



## CHAPTER II

# Public Involvement

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This chapter presents a brief review of the public involvement program for this TDP update. Six open houses were held at various times during the planning process where citizens were openly welcome to comment on transit services in the Valley. The first open houses were held on Wednesday, November 2, 2005.



The locations were the Flathead Valley Community College and the Senior Center in Columbia Falls. That evening, Eagle Transit hosted an open house at the Mountain West Bank in Whitefish. The college had a very limited turnout, while the senior center had approximately 40 to 50 seniors. The Whitefish open house had three persons attend. Flyers, newspaper ads, and radio announcements advertised the open houses.

The second rounds of open houses were held on November 30, 2005 and early December 2005. These were held at the Kalispell Center Mall and Rosauers Grocery Store.

Attendees were given the opportunity to voice what they felt are transit needs within each of their communities. Most responses were for increased service or longer hours of service which would meet their needs. Appendix A presents the actual comments by attendees.

## SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

Comments in Appendix A are categorized into each comment location. A brief summary of those open house comments follows.

### FVCC, Kalispell

This open house was held from 11:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. at the Blake Hall Foyer. The open house was held in the main hallway and was designed to attract

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passersby. Only a few students expressed interest in the open house. However, the open house did attract a woman from Mountain View Manor in Whitefish who has clients who could use more service. One student mentioned she had been missed at her home when she had called for a pick-up. This was largely due to the fact that the buses were running very late.

### **Columbia Falls Senior Center**

Approximately 40 seniors and various other interested persons attended the open house at the senior center. The seniors were prepared for a presentation by the Eagle Transit representatives and the consultant, so a brief overview of the project was given and then each person was asked to voice their transit needs and ideas. Comment sheets were distributed to



each of those attending and an overwhelming response was received. Many indicated wanting longer hours of service so they could participate in senior activities which run later than the existing bus service. Specific interest in expanding the service in the Canyon, as well as advertising the system was indicated. One individual voiced his concern that residents would be willing to pay more for service and that the service needs to meet the needs of not only seniors but the general public as well. Many of the comments are those presented in Appendix A.

### **Mountain West Bank, Whitefish**

As stated, there were only a few attendees for this open house held from 5:00 until 7:00 p.m. Two of the attendees indicated they would use service; however, they felt that younger persons may not use the service. One person indicated they needed trips to FVCC and service up Big Mountain in the summer for recreation. They also thought service to Glacier would be beneficial.

### **Kalispell Center Mall**

The Kalispell Center Mall graciously allowed representatives from Eagle Transit and LSC to have a display of service alternatives. Information, as well as repre-

representatives, were available from 11:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. on November 30, 2005. Alternatives for Eagle Transit's future services were presented and comments were taken from residents, as well as questions answered.

### **Rosauers Grocery Store**

Following the Kalispell Center Mall meeting, an open house from 4:00 until 6:00 p.m. was held in the front entry of Rosauers. There was not a large number of comments received as a winter storm caused hazardous road conditions throughout the afternoon and evening.

## **ONBOARD INTERVIEWS**

This section provides the analysis of data collected through onboard interviews by patrons using the transportation services provided by Eagle Transit. Information provides insight on trip characteristics, cities and communities that need to be served, their perceptions of the quality of service, and how they first learned about Eagle Transit. The onboard interviews were conducted by LSC staff on September 28, 2005. Eight passengers were interviewed.

## **FINDINGS**

The responses are summarized in the following sections. These surveys were analyzed from a more qualitative perspective. A copy of the Eagle Transit onboard questionnaire used by the interviewer is provided in Appendix B.

### **Rider Characteristics**

There were a number of questions asked to determine the characteristics of the riders using Eagle Transit. Respondents were asked whether they had a vehicle available and whether they had a driver's license. Vehicle availability and the ability to drive play key roles in the demand for public transportation. Lack of a private vehicle or the inability to drive influence people to use public transportation. This comparison provides an indication of the number of *choice* riders compared to those who are transit-dependent.

### Vehicle Availability and Driver's License

Four of the eight Eagle Transit passengers had a vehicle available for the trip, while the other four passengers reported that they did not have a vehicle available for the trip. Most passengers who reported having a “vehicle available” were those passengers who were dependent on family, friends, or relatives to drive them.

Six of the eight respondents did not have a driver's license, while the remaining two passengers reported that they had a driver's license. The reasons for using public transportation in spite of having a driver's license were advanced age and wheelchair convenience which would otherwise be cumbersome to load/unload in a car.

This small sample may indicate that there may be more transit-dependent riders than *choice riders* who use Eagle Transit services.

### **Trip Characteristics and Frequency**

The interviews asked passengers to provide information about the trips they make using Eagle Transit service. In some cases, passengers gave multiple trip purposes. The primary trip purposes were school and doctor (each with four responses), while other respondents reported going to work and for shopping. Most respondents interviewed in the morning reported that they used the service for school, while most respondents interviewed in the afternoon were medical-related appointments.

Passengers were asked how often they ride the bus during a typical week. Three respondents ride Eagle Transit service five days a week. The other four passengers responded that they ride one to three days per week, while one of the respondents was a first-time rider.

### **Perceptions about Eagle Transit**

Passengers were asked to rate the present bus service provided by Eagle Transit on several categories including timeliness, cleanliness, driver courtesy, fares, reliability, and overall service quality. Each category was rated on a numerical scale from one to five, one being the best service provided in that category and five

being the worst service provided in that category. The average response was then calculated for each attribute. The responses are shown in Table II-1.

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>2005</b>
Timeliness	2.0
Cleanliness	1.6
Driver Courtesy	1.5
Fares	1.8
Reliability	2.3
Overall Service Quality	1.8

All characteristics of Eagle Transit were scored very positively. The most common complaints were on timeliness and reliability.

### **Fare Information**

Passengers were also asked to indicate how much they were willing to pay to ride the system. Respondents reported different fares that would be considered a reasonable fare, depending upon their type of payment and discounts that they received. The majority of respondents said that \$1.00—the existing fare—would be considered a reasonable fare for a one-way trip. Other fares that passengers were willing to pay were \$2.00, \$30 for 40-Ride tickets, and \$30 for a semester pass.

### **Hours and Days of Operation**

Passengers were asked what they thought should be the hours and days of operation. All respondents reported that the existing hours and days of service served them well, but half of those respondents also expressed the desire that, in addition to the weekday service, they would like to have service on Saturdays. They further reported that they would use the Saturday service for shopping and other errands. Note that Eagle Transit currently operates Monday to Friday from 9:15 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

### **Operate Late Enough**

Passengers were asked whether the system operated late enough. Most passengers thought that the service operated late enough, but one passenger hoped that the system would operate until 7:00 p.m.

### **Cities and Communities to be Served**

Passengers were asked in which cities and communities they would like the service to operate. Most passengers needed the service within the Kalispell area, but a few respondents expressed the desire for service to Whitefish and one respondent identified Columbia Falls and Glacier National Park as places the service should operate.

### **Source of Information**

One of the primary concerns was the decrease in ridership observed in FY 2005. Thus, passengers were asked to indicate how they first learned about Eagle Transit. The primary sources of information for a majority of passengers are word of mouth from a friend or coworker or through visibility of buses. Other sources of information indicated by patrons include the Agency on Aging and local newspapers. This information is useful to Eagle Transit to understand that more marketing and public outreach programs may need to be done. One of the passengers believed that seniors needed to realize that this transportation is meant for them. Currently, using public transportation to get around seems to make them feel less capable and more dependent on others. Outreach and education were the two main suggested solutions to overcome this.

### **Additional Comments**

Passengers were given the opportunity to include additional comments regarding Eagle Transit service. Most comments were positive that this service was in existence. They liked the service because they did not own a car and had the convenience of being picked up at their door step. Some respondents wished that they could reduce the total trip time which includes wait times for being picked up, dropped off, and travel time.

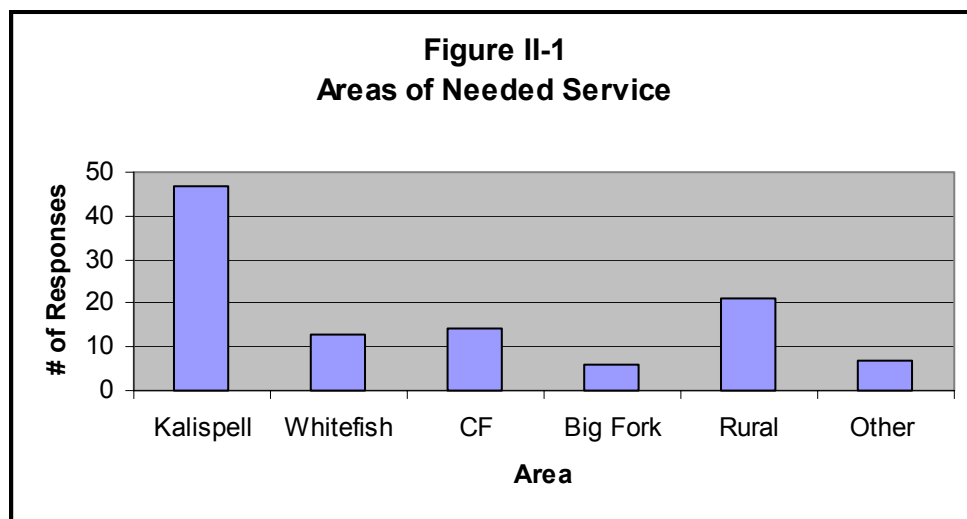
## WEB-BASED SURVEY RESPONSES

A web-based survey was prepared to solicit community input from the general public. The survey was comprised of approximately 10 questions with open-ended questions where respondents could comment on service needs. The link to the survey was e-mailed to a host of businesses, college students, employees, and others. Approximately 73 responses were received in a two-week time period. While this by no means represents a statically-significant sample, it does give a general idea of what responses from interested persons may look like. Questions were posed regarding demographic characteristics, service needs, interest in using service, perceptions on community support, as well as residents were allowed to provide additional comments. The results are provided in the following text, tables, and graphs.

### Results

#### Areas of Needed Service

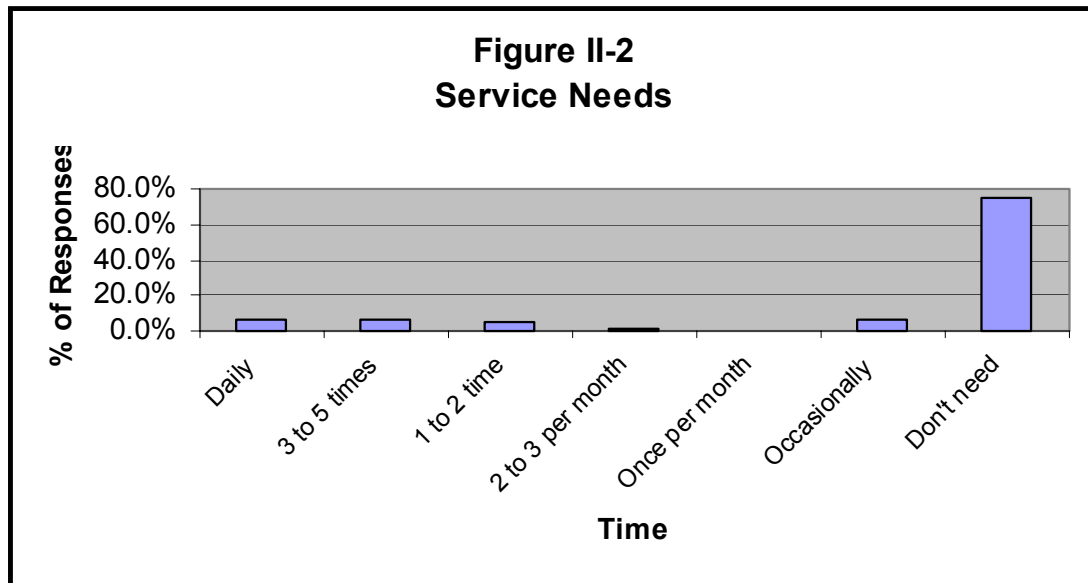
Respondents were asked to indicate the areas in Flathead County which they believe to need the greatest amount of transit service. Respondents largely indicated Kalispell needs the greatest amount of service, followed by the rural areas of the county, with Columbia Falls and Whitefish being the next areas. Figure II-1 illustrates these responses. It must be noted participants could indicate more than one area, therefore responses do not sum to the total number of respondents.

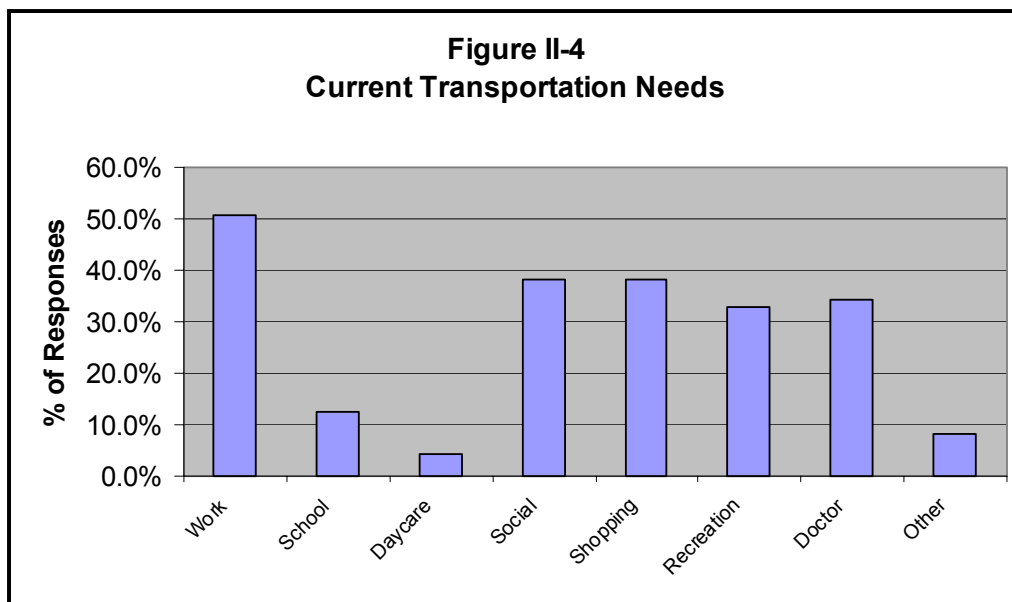
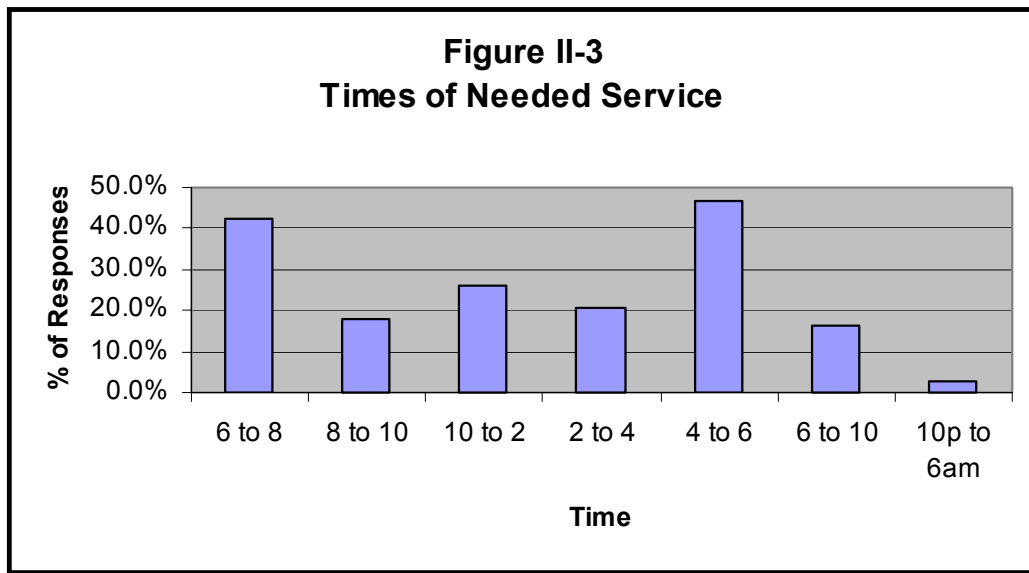


### Respondents Needing Service

Respondents were asked if they need public transportation services. Overwhelmingly—80 percent—indicated that they do not need transportation service. Of the 20 percent who need service, many of the locations they need service to include doctors' appointments, Target, Wal-Mart, the hospital, County Courthouse, and outlying towns and rural parts of Flathead County to Kalispell.

Respondents were asked when they would need service and for what purpose. Figures II-2 through II-4 illustrate those needs. As shown, most indicated they do not need service, but indicated the times they would need service were from 6:00 to 8:00 a.m. and from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. Fifty percent indicated they would use service for work-related trips, while social and shopping were close behind.





**Indication of Usage**

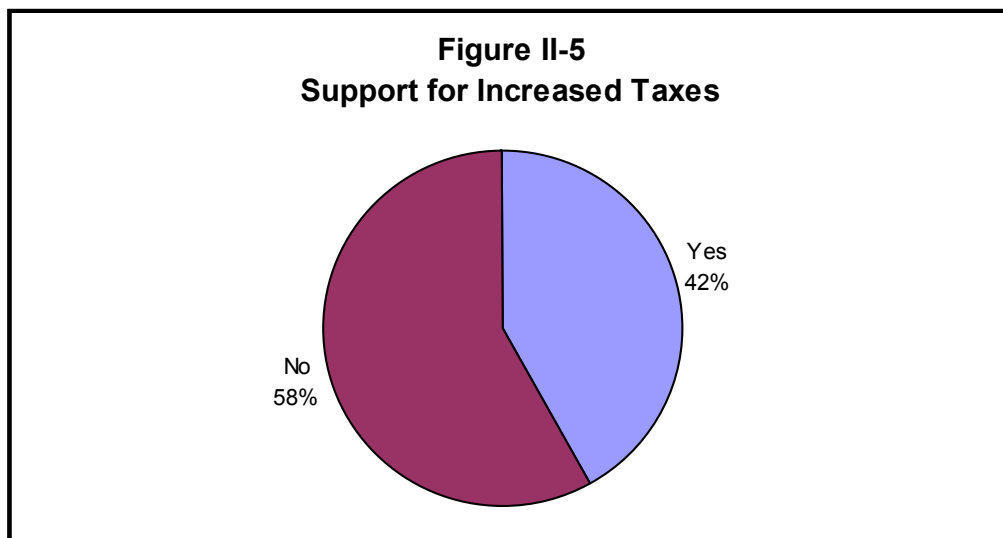
Seventy-three percent of respondents indicated that they would use service if it met their needs. However, 64 percent indicated needing a vehicle at work for business-related travel or personal errands. Only three percent of the respondents indicated they have a transportation limitation. This may indicate that while a large majority would use service, many need a vehicle at work, and only three may

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be considered transit-dependent. Therefore, many of the respondents can be labeled choice riders.

### Support for Service

Finally, respondents were asked to indicate whether they felt there was community support for increased taxes to support increased Eagle Transit services. Fifty-eight percent indicated that “no,” there was not community support for increased taxes. Figure II-5 illustrates these responses.



### **Additional Comments**

Respondents were asked to indicate if they had additional ideas for service as well as what additional comments they would like to make. Those comments are presented in Appendix C. Comments and ideas seem to strongly support increased services for the area. Generally, comments were positive about service and increasing service. Many of the ideas are addressed in the preferred plan.