

Kent Regional Service Commission Regional Transportation
Plan (2026-2030)

Presented to the Kent Regional Service Commission

by

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Author's note

This study was sponsored by the Kent Regional Service Commission (hereinafter “the Commission”). We would like to thank the Commission for placing its trust in us by assigning us this task. The contents of this report are the author's sole responsibility and were not unduly influenced by its sponsor.

We would like to extend our most sincere gratitude to Transport Kent's volunteers, who contribute to community transportation in the Greater Kent region every single day. We are also grateful to Prof. Trevor Hanson of the University of New Brunswick for his invaluable advice and to Prof. Majella Simard of the Université de Moncton for his assistance with the revision of this report.

Although this plan is primarily focused on the community transportation service provided by the Commission, we would like to acknowledge the importance of other modes of transportation to the future development of the Greater Kent region. Under no circumstances should the lack of additional details on other modes of transportation or on land use planning in this plan limit the scope of the Commission's work in the transportation field. Consequently, we encourage the Commission to study and consider the use of other modes of transportation, in particular active transportation, in order to meet local and regional needs and to foster sustainable development in the region.

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1. Introduction

The Greater Kent region, together with most regions of New Brunswick, suffers from a strong dependence on individual automobiles as the primary means of transportation (Bourgeois et al., 2014). This dependence is primarily due to the lack of a provincial public transit service in the region, as well as to road infrastructure (which does not encourage soft mobility) and the fact that the population is so widely dispersed. The transportation challenges facing the Greater Kent region are directly related to other issues of concern, including the aging population, adaptations to climate change and economic development.

The Commission's community transportation service remains the best alternative to owning and using an individual vehicle for many inhabitants of the Greater Kent region. The Commission is required to produce a strategic regional transportation plan and it is in that context that we were brought in to complete this study.

This study is based on consultations with various stakeholders involved either directly or indirectly in regional transportation, as explained in the methodology. This study also sheds light on the operation of the Commission's community transportation service and its main characteristics. Following this detailed overview, we will address the data collection process, starting with the results of the survey conducted with drivers, followed by challenges and recurring themes that emerged during the consultations. We will refer to the Black Arc Inc. study on community transportation in the region to highlight certain issues that emerge from this study and that are still relevant.

We will then put forward 10 short recommendations leading to 10 calls to action. Some of these calls to action are prescriptive, while others include various options for consideration. Finally, the interview grids used for the survey are included in the appendix, together with the implementation plan.

2. Methodology

This study's recommendations stem primarily from a series of consultations carried out between May and July 2025 with inhabitants of the region and with employees and managers of organizations operating in the Greater Kent region. Quantitative data was also collected, in particular from the Commission, to support and detail certain recommendations. At the same time, qualitative data was collected from Transport Kent users and drivers, as well as from certain community stakeholders in Kent County, in connection with a master's thesis in environmental studies that we are undertaking at the Université de Moncton. The data collected for that thesis, which deals with the contribution of community transportation to sustainable territorial development in the Kent region, was not helpful in terms of directly helping to formulate the recommendations of this report. However, that research process was very helpful in providing a clearer understanding of the finer details of the community transportation service. It should be noted that certain individuals interviewed within the formal framework of our academic study were also consulted for the purposes of this transportation plan.

2.1 External consultations

The Commission provided us with a list of 59 community stakeholders designed to guide the consultation process for this report. This initial list was expanded to include over 100 individuals and organizations, of whom 60 were consulted. The format of the consultations varied from interview to interview, depending not only on the availability and preferences of the person being consulted, but also on the type of organization. In the case of nursing homes, healthcare services, foodbanks and private companies, the initial consultation with a stakeholder in each category was carried out in person. The length of each consultation ranged from one to two hours. These in-depth discussions shed light on various needs and key opportunities regarding the drafting of this report. Subsequent consultations with stakeholders from each of these groups were much shorter since in-person interviews provided an opportunity to identify various important points to be addressed in those interviews. Most of the interviews were also conducted by phone or videoconference.

Table 1**Breakdown of consultations conducted with various categories of participants**

Categories of participants	Number of interviews
Community organizations	11
Seniors' clubs and 50+ clubs	9
Other healthcare institutions	7
Indigenous community organizations	6
Municipal councils	5
Companies	5
Public-sector nursing homes	5
Foodbanks	4
Other Regional Service Commissions	4
Schools	1
Other stakeholders	3

Consultations with local residents were mainly carried out via nine public presentations co-organized with seniors' clubs and 50+ clubs in the Greater Kent region. These events were designed to promote the community transportation service, to recruit volunteers and to canvas local residents' opinions on potential changes to this service. During these public consultations, the data saturation point was reached very quickly.

Individual meetings and a group discussion were held with employees and individuals involved in administering community services provided by First Nations in the region. In addition to the consultation aspects, these events provided an opportunity to explain in detail the transportation services currently provided by the Commission so Indigenous community services could redirect their members to Transport Kent as needed.

We conducted presentations for five of Kent's six municipal councils. It should be noted that a meeting could not be arranged with Beausoleil municipal council due to a scheduling conflict. Those meetings provided an opportunity to share the criteria for the data collection process, to discuss certain ideas raised in this report, to answer councillors' questions and to canvas their opinions on the issue of community transportation in Kent.

We also used videoconferences to consult with individuals involved in managing transportation services on behalf of four Regional Service Commissions (Acadian Peninsula, Chaleur, North-West and Edmundston).

2.2 Phone survey

In addition to the consultations carried out with stakeholders external to the Commission, this report draws on interviews with Transport Kent's volunteer drivers. Those drivers comprise the cornerstone of Transport Kent; their perspectives on the issues and challenges associated with the community transportation service are decisively important. Consultations with the volunteers took the form of a short phone survey conducted with the 26 active volunteers on the roster when the data was collected. This phone survey included open-ended as well as closed questions whose results could be quantified. The interview grids used in connection with this report are included in the appendix. Those grids were not pre-approved by an ethics committee because this study is neither academic nor scientific in nature.

2.3 Scope and limits of the study

It is important to note certain limits associated with the consultation process which, in certain cases, served to narrow the scope of this report. First of all, presentations/consultations were only carried out with 9 of the 19 seniors' clubs (or "50+ clubs") we contacted. Several of those clubs could not be consulted due to scheduling conflicts or because they had stopped meeting during the summer season. As previously noted, the results of the consultations/presentations carried out with the seniors' clubs were very similar from one meeting to the next. Consequently, the fact that not all of the seniors' clubs or 50+ clubs in the Greater Kent region could be consulted does not constitute a significant weakness of this report.

Moreover, consultations could not be carried out directly with the band councils of the Indigenous communities in the region. However, it must be acknowledged that it will be imperative to work together with these communities in the future in order to recruit volunteer drivers and to meet the needs of their members wishing to use the service.

Of the five secondary schools in the region, only one responded favourably to our consultation request. These institutions are likely to become ongoing clients (or even partners) if this report's recommendations concerning the issue of the reduced mobility van (i.e. wheelchair-accessible) are carried out.

Finally, current users of the transportation service could not be consulted in large numbers due to difficulties we had during the data collection process in connection with our master's thesis on community transportation. We attempted to contact 140 users of the community transportation service in order to invite them to take part in interviews and discussion groups. Of those 140 individuals, only a small fraction responded favourably to our contact requests. It would have been too time-consuming to survey a sufficient number of users of the community transportation service for the survey to be statistically representative. In addition, we do not believe that a more in-depth survey would have influenced our recommendations. In particular, our recommendations draw on data provided by the Commission and on the opinions of drivers and other stakeholders previously involved in community transportation. Those sources agree that Transport Kent cannot extend the scope of its services to include non-essential or almost-essential trips in the types of transportation provided by the volunteers. Therefore, canvassing the opinions of community transportation users on a potential expansion of the service offer would not have significantly contributed to the formulation of new recommendations.

3. Community transportation in Kent

3.1 Current status of Transport Kent

Founded in 2013 by the Kent Community Inclusion Network, the Kent Community Transportation Service (formerly known as TC Kent CT) provides affordable transportation services to inhabitants of the region via its roster of volunteers. The cost of using the service is \$0.25 per kilometre, although a minority of trips (less than 30% in 2024) are subsidized by companies or government institutions that pay the Commission a higher service cost (usually \$0.58 per kilometre). The reimbursement rate for volunteers is \$0.72 per kilometre for the first 5,000 kilometres per year and \$0.66 per kilometre thereafter. It is important to note that Transport Kent users must pay for the solo distance traveled when they call on volunteer drivers. The term “solo distance” refers to the extra distance traveled by drivers on their way to pick up users, plus the distance to travel back home after the trip (i.e. when the drivers are alone).

All in all, the Greater Kent region’s community transportation service differs from other similar services in New Brunswick due to its low user cost and its high volunteer reimbursement rate, as shown in the following table.

Table 2
Costs of using community transportation services in certain regions of New Brunswick

Service	Service cost per km	Remark
Transport Kent	\$0.25	Van users do not pay for the driver’s supplementary distance.
Flexi Déplacement Péninsule	\$0.50	Users do not pay for the driver’s supplementary distance.
Urban/rural Rides	from \$0.25 to \$0.70	The rate varies depending on the user’s financial/social situation.
Transport Restigouche	\$0.45	
Transport Chaleur	\$0.45 (\$0.85 for the wheelchair-accessible van)	Transport Chaleur also offers transportation for non-essential needs

This table is not an exhaustive list of community transportation services in New Brunswick. We have not identified any comparable service that has a lower cost of use for regular users or a higher reimbursement rate for volunteers. It is important for Kent’s community transportation service to have a low service cost and a high volunteer reimbursement rate due to the wide dispersal of the population and to the long distances that must be traveled to access various services.

The COVID-19 pandemic posed a daunting challenge for Kent’s community transportation service, which lost many volunteers and users in 2020 and 2021. During that same period, community transportation played a key role in offering a grocer/medication delivery service to inhabitants of the region, in particular to residents of Elsipogtog. Today, Transport Kent volunteers no longer handle grocery deliveries, although they sometimes deliver prescription medications. Since June 2025, the Commission has provided users with free transportation to visit foodbanks in the region. The Commission has also operated a wheelchair-accessible van since August 2024 (use of this van will be discussed later on in this report).

At the end of August 2025, Transport Kent had a roster of 27 volunteers. The following table lists the geographic distribution of volunteer drivers in the Greater Kent region.

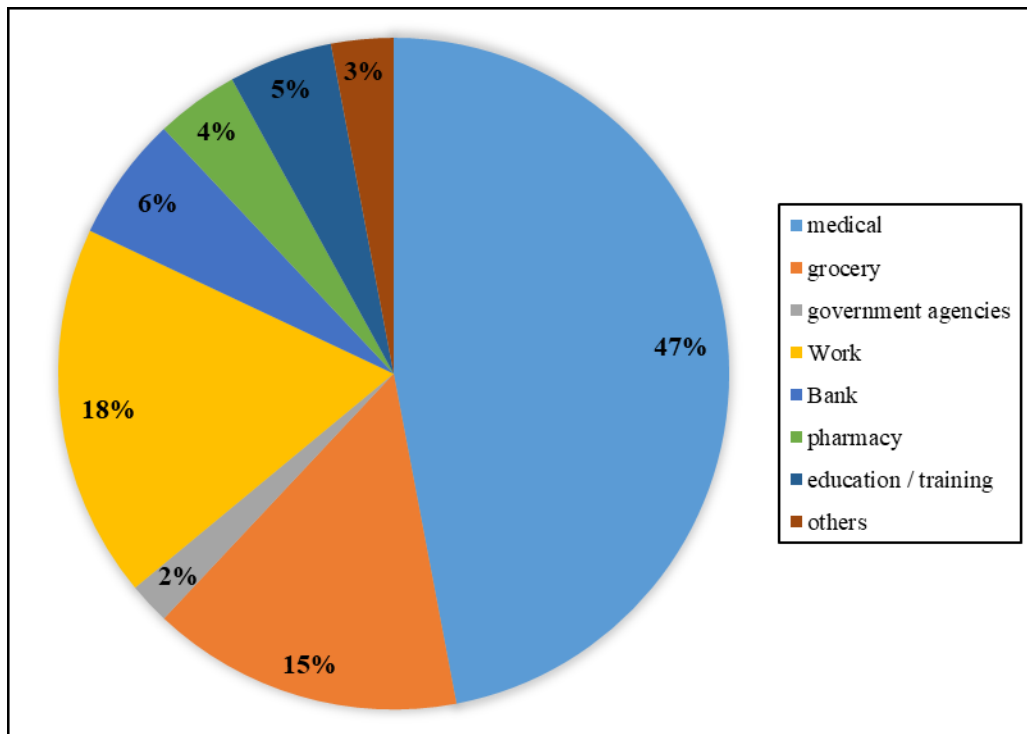
Table 3
Distribution of volunteers by municipality

Municipality	Number of drivers
Nouvelle-Arcadie	0
Beaurivage	9
Five Rivers	5
Champdoré	4
Grand-Bouctouche	5
Beausoleil	3
Kent Rural District (Unincorporated region)	1

The only volunteer living in an unincorporated region is based near Richibouctou-Village, which means that there are no volunteers in the localities north of Kouchibouguac National Park. It should also be noted that several localities further west, such as Saint-Paul, Harcourt, Acadieville and Rogersville, have no volunteer drivers. The lack of volunteers in these localities and the costs that the solo distance may represent for certain inhabitants are a challenge that will be addressed in detail later in this study.

Transport Kent is used for essential trips, in particular to attend medical appointments, buy groceries, travel to work and access government/financial services. The following chart represents, in relative values, the distribution of the 3,397 trips made by Transport Kent in 2024.

Chart 1
Community users' reasons for travel



Source: Data provided by the Kent Regional Service Commission

3.2 SWOT analysis

SWOT analysis is a method used to identify and analyze a company's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The following figure is based on consultations that we carried out in connection with this report.

Figure 1
SWOT matrix for Kent community transportation



Transport Kent's main strength lies in the availability of its exceptional volunteers, who enable the Commission to provide a reliable, high-quality transportation service to inhabitants of the Greater Kent region. The Commission also offers the most affordable community transportation services in New Brunswick while reimbursing the distance traveled by its volunteers at a very high rate. Transport Kent thus represents a viable and essential solution for inhabitants of the Greater Kent region, who sometimes have to travel great distances to access essential goods and services. Many of these same people cannot use an individual vehicle for a variety of reasons.

However, it is impossible to offer a transportation service of such high quality in a region like Kent without incurring costs for the Commission. For information purposes, the budget allocation for community transportation in 2025 is \$434,500. In particular, the costs of operating the service are covered by government grants (\$115,500), municipal contributions (\$68,168) and the service cost paid by users (estimated at \$125,000). Transport Kent's number of users and its

operating costs have gone up steadily since the Commission assumed responsibility for the service in 2022, and that trend is unlikely to reverse. The Commission, however, could reduce its operating costs and service costs by recruiting more volunteers in regions that currently have none. However, the recruitment process is very difficult. The loss or departure of a single driver poses an ongoing threat for Transport Kent, hence the need to ensure the best possible working conditions for all drivers. Higher gas prices (and the rising cost of living in general) are another threat for all community transport services. For one thing, higher costs make the service more expensive for volunteer drivers. For another, the rising cost of living could also boost demand for affordable transportation in rural regions such as Kent.

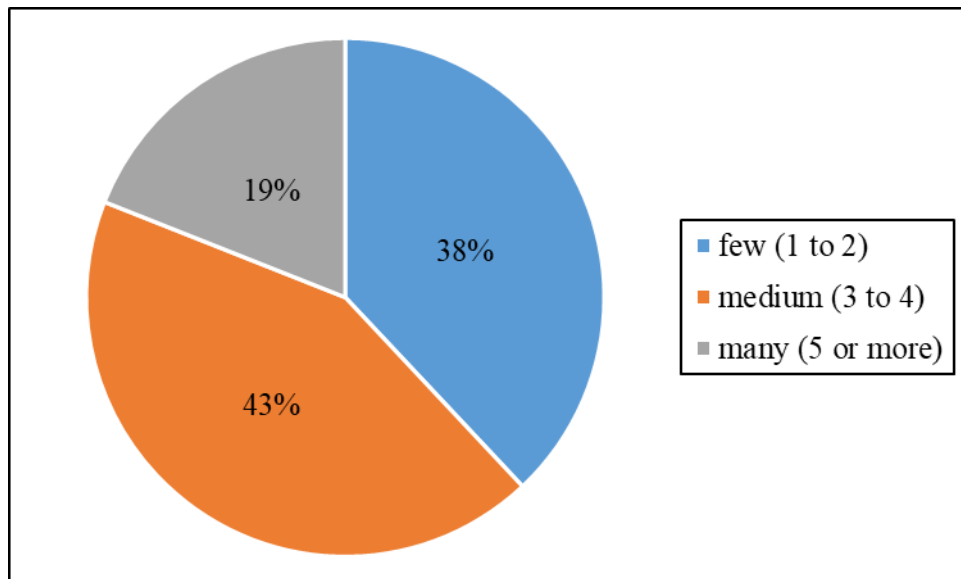
4. Discussion

4.1 Survey results

The survey of volunteer drivers consisted of two open-ended questions and five closed questions whose results could be quantified. The answers to the closed questions are presented as relative values for sake of simplicity.

We initially found that most of the respondents make three or four trips a week. The exact average number of trips per month or per week could have been calculated for each driver by analyzing the Commission's data instead of relying on estimates. However, that would have been overly time-consuming. In addition, it would not have contributed to the formulation of more specific recommendations and would not have resulted in the gathering of any additional information.

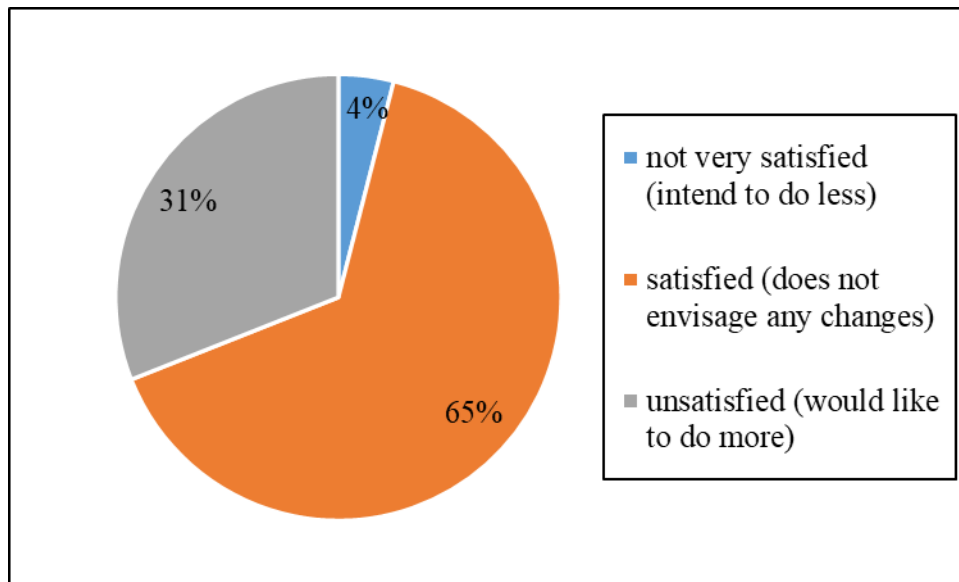
Chart 2
Number of trips made per week by volunteer drivers



In addition, the number of trips made by volunteers varies enormously from month to month depending on their availability. Some drivers make fewer trips per week, but focus primarily on trips that take more time. We also noted that most of the drivers were satisfied with the number of trips they can currently make.

Chart 3

Level of satisfaction of volunteer drivers with the number of trips made

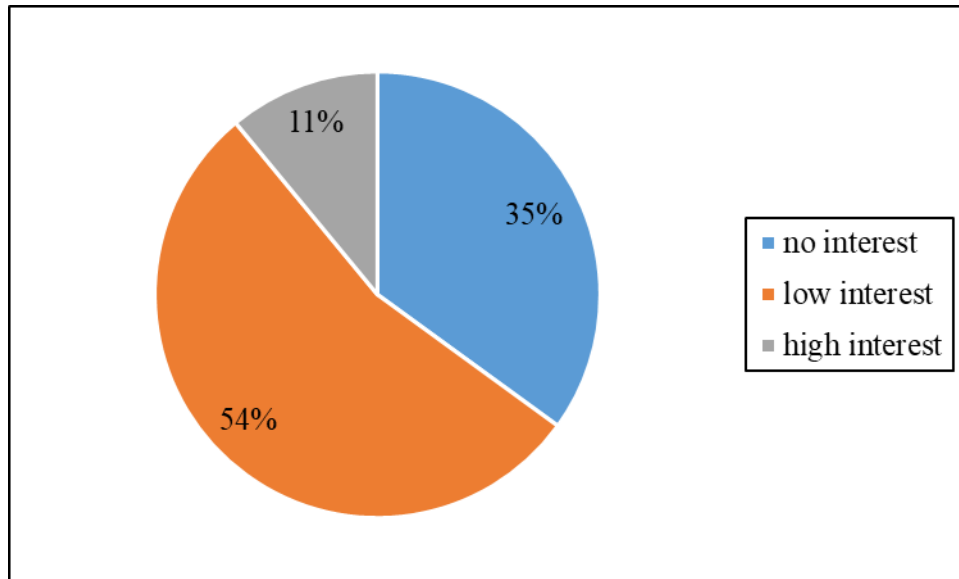


Only one volunteer mentioned that they planned to make fewer trips in the future in order to concentrate on other endeavours. A total of eight volunteers mentioned that they would like to make more trips. Some of those volunteers are based in localities that are home to multiple drivers sharing a limited number of trips, while others live on the outskirts of those localities and are thus called less often. Some users are also in the habit of always asking for the same drivers, which may create an imbalance in the number of trips that volunteers are asked to make.

In addition, five of those eight drivers live less than 13 kilometres from an Indigenous reserve. Interviews and discussions with members of Indigenous communities shed light on these localities' interest in and need for the services provided by Transport Kent. The Commission appears to have enough volunteers to meet those needs, at least in part, not taking into account the possibility of recruiting new volunteers in these localities.

We also asked the drivers whether they thought that Transport Kent should make more non-essential trips and to specify their level of interest in these trips. The chart below presents the results obtained, although certain nuances require explanation.

Chart 4
Drivers' level of intention/interest in making more non-essential trips



Some volunteers stated that the Commission does not have enough drivers to increase its service offer. Other volunteers noted that they were not willing to make non-essential trips and that that should not be part of Transport Kent's mission. A total of 11 of the 26 volunteers stated that Transport Kent should allow more non-essential trips, but only if the Commission has enough volunteers to allow it to do so. When asked about increasing the service offer, a number of volunteers voiced concerns about the financial viability of such a change and the risk that non-essential trips could conflict with medical trips.

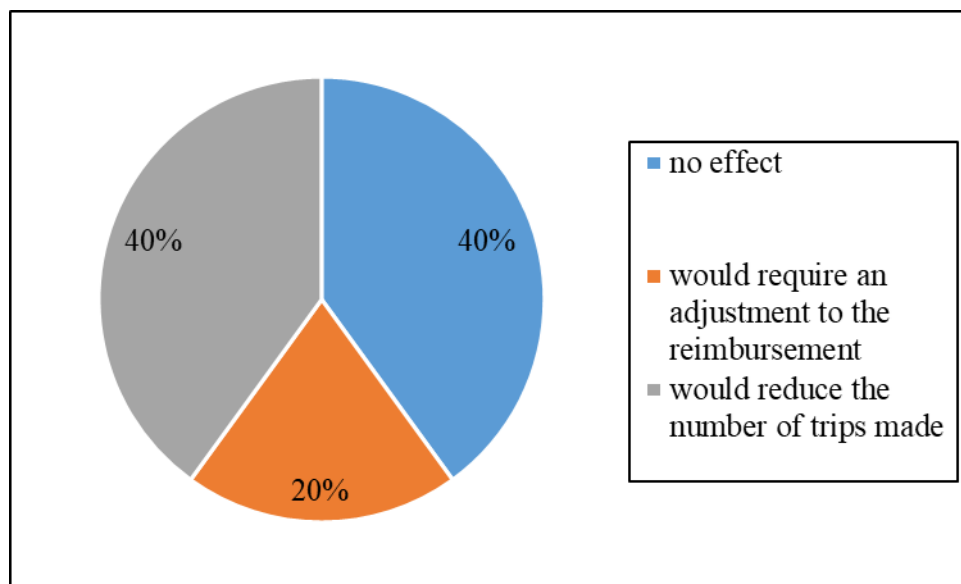
One question dealt with calling volunteers at the last minute. Virtually all of the respondents mentioned having already made trips that were booked at the last minute. In addition, all respondents indicated that making last-minute trips did not bother them, provided that they were available. This last point is extremely important. Currently, the Commission asks that each trip be booked at least 48 hours in advance. In theory, the volunteer drivers have no objection to being called at the last minute because they are free to accept or reject the trip, depending on their own availability. The 48-hour advance notice rule enables the Commission to do the necessary dispatch to provide the transportation service. In the summer of 2025, the dispatch service, which is normally handled by a single employee, was overwhelmed on several occasions despite the regular assistance of an additional employee. In other words, receiving a last-minute call for a trip is not a

problem for the volunteer drivers, although it does represent a sizeable challenge for Transport Kent's dispatch staff, who have to try to reach an available driver on short notice.

Another question had to do with the impact of a potential rise in the cost of gas on the number of trips that volunteers would be willing to make on behalf of Transport Kent. When faced with the possibility of a major gas price increase (reaching two or three dollars a litre), most of the volunteers stated that that would have an effect on the number of trips that they would make.

Chart 5

Impact of a gas price increase on volunteer drivers' participation in community transportation



Consequently, the Commission would be responsible for adjusting the reimbursement rate to offset any such increase. Nevertheless, 10 of the 26 drivers stated that such an increase would not reduce the number of trips they would be willing to make on behalf of Transport Kent. These results, however, should be interpreted with caution given that an individual's desire to potentially take part in the transportation service is no guarantee that they will actually do so. Higher gas prices were a challenge that Transport Kent was confronted with back in 2022 and will surely affect the Commission again in the future. Moreover, if a sudden increase in gas prices, or in the cost of living, were to be maintained over the longer term, it would have an impact on volunteers' participation in community transportation, as well as on the demand for this service among the general population.

Open-ended questions on community transportation

At the beginning and end of this survey, volunteers were asked to share their comments and suggestions concerning challenges and potential improvements to the community transportation service. A total of 12 volunteers had no comments on the service, nor did they raise any specific points about potential improvements. The other volunteers made a few comments and recommendations, although all of them indicated that they were very satisfied with the service quality; none identified any flagrant systemic problems or service-related blind spots.

A number of volunteers pointed out that the dispatch service appeared to be overwhelmed and that it would be a very good idea to allocate more resources to it. Those comments are in line with the interviews conducted with the dispatch staff. Ideally, Transport Kent should be able to assign all trips in a given week in advance; however, the dispatch service is often forced to book trips less than one day in advance. Another issue mentioned by various volunteers pertains to communication between the Commission and volunteers, as well as with service users. Recommendations on these topics will be set out later in this report.

4.2 Analysis of van-related services

In July 2024, the Commission acquired a wheelchair-accessible van with the financial assistance of the Rexton Area Health Care Foundation as well as both federal and provincial governments. This vehicle can accommodate up to eight passengers or two wheelchairs at a time. Alternatively, it can accommodate one wheelchair and five passengers. The accessible transportation service is promoted in particular during a tour of nursing homes in the region.

At the time this report was being prepared, the data compiled by the Commission concerning the use of this vehicle extended from September 2024 to June 2025. During that period, the van was used to make 196 trips. That figure does not include 26 trips that were cancelled during the same period. The vast majority of the trips (84.7%) were for medical reasons. As regards non-medical reasons, the van was used for trips to the grocery store or the pharmacy or for last-minute trips by non-wheelchair users or group travel.

The budget for van operations in 2025 amounts to \$125,000, including the driver's salary. However, the data we consulted suggests that the van's actual operating cost for 2025 should be less than \$90,000, not including revenue generated by use of the vehicle. This assessment does not take into account the forthcoming hiring of an occasional van driver, who will be on hand when the main driver is unavailable or on leave.

The van was used an average of 19.6 times a month during that period, i.e. nearly every business day. It should be noted that the van service is typically not available on weekends or public holidays. On rare occasions, it was impossible to reserve the van because it was already being used by another client. Various scheduling conflicts between van users could have been avoided since the nursing homes that requested this service attempted to reserve their trips more than week in advance and postponed their travel plans when the van was unavailable at the most convenient time for them. Currently, the van is rarely used for more than one trip per day. Taken together with discussions with key Commission employees, these observations suggest that the van-based service is not overloaded and that van use could keep on growing, at least in the short term, without requiring the purchase of a second vehicle. However, it would be very difficult to make more than two van trips a day since it is usually impossible to predict precisely when the van will return from a given trip, in particular for medical trips.

All in all, the van is still not being used to its maximum capacity for travel by individuals with reduced mobility. Since this is a new service, it is difficult to promote it among potential users who are, for the most part, socially isolated or who have trouble accessing information on available services in Kent County. Hiring an occasional driver should enable the Commission not only to offer more reliable service, but also to implement certain recommendations set out in this report. There is no need for the Commission to consider acquiring a second vehicle to help with van operations in the short or medium term, although a second vehicle might enable the Commission to expand its transportation service offer.

The interviews conducted in connection with this report shed light on various transportation needs in the Greater Kent region. Those needs could be met, at least in part, by diversifying how the wheelchair-accessible van is used. We observed a degree of interest among numerous community groups regarding use of the van to organize group trips for non-essential or recreational purposes. Other respondents also noted certain communities' interest in undertaking organized

group trips to access essential services. Use of the van for those purposes will be discussed in greater detail in Section 6.9. For the time being, we note that the Commission could meet those transportation needs without interfering with use of the van by individuals with mobility challenges. For example, the van could be rented out in the evenings or on weekends for group trips involving essential or non-essential services with no impact on daytime availability. In certain cases, group travel services might even be beneficial for the Commission, depending on the number of users and the cost of each trip.

4.3: Volunteer services

The issue of expanding the scope of Transport Kent's services was raised in most of the public consultations we undertook. Several individuals involved in community organizations emphasized the importance of social and recreational activities for their members' mental and physical health. Expanding the scope of community transportation to include social and recreational trips would have a positive impact on the quality of life of individuals without their own vehicle in the Greater Kent region.

However, Transport Kent is already grappling with challenges associated with increased demand for its services, including higher operating expenses and the surcharge for the dispatch service. The data collected during the phone survey indicates that most volunteer drivers are satisfied with the number of trips they can make and that Transport Kent would be unable to cope with an increase in the number of trips for non-essential services. The lack of volunteers in several localities in the region is another determining factor that is hampering the expansion of Transport Kent's service offer. Moreover, boosting the transportation offer without significantly increasing the number of volunteers could lead to situations in which it would be much more expensive for a client to call Transport Kent to make a medical trip because volunteers in the vicinity might have already been asked to make non-essential trips in the same time slot.

Expanding the service scope would result in higher demand for community transportation. Moreover, service demand has been growing since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic; the Commission, however, has not managed to recruit enough volunteers to keep pace with rising demand. It might be possible, however, to reduce growing demand by sharply raising the price for

non-essential travel. For example, Transport Kent could raise the price for non-essential trips to \$0.72 per kilometre, which would limit costs for the Commission. Another solution might involve limiting the number of non-essential trips a user is allowed to make each month. However, both solutions would end up complicating the dispatch process and could prove controversial, as would using public funds for non-essential travel. In those situations, the Commission should come up with a way of charging individuals who access essential and non-essential services on the same trip.

4.4: The issue of solo distance

The issue of the solo distance and related costs was raised in various discussions and interviews, in particular with the Nouvelle-Arcadie municipal council, with former managers of the community transportation service and with potential users in localities where community transportation is seldom used. The recommendations discussed in Section 6.4.3 are drawn from those interviews, as well as from Transport Kent's former practices and those of other community transportation services.

As explained above, the solo distance refers to the distance traveled by volunteers driving on their own from their starting point (e.g. home) to the user's residence and driving back home on their own after the trip is completed. It should be noted that users are not charged for the driver's solo distance when they reserve the wheelchair-accessible van. Typically, the solo distance portion of a trip is twice the distance between the user's residence and the volunteer driver's. Solo distance results in a cost for users; this varies depending on the proximity of available volunteers. By extension, the quality of service provided by municipalities that fund community transportation depends on the Commission's ability to recruit volunteers in their area. This situation is unfair to the Municipality of Nouvelle-Arcadie, which has no volunteer drivers, as well as to inhabitants of further-flung communities such as Pointe-Sapin, Harcourt and Saint-Paul.

For instance, the solo distance charge for users living in Saint-Paul could be as high as \$20. In the case of Rogersville, the lack of volunteers in the region means that individuals wishing to use the community transportation service must pay \$18, regardless of their destination. The solo

distance costs are even more prohibitive in Baie-Sainte-Anne, where the volunteer’s “to/from home” drive time can cost users more than \$28.

Currently, the Commission sometimes manages to reduce the solo distance costs for users living in regions without volunteers. We are of the opinion, however, that this problem requires a solution that could be applied fairly to all Transport Kent users. The solo distance costs for users and for the Commission could be reduced by recruiting more volunteers in communities that currently have none. However, the Commission should take concrete measures to limit the solo distance cost in conjunction with its efforts to reduce user fees by recruiting more volunteers.

To help us estimate the potential impact of recommendations concerning solo distance, we compiled and analyzed data for the last six months of 2024. Please note that we only took into account trips charged at the rate of \$0.25 per kilometre. Those trips represented 71.74% of the total trips during that period, while the remainder (28.26%) included trips subsidized either by the Commission or by government programs, institutions or private companies. We opted to use only trips charged at \$0.25 per km because the goal is to lower the solo distance costs for regular users. Also, those trips are more expensive for the Commission compared to those subsidized by the government or by private companies. The last six months of 2024 were chosen so we could exclude from our calculations trips made using funding provided by the Vitalité Health Network at the beginning of year for trips made to network establishments.

The following table shows the solo distance for regular-rate trips from July 2024 to December 2024, for a total of 1,923 trips.

Table 4
Number of trips made by Transport Kent between July and December 2024 in relation to the “solo distance” traveled

Solo distance (in km)	Number of trips
0 to 9	470
10 to 19	290
20 to 29	343
30 to 39	571
40 to 49	54
50 to 59	77
60 to 69	16
71 to 79	31
80 to 89	17
90 to 99	11
100+	12

Source: Data from the Kent Regional Service Commission

During this period, 87.05% of the completed trips had a solo distance of less than 40 kilometres. The solo distance cost for those trips was thus less than \$10 per user. Therefore, limiting the cost (see Section 6.4.3) would become much more expensive if the solo distance was capped at under 40 km. Another solution would involve establishing a fixed cost that would replace the solo distance, as Transport Kent used to do when it first began operations. As shown below, a fixed cost in the neighbourhood of the average solo distance cost (\$6.53) would result in little or no additional expense for the Commission, but could increase the cost for most users.

4.5: Comments on the Black Arcs Inc. report.

In 2021, the Commission hired the consulting firm Black Arcs Inc. to conduct a study on transportation demand in the Kent region and how to deal with it. That report, entitled *Ensuring Access – A Kent Region Transportation Service Operating Plan*, is based on a survey of Kent County residents, in which 209 respondents took part over a one-month period. The sampling of respondents was representative of Kent County’s population distribution (Black Arcs Inc., 2021). Some of the study’s conclusions are still relevant and should be taken into account when implementing our own recommendations, as detailed below. Other recommendations concerning the Black Arcs Inc. study are less relevant since the Commission assumed responsibility for community transportation in Kent but should still be given consideration.

First and foremost, the consultations we carried out with local residents in connection with this report lend weight to the recommendations of the *Ensuring Access* report, which emphasized the importance of recruiting volunteers and providing services geared towards essential needs. The study also shed light on the need to have multiple funding sources to ensure long-term service viability.

The results of the survey conducted by the consulting firm Black Arcs Inc. indicate that individuals who self-identify as newcomers to Kent County are more likely to have transportation-related difficulties than the rest of the population. Indeed, the data obtained during our interviews corroborate this observation, which underscores the need for community transportation in Kent by newcomers and foreign workers who could help support and revitalize the regional economy.

The survey data was extrapolated by the Black Arcs Inc. experts to estimate the demand for community transportation in the Kent region, together with the optimal number of volunteers to serve the system's users. The objectives proposed by Black Arcs Inc. in 2021 in terms of the number of users and volunteers and the degree of satisfaction with the service offer are listed in Table 5.

Table 5
Black Arcs Inc.'s objectives for recruitment and use of community transportation

Indicators/Years	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Percentage of demand met	24	29	34	39	44	50
Desired number of users	134	163	195	226	257	295
Optimal number of drivers	27	33	39	46	52	59

Source: Black Arcs Inc. *Ensuring Access – A Kent Region Transportation Service Operating Plan*, 2021.

The proposed objective is to reach 295 users in 2026 to meet 50% of the transportation demand estimated by Black Arcs Inc. Transport Kent currently has more than 608 registered users. Some of them have only used the service once, while others are regular users. For that reason, the recorded number of users is not a reliable indicator for measuring either the growth of the community transportation service or the demand for it. During the consultations we undertook, people frequently mentioned that the community transportation service was not very well known among inhabitants of the Greater Kent region. In addition, the Black Arcs Inc. study was completed when Transport Kent was only operating in Kent County (and not in the Greater Kent region). Those factors support the idea that the estimated demand in the consulting firm's study is less than the actual demand. It should be noted that Transport Kent was not able to meet the very ambitious recruitment targets proposed by Black Arcs Inc. The Commission should therefore persevere with its efforts to recruit more volunteers. Allocating more resources to the dispatch service could help to offset the limited number of volunteer drivers.

4.6: Technological aspects

Transport Kent trips are reserved over the phone. Users of the service do not need Internet access, nor do they need to use a specific cellphone app. Although some people do not have a telephone, this straightforward system for users is a valuable asset for community transportation.

Getting one's name placed on the list of users is also a very rapid process that does not require applicants to submit any documents or to stop by the office.

The dispatch service relies on the SAUVÉR-SIGTIC platform. However, there are plans for Transport Kent to transition to the Blaise Transit Inc. platform as soon as it is able to host the service. This transition stems from a request by the provincial government. The provincial government wants all subsidized community transportation services to use the same platform. This transition was initially scheduled for November 2024. Moreover, the service start date is still uncertain.

The Blaise Transit Inc. platform transition will require a period of adaptation and more resources for the dispatch service. Certain recommendations, such as those dealing with the cost for users of the service, may not be implemented until after the transition to Blaise Transit Inc. Requested modifications to the platform to implement those recommendations are expected to lead to additional delays.

5. General recommendations

Collecting and analyzing qualitative and quantitative data enabled us to formulate ten recommendations designed to shape the evolution of Transport Kent in the coming years.

5.1: Avoid increasing the scope of services provided by volunteers

The community transportation service does not have enough volunteers to offer non-essential services. The Commission should not attempt to expand the community transportation service beyond what the volunteers are able to offer.

5.2: Enhance the dispatch service

The Commission should allocate additional resources to the community transportation dispatch service to ensure its long-term viability. The Commission should consider hiring an additional employee to ensure the adequacy of the dispatch service.

5.3: Keep on recruiting volunteers

The Commission should continue its attempts to recruit volunteer drivers and make more of an effort in localities without drivers, such as Nouvelle-Arcadie, Baie-Sainte-Anne and Saint-Paul. In particular, the Commission should target younger retirees, who could take over from the current volunteers.

5.4: Adjust the service cost for users

The Commission should adjust the service cost for users to reduce the pressure on the municipalities. The Commission should try as long as possible to maintain the service cost, which will be adjusted in the near future, in order to maintain at least some predictability in the service cost for users. The Commission should also take measures to reduce the solo distance cost for individuals residing in localities without volunteer drivers.

5.5: Freeze the reimbursement rate for volunteer drivers

The Commission should freeze the reimbursement rate per kilometre for volunteers until the rate goes down again or reaches a certain threshold.

5.6: Improve communication with volunteers and users

The Commission should improve communication with volunteers and users. The Commission should enhance the “Transportation” section of its website in order to showcase the advantages of the service and the various initiatives stemming from this report. Volunteer drivers should have access all necessary information to promote the service to potential volunteers and to answer users’ questions. Volunteers should play a key role in relaying information to users.

5.7: Develop multi-stakeholder partnerships with communities, private companies, institutions and social groups

The Commission should expand its service offer by forging partnerships with public institutions, community groups and private companies. These partnerships should aim to support existing social services, help recruit volunteers or contribute to transportation funding. The Commission should also enter into partnerships to facilitate the sharing of transportation vehicles with other institutions in order to spur the growth of its service.

5.8: Diversify use of the wheelchair-accessible van

The Commission should consider ways to increase use of the wheelchair-accessible van in order to diversify the transportation offer in the Greater Kent region while reducing operating costs. Changes in how the van is used should not have a negative impact for users who request the van to access essential services inside and outside the region.

5.9: Prepare the way for a proper public transit system

The Commission should seriously consider creating a proper public transit system in the Greater Kent region. The Commission should work with municipalities and the provincial government to support a residential and economic development model that could fit perfectly with a public transit system featuring paid drivers and fixed schedules.

5.10: Centralize management of the service

The Commission should assign responsibility for managing the community transportation service to one person, rather than dividing those responsibilities between several managers, as is currently the case. This manager will oversee the implementation of the recommendations set out in this report and will maintain dialogue with organizations that might enter into partnerships with Transport Kent.

6. Calls to action

The following calls to action have a twofold purpose. Some recommendations are prescriptive and should be implemented immediately in order to facilitate the development of the community transportation service. Other recommendations take the form of proposals accompanied by explanations and information needed to guide the Commission's Board members in making the public policy decisions that they deem appropriate for Transport Kent.

6.1: Maintain existing services

As previously noted, Kent's community transportation service does not have sufficient resources to open the door to providing non-essential services. Expanding Transport Kent's service offer by allowing the use of volunteers for trips involving non-essential services would undoubtedly increase the rate of growth in the number of users. Before expanding the volunteer service offer, Transport Kent should:

1. Recruit enough volunteers in localities that have few or no volunteers in order to provide the same service quality throughout the Greater Kent region.
2. Boost the efficiency of the dispatch service. This would mean assigning at least one extra person to help with the dispatch process. The new Blaise Transit Inc. platform might slightly enhance the efficiency of dispatch, although this remains to be seen.
3. Recruit enough volunteers to deal with higher demand stemming from service expansion.
4. Obtain provincial government funding to ensure the service's financial viability. Even if the Commission charged a user price of \$0.72 for non-essential transportation, the government should grant more funding to improve the dispatch service.

However, the Commission could increase the scope of what it regards as "essential transportation" slightly and gradually in order to meet social and community objectives. For example, the Commission should accept and promote the use of community transportation for individuals traveling to places where they engage in volunteer work. Volunteering is a community activity akin to employment. The impact of including this transportation category should not place undue pressure on the transportation service. The Commission could also include

moving/relocation activities in the essential transportation list to facilitate the arrival of newcomers to the region.

The Commission could also allow use of the transportation service by individuals traveling to certain social or community events specifically chosen by the Commission or by participating municipalities, such as meetings dealing with public safety, violence prevention, etc.

6.2: Assign more resources to dispatch

The Commission should assign more staff to the dispatch service. As a minimum, the Commission should assign a second person to the dispatch service at least two full days a week. The Commission could also combine that individual's regular work with other similar responsibilities, such as receiving phone calls for other services, provided that the time spent on those other tasks is offset by more days spent on dispatch for Transport Kent.

In addition, the transition to the Blaise Transit Inc. IT platform will surely require the temporary assignment of additional resources to the dispatch service so the individuals in charge have an opportunity to familiarize themselves with this new platform and to ensure a smooth transition.

6.3: Recruit volunteers in localities with none

The Commission should pursue its attempts to recruit volunteers in localities that currently have none. To achieve that goal, the Commission should work with community organizations and other institutions in those localities. The persons in charge of the dispatch service should ask users in those same localities if they know anyone who might be interested in becoming a volunteer driver. A Commission employee not assigned to dispatch should be in charge of contacting potential new drivers.

6.4: Adjust the service cost for users

6.4.1 – Increase the service price

The Commission is considering an increase in the cost of using the transportation service. We recommend that the Commission take the following factors into consideration before increasing the cost of the service. We also recommend maintaining the next cost of use for several years rather than adjusting it regularly. As explained above, Kent's community transportation service is one of the most affordable in the province and could remain so even after increasing the service price.

In 2024, 77.67% of the trips made by Transport Kent were charged to users at a rate of \$0.25 per kilometre, generating revenues of \$68,729. It is impossible to accurately predict the financial impact resulting from increasing the service price, in particular because a price increase could reduce the number of people using community transportation. However, one could arrive at a reasonable estimate using the data for 2024.

All things being equal, a rate of \$0.30 per kilometre would have enabled the Commission to increase its revenues by \$13,745 in 2024. A fixed rate of \$0.35 per kilometre would have generated \$27,490 in additional revenue, while \$0.45 would have generated total revenues of \$54,983. Similar amounts could have been saved in 2024 if the volunteer reimbursement rate had been reduced by \$0.05, \$0.10 or \$0.20.

Even though a \$0.05 or \$0.10 increase may seem negligible, it should be kept in mind that the long distances that local residents must travel to access certain services boost the impact of a service price increase. For instance, a return trip from Richibucto to Dr. Georges-L. Dumont Hospital in Moncton currently costs around \$40.55. Increasing the cost charged to users by \$0.05 per kilometre would mean that the entire trip would be \$8.11 more expensive. We are in agreement, however, that such an increase could prove problematic for users who frequently use community transportation to access essential services. Richibucto was chosen for this example because of the large number of volunteers in that locality. That means that costs for service users can be reduced and remain predictable. An increase in the service price could be offset in certain regions by boosting the number of volunteers and/or capping the solo distance cost (see Section 6.4.3).

6.4.2 - Try to keep the service price stable

Due to the community transportation service model, the price may vary from day to day, depending on the proximity of available volunteers. Nevertheless, the Commission should try to keep the service price stable for at least the next five years.

The Commission should ensure that reductions in charges for accessing certain services, such as foodbanks, are made permanent. The Commission should favour partnerships and pilot projects that are more likely to be supported in the medium or long term. For example, a new pilot project carried out in partnership with a health authority aimed at reducing the costs of transportation to a hospital should be designed so it can be maintained for at least one year, even if that means limiting the number of users who might benefit from this funding by imposing eligibility criteria. This approach appears necessary due to the sharp increase in use of the transportation service observed during the months in which transportation to Dr. Georges-L. Dumont Hospital was free for all users.

6.4.3 - Cap the solo distance cost

The Commission should seriously consider taking measures to limit or eliminate the cost associated with drivers' solo distance for service users. However, certain trips with a solo distance of more than 100 kilometres have a starting point outside the Greater Kent region. To limit the cost for the Commission of those long-distance trips, we recommend that trips with a starting point outside the region, as well as one-way trips to destinations outside Kent County, should retain the current pricing formula and should not benefit from measures designed to minimize the solo distance cost. We propose three mutually exclusive solutions to the solo distance problem.

1) The Commission could completely eliminate the solo distance cost for service users for all trips. This approach is used by community transportation services in both the Acadian Peninsula and the Chaleur region. The Regional Service Commissions providing those services can afford not to charge clients for the solo distance due to their higher service prices and the higher population density of their respective regions, based on the consultations we carried out. For information

purposes, not charging for the solo distance from July to December 2024 would have cost the Commission more than \$12,000.

2) The Commission could reinstate a fixed price for use of its service that would be added to the distance traveled between the user’s residence and their destination. That would replace the solo distance charge. This method was used in the past by Kent’s community transportation service, which used to charge a fixed price of \$5.00 to use the service, plus a user fee based on the distance traveled.

Implementing this solution would require making ambitious changes to the community transportation service’s pricing system and to drivers’ remuneration. Establishing a fixed rate would also mean adjusting the Blaise Transit Inc. IT system to incorporate this pricing model. These pricing changes should be communicated clearly to the volunteers and users in order to limit potential conflicts and controversies that might arise.

Determining the amount of the fixed rate would be a thorny public policy question that would have to be justified to local residents. To arrive at an estimate of the costs associated with a fixed rate for the solo distance, we compiled the solo distances for all trips completed between July 2024 and December 2024 and calculated the revenues and costs associated with various fixed prices. These calculations were based on the current user cost of \$0.25 and do not take into account the fact that trips of less than 40 kilometres cost users at least \$10.00. As shown in Table 6, the “Costs” row indicates the additional sums that the Commission should have paid to volunteer drivers to ensure that they were paid for the number of kilometres they traveled when the fixed price is lower than what a user would normally pay for the solo distance.

Table 6
Impact of various fixed prices on the Commission’s expenditures and revenues

Variables/Costs	Fixed price of \$5	Fixed price of \$6	Fixed price of \$7	Fixed price of \$10
Costs	\$5,053.25	\$3,985.00	\$3,109.24	\$1,656.00
Revenues	\$2,381.30	\$3,224.06	\$4,283.289	\$8,603.041
Number of subsidized trips	1,147	950	804	236
Number of trips negatively impacted	825	964	1,098	1,686

This data suggests that a fixed price of \$7, plus a charge for the distance traveled by the user, would not immediately lead to additional costs for the Commission. However, we would like to emphasize that the figures above are not an estimate of what the costs and revenues associated with a fixed price for solo distance might be. Such a measure would be expected to boost use of the transportation service in localities with no volunteers, which would increase the costs associated with this fixed price for the Commission. Another effect would be a higher service cost for many users. Moreover, the number of trips negatively affected in Table 6 does not take into account the fact that the minimum charge for using the transportation service is currently \$10. Consequently, we recommend maintaining this minimum charge if the Commission adopts a fixed price for the solo distance. That way, users who pay \$10 for a short trip for which there is also a short solo distance will be barely impacted, or impacted not at all, by the adoption of a fixed price. In other words, the number of trips that would be negatively impacted by a fixed price is slightly overestimated in Table 6 due to the \$10 minimum user charge. However, the number of trips whose costs would be reduced by implementing a fixed price might increase over time unless the Commission fails to recruit enough volunteers in localities that currently have none.

3) The Commission could cap the solo distance price, which would have the advantage of not leading to a cost increase for users who found themselves below the cap. In contrast, implementing a fixed price would increase the cost for users who live near volunteers. A significant advantage of this recommendation, in contrast with a fixed price, is that the cap on the solo distance price could be easily adjusted without raising questions among users. This is because the existence of this cap would not be the basis of the service cost. The number of users benefiting from this measure would depend directly on the level of the cap on these transportation costs. If the cap is low, the Commission will have to subsidize more trips. On the other hand, a high cap (or unduly high) would only have an impact on far-away users and would mean lower costs for the Commission. Table 7 shows the impact of a \$15 cap and a \$10 cap on the solo distance cost for the last six months of 2024 when applying a rate of \$0.25 or \$0.30 per kilometre.

Table 7**Impact of various caps on the “solo distance” cost**

Cap	“Solo distance” for the cap (in km)	Number of trips impacted during the period in question	Cost for the Commission
\$15 at \$0.25/km	60	110	\$733.50
\$15 at \$0.30/km	50	187	\$1,375.80
\$10 at \$0.25/km	40	236	\$1,661.25
\$10 at \$0.30/km	33.33	414	\$2,637.71

The exact costs associated with implementing a cap cannot be estimated due to a potential increase in the number of trips in more remote localities. However, the data we examined suggests that a \$15 cap on the solo distance cost would mean having to add \$3,000 to the Commission’s annual budget if the charge for using the service is raised to \$0.30 per kilometre. This cap would benefit all users living more than 25 km from a volunteer, including residents of Pointe-Sapin and Baie-Sainte-Anne and the localities between Rogersville and Saint-Paul, in particular.

6.5: Maintain the volunteer reimbursement rate

The Commission should maintain the volunteer reimbursement rate at \$0.72 per kilometre until such time as the federal government lowers the reimbursement rate below that level or until the maximum reimbursement rate reaches a certain threshold. We recommend waiting until the rate for tax-deductible mileage allowance goes up and until the reimbursement rate after 5,000 kilometres traveled reaches \$0.72 per kilometre before increasing the volunteer reimbursement rate once again. Over time, this strategy will ensure that the reimbursement rate will no longer go down after the first 5,000 kilometres of the year. This will simplify the process of compensating volunteers and will facilitate communication in this regard. Maintaining the reimbursement rate below the limit allowed by the federal government would also enable the Commission to increase the volunteer reimbursement rate without having to wait for a federal government decision. This could prove useful if gas prices went up suddenly. Lowering the volunteer reimbursement rate, whether following a decision by the Commission or by the federal government, should be carefully explained to the drivers.

6.6: Improve communication

The Commission should improve communication regarding the community transportation service, in particular with a view to encouraging volunteer recruitment and retention.

The Commission should systematically communicate with volunteers whenever there are changes to the community transportation service. This information could be shared by phone, during the dispatch process or via emails and text messages to drivers. The drivers themselves play a key role in sharing information with current and potential service users and in recruiting future volunteers.

The Commission should ensure that new users of the community transportation service make their first trips with volunteers who feel confident behind the wheel. Needless to say, the Commission should also advise volunteers that a proposed trip is the first one being undertaken by a new user (if that is the case). The Commission should follow up after each new user's first trip in order to make a note of drivers' comments that could help the Commission in the subsequent distribution of trips involving those users.

The Commission should provide more information on Transport Kent's operations and terms and conditions on its website. We recommend adding a "Frequently Asked Questions" section setting out the multiple advantages of volunteering, as well as an explanatory video that could be used for promotional purposes on social media. The website should mention the volunteer reimbursement rate and should specify that there is no income tax impact. The website could also include testimonials by drivers or service users.

6.7: Support and work closely with Meals on Wheels

The Commission should try to forge potentially mutually beneficial links with Meals on Wheels in the region. We have compiled a list of five organizations that offer Meals on Wheels services: Manoir Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Foyer Saint-Antoine, Villa Maria, Rexton Nursing Home and Bien vieillir chez soi Beausoleil (Cocagne). Each of those organizations delivers affordably-priced meals to elderly people and/or individuals with reduced mobility through the efforts of volunteers

who are not reimbursed for the trips they make, although some organizations offer their volunteers gift cards from time to time.

By working closely with these organizations, the Commission could recruit some of their volunteer drivers to assist with the community transportation service. Those volunteers could keep on driving for Meals on Wheels, in addition to making regular trips for Transport Kent if they so desired. Volunteers who registered as drivers for Transport Kent would be reimbursed for the distance they traveled when delivering meals.

Ideally, the Commission should ask the provincial government for additional funding to cover the costs associated with these new trips. Currently, Meals on Wheels clients do not pay a delivery charge; it would be unthinkable to ask them to pay for the volunteers' mileage. The Commission could find the necessary funds for this service by dipping into the revenues generated by increasing the service price.

The benefits stemming from those partnerships would be multiple. For one thing, those partnerships would enable the Commission to recruit new volunteers in the localities concerned. Some Meals on Wheels services, such as the one in Saint-Louis-de-Kent, could achieve a much larger scope by reimbursing their volunteers. This new funding could also enable the Meals on Wheels services to retain and recruit more volunteers. Finally, each meal delivery trip generates a multiplier effect compared to a subsidized trip of a comparable distance that would involve only one Transport Kent user.

It is impossible to calculate in advance the cost of such a partnership due to multiple "unknowns". Each Meals on Wheels service has a different number of beneficiaries; in addition, the number of meals delivered may vary enormously from one day to the next. Each Meals on Wheels service has between 10 and 20 volunteer drivers. Some of them are already driving for Transport Kent.

6.8: Increase the accessible/group transportation offers

As explained previously, the van-based accessible transportation service geared towards reduced mobility users has not reached its full potential. However, due to aging population issues

facing the Greater Kent region, the demand for transportation among individuals with mobility issues could outstrip supply in the next few years, particularly as current assets remain stable. Hiring an occasional driver for the van should help to resolve this problem, but the Commission should consider other avenues as well.

1) The Commission could enter into partnerships with organizations (e.g. nursing homes) that already have adapted vehicles for transporting individuals with reduced mobility and could ask to use their vehicles whenever Transport Kent's van is unavailable. In exchange, the Commission could reimburse the vehicle owner for the Transport Kent trip or could offer that organization free transportation with the Transport Kent van as needed.

Ideally, sharing vehicles between multiple organizations could lead to savings for all stakeholders. In the short term, it would be much less costly for the Commission to occasionally call on other organizations to meet the demand for accessible transportation when the Commission's van is busy elsewhere.

Villa Maria nursing home is currently in the process of becoming a "nursing home without walls" and plans to acquire a wheelchair-accessible van for that purpose. Villa Maria's general manager suggested that they would be willing to share this van with the Commission if the Commission is willing to provide its own driver when the van is used for Transport Kent clients. The Commission could consider offering training to volunteers living near the nursing home so they could drive Villa Maria's van, if the nursing home's management has no objection. This approach is already being used by the Chaleur Regional Service Commission and could enable Transport Kent to operate more vehicles without increasing the number of paid drivers. The Commission should cover the additional insurance charges that could stem from such a partnership.

2) Over time, the Commission could consider purchasing a second accessible vehicle, preferably in partnership with another organization, in order to strengthen its service offer. Having a second van, with a second driver, would make it possible to take action on one or more of the proposals set out in Sections 6.9 and 6.10 without any impact on services for individuals with reduced mobility. A manager at Stella-Maris-de-Kent Hospital raised the possibility of launching a fundraiser to purchase a van, provided that it is also used for the hospital's benefit (see Section 6.9, point 3).

6.9: Diversify how the van is used

For the abovementioned reasons, the Commission should expand use of the van with a view to diversifying the service offer in the Greater Kent region and without negatively affecting any users with locomotion issues. Therefore, we recommend that the Commission implement at least one of the following three recommendations.

1) The Commission could authorize renting out the reduced mobility van to organizations in the Greater Kent region (e.g. seniors' clubs and nursing homes) in order to transport groups engaged in recreational or non-essential activities. This transportation service should be booked in advance and the Commission should reserve the right to cancel a rental with at least 48 hours' advance notice if someone with mobility issues needs the van for essential transportation. As previously explained, the van is rarely used in the evenings or on weekends. This reduces the risks of scheduling conflicts between essential and non-essential transportation. The van would be supplied with a driver and should be rented out in a way that is financially viable for the Commission. The rental rate should be advantageous for users when compared to similar services outside Kent County.

2) The Commission could authorize use of the van for transporting groups requiring essential services, even if the users do not have mobility issues. This service would be particularly appreciated by the Mennonite community in Nouvelle-Arcadie. The Indian Island community has also expressed interest in group transportation to Richibucto to ensure access to local supermarkets on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. Once again, van scheduling conflicts could be limited by undertaking group transportation in the evenings and on weekends.

Currently, an individual return trip (Indian Island/Richibucto) costs the Commission at least \$22.28, but this could be reduced to \$14.50 if the Commission had a volunteer on Indian Island to make the trip. The cost to the Commission of using the van for individuals with reduced mobility is estimated to be \$35 an hour. That, however, does not take into account either the fact that the driver is paid a fixed wage, regardless of what the van is used for at a given time, or that the costs

of using the vehicle are less when the van is parked while the users are grocery shopping. Group transportation from Indian Island to Richibucto with the van would take around two-and-a-half hours, assuming that it takes 90 minutes to travel from Bouctouche to Indian Island and 60 minutes is spent waiting at the grocery store. Although the cost of a trip from Indian Island to Richibucto may vary depending on driver availability, it would be less expensive for the Commission to use the van for group transportation than it would be to call on individual volunteers (provided that at least six passengers are taking part). The usual cost of using the van could be divided among the group members or a reduced rate (e.g. \$0.10 per kilometre) could be charged for each passenger.

3) The Commission could help Stella-Maris-de-Kent Hospital with employee transportation. Several times a week, Stella-Maris-de-Kent Hospital has to bring in employees from Moncton by taxi to keep the hospital running. These taxi trips cost the hospital approximately \$250 a day. This “shuttle service” can only accommodate three employees a day, whereas the demand for transportation is strong enough to accommodate eight employees a day, several days a week.

The Commission could meet a portion of the hospital’s weekly transportation needs at a lower cost than the taxi shuttle service. A cost of \$80 or \$100 per trip would be financially viable for the Commission, as well as cheaper for the hospital than the taxi shuttle service. The complete trip would take around two hours.

Needless to say, the Commission would not be able to replace the taxi shuttle service overnight. The Commission should limit itself to one trip per day (either in the morning or the evening), unless a second driver were hired who could cover the evening shift (or early-morning shift). The Commission could start by making one or two trips a week, and then pick up the pace over time. Eventually, the shuttle service between Stella-Marie-de-Kent Hospital and Dr-Georges-L.-Dumont University Hospital Centre could be expanded to include the transportation of patients, blood samples or employees from other companies.

In practice, the shuttle service would operate as follows. At the beginning of the week, the hospital would specify the days on which it requires the shuttle service and the Commission would accept or refuse those days depending on van availability. If an individual with reduced mobility called the Commission for van transportation and thus created a conflict with the hospital’s scheduled shuttle service, the Commission could cancel the shuttle service at least 24 hours in

advance without causing any problems (because the hospital could still use the taxis). For the time being, Stella-Marie-de-Kent Hospital has no budget to enter into an official transportation partnership, even if collaborating with the Commission were less expensive for the hospital. However, by presenting the shuttle service as an affordable substitute for the taxis currently being used, the Commission could access the same “emergency funds” to promote this employee shuttle service.

6.10: Prepare the Greater Kent region for a public transit system

The Commission should work with communities in the Greater Kent region to create a public transit system worthy of that name over the next few years. To that end, the Commission should encourage higher density within towns and rural municipalities while encouraging active transportation based on safety-oriented infrastructure and promoting economic development aimed at creating hubs that could be served by a public transit system.

Implementing a public transit system in Kent County would require a study in its own right. This issue should be addressed in greater detail in the Commission’s next community transportation plan or even earlier if circumstances lend themselves to the adoption of a public transit system. Implementing a community transportation system will require communication and education efforts so local populations could voice their transportation preferences in line with this new service. To complete a potential study on implementing a public transit system in Kent County and to facilitate education efforts in that regard, we are putting forward three options for public transit in Kent.

1) Shuttle service within each locality. Public transit could be focused on short trips within one or two neighbouring localities. This service could use fixed routes and schedules or could draw inspiration from the City of Edmundston’s taxi-bus service to offer greater flexibility. This type of service could benefit employers in the Richibucto industrial park or various industries in Bouctouche. Agreements should be entered into between these stakeholders to share the service’s operating costs and better meet stakeholders’ needs.

2) Shuttle service to urban centres. Rather than serving a specific locality, a public transit system in Kent County could take the form of a shuttle service that would stop at various points on its way to an urban centre (Moncton or Miramichi). For example, a shuttle could make the Richibucto-Rexton-Bouctouche-Cocagne-Moncton trip by making only one or two stops in each locality and dropping off passengers at the Université de Moncton, at either of the two hospitals in Moncton or at Place Champlain. Once again, such a service would leave many inhabitants of the Kent region sidelined and should be supported financially by the provincial or federal government.

3) One-day-per-locality shuttle. A public transit service could be offered in various Kent County municipalities using one or only a few vehicles by assigning the vehicle(s) to a different locality each day of the week. That way, more equitable service could be provided to all users in Kent County's municipalities because each locality would be covered for one or two days a week. It would be possible and preferable to include the municipalities in the planning process. This public transit system could follow fixed routes or could take the form of a taxi-bus service similar to that found in Edmundston. This would also make it possible to gradually familiarize the inhabitants of the Greater Kent region with using a public transit service.

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Appendix A – Interview grid for the survey conducted among volunteer drivers

1. How often do you make rides for transport Kent?
1. À quelle fréquence faite-vous des déplacements pour transport Kent ?
2. Are you satisfied with the number of trips you are currently allowed to make?
2. Est-ce que vous êtes satisfait du nombre de déplacements que vous avez la possibilité de faire présentement ?
3. How could we improve our service? For the users and for the drivers?
3. Est-ce qu'il y a des aspects du service actuel que l'on pourrait améliorer ? Pour les utilisateurs et pour les conducteurs ?
4. Would you be interested in making more non-essential trips?
4. Est-ce que vous auriez un intérêt à effectuer davantage de déplacements non essentiels ?
5. Have you done any last-minute rides? If so, would you be interested in making more of them?
5. Est-ce que vous avez déjà eu à faire des déplacements de dernière minute ? Si oui, est-ce que vous seriez disposé à en faire davantage ?
6. To what extent would an increase in the cost of gas affect your participation in the community transportation services?
6. Dans quelle mesure est-ce qu'une augmentation du coût de l'essence aurait un effet sur votre participation au service de transport communautaire ?
7. Do you have any other comments or ideas regarding the community transportation services?
7. Avez-vous d'autres commentaires ou d'autres idées concernant le transport communautaire ?

Appendix B – Implementation Plan

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	ACTION	PERFORMANCE INDICATOR	RESPONSIBILITY	DEADLINE	ESTIMATED BUDGET
Improve service quality by ensuring that drivers can be assigned to trips within a reasonable time frame.	Assign an additional employee to the dispatch service	Faster trip confirmation	Chief Executive Officer / Assistant Executive Director	01-06-2026	N.A.
	Hiring an additional employee to the dispatch service	Faster trip confirmation	Chief Executive Officer / Assistant Executive Director	01-01-2027	\$60,000 -\$78,000
Increase transportation options without compromising existing service by diversifying the use of wheelchair-accessible van and forging partnerships	Hire an occasional driver for the mobility van	Increased use of the mobility van	Chief Executive Officer / Assistant Executive Director	01-03-2026	\$25,000 (included in 2026 budget)
	Forming a partnership to share the mobility van	Increased flexibility and capacity	Chief Executive Officer	01-08-2030	\$15,000
Make the service more affordable for users in areas that lack volunteers by reducing costs related to the approach distance	Cap the cost related to the approach distance	Increased use of the service in communities without volunteers	Chief Executive Officer / Director of Finances	01-01-2027	\$3,000
	Establish a fixed cost for the approach distance	Increased use of the service in communities without volunteers	Chief Executive Officer / Director of Finances	01-01-2028	\$4,000
Collaborate with local organizations to support their initiatives while increasing volunteer recruitment for the service.	Subsidize the travel expenses of Meals on Wheels and try to recruit their drivers.	Increase in the number of volunteer drivers	Chief Executive Officer / Director of Finances	01-10-2029	\$25,000
Improve service promotion and the recruitment process	Update the website and brochures, and develop promotional videos.	Increased use of the service, the van, and the number of volunteers	Assistant Executive Director	01-09-2026	\$5,000 (included in 2026 budget)