, Six Flags).
- Better road repairs that do not need to be redone so frequently; better snow and ice removal.
- Discounted Uber program, like the one at Salem State University (Salem Uber).
- Discounted transit for those on SSI and Social Security.
- Way Finders transportation vouchers to get to medical appointments.
- Gas cards to pay for gas.
- “Way Finders Uber.”
- Way Finders programs to help immigrants with insurance (health, car).
- More communication about Way Finders programs and services across different programs and departments.

### **Group #3:**

Date & Time: September 26, 2024, 12-1:30pm

Location: Virtual - Zoom

Language: English

Number of participants: 11

### *Summary*

This group featured participants from Hampshire County (Northampton, Amherst) as well as Chicopee, Holyoke, and Springfield. Those who drove cited road constructions and inconsistency of the quality and speed of road work across different communities and neighborhoods within communities. Those who have had to fix their cars complained about high repair costs and the challenge of finding a good and trustworthy mechanic.

#### In their own words...

*“Every time I think I have savings, I have to turn around and spend it on fixing the car. It puts a dent in my ability to create wealth for me and my children.”*

PVTA users highlighted frequent delays, inconvenient schedules, and problems with accessibility. One participant said a trip to the doctor can take 20 minutes by car but more than an hour by bus. Some also complained of missing or changing bus stops due to construction without adequate notice. Those who rode transit said they had missed medical appointments due to multiple bus transfers. Bringing children and groceries on the bus was also challenging. A lack of signage and bus stop infrastructure, like benches, made riding harder for those with disabilities and those with limited access to technology that would let them use the bus apps.

Problems with the PVTA, including safety concerns, pushed some to use Uber and Lyft instead, especially when traveling with children. Still, many complained about the cost of rideshare and wished there were subsidies to help with the expense. The cost of rideshare was also a major concern for those with a car in the shop being repaired. Getting a ride from friends or family involved more advance notice and coordination than many were willing or able to do. Participants also complained about the PT-1 medical transportation system as not being convenient or in sync with patients’ appointments.

Participants had questions about how free PVTA service would be implemented and complained that some riders, unaware that the service would be free, purchased bus passes and could not be reimbursed.

### Solutions

- Making sure that road construction is done equitably and efficiently across different communities.
- Having a database of reputable mechanics to help with car repairs.
- Way Finders notifying clients when buses are free (One-pagers on doors for Way Finders housing residents).



- Way Finders providing free bus passes to clients without them having to ask – letting them know this resource (and other transportation resources) are available.
- Way Finders increasing the amount of money awarded to families / individuals every year.
- Better communication about the resources available through Way Finders.

#### Group #4:

Date & Time: October 2, 2024 - 12-1:30pm

Location: Virtual - Zoom

Language: English

Number of participants: 10

#### Summary

This group featured participants from some more rural communities, for whom public transportation was barely available, as well as participants from closer to larger cities. For drivers in the group, we heard complaints about potholes and the damage done, as well as the cost of gas, which can vary from town to town. One participant from Northampton noted that more bike and pedestrian traffic could be challenging for drivers not used to sharing the road. Drivers down by Springfield cited specific roads as being in poor shape: Liberty, Armory, Worthington, Boston Road, and Wilbraham Road.

#### In their own words...

*“Almost every town or city nowadays has a Facebook page. It wouldn't be very difficult for cities or municipalities to tell on the Facebook pages, ‘Hey, we're gonna have construction on these streets. This is how it's gonna impact you.’”*

Several participants were unable to drive due to health issues, and for them, getting around was much more difficult, especially for those living farther from the city (Wales, Palmer). They reported having to rely on family for rides, or the PT-1 medical transportation services, which again got poor reviews in this group. The PVTa was not much of an option for those living farther out, with sometimes a single stop in their community.

Those with more access to the PVTa reported familiar complaints about schedules, limited service times, and infrequent buses. One participant said a relative needed to leave at 7am to reach their work on the bus by 9am. Participants also found the PVTa website and apps difficult to use and

navigate, and felt anxious because they were unfamiliar with the system. They also felt PVRTA drivers could use more training about helping passengers with sensory or mental health needs. Participants were interested in the free PVRTA service and felt it would make a difference for them personally. There were fewer concerns raised about side effects of free transit in this group than others.

Some participants did use Uber and Lyft and noted the high price, even with certain discounts. Lyft was seen as cheaper than Uber, something echoed in other focus groups. Compared to more populous parts of the state, there are far fewer Uber and Lyft drivers in Western Massachusetts, making it harder to get a ride in a timely manner.

In terms of walking, some participants complained about a lack of sidewalks in their communities, and the fact that some sidewalks are not well maintained or shoveled during the winter, impacting the ability to get to and ride public transit.

### *Solutions*

- Cities and towns should post about road construction and impacts on their social media (Facebook) pages, not just on city websites that residents might not know to check.
- More senior transportation in rural areas, more than once a month.
- More PVRTA service to Palmer than the current schedule.
- More cleanliness on PVRTA buses to encourage use.
- Teaching about how to use public transit in school.
- Way Finders classes on how to use the PVRTA.

## Appendix F – Pre-Survey Focus Group Moderator’s Guide

### TOPICS:

1. Ground rules (5 minutes)
2. Introductions; how are folks getting around right now? (20 minutes)
3. What are the main challenges folks are experiencing getting around? (25 minutes)
4. What changes would people like to see to transportation around this region? (20 minutes)
5. What could Way Finders do to help its clients with transportation? (10 minutes)
6. Wrap up and closing thoughts on the topic (10 minutes)

### MODERATOR’S GUIDE:

#### Welcome, Ground Rules, Introduction (5 min)

- a. Hi all, thank you for joining us today. My name is **X** and I will be leading our discussion today. While some of you may know me through my work at Way Finders, today my role is to lead our discussion, and listen and learn from you all.
- b. **FOR VIRTUAL GROUPS:** Can everyone hear and see OK? Does everyone have their camera on? Does everyone know how to turn their microphone on and off? If you have any technical issues, I have some of my colleagues observing the group and they can try to help you if you message them in the chat. Please keep your camera on during this group so we can all be present together for this discussion.
- c. Before we jump in, I’d just like to remind you that there are no wrong answers. We’re not looking for a specific answer to any question, we just want to hear your perspective and experiences.
- d. We want to hear from everyone today, and so I may call on folks to ensure everyone has a chance to speak. Each of you here today is representing your community, whether that be your family, friends, or neighbors. So please use this opportunity to make your voice heard.
- e. We will be talking together for about 90 minutes, and we’ll do our best to get you out on time.
- f. I do want to remind you that our discussion is being recorded, just to help us with our notes. However, your responses will remain anonymous. We may use quotes from tonight in our report, your name will not be shared. Since we are recording, please speak one at a time.
- g. Any questions about any of this before we get started?

- a. **IF SOMEONE ASKS WHO THIS IS FOR, ETC:** We are working with The MassINC Polling Group, which is a public opinion firm with offices in Boston and Northampton. Together Way Finders and MassINC Polling are doing this research with the support of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, or MassDOT.

**Intro / current modes of transportation (20 minutes)**

1. To get started, could each of you please share your name, the town or city you live in, how you mainly get around?  
**[GO AROUND TABLE; IF ON ZOOM CALL ON THE NEXT PERSON BASED ON THEIR ORDER ON YOUR SCREEN.]**
2. Thank you. So, we've talked about the main ways folks get around, but of course people use different types of transportation for different types of trips: Show of hands, how many of you do each of the following? **READ LIST 1 BY 1, NOTE # OF HANDS**
  - a. Drive a car
  - b. Ride as a passenger in someone else's car
  - c. Walk
  - d. Take a Public Bus
  - e. Uber / Lyft / Taxi
  - f. Ride a bike
3. For those of you who raised your hands for multiple modes of transportation, how do you decide when to use one mode over another?
4. Some of you have mentioned travelling with other people. For those of you who have children or young adults in your life, what does getting around with them look like?
5. So, we've talked about how folks are getting around now. Are there modes of transportation that you would like to be using **more than you are right now**?
  - a. **PROBE:** What about those other modes is appealing to you?
  - b. **PROBE IF NEEDED:** Anyone else also want to [drive/walk/bike, etc.] more than you do now? What's stopping you?

### Challenges of current modes (25 mins)

1. Thinking about all the different ways you get around now, are there any challenges you face getting around with your current mode or modes of transportation?
2. Show of hands, how many have you ever:
  - a. Had to skip or miss an appointment due to transportation?
  - b. Been late for work or picking kids up from childcare?
    - i. Someone who raised your hand, what happened?
    - ii. Does this happen a lot or just some of the time?
3. Are there some places you want to go or things you want to do that you can't right now with the transportation that's available to you?
  - a. **PROBE:** What would have to change for you to be able to make that trip?
4. Do any of you have to travel outside of the region, like to Boston or Hartford?
  - a. How do you make those trips? Is it difficult to do that?

### IF YOU HAVE BUS RIDERS IN YOUR GROUP, ASK THE FOLLOWING:

5. The Pioneer Valley Transit Authority is the name of the company that runs the public buses in this region. For someone who uses the PVTB buses, what are they like?
  - a. What's challenging about riding the bus?
6. For those of you who don't ride the bus, what are the reasons you don't ride?
  - a. **PROBE:** What, if anything, would get you to try riding the bus?
7. In some other parts of the state, the buses are free to ride. Would you like to see that happen with the PVTB buses that run out here?
  - a. **PROBE:** Someone who likes that idea, what is appealing to you? What do others think?
  - b. **PROBE:** If the bus were free, would you ride it more than you do now?

### Future changes (20 minutes)

**SOME OF THIS MAY COME UP ON ITS OWN AS PEOPLE TALK ABOUT CHALLENGES. IF IT FEELS COVERED, JUST ASK ABOUT CHANGES THAT HAVEN'T COME UP.**

1. Now I want to open things back up to all transportation, not just public transportation. Thinking ahead over the next, say, 5 to 10 years, what changes would you like to see to transportation around this part of the state?
  - a. **PROBE:** What's something that, if it changed, would make it easier for you and your household to get around and do what you need to do?
2. We've talked a lot about public transit, but for the drivers, are there any roads or highways that need special attention over the next 5 to 10 years?

3. **IF NOT MENTIONED:** As you may have heard, the state is looking to run train service from Springfield east to Worcester and then all the way into Boston. What do people think of that idea?
  - a. **PROBE:** Would any of you use a train like that to get to Boston?

#### **Way Finders support (10 minutes)**

1. What are some ideas of how Way Finders can help the people it serves with some of the transportation challenges we've been discussing?

#### **Wrap up (10 mins)**

**YOU CAN CUT THE FIRST TWO ITEMS HERE IF YOU'RE RUNNING LONG ON TIME, JUST GO RIGHT TO WRAPPING UP.**

1. We are just about out of time, and I know we've covered a broad range of topics tonight. Is there anything that we didn't discuss that anyone would like to mention before we finish?
2. I want to go around the room and have everyone mention one thing they took away from tonight's discussion. It could be something new you learned, or just something you hadn't thought about before. **GO AROUND ROOM MAKING SURE EVERYONE GETS A CHANCE TO SPEAK.**
3. Thank you all very much for your time. Before you leave, make sure to get your gift card as a thank you for your time and sharing your opinion. **IF VIRTUAL:** You will receive a digital gift card for \$100 to thank you for participating tonight. That email should come in the next week or so, so please keep an eye out.
4. In the meantime, you should all have our contact information, so please reach out if you have any additional questions. Have a great night!

## Appendix G – Post-Survey Focus Group Moderator’s Guide

### TOPICS:

1. Welcome and ground rules (5 minutes)
2. Introductions and modes of transportation (35 minutes)
3. Challenges getting around (20 minutes)
4. Solutions (20 minutes)
5. Wrap up and closing thoughts on the topic (10 minutes)

### MODERATOR’S GUIDE:

**FOR SPANISH GROUP, GUIDE WILL BE SPLIT BETWEEN TWO WAY FINDERS (WF) MODERATORS. SECOND WF MODERATOR WILL TAKE THE SECTIONS MARKED FOR MASSINC POLLING GROUP (MPG) MODERATOR.**

#### Welcome and ground rules (5 min)

1. **WF MODERATOR:** Hi all, thank you for joining us today. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I will be leading our discussion today. While some of you may know me through my work at Way Finders, today my role is to lead our discussion, and listen and learn from you all.
2. **FOR ENGLISH IN-PERSON GROUPS – MPG MODERATOR:** And my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a public opinion researcher. I have been working with Way Finders on this project. We are doing this project for the Massachusetts Department of Transportation. Today I will be co-moderating the group.
3. **FOR VIRTUAL GROUPS – MPG MODERATOR:** Can everyone hear and see OK? Does everyone have their camera on? Does everyone know how to turn their microphone on and off? If you have any technical issues, we have a colleague here [NAME] taking notes who can help with any technical issues. You can message them in the chat. Please keep your camera on during this group so we can all be present together for this discussion and please mute if there is noise around you. We want to make sure you can raise your hand to respond to questions. At this time, please raise your hand. (If someone hasn’t raised their hand, demonstrate and explain how).
4. **WF MODERATOR:** Before we jump in, I’d just like to remind you that there are no wrong answers. We’re not looking for a specific answer to any question, we just want to hear your perspective and experiences to clarify the survey results and make sure we understand the results properly. We really appreciate your help with this.

5. **WF MODERATOR:** We want to hear from everyone today, and so we may call on folks to make sure everyone has a chance to speak. Each of you here today is representing your community, whether that be your family, friends, or neighbors. So please use this opportunity to make your voice heard.
6. **WF MODERATOR:** We will be talking together for about 90 minutes, and we'll do our best to get you out on time. Please take care of your needs during this time. If at any point you need to stand up or stretch or use the restroom, please do so.
7. **MPG MODERATOR:** I do want to remind you that our discussion is being recorded, just to help us with our notes. However, your responses will remain anonymous. We may use quotes from tonight in our report, your name will not be shared. Since we are recording, please speak one at a time.
8. **MPG MODERATOR:** Any questions about any of this before we get started?

### **Introductions and modes of transportation (35 minutes) – WF MODERATOR TO LEAD**

1. To get started, could each of you please share your name, the town or city you live in, and how you mainly get around? Again, we will keep your comments anonymous, but we want to be able to refer to everyone by their names here.  
**[GO AROUND TABLE; IF ON ZOOM CALL ON THE NEXT PERSON BASED ON THEIR ORDER ON YOUR SCREEN.]**
2. Thank you. All of you completed a survey earlier this summer about transportation. Today we want to ask you some questions based on the results of that survey.
3. We want to start with how you get around. The most common type of transportation in the survey was driving. Someone who said that they drive, can you talk about what it's like driving around the area?
  - a. What are some of the challenges related to driving as your mode of transportation?
  - b. Are there specific roads or streets that are a problem?
  - c. Do any of you have issues related to your car?
  - d. If you had a problem with your car, like a major repair, would you be able to fix it right away? If not, how would you get around? How would that impact your life?
4. The next most common way of getting around was getting a ride from someone else. Do any of you rely on friends or family or neighbors for rides getting around? **IF NO ONE GETS RIDES, SKIP TO 4B.**
  - a. Someone who gets a ride from others, why do you do that? How does that work for you?
  - b. Those of you who drive, do you give rides to friends or family or neighbors?



5. About a quarter of survey respondents said they ride the PVTA bus, and another 4 percent ride the PVTA paratransit service. Show of hands, how many of you live near a PVTA bus stop? And how many of you ride the PVTA? **IF NO ONE RIDES PVTA, SKIP 5A AND 5B**
  - a. Someone who rides, what is your experience of riding the bus?
  - b. What would make riding the bus or paratransit better?
  - c. Raise your hand again if you live within walking distance to a PVTA stop. Then if someone raises their hand ask, "Why do you not use PVTA for transportation?"
  - d. What would make you want to ride PVTA more?
  - e. The PVTA was free to ride this summer, and it is applying for money from the state to be free to ride in the future. Have you heard about this?
  - f. If the PVTA were free to ride, do you think you will ride the PVTA more now than you did before?
  - g. In what ways do you think the free rides would impact your daily life?
6. The survey also showed that a quarter of folks are using Uber or Lyft, with another 3% using taxis and 4% getting rides from folks via social media like Facebook. How many of you use any of those ways to get around? **IF NO ONE USES THIS MODE SKIP TO 6B.**
  - a. For those who use one of these modes, when you do, why do you choose to travel that way?
  - b. For those who don't, why do you not use these services?
7. Last thing for this section, walking. Where do you walk, and what are your major concerns when you walk?
  - a. **IF SOMEONE SAYS THEY FEEL UNSAFE WALKING:** Someone raising concern, why is this a concern for you? What would have to change to make walking easier?
8. Are there are any other way that people get around that we haven't talked about yet?

### **Challenges getting around (20 minutes) – MPG MODERATOR TO LEAD**

1. Thank you. Now we want to ask a bit about specific problems getting around. Think about the different types of trips you make, like going to work or school, or to the doctor, or to go shopping or going out to eat, are there any that are especially hard for you to make right now?
2. One thing the survey found was that it can take different amounts of time for people to get to places depending on how they travel. For those of you who work or go to school, how long does it take you to get there, on a typical day? And how do you get there?
3. Show of hands, how many have you ever had to skip or miss an appointment due to transportation?
  - c. Someone who raised your hand, what happened? Someone else? **ALLOW MULTIPLE PARTICIPANTS TO SHARE THEIR STORIES.**
  - d. Does this happen a lot or just some of the time?

4. Again, show of hands, how many have you have ever been late for work or picking kids up from childcare?
  - a. Someone who raised your hand, what happened? Someone else? **ALLOW MULTIPLE PARTICIPANTS TO SHARE THEIR STORIES.**
  - b. Does this happen a lot or just some of the time?
5. Does anyone else have story of being impacted by a lack of transportation they would like to share?
6. Thinking about how much you spend on getting around each month, like for gas, car payments, maintenance, insurance, parking, Uber, Lyft, or public transit. How expensive is it for your family?
  - a. What specifically is most expensive for you?
  - b. Have you ever not been able to get somewhere because it was too expensive to get there? What happened?

#### **Solutions (20 minutes) – WF MODERATOR TO LEAD**

1. We've heard about some challenges people face getting around here. I want to shift a bit towards solutions. But first, who do you think is most responsible for solving problems that have to do with transportation in our community?
  - a. **PROBE IF NEEDED:** Another way of asking that: if you had a complaint about transportation, who would you send that to?
2. Thinking about all those different groups and challenges we just identified, what could they do to fix some of them? What would make it easier to get around here?
3. This project is funded by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, or MassDOT. What would you like to see MassDOT do to solve some of these problems?
  - a. **PROBE IF NEEDED:** MassDOT is responsible for the state roads and highways, and they give money to cities and towns for transportation projects. They also give money to the PVTa to run the buses and paratransit service here.
4. Are the problems we are talking about just limited to transportation, or do they connect to other problems in your community?
5. There are other groups that are not government, including Way Finders, which provides services to clients in this region. What could groups like Way Finders do to fix some of these transportation problems?
6. We talked earlier about the cost of transportation. If there were a program that offered families money to help cover their transportation costs, would you be interested in that?
  - a. **IF ANY INTERESTED:** What kinds of costs would you use it to cover?

7. Of course, transportation costs money not just for families, but to fix the roads and bridges and to run the buses and trains. Do you think there is enough money to solve the problems we have been talking about today?
  - a. Do we, as a state, need more money to spend on transportation, or should we spend money differently?
  - b. If you think we need more money, where do you think that money should come from?

**Wrap up (10 mins) MPG MODERATOR TO LEAD**

**YOU CAN CUT THE FIRST TWO ITEMS BELOW IF YOU'RE RUNNING LONG ON TIME – SKIP TO #3.**

1. We are just about out of time, and I know we've covered a broad range of topics tonight. Is there anything that we didn't discuss that anyone would like to mention before we finish?
2. I want to go around the room and have everyone mention one thing they took away from the discussion. It could be something new you learned, or just something you hadn't thought about before. **GO AROUND THE ROOM / ZOOM MAKING SURE EVERYONE GETS A CHANCE TO SPEAK.**
3. **ADD IF ANYONE HAD A WF-SPECIFIC TRANSPORTATION PROBLEM:** Some of you mentioned you had some issues with transportation related to your Way Finders experience. If you could please stick around after the group, we will get some more information so Way Finders can help you.
4. Thank you all very much for your time. Before you leave, make sure to get your gift card as a thank you for your time and sharing your opinion. **IF VIRTUAL:** You will receive a digital gift card for \$100 to thank you for participating tonight. That email should come in the next week or so, so please keep an eye out. If you have any questions or suggestions following this session, you can reach out to [name/email].

## Appendix H – Email Invitation to Pre-Survey Focus Groups



### Participate in a Way Finders focus group for a \$100 gift card!

¡Participe en un grupo focal de Way Finders para  
obtener una tarjeta regalo de \$100!

Hello,

Way Finders wants to hear from you!

You recently took a survey about your experiences with transportation and said that you would be interested in participating in a follow-up 90-minute focus group.

Participants will be given a \$100 gift card after completion of the focus group.

If you are interested, please take **THIS SHORT SURVEY** to tell us a little bit about yourself and when you are available.

If you're chosen for a group, you will receive an email from [panel@massincpolling.com](mailto:panel@massincpolling.com) inviting you to participate.

Thank you!

Hola,

¡Way Finders quiere saber de usted!

Recientemente usted participó en una encuesta sobre sus experiencias con el transporte y mencionó que estaría interesado en participar en un grupo focal de seguimiento de 90 minutos.

Los participantes recibirán una tarjeta de regalo con un valor de \$100 al finalizar el grupo.

Si está interesado, por favor responda a **ESTA CORTA ENCUESTA** para contarnos un poco sobre usted y cuándo está disponible.

Si es elegido para un grupo, recibirá un correo electrónico de [panel@massincpolling.com](mailto:panel@massincpolling.com) con una invitación para participar.

¡Muchas gracias!



family.neighborhood.community.

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## Appendix I – Aggregated Survey Pre-Test Responses

### About the pre-test:

The MassINC Polling Group (MPG) and Way Finders collected “pre-test” responses on the first draft of the People and Transportation project survey. The purpose of pre-testing is to identify and correct issues with the survey prior to full launch. These include questions that are difficult for respondents to understand and burdensome to complete; missing or non-exhaustive response options for questions; missing topics; and any other issues that might prevent respondents from successfully completing the survey. All pre-test participants were given a \$25 gift card for their time and opinion.

Way Finders identified two discrete populations among its client base for the pre-test: clients currently in shelters through their Supportive Service department, and community members who participate in Way Finders events through its Community Building and Engagement department. MPG trained Supportive Services staff on how to conduct the pre-test at a session at Way Finders on April 22, 2024. Staff then conducted pre-tests during their regularly scheduled check-in visits with shelter families from April 22 through April 26. Staff sat with clients as they took the survey on their own devices and made note of general impressions as well as specific questions and concerns. All told, Supportive Services generated nine pre-tests of the survey.

Pretests with volunteers through Community Building and Engagement took place at an event at Way Finders April 29. After a brief introduction by MPG, volunteers took the survey on their own devices and noted any issues on a printed version of the survey. MPG staff was present to assist with technical issues and answer questions. Afterwards, MPG and Way Finders led a group discussion to go through general and specific concerns volunteers had identified. We collected 13 pre-tests from this session, for a total of 22. (Our goal was to collect at least 15 pre-tests.)

MPG has compiled comments received from the pre-test worksheets below in blue text. General comments appear below the introduction. Comments in quotations marks are taken directly from the worksheets; comments not in quotations are paraphrases of comments and MPG notes on the follow-up discussion of the pre-test results. The survey questions on the worksheet reflect the version of the survey at the time of the pre-test.

As a result of the pre-test, MPG and Way Finders made several changes to the survey to reduce its overall length and complexity. These included removing a section of questions about satisfaction with Way Finders’ services. (These questions will be asked in a separate survey to inform Way Finders’ strategic plan later this year.) We also decided to increase the incentive for completing the survey from \$5 to \$10. These changes were in response to a general sense from the pre-testers that the survey was overly long and that the \$5 incentive

would not be adequate. Removing questions also gave us room to include a question about pedestrian challenges, which was requested during the pre-test.

## Survey Pre-Test Responses:

1. Thank you for your interest in this survey! Way Finders is working with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) to understand the transportation challenges in Western Massachusetts. The survey should take about 10 minutes to complete. **The first 1000 people who complete this survey will receive a \$5 gift card for their time.**

At the end of the survey, you will have the chance to sign up for a follow-up focus group held in September. If you're selected for a group and participate, you'll receive a \$100 gift card for your time and opinion.

"Way too long" x3

"Too long survey. Direct to household members instead of family or "you"."

Participants noted that the survey took them longer than 10 minutes to complete – more like 15-20 minutes. There was a general sense that the survey need to be reduced in length.

There was also a consensus that, at its current length, a \$5 incentive would not be adequate.

Older pre-testers strongly urged that the incentive be a physical gift card rather than an email gift card. There was discussion of giving people a choice of an e-gift card and a physical gift card.

Participants wanted this intro to convey that this survey would lead to actual change, because that would encourage people to take the survey.

Also some discussion in the group about whether to answer the questions as an individual or speaking for one's household or family. Some noted that they personally didn't have many challenges get around, but others in their household or family might, and so the scope could impact their answers.

Finally, there was a discussion of adding something about pedestrian safety somewhere in the survey.

2. First, what is your age?

Under 18
18-29
30-44
45-59
60+
Prefer not to say

There was a question about why this question was at the top. We explained that this is to screen out “Under 18” and also to help with analysis when the survey is over.

Suggestion to change scale to 45-54, 55-64, 65+.

3. Thank you. We'd like to ask you about you and your family's experiences getting around your area. To start, over the past year, how often do you do each of the following to get around?

<b>ROTATE ORDER</b>	Almost every day	At least once a week	At least once a month	Less often	Never	Prefer not to say
Drive yourself						
Get a ride with a friend, family, or neighbor						
Ride in an Uber or Lyft						
Ride in a taxi						
Get a ride from someone offering on social media, sometimes called a "Hood Uber"						
Ride a public bus (Pioneer Valley Transit Authority or PVTa)						
Ride paratransit or medical transportation						
Ride a bike or electric bike						
Ride an electric scooter						
Walk						

First sentence above saying "you and your family", but then we ask about "you" – which do we want here?

"This question looks better like this (table). Repeating the same question annoys me."

Request to add an option for medical scooter, perhaps as part of "walk".

One participant noted that her transportation behavior varied based on whether she was traveling during the day or at night.

Perhaps add a question for folks to note their PRIMARY mode of transportation?

Suggestion to combine "taxi" with uber/lyft option.

4. In a few words, what are the biggest challenges you face when you are trying to get around your area? \_\_\_\_\_

Open ended responses on this question indicate folks are comprehending this question and responding appropriately.



5. How difficult is it for you to make the following trips?

<b>ROTATE ORDER</b>	Not difficult at all	A little difficult	Very difficult	Almost impossible	Do not make this trip	Prefer not to say
School						
Work						
Childcare						
Shopping or errands						
Health care appointments						
Visiting friends or family						
Going out (dining / entertainment / nightlife)						
Trips outside the region (Boston, New York, etc.)						

“Or family – my husband is disabled, so his answers are different than mine”

“For which mode of transportation when someone uses multiple?”

“Better 1 question with choices” – maybe a check box on which of the following trip are difficult for you to make? Or they prefer a table question as with the mode question.

Trips to Boston and New York are different. Better to just choose one destination: Trips to Boston probably most relevant for DOT.

Suggestion to clarify that “Do not make this trip” is the N/A option here.

6. How often do you feel each of the following emotions while traveling around the region?

<b>ROTATE ORDER</b>	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never	Prefer not to say
Frustrated					
Angry					
Scared					
Stressed					
Calm					
Unsafe					
Confused					
Lost					

“Hard to answer when you take multiple modes of transportation”.

This question was confusing to people. One person who used multiple modes didn’t know if they were supposed to answer for each mode they use. Question was also seen as very long. We discussed in the group changing this to a “checkbox” question and clarifying that this is meant to cover all the different ways folks get around.

Suggestion to flip order of the response options (Never, Rarely, Occasionally, Frequently)

---

7. In the past year, have any of the following happened to you as a result of a problem getting where you needed to go? **Select all that apply. ROTATE ORDER**

Been late for work
Had to turn down work or a job
Been late for an appointment
Missed an appointment
Lost a job
Skipped medical care
Been late getting home after work or errands
Been late getting a child to or from school or daycare
Skipped care for a child or other dependent
Been late to school or class
Been stranded somewhere
None of the above
Prefer not to say

8. Thinking about the neighborhood where you live, are you able to easily access each of the following?

<b>ROTATE ORDER</b>	Yes	No	Unsure
A grocery or other food market			
A PVTA or other bus stop			
A public park			
A playground			
Health care			
A library or community center			

“This definition is too broad. What do you mean how easily? How close or far does each these have to be? Would you want to know why they are not easily accessible?”

Perhaps solve this by change to “within 10 minutes” of you? Should we specify mode? Walking versus car?

---

9. In a typical month would you say that the amount you spend on transportation, including car payments, gas and maintenance, bus fares, Uber, Lyft, and taxis, is...

Not a burden at all
A little bit of a burden
A minor burden
A major burden
I don't have any transportation expenses
Unsure

“This question needs to be separated. Car payments, gas, maintenance is a lot different than paying for PVTA, Uber, Lyft”.

Not sure what to make of this one! We can't really make the survey longer.

---

10. At any point in the past year, have you been unable to pay your rent, mortgage or other bills, or to buy food or other necessities, because you had to pay for transportation?

Yes
No
Prefer not to say

**11. Thank you. Now we'd like to ask some questions about specific ways of getting around.**

Do you have or are you in the process of getting a driver's license?

I have a driver's license
I am in the process of getting a driver's license (getting or have a permit)
I do not have a driver's license and am not in the process of getting one
Prefer not to say

"This does not include those who cannot receive a license due to fees owed to the state. For example: pike tolls, excise taxes, unpaid tickets. All in which license is suspended until bills/tickets are paid. They all incur (sic) interest".

---

**12. Does anyone in your household own or lease a car?**

I have my own car
I share a car with someone in my household
No, my household does not own or lease a car
Prefer not to say

"I own and lease a vehicle. There is no option for multiple and no option for loan, only own. When you lease a vehicle, it's not fully yours until it is fully paid for. This needs to be categorized and clarified differently".

### ASK IF HOUSEHOLD DOES NOT OWN OR LEASE CAR

13. Could you get access to a car if you needed to drive or get a ride somewhere? **Select all that apply. ROTATE ORDER**

I could borrow a car from a friend or family
I could get a ride with a friend or family
I could afford to rent a car if I needed to
No, I could not access a car if I needed to
Unsure

“I did not get asked this question. What if my car breaks down, then I have to choose of these options. It should not be skipped just because someone owns their own vehicle”.

---

### ASK IF HOUSEHOLD OWNS OR LEASES CAR

14. If your car needed a major repair (flat tire, body work, engine repair) could you afford to fix it right away? If not, would you have access to another car, or would you be without a car?

Could afford to fix right away
Could not afford to fix right away, but would have access to another car
Could not afford to fix right away and would not have access to another car
Unsure

**ASK FOLLOWING 2 QUESTIONS IF USED RIDESHARE OR TAXIS**

15. You mentioned that you have ridden in an Uber, Lyft, or taxi in the past year. Which of the following are reasons why you use Ubers, Lyfts, or taxis? **Select all that apply. ROTATE ORDER**

No public transit convenient to where I was going
No parking where I was going
Not enough time to go another way
Prefer to travel by myself
Don't have access to a car
Some other reason: _____
None of the above
Unsure

- 
16. How much does your typical one-way ride in an Uber, Lyft, or taxi cost? An estimate is fine.

\_\_\_\_\_

This question was flagged as confusing.

“Depends on what I’m going. Not a valid question. Work is farther than school. Doctors is farther than work. Which one am I talking about?”

“didn’t allow putting in a text answer “don’t use enough to know an answer” – had to enter a # but question was required”

Include an instruction for folks who don’t recall or don’t know – how to interpret a “0” on this question.

## ASK IF NEVER USE RIDESHARE

17. You mentioned that you have not used Uber or Lyft in the past year. Which of the following are reasons why you don't use Uber or Lyft? **Select all that apply. ROTATE ORDER**

Don't have a smartphone
Don't know how to use the app
Not enough drivers in my area
Costs too much
Don't trust the drivers
Don't have a debit/credit card to pay
Worried about getting sick
Some other reason: _____
None of the above
Unsure

"This question is relevant to me bc there are not many Uber drivers near my house at night. Should not be skipped bc I have taken one from work to home but not from home to work!"

---

## ASK ALL

18. The Pioneer Valley Transit Authority, or PVTA, runs the public bus and van service in Hampden and Hampshire counties. Do you think that the bus service provided by the PVTA is good enough that you could rely on it to get to the places that you need to go, or not?

Yes, good enough to rely on
No, not good enough to rely on
Unsure

19. Which of the following are challenges or obstacles to you riding the PVTB buses in the region? **Select all that apply. ROTATE ORDER**

Buses are too slow
No bus stop near me
No bus goes to the places I need to go
Buses don't come often enough
Buses don't run early or late enough for my schedule
Don't feel safe riding the bus
Can't afford to pay bus fare
Buses are not clean
Don't feel safe waiting for the bus
Hard to travel with kids or dependents on the bus
Buses are too crowded
Hard to bring bags / shopping on the bus
Language barriers with bus signs or drivers
Some other reason: _____
None of the above
Unsure

"Too many question asking the same thing" – too many options here, try to consolidate somewhat. Or maybe an open-end?

"I didn't see to rotate the order" – check that these are rotating.



20. In some other parts of the state, public buses are free to ride. The PVRTA buses and paratransit have been free to ride at certain times of the year as well. How much would you support or oppose making the PVRTA buses and paratransit service free to ride all year round?

Strongly support
Somewhat support
Somewhat oppose
Strongly oppose
Unsure

---

21. If the PVRTA were free to ride, how likely would you be to ride it more than you do now?

Very likely
Somewhat likely
Not too likely
Not at all likely
Unsure

---

22. The Massachusetts state government is currently working on a plan to provide a passenger train service connecting Pittsfield and Springfield in Western Massachusetts to Worcester and Boston. How likely would you be to ride such a train service?

Very likely
Somewhat likely
Not too likely
Not at all likely
Unsure

**Thank you. Now we would like to ask you about a different topic.**

23. Which of the following services have you received from Way Finders. **Select all that apply.**

Help with paying rent
Help paying other bills
Help buying my first home
Help becoming a landlord
Help finding a job
Live in Way Finders housing units
Live in Way Finders shelter and/or receive HomeBase
Receive a housing voucher from Way Finders
Attending a resident training or workshop
Attending community meetings
None of the above
Prefer not to say

---

**ASK FOLLOWING 5 QUESTIONS IF RECEIVED SERVICES FROM WAY FINDERS (PROG = 1 THRU 10)**

24. **How satisfied are you with the services you received** or are receiving at Way Finders?

Very dissatisfied
Dissatisfied
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
Satisfied
Very satisfied
Unsure

“Depends on which services”.

25. Please **describe the impact of the services you received** from Way Finders on your life:

Very positive impact on my life
Positive impact on my life
Neutral
Negative impact on my life
Very negative impact on my life
Unsure

“How do you know which services? Different services, different experiences”.

26. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statements:

<b>ROTATE ORDER</b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable	Unsure
It is easy to access services offered by Way Finders							
The services or supports I receive from Way Finders are helpful							
Staff at Way Finders treat me with respect							
Way Finders increased my awareness of resources available to me							
Way Finders is responsive to my requests							
I feel understood by the staff at Way Finders							
I feel safe at Way Finders locations							
It is easy for me to communicate with staff at Way Finders							
Way Finders understands the challenges that I have faced/am facing							

“Depends on the services, don’t know how to answer”

“Depends on the department. Different staff in each.”

27. On a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being not at all likely and 10 being extremely likely, how likely is it that you would recommend Way Finders to a friend or colleague? **SCALE QUESTION (0-10)**

“Depends on what services. I have both positive and negative... too broad”

---

28. What new services or programs would you like Way Finders to offer? \_\_\_\_\_

“Wanted to return to previous question and couldn’t. Didn’t the way I wanted. Need positive at top (???) Don’t require this question.”

---

**29. Thank you. These last few questions are for statistical purposes, to help us analyze your responses alongside others.**

Including yourself, how many people live in your household?

One
Two
Three
Four or more
Prefer not to say

---

30. How many children under the age of 18 live in your household?

None
One
Two
Three
Four or more
Prefer not to say

31. Do you or anyone in your household have any medical conditions (physical or mental) that make it difficult to get around?

Yes
No
Prefer not to say

“Difficult to categorize. Physical should be one question. Mental should be another”.

---

32. Do you have access to a debit or credit card that could be used to make payments, or do you only use cash or checks?

Have access to debit/credit card
Only use cash or checks
Prefer not to say

“More options: Venmo, Zelle, Apple Pay”

Another tester felt this was too personal.

---

33. Do you have a smartphone?

Yes
No
Prefer not to say

34. Which one of the following best describes your work situation—employed full time, employed part time, or not currently employed?

Employed full time
Employed part time
Not currently employed
Prefer not to say

“I’m part time but working full time hours in 3 different jobs. Needs to more specific. I’m also a student.”

“Provide a retired option” – so, combine this and 35.

---

#### **ASK IF NOT EMPLOYED**

35. Are you a student, a homemaker, retired, temporarily unemployed, or unable to work due to a disability or mental illness?

A student
A homemaker
Retired
Temporarily unemployed
Unable to work due to disability or mental illness
None of the above
Prefer not to say

“I’m a student and was not asked this question. Needs to be asked of employed as well.”

“Homemaker? (Confused)”

**ASK FOLLOWING 2 QUESTIONS IF EMPLOYED FULL OR PART TIME**

36. When do you work? **Select all that apply.**

9am to 5pm
Early shift (before 9am)
Late shifts (after 5pm)
Late night or overnight
Some other schedule: _____
Prefer not to say

“Work multiple jobs. In a restaurant there are multiple shifts. Same with being a bus driver and having a break in between”

---

37. How often do you work from home right now?

Every work day
A few times a week
A few times a month
Less than once a month
Never, I prefer not to work from home
Never, this is not an option for my work
Prefer not to say

“Different jobs different answers”

---

**ASK NEXT QUESTION IF COMMUTE TO WORK**

38. On a typical day when you have to commute to work, how long does it take for you to commute home?

Less than 15 minutes
15 to less than 30 minutes
30 to less than 60 minutes
60 minutes or more
Unsure



**ASK ALL**

39. How do you describe your gender?

Man
Woman
Non-binary
Some other way: _____
Prefer not to say

---

40. Which of the following best describes your race? **Select all that apply.**

White / Caucasian
African-American / Black
Hispanic / Latino
Asian or Pacific Islander
Native American or Alaskan Native
Middle Eastern / Arab American
Some other race
Prefer not to say

---

41. What is the highest level of schooling that you have completed?

11 <sup>th</sup> grade or less
High school graduate
Some college, no degree
Associate degree
Bachelor's degree
Graduate courses
Advanced degree
Prefer not to say

42. Last year, what was your total family income from all sources, before taxes?

Below \$15,000
\$15,000 to less than \$25,000
\$25,000 to less than \$35,000
\$35,000 to less than \$50,000
\$50,000 to less than \$75,000
\$75,000 to less than \$100,000
\$100,000 to less than \$125,000
\$125,000 to less than \$150,000
\$150,000 or more
Prefer not to say

---

43. What is the zip code where you live? \_\_\_\_\_

---

44. Thank you! Would you be interested in participating in a follow-up focus group held in September about these topics? The group will last 90 minutes. Participants will receive \$100 as compensation for their time and opinion.

Would you like to participate in a focus group?

Yes
No
Prefer not to say

“Choice between mail or e-gift card, possibly text the e-gift card?”

“Is the \$100 real? how do they get follow up info?”

**IF YES COLLECT EMAIL INFORMATION:**

45. Please provide your full name and email address so that we can contact you in August regarding your availability for a focus group.

First and last name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Make sure the question text and the entry fields are on the same page.

---

46. Thank you very much for your time completing this survey. Your answers are very important to us!

Please provide your full name and email address to receive your \$5 gift card if you are one of the first 1,000 people to take this survey. If you do not wish to receive the \$5, please leave blank and click the “submit” button.

First and last name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Confusing that folks need to enter their information twice here.

**QUESTION FOR WAY FINDERS STAFF:** Is there anything else you would like us to know about distributing this survey that will improve the final draft?


Few remarks about survey being very long

Confused about when to enter workers/self contact information (this is a comment regarding the Supportive Services test specifically)

End of survey inputting their name twice threw them off.

Didn't mind completing the survey x6.

## Appendix J – Email Invitation to Way Finders Survey



### MassDOT Transportation Survey

*First 500 people to complete this survey get \$10!*

Hello Olivia,

Way Finders wants to hear from you! The first 500 people who complete this survey will receive a \$10 gift card.



Way Finders is working with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) and The MassINC Polling Group to better understand your experiences and challenges with transportation.

This link is unique to you. Please do not share it with others.

Thank you for your time! Ready to get started? Click the green button:




[Take the survey](#)

This is your unique reference number: 33333



## family.neighborhood.community.

1780 Main Street, Springfield, MA 01103 • 413.233.1500  
800.332.9667 • FAX: 413.787.1797 • TDD: 413.233.1669 • [www.wayfinders.org](http://www.wayfinders.org)



## Appendix K – Mail Invitation to Way Finders Survey

# Way Finders clients, we want to hear from you!

Way Finders has teamed up with  
MassDOT to ask community  
members about their experiences  
getting around the region

Use the QR code or link  
below to take the survey

Utiliza el código QR o el enlace  
abajo para completar la encuesta



Find your 5 digit  
number above your  
name and address on  
the back of this letter

<https://bit.ly/44yoE0D>

**FIRST 500  
RESPONDENTS  
GET A \$10 GIFT CARD**

**(LIMIT OF ONE RESPONSE  
PER HOUSEHOLD)**



## Appendix L – Poster Invitation to Way Finders Survey

# We want to hear from you! Take our short survey

Way Finders has teamed up  
with MassDOT to ask  
community members about  
their experiences getting  
around the region

Use the QR code or link  
below to take the survey

Utiliza el código QR o el enlace  
abajo para completar la encuesta



**FIRST 500  
RESPONDENTS  
GET A \$10 GIFT CARD**

<https://bit.ly/3WAnhMT>

**(LIMIT OF ONE RESPONSE  
PER HOUSEHOLD)**



## Appendix M – Paper Version of Way Finders Survey

### People and Transportation Survey

Way Finders is working with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) to understand the transportation challenges in Western Massachusetts. The survey should take about 10 minutes to complete. **The first 500 people who complete this survey will receive a \$10 gift card for their time.**

At the end of the survey, we will ask for your contact information in order to deliver your gift card. You will also have the option of volunteering for a focus group to further discuss these issues. If you're selected for a group and participate, you'll receive a \$100 gift card for your time and opinion. No personal information collected at the end of the survey will be linked to your other answers in the survey.

1. We'd like to ask you about your experiences getting around your area. To start, over the past year, which of the following types of transportation have you used to get around? **Select all that apply.**

- ☐ Drive yourself
- ☐ Get a ride with a friend, family, or neighbor
- ☐ Ride in an Uber or Lyft
- ☐ Ride in a taxi
- ☐ Get a ride from someone via social media, sometimes called a "Hood Uber"
- ☐ Ride a public bus or van provided by the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority, or PVTa
- ☐ Ride paratransit service provided by the PVTa
- ☐ Ride another type of medical transportation not provided by the PVTa
- ☐ Ride a bike or electric bike
- ☐ Ride an electric scooter
- ☐ Walk or get around in a wheelchair
- ☐ Some other way (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Prefer not to say



2. And which of these would you say is the main way you get around?

- ☐ Drive yourself
- ☐ Get a ride with a friend, family, or neighbor
- ☐ Ride in an Uber or Lyft
- ☐ Ride in a taxi
- ☐ Get a ride from someone offering on social media, sometimes called a “Hood Uber”
- ☐ Ride a public bus or van provided by the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority, or PVTa
- ☐ Ride paratransit service provided by the PVTa
- ☐ Ride another type of medical transportation not provided by the PVTa
- ☐ Ride a bike or electric bike
- ☐ Ride an electric scooter
- ☐ Walk or get around in a wheelchair
- ☐ Some other way (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Prefer not to say

3. In a few words, what are the biggest challenges you face when you are trying to get around your area? Please write your response in the box below.

4. How easy or difficult is it for you to make each of the following types of trips?

	Very easy	Pretty easy	Pretty difficult	Very difficult	Do not make this trip	Unsure
Going to school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Going to work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bringing kids to school or childcare	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Going shopping or running errands	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Going to health care appointments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Visiting friends or family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Going out (dining / entertainment / nightlife)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Traveling to Boston	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. In the past year, have any of the following happened to you as a result of a problem getting where you needed to go? **Select all that apply.**

- ☐ Been late for work or school
- ☐ Lost or had to turn down work
- ☐ Been late for or missed an appointment
- ☐ Skipped medical care (for yourself or a child or dependent)
- ☐ Been late getting home after work or errands
- ☐ Been late getting a child to or from school or daycare
- ☐ Been stranded somewhere
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Prefer not to say

6. Which of the following are within a 5-minute drive or 10-minute walk from your home? **Select all that apply.**

- ☐ A grocery store or other food market
- ☐ A PVTa or other bus stop
- ☐ A public park
- ☐ A playground
- ☐ Health care
- ☐ A library or community center
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Unsure

7. In a typical month would you say that the amount you spend on transportation, including car payments, gas and maintenance, bus fares, Uber, Lyft, and taxis, is...

- ☐ Not a burden at all
- ☐ Not much of a burden
- ☐ Somewhat of a burden
- ☐ A very big burden
- ☐ I do not have any transportation expenses
- ☐ Unsure

8. At any point in the past year, have you been unable to pay your rent, mortgage, or other bills, or buy food or other necessities, because you had to pay for transportation?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

9. At any point in the past year, have you been unable to get somewhere you needed to go due to a lack of funds?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

**Now we'd like to ask some questions about specific ways of getting around.**

10. Do you have or are you in the process of getting a driver's license?

- ☐ I have a valid driver's license
- ☐ I have a driver's license, but it is currently suspended
- ☐ I am in the process of getting a driver's license (getting or have a permit)
- ☐ I do not have a driver's license and am not in the process of getting one
- ☐ Prefer not to say

11. How many cars does your household own or lease?

- ☐ None
- ☐ One
- ☐ Two
- ☐ Three or more
- ☐ Prefer not to say

12. **ONLY ANSWER THIS QUESTION IF YOUR HOUSEHOLD DOES NOT OWN OR LEASE ANY CARS:** Could you borrow a car or get a ride if you needed to get somewhere by car?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

13. **ONLY ANSWER THIS QUESTION IF YOUR HOUSEHOLD DOES OWN OR LEASE AT LEAST ONE CAR:** If your car needed a major repair (flat tire, body work, engine repair) could you afford to fix it right away?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

14. **ONLY ANSWER THIS QUESTION IF YOU HAVE RIDDEN IN AN UBER, LYFT, TAXI, OR “HOOD UBER” IN THE PAST YEAR:** You mentioned that you have ridden in an Uber, Lyft, taxi, or a “Hood Uber” in the past year. Which of the following are reasons why you use these to get around? **Select all that apply.**

- ☐ No way to get there by bus
- ☐ No where to park where I am going
- ☐ Not enough time to go another way
- ☐ Don't want to ride the bus
- ☐ Don't have access to a car
- ☐ Don't feel comfortable riding the bus
- ☐ Some other reason (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Prefer not to say

15. **ONLY ANSWER THIS QUESTION IF YOU HAVE RIDDEN IN AN UBER OR LYFT IN THE PAST YEAR:** How much does your typical one-way ride in an Uber or Lyft cost? If you take trips to multiple destinations, think about the trip you make most often.

- ☐ Less than \$1 to less than \$5
- ☐ \$5 to less than \$10
- ☐ \$10 to less than \$20
- ☐ \$20 to less than \$30
- ☐ \$30 or more
- ☐ Unsure

16. **ONLY ANSWER THIS QUESTION IF YOU HAVE NOT RIDDEN IN AN UBER, LYFT, TAXI, OR “HOOD UBER” IN THE PAST YEAR:** You mentioned that you have not used Uber, Lyft, taxi, or “Hood Uber” in the past year. Which of the following are reasons why you have not traveled in this way? **Select all that apply.**

- ☐ Don't have a smartphone
- ☐ Don't know how to use the app
- ☐ Not enough drivers in my area
- ☐ Costs too much
- ☐ Don't trust the drivers
- ☐ Don't have a debit/credit card to pay
- ☐ Worried about getting sick
- ☐ Some other reason (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Prefer not to say

17. Which of the following are challenges or obstacles that you have encountered when walking or getting around in a wheelchair? **Select all that apply.**

- ☐ A lack of sidewalks
- ☐ A lack of crosswalks
- ☐ Reckless or speeding drivers
- ☐ Sidewalks in poor condition
- ☐ A lack of street lighting
- ☐ A lack of ramps for wheelchairs
- ☐ Concerns about crime
- ☐ A lack of stop signs or traffic lights
- ☐ Some other reason (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Prefer not to say

18. The Pioneer Valley Transit Authority, or PVRTA, runs the public bus and van service in Hampden and Hampshire counties. Do you think that the bus service provided by the PVRTA is good enough that you could rely on it to get to the places that you need to go, or not?

- ☐ Yes, good enough to rely on
- ☐ No, not good enough to rely on
- ☐ Unsure

19. **ONLY ANSWER THIS QUESTION IF YOU HAVE RIDDEN ON THE PVRTA BUS OR PARATRANSIT IN THE PAST YEAR:** You mentioned you ride a service provided by the PVRTA. In a few words, what changes, if any, would make PVRTA service work better for you? Please write your response in the box below.

20. **ONLY ANSWER THIS QUESTION IF YOU HAVE NOT RIDDEN ON THE PVTA BUS OR PARATRANSIT IN THE PAST YEAR:** You mentioned that you do not ride any services provided by the PVTA. In a few words, what changes, if any, would make you consider riding the PVTA? Please write your response in the box below.

21. In some other parts of the state, public buses are free to ride. The PVTA buses and paratransit have been free to ride at certain times of the year as well. How much would you support or oppose making the PVTA buses and paratransit service free to ride all year round?

- ☐ Strongly support
- ☐ Somewhat support
- ☐ Somewhat oppose
- ☐ Strongly oppose
- ☐ Unsure

22. If the PVTA were free to ride, how likely would you be to ride it more than you do now?

- ☐ Very likely
- ☐ Somewhat likely
- ☐ Not too likely
- ☐ Not at all likely
- ☐ Unsure



23. The Massachusetts state government is currently working on a plan to provide a passenger train service connecting Pittsfield and Springfield in Western Massachusetts to Worcester and Boston. How likely would you be to ride such a train service?

- ☐ Very likely
- ☐ Somewhat likely
- ☐ Not too likely
- ☐ Not at all likely
- ☐ Unsure

**These last few questions are for statistical purposes, to help us analyze your responses alongside others.**

24. Have you received any of the following services from Way Finders? **Select all that apply.**

- ☐ Help with paying rent
- ☐ Help paying other bills
- ☐ Help buying my first home
- ☐ Help becoming a landlord
- ☐ Help finding a job
- ☐ Live in Way Finders housing units
- ☐ Live in Way Finders shelter and/or receive HomeBase
- ☐ Receive a housing voucher from Way Finders
- ☐ Attending a resident training or workshop
- ☐ Attending community meetings
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Prefer not to say

25. Including yourself, how many people live in your household?

- ☐ One (live by myself)
- ☐ Two
- ☐ Three
- ☐ Four
- ☐ Five or more
- ☐ Prefer not to say

26. How many children under the age of 18 live in your household?

- ☐ None
- ☐ One
- ☐ Two
- ☐ Three
- ☐ Four or more
- ☐ Prefer not to say

27. Do you or anyone in your household have any medical conditions (physical or mental) that make it difficult to get around?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

28. Do you have a smartphone?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

29. Which of the following describes you? **Select all that apply.**

- ☐ I work a full-time job
- ☐ I work one or more part-time jobs
- ☐ I go to school
- ☐ I take care of children or other dependents at home
- ☐ I am retired
- ☐ I am unable to work due to a medical condition
- ☐ I am not working for other reasons
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Prefer not to say

30. **ONLY ANSWER THIS QUESTION IF YOU WORK FULL OR PART TIME:** When do you work? **Select all that apply.**

- ☐ 9am to 5pm
- ☐ Early shift (before 9am)
- ☐ Late shifts (after 5pm)
- ☐ Late night or overnight
- ☐ Some other schedule: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Prefer not to say

31. **ONLY ANSWER THIS QUESTION IF YOU WORK FULL OR PART TIME:** How often do you work from home?

- ☐ Nearly every workday
- ☐ A few times a week
- ☐ A few times a month
- ☐ Less than once a month
- ☐ Never, I prefer not to work from home
- ☐ Never, this is not an option for my work
- ☐ Prefer not to say

32. **ONLY ANSWER THIS QUESTION IF YOU WORK FULL OR PART TIME:** On a typical day when you have to commute to work, how long does it take you to get to work?

- ☐ Less than 15 minutes
- ☐ 15 to less than 30 minutes
- ☐ 30 to less than 60 minutes
- ☐ 60 minutes or more
- ☐ Do not commute to work
- ☐ Prefer not to say

33. What is your age?

- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18-29
- ☐ 30-44
- ☐ 45-59
- ☐ 60-74
- ☐ 75+
- ☐ Prefer not to say

34. How do you describe your gender?

- ☐ Man
- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Non-binary
- ☐ Some other way (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Prefer not to say

35. Which of the following best describes your race? **Select all that apply.**

- ☐ White / Caucasian
- ☐ African-American / Black
- ☐ Hispanic / Latino
- ☐ Asian or Pacific Islander
- ☐ Native American or Alaskan Native
- ☐ Middle Eastern / Arab American
- ☐ Some other race or ethnicity (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Prefer not to say

36. What is the highest level of schooling that you have completed?

- ☐ 11<sup>th</sup> grade or less
- ☐ High school graduate
- ☐ Some college, no degree
- ☐ Associate degree
- ☐ Bachelor's degree
- ☐ Graduate courses
- ☐ Advanced degree
- ☐ Prefer not to say

37. Last year, what was your total family income from all sources, before taxes?

- ☐ Below \$15,000
- ☐ \$15,000 to less than \$25,000
- ☐ \$25,000 to less than \$35,000
- ☐ \$35,000 to less than \$50,000
- ☐ \$50,000 to less than \$75,000
- ☐ \$75,000 to less than \$100,000
- ☐ \$100,000 to less than \$125,000
- ☐ \$125,000 to less than \$150,000
- ☐ \$150,000 or more
- ☐ Prefer not to say

38. What is the zip code where you live?

39. Would you be interested in participating in a follow-up focus group held in September about these topics? The group will last 90 minutes. Participants will receive \$100 as compensation for their time and opinion.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

40. Please provide your name and contact information so we can email you your gift card and contact you for the focus group *if you stated that you were interested in participating*. If you would not like to receive a gift card, and do not want to participate in a focus group, you can leave these blank.

The gift cards will arrive via email. If you are unable to use an email gift card, please email [info@massincpolling.com](mailto:info@massincpolling.com) and we will do our best to accommodate you.

First and last name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for taking our survey! Please look for an email from [info@massincpolling.com](mailto:info@massincpolling.com) within the next two weeks with information about your email gift card if you opted in.**