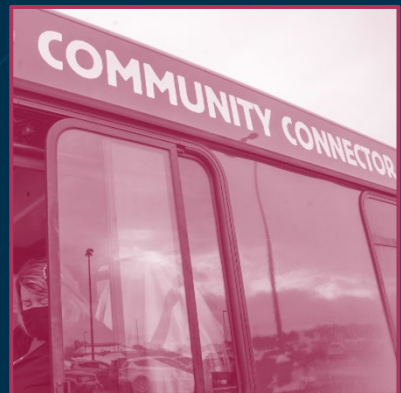


Bangor Area Comprehensive Transportation System

# Current Fare Structure Assessment

## Community Connector Fare Structure Assessment

May 2025



Prepared by:



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# 1. Introduction

The **Community Connector Fare Structure Study** is an initiative by the Bangor Area Comprehensive Transportation System (BACTS) and the City of Bangor Community Connector to evaluate and improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and equity of fare policies for the Community Connector fixed-route and ADA paratransit services. This study builds on recent planning efforts, including the 2019 Bangor Transit Study, which recommended studying advanced fare payment options in the short term and introducing mobile fare payment technologies in the mid-term.

In recent years, Community Connector has invested in significant upgrades, such as a new transit center, fleet renewal, fixed stops, and automatic passenger counting (APC) and automatic vehicle location (AVL) technology. While these improvements contributed to an increase in operating costs, they also helped boost ridership and fare revenue. Still, as of FY2024, ridership and fare revenue remain below pre-pandemic levels (down 28 percent and 22 percent from FY2019, respectively). Ongoing financial and staffing challenges also highlight the need for a sustainable, equitable fare strategy.

The **Current Fare Structure Assessment** reviews the existing fare structure, evaluating financial performance, operational impact, and rider experience. It sets the stage for identifying improvements and developing future fare strategies. This document is organized as follows:

- **Section 1** introduces the system and its fare structure history.
- **Section 2** presents a ridership profile to add context for evaluating fare policy.
- **Section 3** analyzes fare products, fare revenue, and related funding data.
- **Section 4** details riders' priorities and identifies key fare collection challenges facing Community Connector.
- **Section 5** summarizes key findings and outlines the study's next steps.

## Fare History

Fare collection on Community Connector buses was established in 1972. Since then, several fare products and partnerships have been developed, including:

- Introduction of five-ride tickets in 1987.
- Introduction of half-fares in 1993.
- Introduction of monthly passes in 1997.
- Introduction of free transfers, monthly student passes, and the first college partnership for fare-free rides with student IDs in 2003.
  - University of Maine students ride for free on Old Town buses with a student ID.
- Expansion of free fare programs for college students in the 2010s:
  - The University of Maine (UMaine) at Orono shuttle agreement is signed and fare-free with a University of Maine student ID expanded to the entire Community Connector system in 2010.
  - Husson University and Eastern Maine Community College's (EMCC) fare-free programs started in 2012.
  - The University of Maine Augusta (UMA) Campus entered the fare-free program in 2017.
  - Beal College entered the program in 2018.

**Table 1** summarizes fare changes in the last five decades. While in the past fares have increased two to three times each decade, the last fare increase took place in 2014.

**Table 1: Fare History**

YEAR	CHANGE	CASH FARE	HALF FARE	TRANSFERS	FIVE-RIDE TICKET	MONTHLY PASS	STUDENT MONTHLY PASS	ZONE-BASED CHANGES
1972	Fares Established	\$0.25	-	-	-	-	-	\$0.25-\$0.60
1975	Zone-Based Fare Introduced	\$0.35	-	-	-	-	-	\$0.35-\$0.60
1980	Fare Increased	\$0.50	-	-	-	-	-	\$0.50-\$1.00
1982	Transfer Charges Introduced	\$0.50	-	\$0.25	-	-	-	\$0.50-\$1.25
1987	Fare Increased and Five-Ride Ticket Introduced	\$0.60	-	\$0.30	\$2.50	-	-	*
1992	Fare Increased	\$0.65	-	\$0.30	\$2.75	-	-	*
1993	Fare Increased and Half-Fare Introduced	\$0.75	\$0.50	\$0.30	\$3.00	-	-	*
1997	Monthly Passes Introduced	\$0.75	\$0.50	\$0.30	\$3.00	\$30.00	-	*
2003	Fare Increased, Student Passes and Free Transfers Introduced, and Zone-Based Fares Discontinued	\$0.85	\$0.40	Free	\$3.00	\$34.00	\$17.00	Discontinued
2007	Fare Increased	\$1.00	\$0.50	Free	\$4.00	\$40.00	\$20.00	-
*	Fare Increased	\$1.25	*	Free	\$5.00	\$45.00	\$20.00	-
2014	Fare Increased	\$1.50	\$0.75	Free	\$6.00	\$45.00	\$20.00	-

\*Indicates unknown dates or fare values.

Compared to historical fares adjusted for inflation, the current fare of \$1.50 is relatively low (**Table 2**). Real fares were higher through much of the 1970s and 1980s, surpassing \$2.00, and again when the fare last increased in 2014. Adjusted fares dropped in the 1990s and early 2000s, reaching a low of \$1.48 in 2003. Today's fare falls near the bottom of the historical range, suggesting that the real cost of riding Community Connector is lower now than in many previous years.

**Table 2: Cash Fare History in 2025 Dollars**

	1972	1975	1980	1982	1987	1992	1993	1997	2003	2007	2014	2025
CASH FARE	\$1.93	\$2.12	\$2.00	\$1.69	\$1.71	\$1.49	\$1.67	\$1.50	\$1.48	\$1.56	\$2.03	\$1.50

## Recent Service Changes

Like many transit providers across the country, Community Connector implemented several operational changes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to protect passengers and operators. From mid-March to June 2020, fare collection was suspended, read-door boarding was instituted, and passenger loads were limited to a maximum of ten riders per vehicle, with every other seat blocked off. These temporary policies, while necessary for public health, disrupted normal fare collection and ridership patterns, and their impacts are reflected in the data and trends reviewed in this document.

Like many other providers in the country, Community Connector is experiencing a driver shortage. With fewer operators, service levels needed to be reduced over time. Service changes since 2020 include:

- **From Mid-March to June 2020:** Suspension of fare collection and implementation of rear-door boarding and free fares.
- **From Mid-June 2022 to Mid-June 2023 and Since October 2024:** Saturday Service Suspended.
- **From March 2021 to Mid-October 2023:** Modified service levels for several routes, operating every hour instead of every half-hour.

## Existing Services

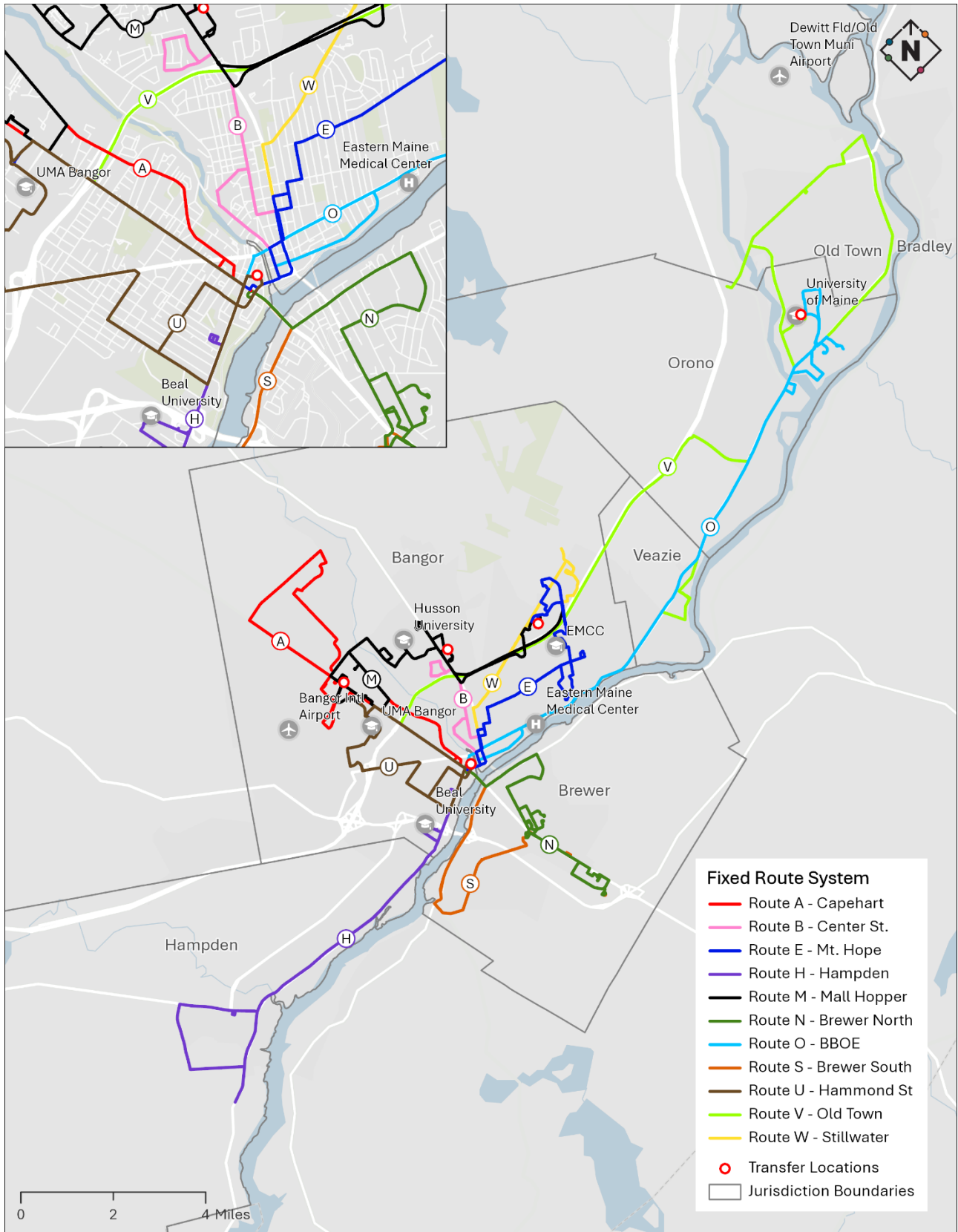
Owned and operated by the City of Bangor, the Community Connector is the only fixed-route public transit system in the Greater Bangor Urbanized Area. The Community Connector operates within the urbanized area of the six-member communities: Bangor, Brewer, Veazie, Orono, Old Town, and Hampden.

Community Connector operates 11 routes with a fleet of 22 buses. Services operate between 5:45 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. on weekdays. Routes A, B, O, and U have a frequency of 30 minutes, and the other seven routes operate hourly (**Table 3**). Community Connector offers transfers between routes free of charge at five designated locations: Bangor Depot, Bangor Mall, Airport Mall, Broadway Plaza, and the University of Maine.

**Table 3: Routes and Transfer Locations**

ROUTE	FREQUENCY	JURISDICTION	TRANSFER LOCATIONS SERVED				
			TRANSIT CENTER	BANGOR MALL	AIRPORT MALL	BROADWAY PLAZA	UNIVERSITY OF MAINE
Route A	30 minutes	Bangor	✓		✓		
Route B	30 minutes	Bangor	✓			✓	
Route E	60 minutes	Bangor	✓	✓			
Route H	60 minutes	Hampden	✓				
Route M	60 minutes	Bangor		✓	✓	✓	
Route N	60 minutes	Brewer	✓				
Route O	30 minutes	Orono	✓				✓
Route S	60 minutes	Brewer	✓				
Route U	30 minutes	Bangor	✓				
Route V	60 minutes	Old Town	✓				✓
Route W	60 minutes	Bangor	✓	✓			

Figure 1: Community Connector Fixed Route System



## 2. Ridership and Community Profile

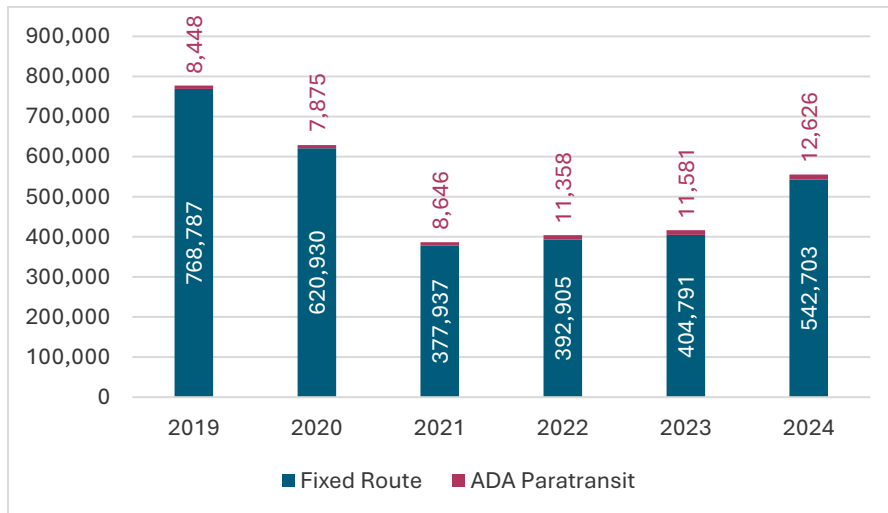
Understanding who rides the system and how they use it is essential to evaluating the effectiveness and equity aspects of the current fare structure. This section presents an overview of system ridership trends and rider characteristics based on survey data.

### RIDERSHIP DATA ANALYSIS

Ridership dropped sharply in FY2020 and FY2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but has steadily increased since. Recent gains can be linked to system and service improvements, including the opening of the Pickering Square Transit Center in Bangor in FY2023 and the return of Saturday service, bus stop implementation, and real-time bus information in FY2024. However, Saturday service was recently suspended again due to worsening driver shortages.

As shown in **Figure 2**, ridership in FY2024 reached 555,329 across the entire system, an increase of 33 percent from FY2023. While the system overall and the fixed-route service have yet to reach pre-pandemic levels, demand-response ridership rebounded more quickly, surpassing pre-pandemic levels already in FY2021 and growing nearly 50 percent over the past five years. This accelerated growth in demand-response ridership has had a meaningful impact on operating costs.

**Figure 2: Annual Unlinked Trips (Fiscal Years)**



Source: National Transit Database, FY2019-2023

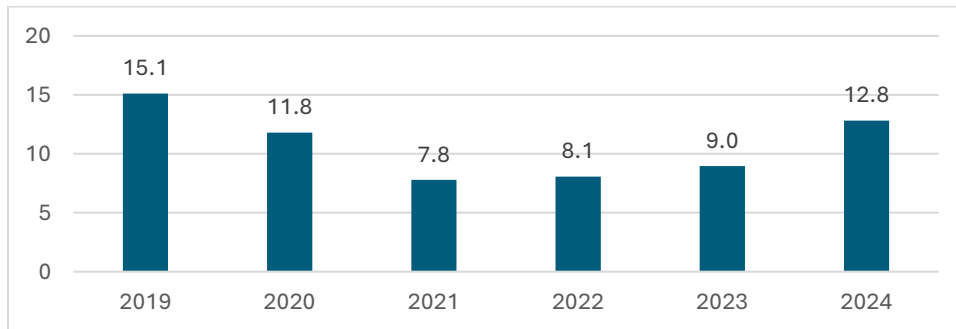
Between FY2019 and FY2023, Community Connector has increased demand-response service revenue hours by 130 percent, while fixed-route hours declined by 20 percent. As a result, demand-response accounted for 15 percent of total operating costs in FY2023, up from just 6 percent in FY2019. This places growing financial pressure on the provider.

For a comparison of fixed-route service productivity over the last six years, **Figure 3** illustrates the change in the number of passengers the system has carried for each hour of service provided. This was calculated by dividing the annual unlinked passenger trips by vehicle revenue hours. While ridership figures alone illustrate overall system usage, the number of passengers per vehicle revenue hours demonstrates the impacts of service investments. Service productivity was lowest in FY2021 and has increased over the last three years, despite a slight decrease in the level of service (annual vehicle revenue hours) since FY2022. While the FY2024 ridership remained lower than FY2020 levels, overall system productivity has increased



more rapidly. This indicates that ridership has rebounded faster than service hours, suggesting improved efficiency and service utilization, likely attributable to recent system investments.

**Figure 3: Annual Passengers per Vehicle Revenue Hours (Fiscal Years)**



Source: National Transit Database, FY2019-2023.

Ridership and productivity trends highlight the importance of aligning fare policy with how people are using the system. As demand-response service grows and strains the budget, and fixed-route productivity improves, fare strategies must support long-term financial sustainability while preserving equitable access across both service types.

## RIDER PROFILE

Understanding who uses Community Connector services helps ensure that any fare system recommendations are equitable, effective, and aligned with the needs and behaviors of riders. To collect insights from riders, the study team conducted a survey of riders accessible online or on paper at the Pickering Square Transit Center. The survey offered a drawing for a \$50.00 e-gift card to encourage participation and was open between March 11, 2025, and April 6, 2025. While the results offer useful directional insight, they are not statistically representative and should be interpreted appropriately.<sup>1</sup>

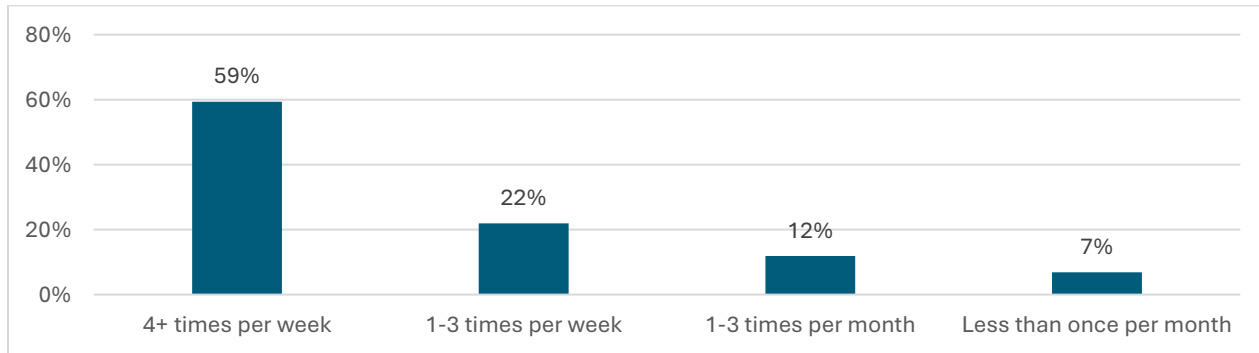
In total, 246 people started the survey, including 219 riders and 27 non-riders.<sup>2</sup> Of the 219 rider respondents, 171 responded to the online survey, and 48 completed paper surveys at the transit center. The results analyzed in this section exclude responses from non-riders to provide an overview profile of current Community Connector riders.

### TRIP FREQUENCY AND PURPOSE

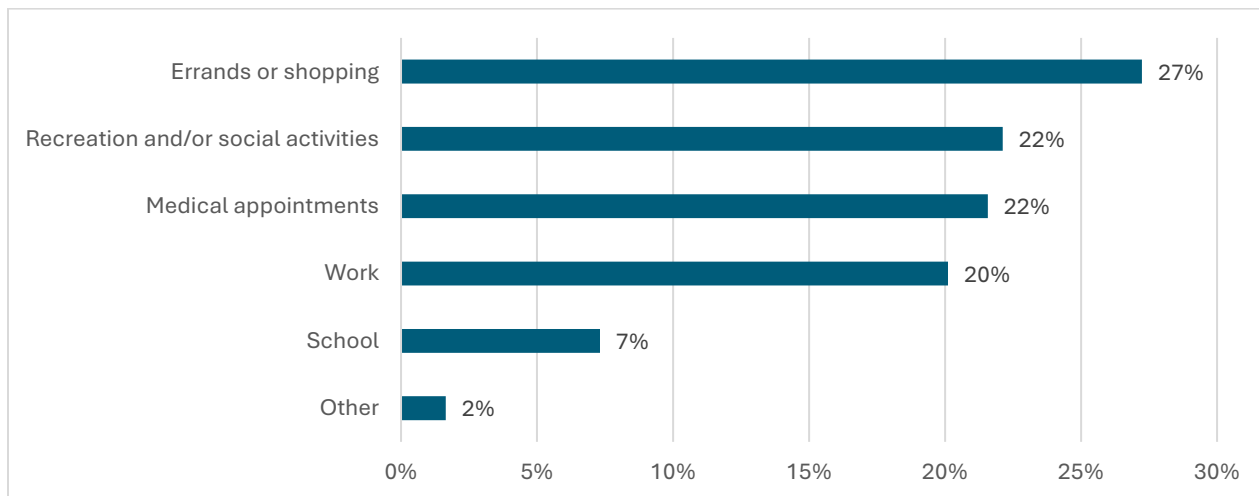
The frequency with which riders use Community Connector and the diversity of trip purposes have important implications for fare policy. A majority of surveyed riders use the system multiple times per week, suggesting that many rely on transit for their day-to-day needs (**Figure 4**). Frequent use makes fare products like monthly passes more attractive, especially when they offer cost savings or convenience compared to paying per trip. However, the presence of a sizeable group of occasional riders also highlights the need for flexible and affordable options such as five-ride tickets or fare capping, which offer equitable pricing for lower-frequency riders.

<sup>1</sup> No formal sampling strategy was used, and the results were not weighted to reflect the actual distribution of ridership by route, geography, or time of day.

<sup>2</sup> Responses were reviewed and cleaned prior to analysis. A small number of surveys were removed from the dataset due to indicators of potential automated or fraudulent completion, including identical start times, unusually consistent response durations, uniform answers across all questions, and mismatched or clearly auto-generated names and email addresses.

**Figure 4: Survey Results: How often do you ride?**

The variety of trip purposes, with a sizable share of respondents riding the service for errands, recreation, and medical appointments, reflects Community Connector’s broad role in connecting people to essential services and community life (**Figure 5**). Fare structures that are overly focused on traditional commuters may overlook the needs of riders who use the system regularly but not daily, or who depend on it for multiple trip types throughout the day or the week. A balanced approach that supports both high-frequency and occasional use will help ensure that fares are equitable and encourage ridership.

**Figure 5: Survey Results: For what purposes do you use Community Connector?**

## RIDER DEMOGRAPHICS

Based on survey responses, trends among Community Connector riders include:

- The most common age range for riders is between 45 and 54, with nearly two-thirds of riders between the ages of 25 and 54 (**Figure 6**).
- Forty-eight percent of riders identify as female, compared to 42 percent male and four percent non-binary or other (**Figure 7**).
- The vast majority speak English at home, 96 percent (**Figure 8**).
- Almost three-quarters of riders identify as white (**Figure 9**).
- Less than one in three riders owns a vehicle (**Figure 10**).
- One in five riders has a disability that affects their ability to use public transportation (**Figure 11**).
- Nearly half of riders (46 percent) have a household income under \$25,000 (**Figure 12**).
- Half of the riders are employed at least part-time or are self-employed. Eleven percent of riders are students, 14 percent are retired, and 15 percent are unemployed (**Figure 13**).

Figure 6: Survey Results: What is your age?

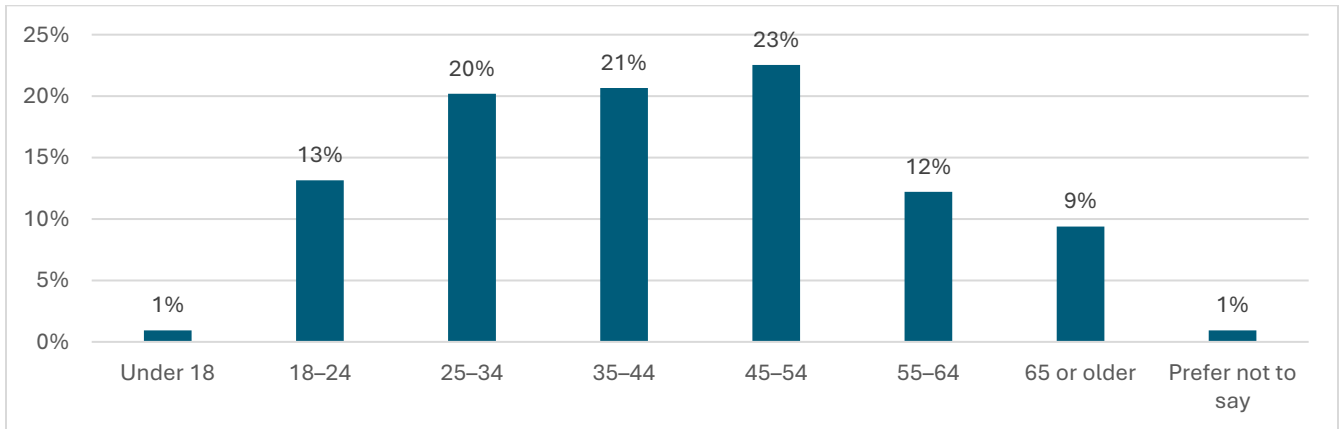


Figure 7: Survey Results: What is your gender?

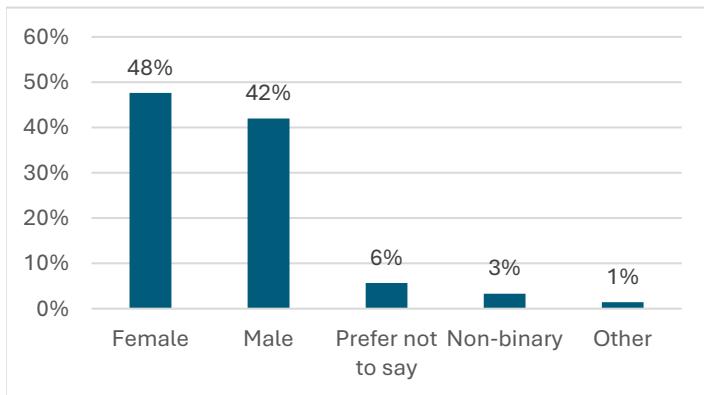


Figure 8: Survey Results: What is your primary language spoken at home?

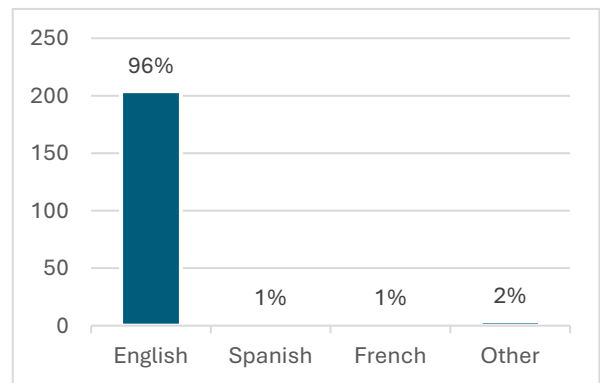
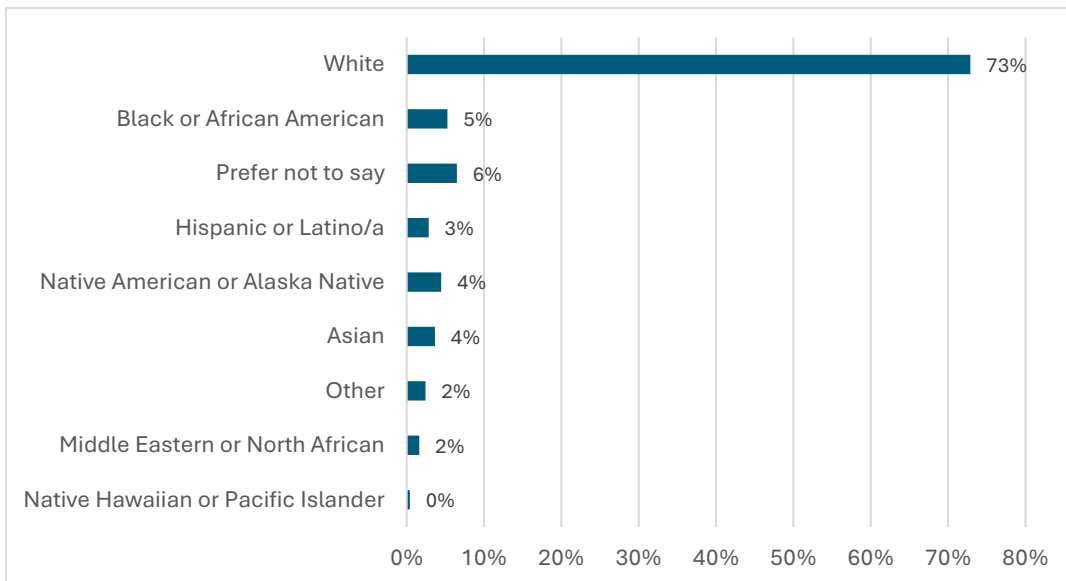
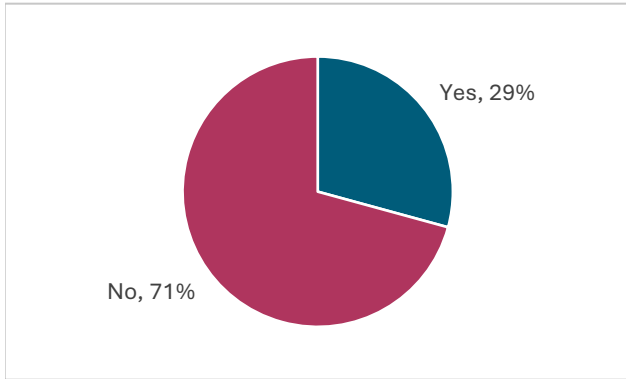


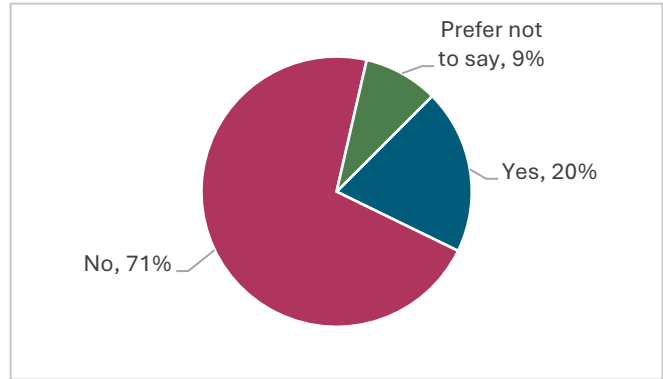
Figure 9: Survey Results: What is your race/ethnicity?



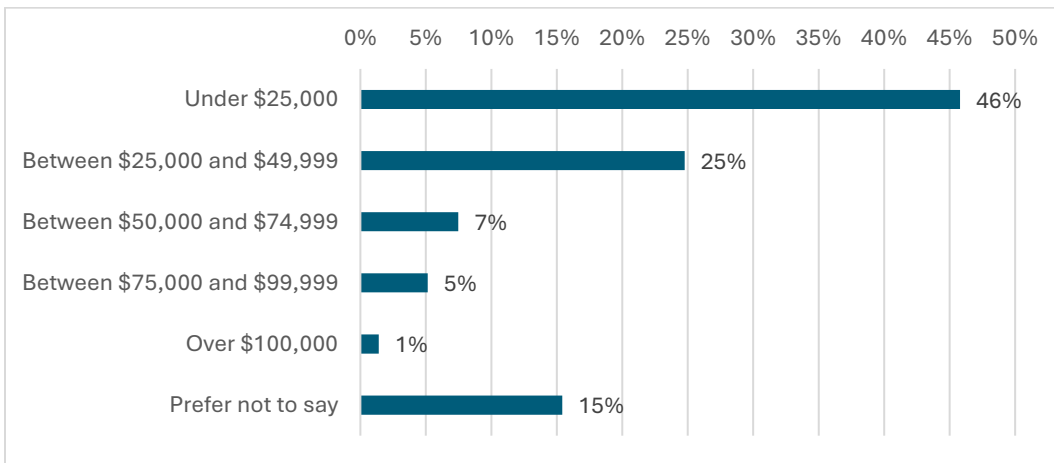
**Figure 10: Survey Results: Do you own or have regular access to a personal vehicle?**



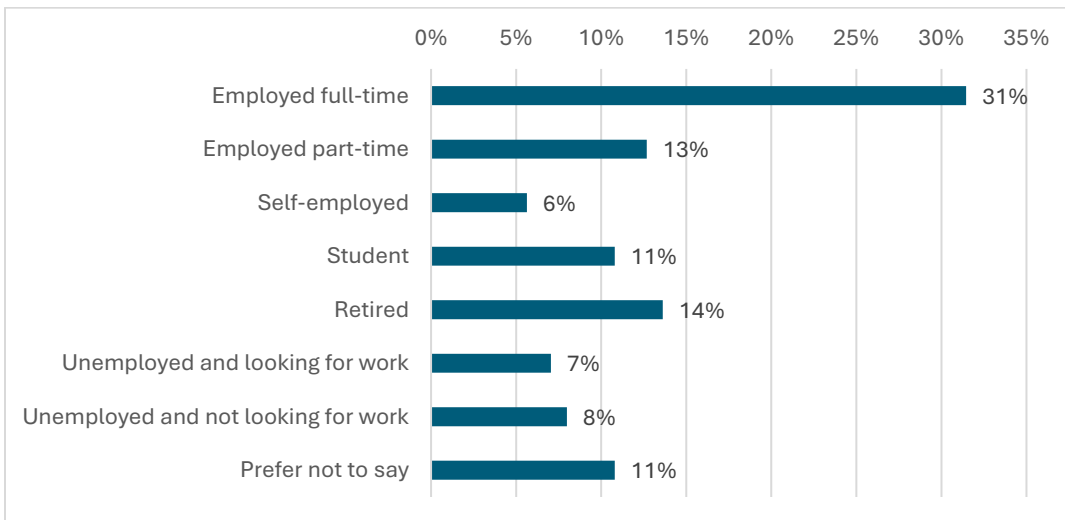
**Figure 11: Survey Results: Do you have a disability that affects your ability to use public transportation?**



**Figure 12: Survey Results: What is your household income?**



**Figure 13: Survey Results: What is your employment status?**



# 3. Fare Revenue Analysis

Evaluating fare revenue trends and the performance of existing fare products is critical to understanding the financial sustainability of the current fare structure. This section provides an overview of fare usage patterns, revenue generation, farebox recovery ratio, and key operating cost and funding data. These insights help assess how well the fare system supports the Community Connector's financial needs and informs future decisions and recommendations on fare structure.

## USAGE OF FARE PRODUCTS

Community Connector offers several fare products, including single rides, multi-ride tickets, monthly passes, discount fares, and transfers. Taking a closer look at the usage of different fare products can provide insight into trends in how riders are paying their fares.

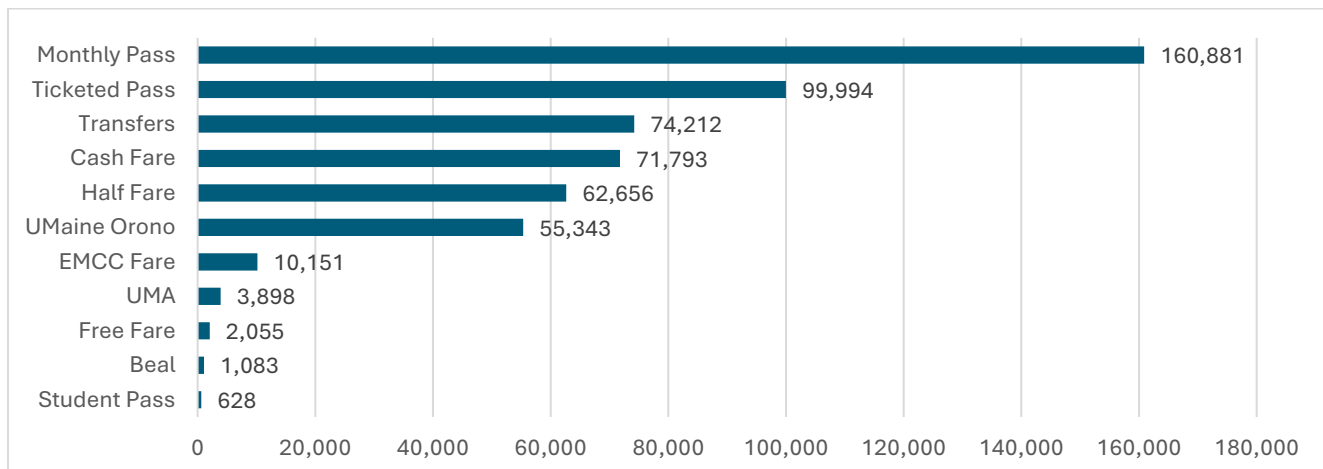
**Table 4: Fare Product Fees**

FARE PRODUCT	FEE
Single Ride	\$1.50
Half Fare	\$0.75
Children's Fare	\$0.75
Five Ride Ticket	\$6
Monthly Pass	\$45
Student Monthly Pass	\$20
Transfer	Free
With a UMaine, EMC, Beal, or UMA Bangor ID.	Free

The cost of the fare varies depending on the fare product (see **Table 4**). The highest a passenger would pay for a single ride is \$1.50, with discounts for children and those with a half-fare cash card. Monthly passes for the general public cost \$45 and are valid for a calendar month. Students from four local colleges and universities ride free of charge with a student ID card, while other students can purchase monthly passes for \$20. Five-ride tickets are also available for \$6, and transfers are complimentary.

The current fare product usage highlights several key considerations for evaluating the fare structure (**Figure 14**). The high share of boardings using monthly passes (30 percent) aligns with the system's frequent ridership patterns and suggests these passes are meeting the needs of regular users. However, the continued use of cash fares may signal opportunities to improve access to more cost-effective and convenient payment options, as well as reduce dwell times. Also, the significant use of student passes, largely driven by the University of Maine partnership, demonstrates the value of institutional agreements in expanding ridership and providing stable, predictable revenue.

**Figure 14: Total Ridership by Fare Mode (FY2024)**



Survey results also offer insight into transfer patterns. A significant majority (73 percent) of riders who pay by cash or tickets (50 percent of all riders) reported typically requiring a transfer to complete their trip. On-board fare data, however, shows that 43 percent of riders who pay with cash or five-ride tickets use a transfer, highlighting a discrepancy between how riders respond about transfers and actual behavior.

Along with the on-board fare payment data, survey data offer valuable insights into how fare payment varies by trip frequency. Frequent riders are more likely to use monthly passes to take advantage of cost savings, while infrequent riders tend to pay with cash (Table 5). Riders who travel between one and three times per week or month are split. These patterns highlight the importance of convenience and flexibility in fare options. Infrequent and choice riders are more likely to pay with cash, which is currently the only option for a one-time fare. Since monthly passes and five-ride tickets require upfront payment and some level of commitment, they may present a barrier to casual or occasional users or those who cannot afford the full amount upfront.

**Table 5: Survey Results: How do you typically pay your bus fare?**

RIDE FREQUENCY	MONTHLY PASS	FIVE RIDE TICKET	CASH
4+ times per week	41%	37%	22%
1-3 times per week	17%	50%	33%
1-3 times per month	5%	55%	41%
Less than once per month	0%	9%	91%

Figure 15 highlights the importance of maintaining flexible payment options as the provider considers fare system upgrades. While many riders already purchase passes and tickets using debit or credit cards (51 percent), a substantial share still rely on cash (39 percent). Transitioning to mobile or contactless payment systems could improve efficiency and reduce onboard cash handling, but it would also require many current users to change how they pay. Offering a reloadable transit card could bridge this gap by modernizing the system while preserving compatibility with existing payment preferences, minimizing disruption for cash-reliant riders.

**Figure 15: Survey Results: If you buy tickets/passes, how do you pay for them?**

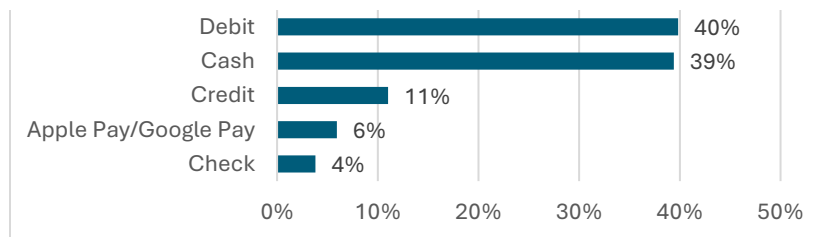
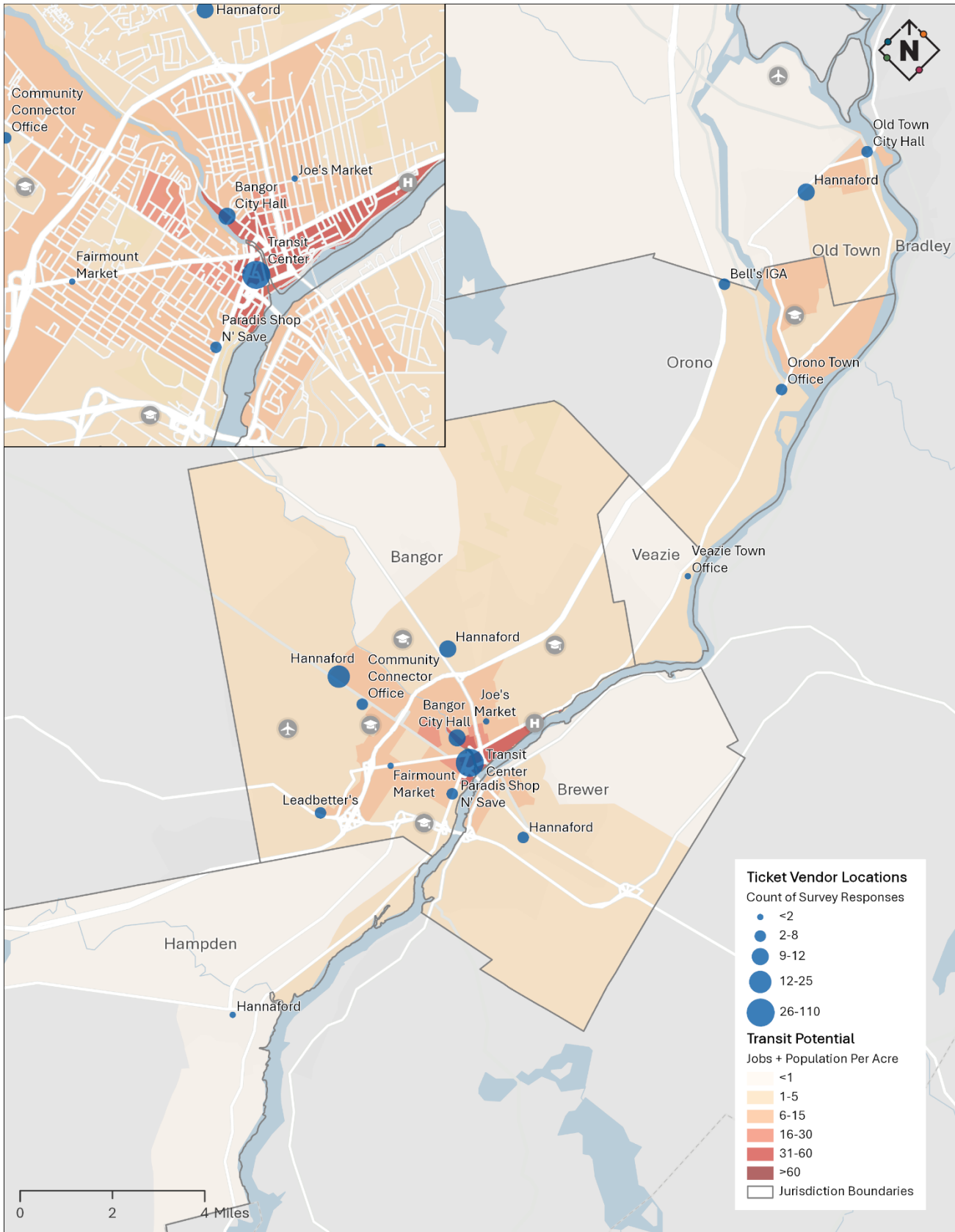


Figure 16 illustrates the vendor locations for tickets and passes, visualized by riders’ survey responses. These results are visualized against overall transit potential, defined as the density of population and employment at the Census block group level. Vendor locations are distributed across the region, with at least one in each jurisdiction, though the majority of locations are within Bangor, where most of the riders are. The survey results were dispersed, with the most popular destinations correlated with high-transit potential areas. Transit potential is highest in downtown Bangor, where the transit center is located and over half of the riders purchase their fare (51 percent). Across all locations, 25 percent of riders purchase tickets and passes at a Hannaford supermarket, with the most popular location at Union Street in Bangor. Riders are likely purchasing passes and tickets at places where they are already visiting, such as the supermarket or the transit center, illustrating the importance of overall convenience as well as the consideration of density when determining vendor locations.

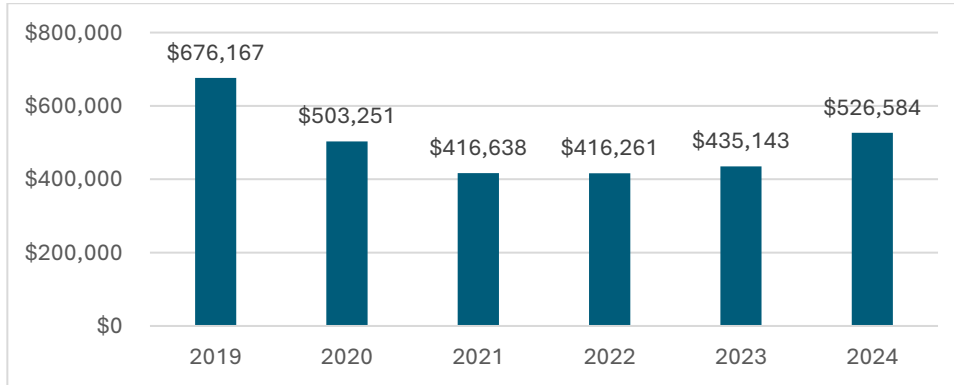
Figure 16: Ticket Vendor Locations and Transit Potential



## FARE REVENUE

**Figure 17** shows fare revenue between FY2019 and FY2024. Fare revenue in FY2024 was the highest since FY2019 levels, with \$526,584 collected across the entire system. Between FY2023 and FY2024, fare revenue increased by 21 percent, which was the highest year-by-year increase over the six-year period.

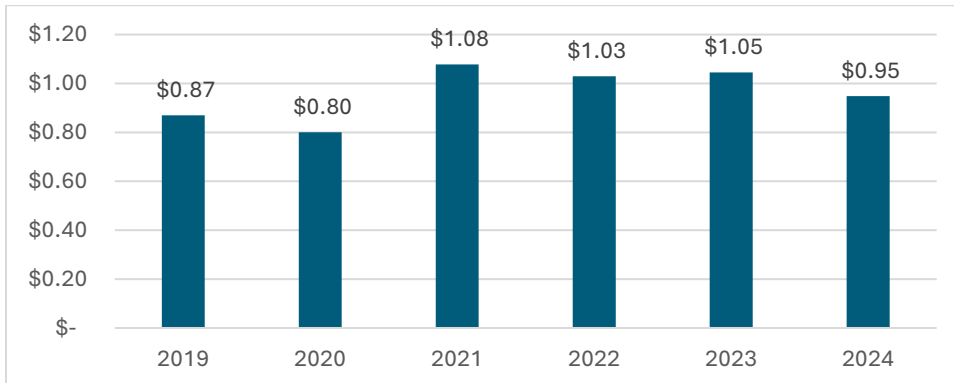
**Figure 17: Fare Revenue (FY2019-FY2024)**



Source: National Transit Database, FY2019-2023

Over the six-year period, the average fare per passenger was highest between FY2021 and FY2023 (**Figure 18**). During this time, fare revenues were higher relative to ridership, despite the lower overall totals. In FY2024, the average fare per passenger was \$0.95, a 10-cent reduction from FY2023, likely due to the significant increase in ridership paired with a slightly less significant increase in fare revenue.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 18: Average Fare per Passenger (2019-2024)**



Source: National Transit Database, FY2019-2023

## FAREBOX RECOVERY RATIO

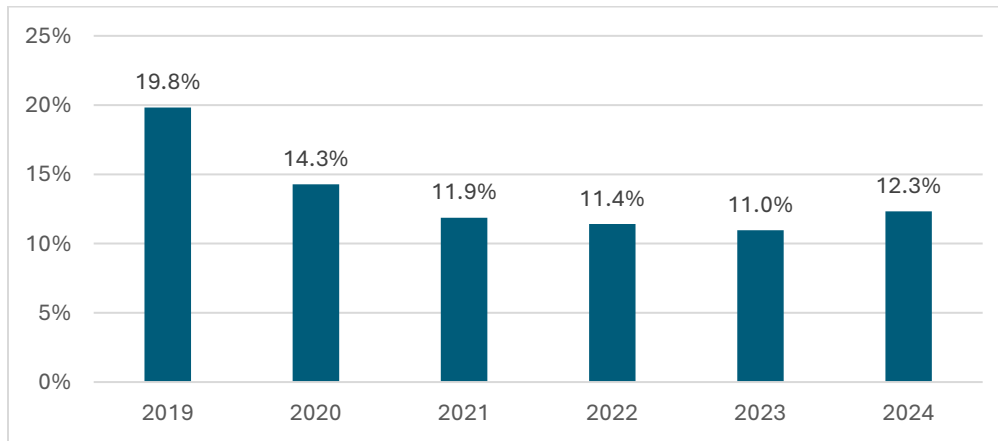
The farebox recovery ratio is a key indicator of how much operating cost is offset by fare revenue, and while it has improved modestly in FY2024, it remains well below pre-pandemic levels (**Figure 19**). The recent uptick reflects gains in ridership and service productivity, but fare revenues are still growing more slowly than operating costs. The continued gap between rising operating costs and slower-growing fare revenue underscores that even as the system recovers, fare revenue is unlikely to keep pace with

<sup>3</sup> The average fare per passenger declining while ridership increases may be due to an increase in lower revenue fare types, such as half-cash fare or student passes.



expenses under the current fare structure. It also reinforces the value of diversifying funding sources and finding operational efficiencies.

**Figure 19: Farebox Recovery Ratio (FY2019-FY2024)**



Source: National Transit Database, FY2019-2023

Compared to peer transit providers, Community Connector was one of the highest performing in terms of farebox recovery ratios in FY2019 (**Table 6**).<sup>4</sup> Like other providers, Community Connector had a lower farebox recovery ratio in FY2023 compared to FY2019. However, the Community Connector saw the greatest decline in farebox recovery among peer agencies.

**Table 6: Peer Agencies Farebox Recovery Ratio (FY2019-2023)**

AGENCY	FAREBOX RECOVERY RATIO		
	FY2019	FY2023	CHANGE
City of Harrisonburg	39.20%	38.00%	-3%
<b>Community Connector</b>	<b>19.80%</b>	<b>11.00%</b>	<b>-44%</b>
Shoreline Metro	15.70%	12.30%	-22%
AMTRAN	15.20%	12.00%	-21%
Johnson City Transit System	14.10%	9.50%	-33%
Manchester Transit Authority	12.40%	7.40%	-40%
Washington County Transit	11.90%	8.60%	-28%
High Point Transit System	10.50%	6.60%	-37%
Ohio Valley Regional Transportation Authority	9.50%	6.70%	-29%
Easy Rider	6.10%	4.30%	-30%

Source: National Transit Database, FY2019-2023

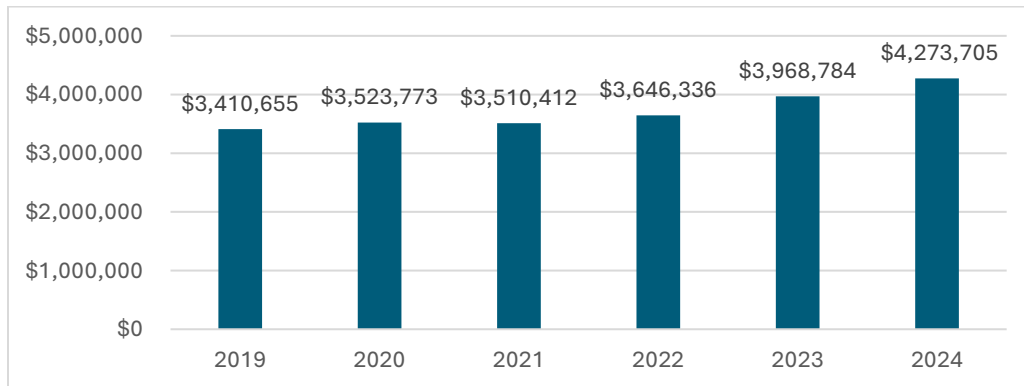
## OPERATING EXPENSES AND FUNDING SOURCES

The total operating expenses have increased almost every year over the six-year period, with FY2024 costs exceeding \$4.2 million, up nearly 8 percent from FY2023 (**Figure 20**). The increase in operating costs follows the overall increase in costs across the industry, as well as costs associated with personnel and the improvements the Community Connector has implemented. To help retain operators, Community Connector updated employee benefits and compensation and provided overtime for the overall operations staff. Additionally, FY2024 was the first full year of transit center operations, which was a

<sup>4</sup> Peer agencies were selected using Urban iNTD peer selection module available at: <https://www.ftis.org/iNTD-Urban/SelectSystems.aspx>

major expansion to facility infrastructure. The increase in ADA paratransit service hours also contributed to higher operating expenses.

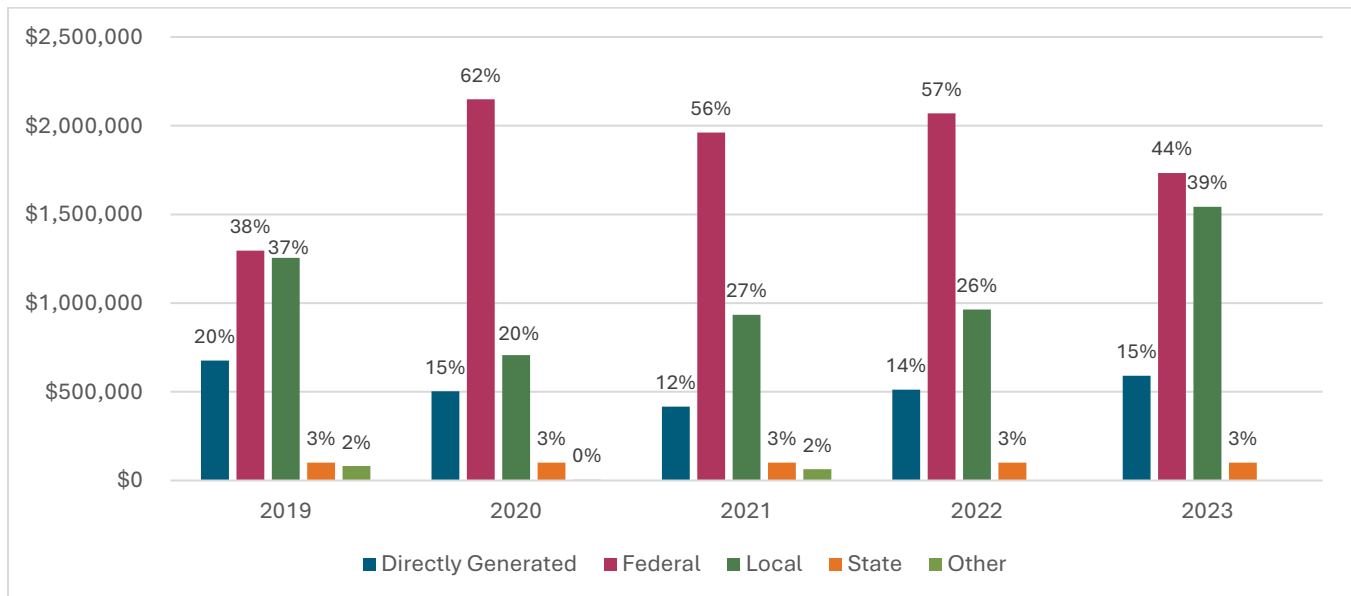
**Figure 20: Total Operating Expenses (2019-2024)**



Source: National Transit Database, 2019-2023

Before the pandemic, Community Connector’s operating funds were relatively balanced across federal and local sources (Figure 21). Since FY2020, federal funding has significantly increased, ranging nearly 60 percent, due to pandemic relief programs. At the same time, local funding has grown steadily, rising from 20 to 39 percent by FY2023, helping to sustain operations and enable service improvements. Meanwhile, the share of directly generated funds has declined from 20 to 15 percent. As federal support phases out, continued increases in local funding have been critical, but there is a strategic opportunity to grow fare revenue to reduce dependence on external sources and ensure long-term financial resilience.

**Figure 21: Sources of Operating Funds Expended (2019-2023)**



Source: National Transit Database, 2019-2023

# 4. Fare Collection Priorities and Challenges

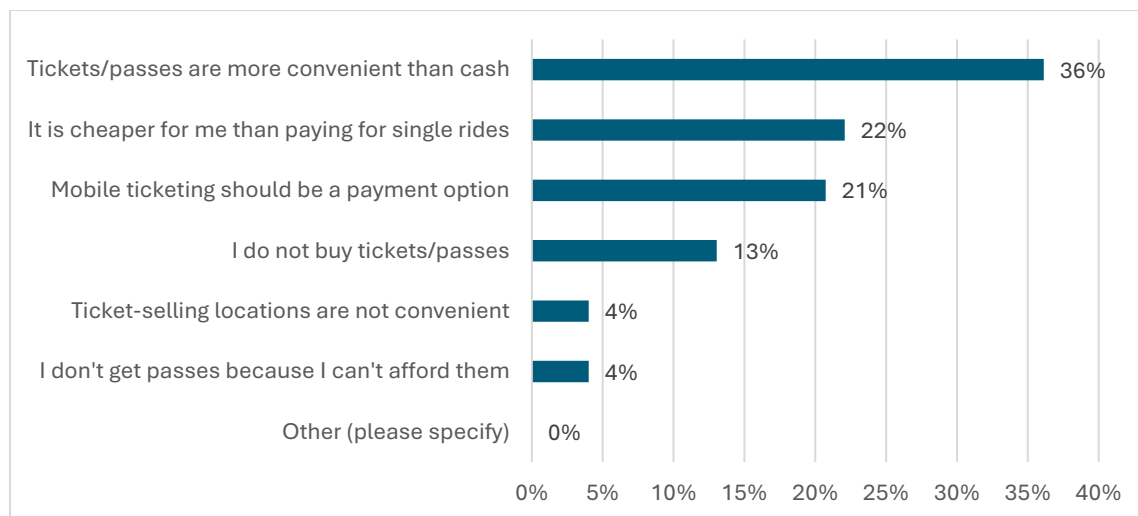
This section discusses riders' fare-related priorities and challenges Community Connector faces with fare collection, including fare collection burden and compliance and enforcement issues. This section is informed by public survey results, a focus group with operators and dispatchers, and a structured discussion with management staff.

## RIDERS' PRIORITIES

A primary goal for the rider survey is to understand riders' priorities regarding fare payment. The 2019 Bangor Transit Study found that 72 percent of survey respondents would be willing to pay a higher fare for an enhanced level of service. Since then, Community Connector has implemented significant improvements, such as the transit center and mobile app and live map. While fewer respondents from this study's rider survey indicated a willingness to pay more, a majority (62 percent) agreed that the fares are reasonable, and another 15 percent responded that the current fare prices are a great value. Additional questions were included in the survey to better understand riders' opinions on fares, highlighting the potential for introducing new payment methods and reevaluating the overall fare structure.

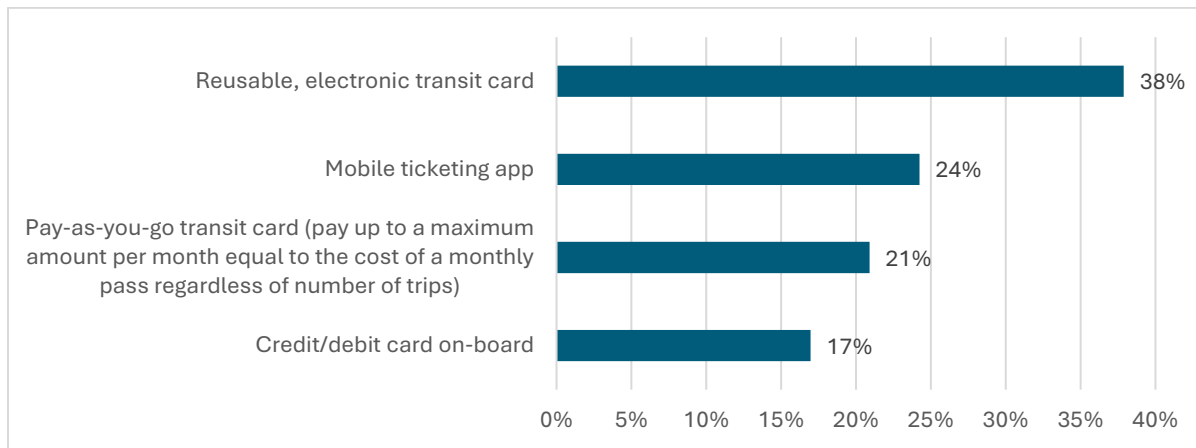
**Figure 22** illustrates riders' opinions on tickets and passes. The top priority for riders is the convenience of payment, with over a third of riders (36 percent) expressing that tickets and passes are more convenient than cash. While tickets and passes are more convenient than cash, they still require passengers to visit a ticket vendor location and plan ahead for their trips. More convenient payment options, such as mobile ticketing, could enhance the usability of the system for riders. Additionally, cost savings associated with tickets and passes are a significant priority for riders, with 22 percent of riders preferring tickets and passes because it is cheaper than paying for single rides. Increasing accessibility to fare types with cost savings can increase ridership for more cost-conscious riders.

**Figure 22: Survey Results: What are your thoughts on tickets/passes?**



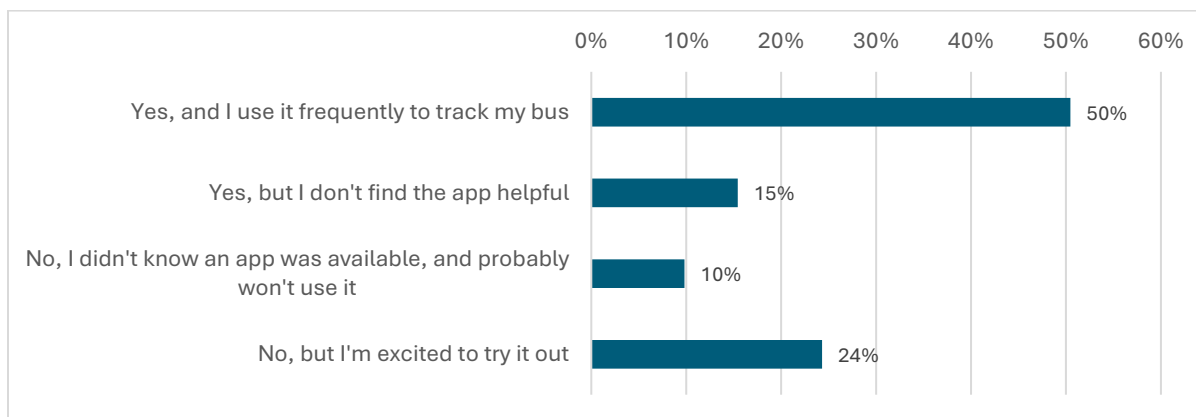
When presented with four different alternative payment options, the most popular method riders prefer was a reusable, electronic transit card (**Figure 23**). Approximately a quarter of riders also indicated interest in a mobile ticketing app. One in five respondents expressed interest in a pay-as-you-go transit card that would cap monthly spending at the cost of a monthly pass, regardless of the number of trips taken. Known as fare capping, this approach allows riders to accumulate the benefits of a pass over time without the burden of paying upfront, making fare payment more flexible and equitable, particularly for those with limited financial resources.

**Figure 23: Survey Results: Which of the following alternative payment options would you most prefer for paying fare?**



**Figure 24** provides a background for riders’ familiarity with the new Bangor Community Connector app. Sixty-five percent of riders are familiar with the app, with a majority of them using it frequently to track their bus. This high level of engagement with the app corroborates a potential openness to mobile ticketing, indicating that riders may be willing to adopt digital fare payment tools if made available.

**Figure 24: Survey Results: Are you familiar with the new Bangor Community Connector app?**



## FARE COLLECTION COSTS

### Fare Collection and Ticket and Pass Distribution

Community Connector’s current fare collection approach involves a range of processes tied to different fare products, each with unique operational considerations. Understanding these processes is essential for identifying opportunities to streamline fare management, reduce staff burden, and improve the rider experience.

Monthly passes, which account for 30 percent of fare payments, are distributed through 15 vendor locations across the service area. While these passes are easy for operators to validate on board, requiring no cash handling, the distribution and sales process is more complex. Passes are printed in-house and delivered to vendors, with vendor repayment calculated on an ad-hoc basis. This introduces potential for administrative inefficiencies and inconsistencies, particularly given the variation in sales arrangements and payment methods across vendors.

Cash is used by nearly 25 percent of riders and is accepted via traditional on-board fareboxes. Operators visually verify fare payment, which can lead to occasional discrepancies due to overpayment or underpayment, and may create delays or disagreements. Cash fares are manually collected and counted daily, adding to the operational effort.

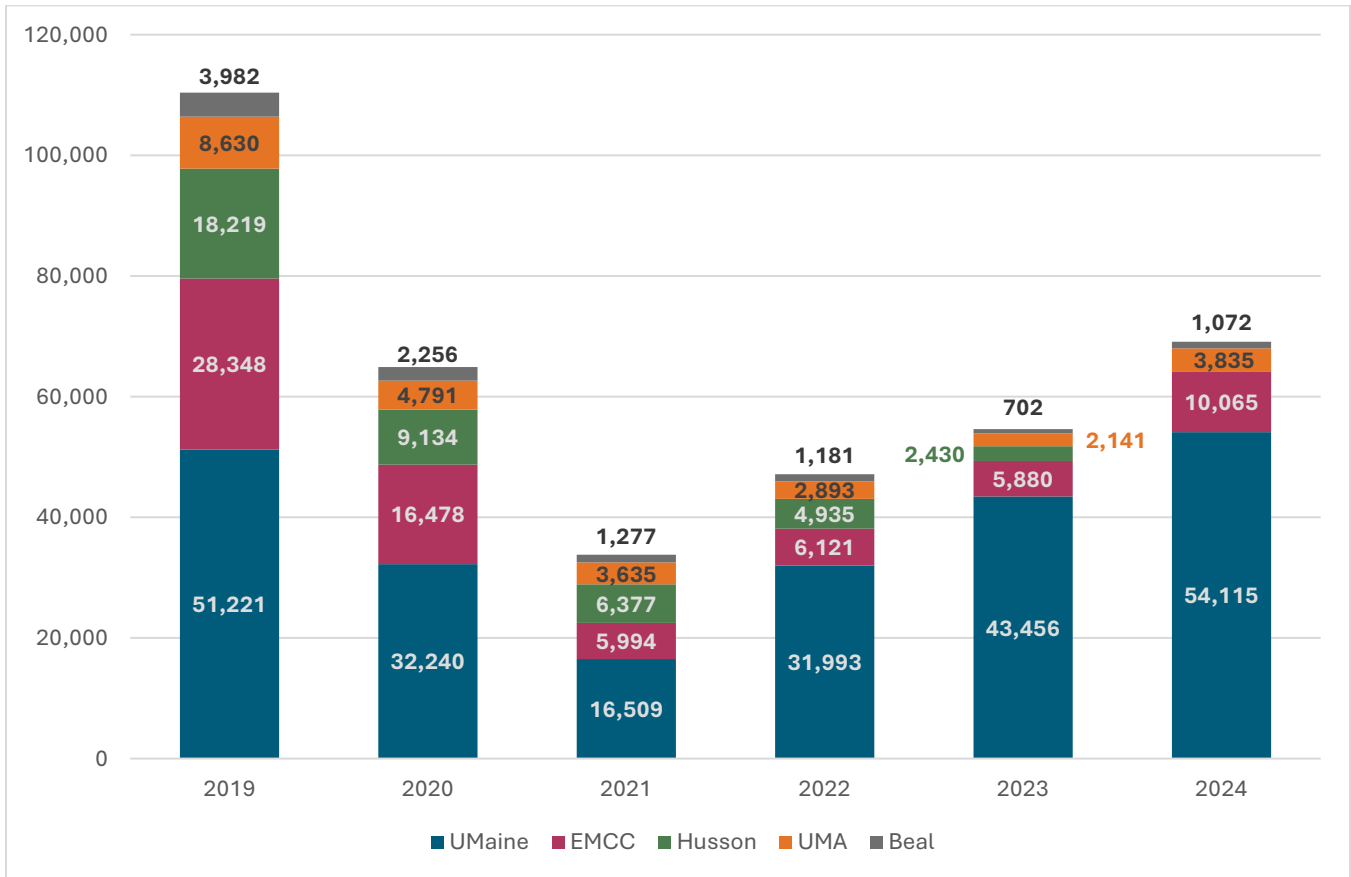
The costs associated with fare collection and distribution are not directly tracked, but an estimation can provide an understanding of the effort required for handling cash, tickets, and passes. First, tickets and passes must be printed, which could take one administrative staff day. Monthly passes and tickets take administrative staff a half-workday to prepare for visiting each vendor, one full workday each month to distribute to the different vendor locations across the service area, and another half-workday to reconcile payments and document the activity. There is a maximum of 18 vehicles operating service each day, estimating an average of \$32 per farebox per day in cash fare that needs to be collected and accounted for each day.

Improving data collection around fare payments and sales channels could support more informed fare policy decisions, enhance operational efficiency, and open up opportunities for future technology upgrades that maintain rider accessibility while easing the provider's administrative workload.

## College Contract Management

A notable share of Community Connector's ridership comprises college students who ride fare-free using a qualifying student ID (13 percent). Since the pandemic-related dip in FY2021, student ridership has steadily rebounded, though unevenly across institutions. While total ridership recovered by 62 percent between FY2019 and FY2024, only UMaine saw an increase in student ridership over this period, growing from 46 percent to nearly 80 percent of all college-affiliated rides (**Figure 25**). Husson and UMA suspended their partnership with Community Connector in the last couple of years.

Figure 25: College and University Student Riders (FY2019-FY2024)



Community Connector maintains separate service agreements with each college and university, and managing these contracts can be complex. Historically, contract pricing has been based on student enrollment, with institutions billed quarterly or by semester. However, contract rates have not changed since 2014, despite fluctuations in ridership and rising operating costs. As a result, the effective fare per student ride varies considerably across institutions (Table 7). It’s worth noting that UMaine also supports Community Connector’s operations via direct contract of Route O – Black Bear Orono Express and local funding match contributions.

Table 7: Contract Revenue by Student Ride (FY2024)

METRIC	UMAINE	EMCC	BEAL	TOTAL
Contract Revenue	\$25,500.00	\$18,000.00	\$1,518.00	\$50,770.00
Rides	54,115	10,065	1,072	69,087
Revenue by Trip	\$0.47	\$1.79	\$1.42	\$0.73

Current contract terms span three years with optional one-year extensions, but the most recent agreements expired in 2022. With renegotiations overdue, there is an opportunity to update the process, evaluate the pricing structure, and improve equity and transparency across institutional agreements. Transit providers and universities typically partner through one or more of the following contractual arrangements:

- **Universal Access Agreements:** The university pays a flat annual fee or a per-capita rate to the transit provider, allowing all eligible students (and sometimes faculty and staff) to ride fare-free. These agreements are often funded through student transportation fees.
- **Per-Ride Reimbursement:** The university reimburses the provider based on the number of trips taken by eligible riders.
- **Service Purchase Agreements:** The university contracts the transit provider to operate specific services (campus shuttles, late-night routes, express connections, etc.) with tailored service hours and routing.
- **In-Kind Partnerships:** Instead of (or in addition to) direct payments, the university provides support such as bus stop infrastructure, marketing and outreach, vehicle storage, or access to facilities, helping offset provider operating costs or improve rider experience.

Each model comes with trade-offs related to cost predictability, data needs, and the flexibility of service design. Providers often work closely with university partners to align contract structure with ridership goals, funding capacity, and operational feasibility.

## COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT

Operators report that fare evasion is generally low; few passengers attempt to ride the bus without paying entirely. The primary concern around fare noncompliance centers on the misuse of paper transfers (**Figure 26**). Common issues include passengers using transfers longer than allowed or sharing transfers with other passengers who have not paid a fare. Transfers are printed slips distributed by operators as passengers board the bus, with operators required to manually punch the time and manage color-coded slips by day. This process adds to the operator’s workload and introduces opportunities for error or misuse.

Figure 26: Transfer Ticket



The level of fare noncompliance caused by issues with paper transfers is difficult to measure. While all passengers using paper transfers are accounted for, these total figures include both valid and invalid uses of transfers by passengers. Thus, it would be difficult to accurately calculate the revenue lost due to non-compliance due to the nature of non-compliance.

Operator responses to fare disputes vary. While they are expected to make a reasonable effort to collect fares, they are also instructed not to delay service. This creates a trade-off between enforcing fare policy and maintaining on-time performance.

# 5. Key Findings and Next Steps

Community Connector has made important strides in recovering ridership, improving service efficiency, and understanding the fare needs of its riders. Findings from this document provide a starting point to identify opportunities to improve fare system performance, rider experience, and operational efficiency.

## KEY FINDINGS

### System Context and Rider Demand

- Community Connector has made notable improvements in recent years, yet faces persistent workforce challenges that have limited service delivery.
- Despite a significant growth in ridership between FY2023 and FY2024, fixed-route ridership in FY2024 was still 70 percent of the FY2019 figures.
- Demand-response ridership has already surpassed pre-pandemic levels. In FY2023, it accounted for 15 percent of the operating costs, up from just 6 percent in FY2019, placing growing pressure on the budget.

### System Performance

- System productivity (passengers per service hour) has improved each year since FY2021, indicating more efficient service delivery.
- Farebox recovery improved modestly in FY2024 but remains below pre-pandemic levels. Meanwhile, total operating expenses rose nearly 8 percent from FY2023, reflecting broader industry trends and increased ADA paratransit costs.
- Compared to peers, Community Connector had one of the highest farebox recovery ratios pre-pandemic but experienced the steepest decline among its peers by FY2023.

### Rider Profile and Priorities

- Most riders use the system frequently, with nearly 60 percent riding four or more times per week.
- Riders are diverse in age, ability, and purpose of travel, but most are lower-income and do not own a car, underscoring the system's importance as a lifeline for daily needs.
- Riders value affordability and convenience. Many find passes more economical than cash, and more than a third find them more convenient.

### Fare Product Use and Revenue Trends

- Monthly passes are the most commonly used fare product, followed by cash fares.
- Cash fares remain prevalent, especially among occasional users, signaling opportunities to improve payment flexibility.
- While survey responses suggest a high rate of transfer use among cash and ticket users (73 percent), onboard data shows a lower rate (43 percent).
- Student passes represent a significant share of boardings, particularly through the longstanding University of Maine agreement. However, unchanged contract rates since 2014 point to the opportunity to review terms and rates.



### Fare Collection and Distribution Challenges

- Physical pass and ticket distribution places a significant administrative burden on staff due to limited process and payment standardization across sales locations, introducing room for error and inefficiencies.

### Readiness for Modern Fare Options

- Riders show strong interest in more modern payment options. Over one-third support a reloadable electronic card, one in four would use mobile ticketing, and one in five favor fare capping.
- High engagement with the real-time trip planning app suggests readiness for mobile payment integration.
- While more than half of riders already use debit or credit cards to purchase fare products, a substantial portion (39 percent) still rely on cash. Introducing a reloadable transit card could modernize fare collection while supporting riders who are not yet ready to transition to mobile-only platforms.

### NEXT STEPS

Guided by these findings, the next task will focus on identifying fare policy goals to guide the development and evaluation of alternatives to define a set of recommendations for Community Connector's fare structure. Goals will inform the development of up to two fare scenarios, each exploring different structures, products, and fare media options. A literature review and case studies will support the identification of feasible models, while a detailed impact analysis will assess each alternative's potential effects on revenue, ridership, operations, and rider experience. This process will inform a recommended fare approach and implementation plan.