

BEST FRIEND EXPRESS – TRANSIT IMPROVEMENT STUDY

NORTH AUGUSTA CHAMBER PRESENTATION

FEBRUARY 8, 2024



Our presentation

- Project Overview
- Existing Conditions Summary
- Public Engagement Summary
- Comments and questions





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Code is **2886 1583**



QUICK POLL: ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH THE BEST FRIEND EXPRESS?



PROJECT OVERVIEW



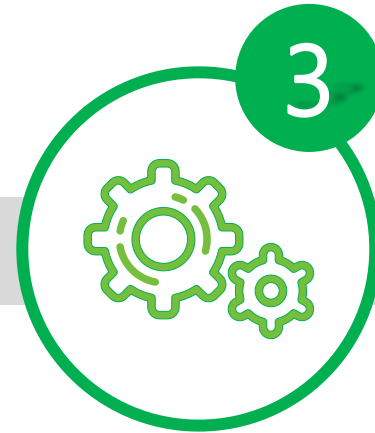
Transit Improvement Study Process



**Analyze Existing
Conditions**



**Identify
Opportunities for
Improvement**



**Develop and
Evaluate
Alternatives**

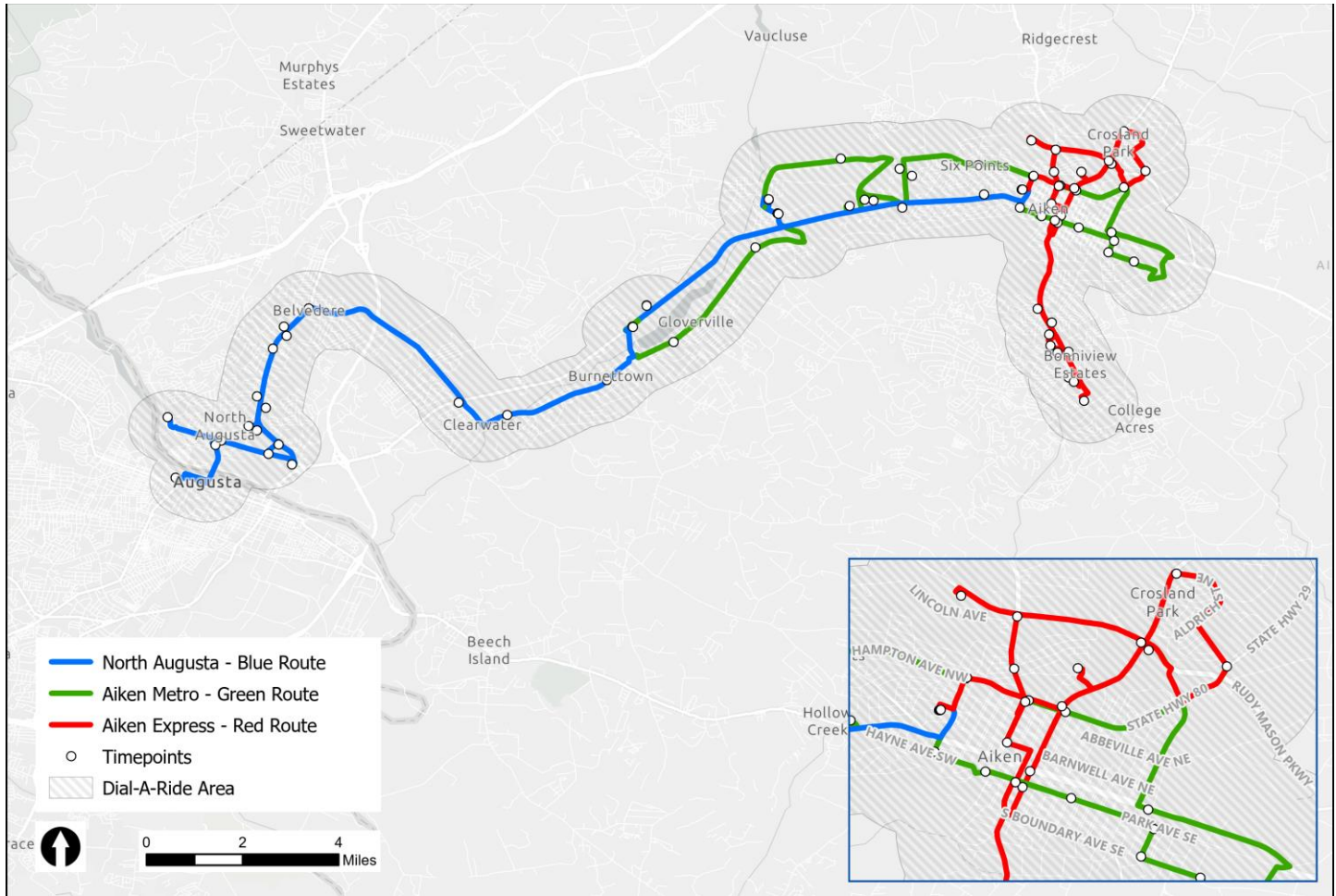


**Draft and Adopt
Final Plan**



EXISTING CONDITIONS





**WHERE DOES
THE BEST
FRIEND
EXPRESS GO?**

Where does the Best Friend Express go?

- Runs Monday to Friday from 7am to 7pm
- The Best Friend Express (BFE) is a service of the Lower Savannah Council of Governments (LSCOG)
- Serves Aiken County and stops at Augusta Transit Center
- 3 routes
- Paratransit (Dial-a-Ride) service: door-to-door service for eligible residents

Route	Service Days	Hours of Service	Frequency (Minutes)	Description
Blue	Mon – Fri	7AM – 7PM	120	North Augusta (Aiken to Augusta)
Green	Mon - Fri	7AM – 7PM	120	Aiken Metro (Aiken to Burnetown)
Red	Mon - Fri	7AM – 7PM	120	Aiken Express (North-South)

Fare Payment

- Fares payable only in cash
 - Payment at fareboxes at the vehicle entrance
 - No ticketing equipment
 - Free route transfers
- No integration of fare payment between BFE and Augusta Transit
 - Transfers between the two services must pay separately for both

Service Type	Fare Type	Cost
Fixed-Route Bus	Regular	\$2.00
	Student	\$1.50
	Senior/Disability	\$1.00
Dial-A-Ride	Regular	\$3.00

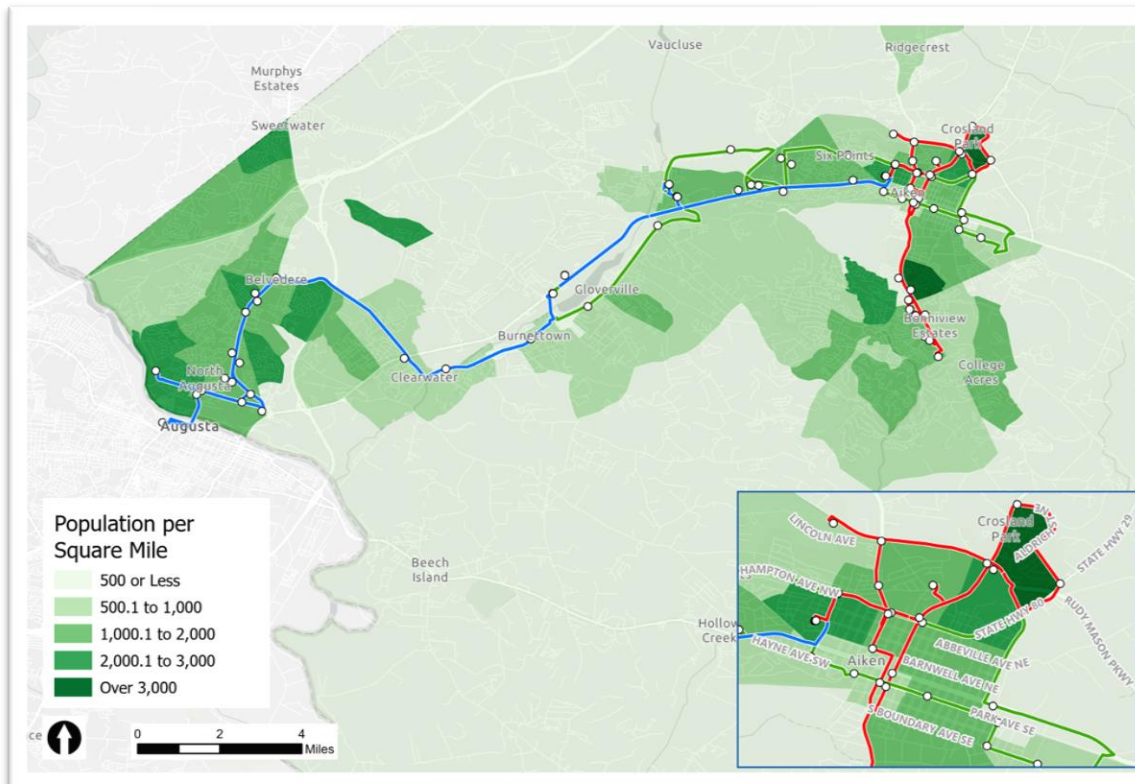
Operations

- Dial-A-Ride
 - Riders must apply for eligibility
 - Trips reserved at least one day in advance
- Fixed Route
 - All routes operate on a flag-stop basis with some fixed timepoints
 - First weekday trip is usually different from regular trips, serving work-oriented trips and minimizing downtime
- All vehicles equipped with lifts and bike racks

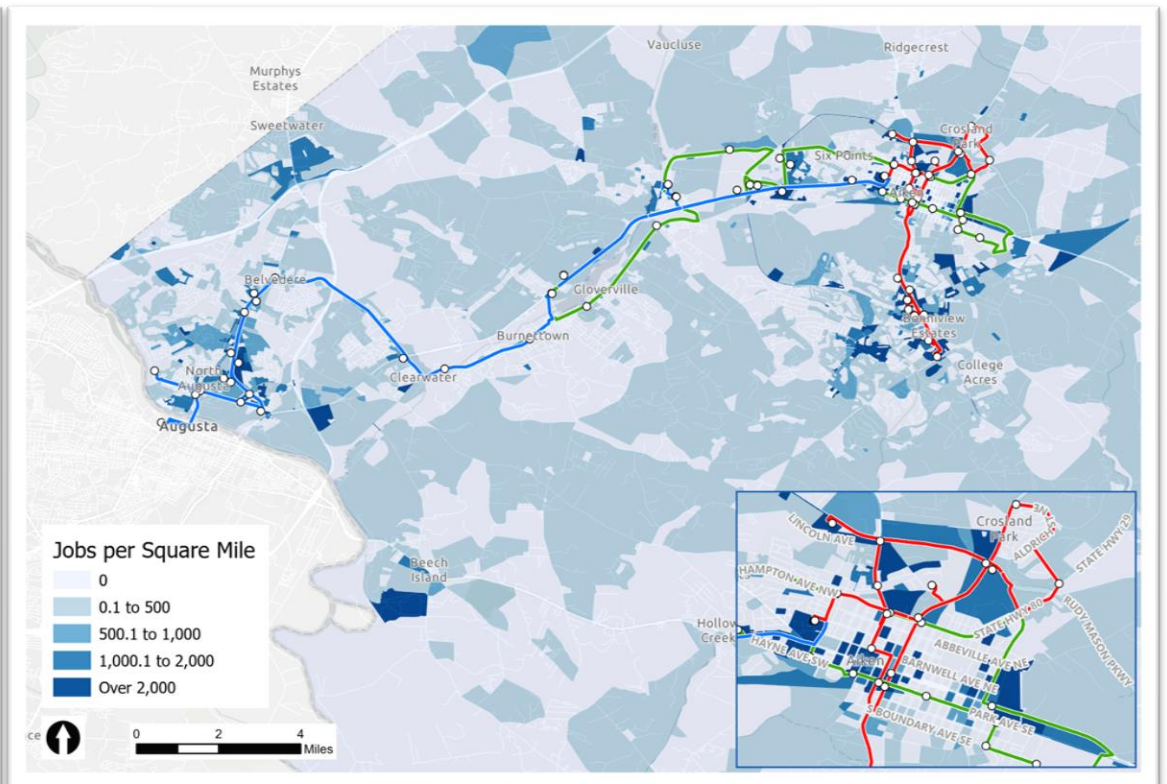


Demographics

Population Density



Employment Density

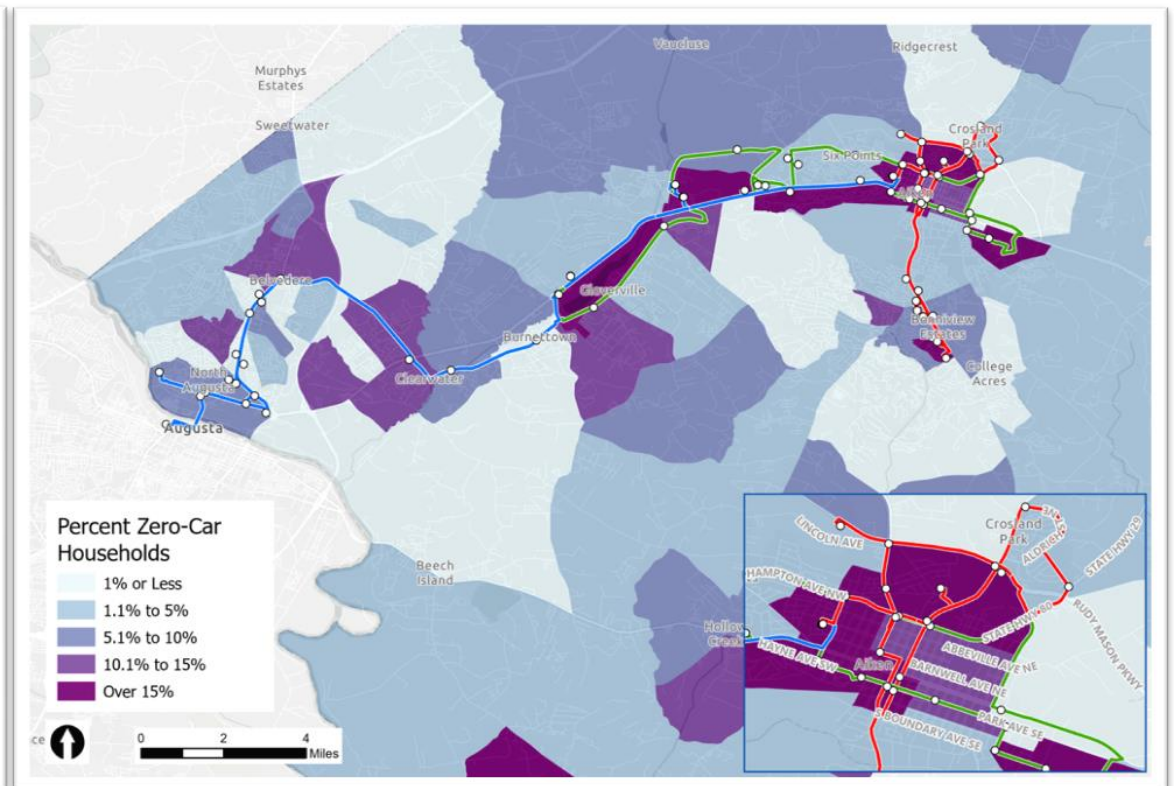


Demographics

Low-Income Population

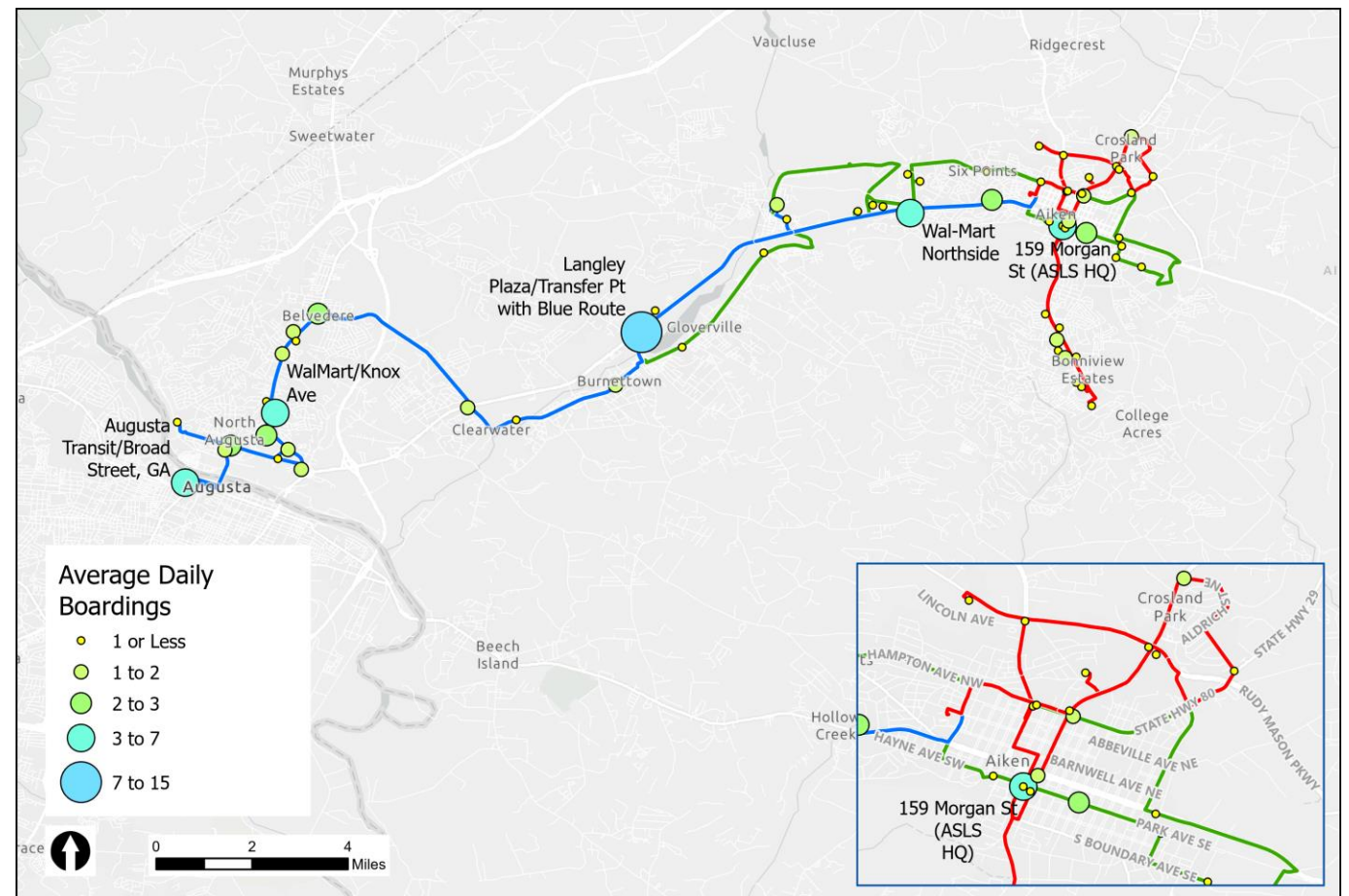


Zero-Car Households



Ridership

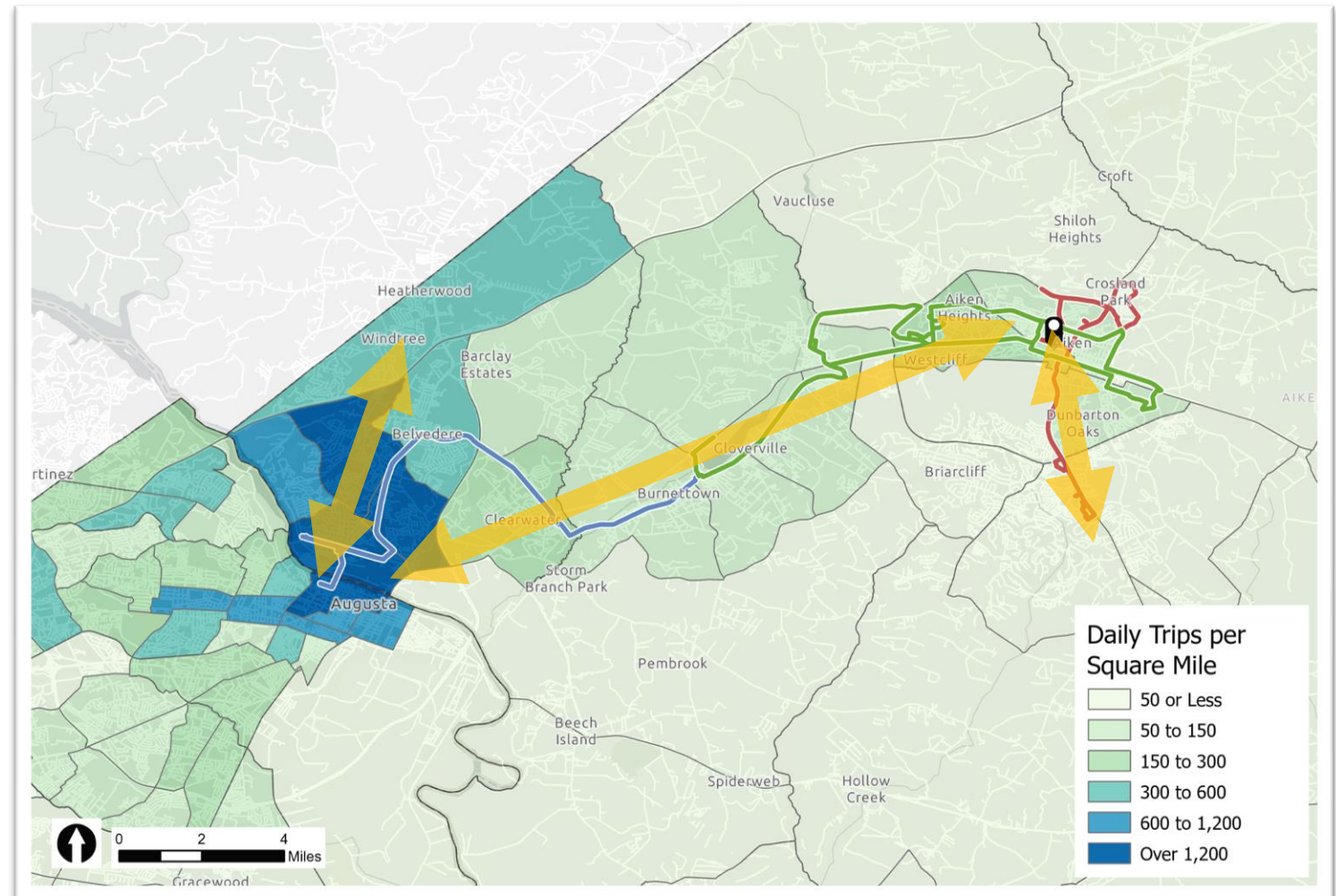
- Quarterly ridership (Oct – Dec 2023): just under 6,500
- Average annual ridership (7/22-6/23)
 - Fixed Route: approximately 20,000 trips
 - Dial-A-Ride: just under 3,500 trips



North Augusta Travel Patterns

Travel Demand

- Trips from North Augusta are decidedly more drawn to Augusta than to Aiken County destinations
- Popular destinations in Aiken County include:
 - Areas north of central North Augusta (partially served by Blue Route), including north of I-20 and Exit 5
 - USC – Aiken
 - Area directly southeast of downtown Aiken





WHAT WE'VE HEARD

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT



Public Engagement Activities

- Community Leaders Meeting
- Stakeholder Interviews
- Drivers and Operating Staff Meetings
- Pop-ups and Intercept Surveys
 - Augusta Transfer Center
 - Lessie B. Price Center
- Online Promotion
- Rider and Community Survey



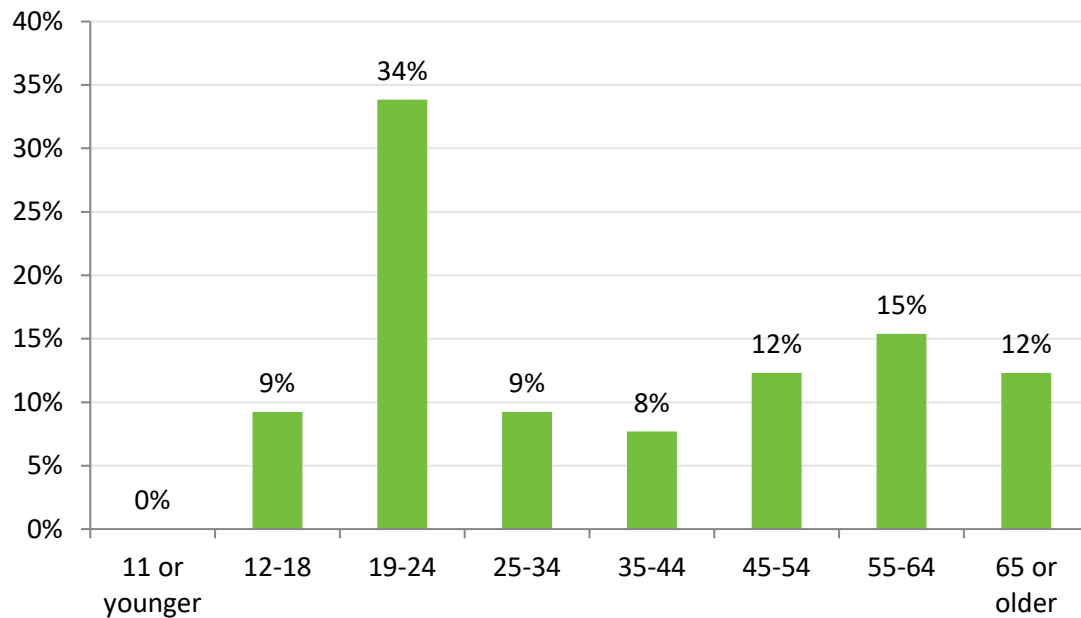
Stakeholder Meeting Discussions

- Met with 11 key stakeholder groups
 - SC Works
 - Aiken Technical College
 - USC Aiken
 - Aiken Regional Medical Center
- Gather feedback on current use, needs, ideas, aspirations for transit service
- Follow up in spring with recommendations



On-Board Rider Survey

- Total of 65 survey responses
- 12 responses gathered on board bus



- Potential new places the Best Friend Express should serve
- How can the Best Friend Express better serve you

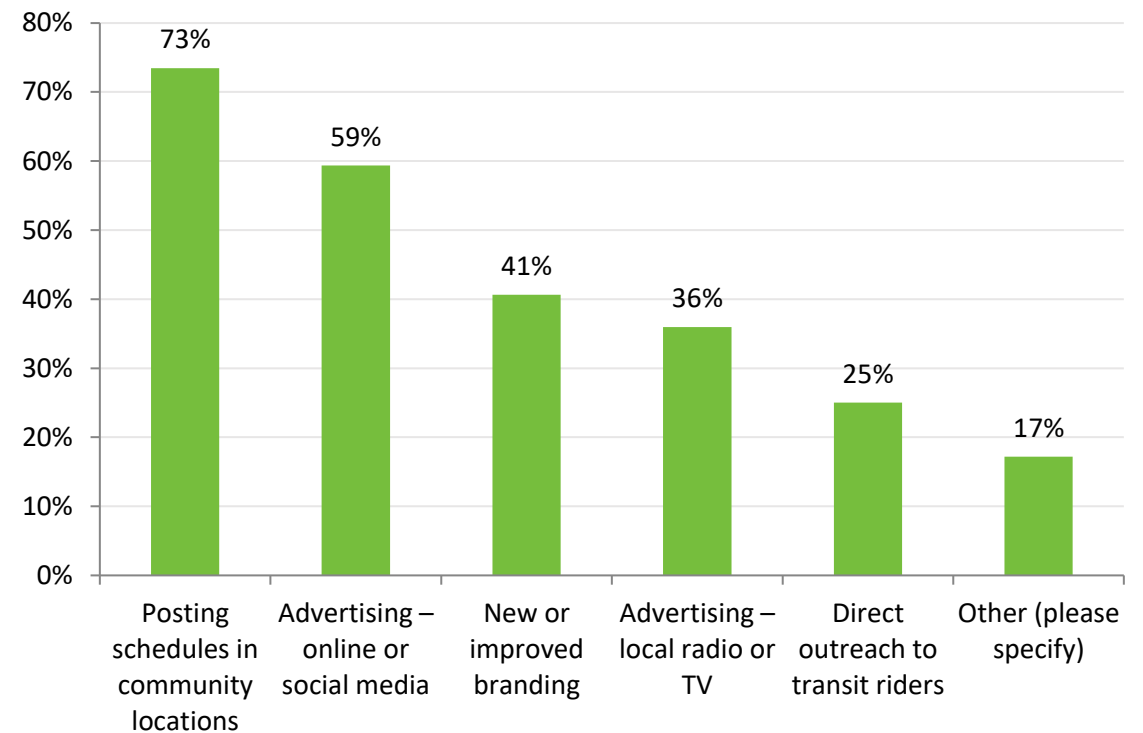
Thanks for helping plan the future of transit. We look forward to your feedback!

- How do you get to the places you want to go? Please rank the ways you get around. (1=most frequent, 5=least frequent).
 - Drive or ride in my own vehicle
 - Drive or ride in someone else's vehicle
 - Ride the bus
 - Walk or use a wheelchair
 - Ride a bicycle
 - Other: UBER/LYFT
- How familiar are you with the Best Friend Express bus service?
 - Very familiar / current rider
 - Somewhat familiar / have heard of the service
 - Not familiar / have not heard of the service
- On average, how often do you ride the bus in a month?
 - Daily
 - 3-5 times a week
 - 1-2 times a week
 - 1-2 times a month
- Do you have a driver's license?
 - Yes
 - No
- How many people live in your household? 3
- How many reliable vehicles are you and others in your household able to access? 0
- Have you ever quit or lost a job because it was hard for you to get to work?
 - Yes
 - No
- If yes, why was it hard for you to get to work? _____
- Overall, how well does the Best Friend Express Transit system meet your needs?
 - Very well
 - Well
 - Neither well nor poorly
 - Poorly

Rider and Community Survey Key Themes

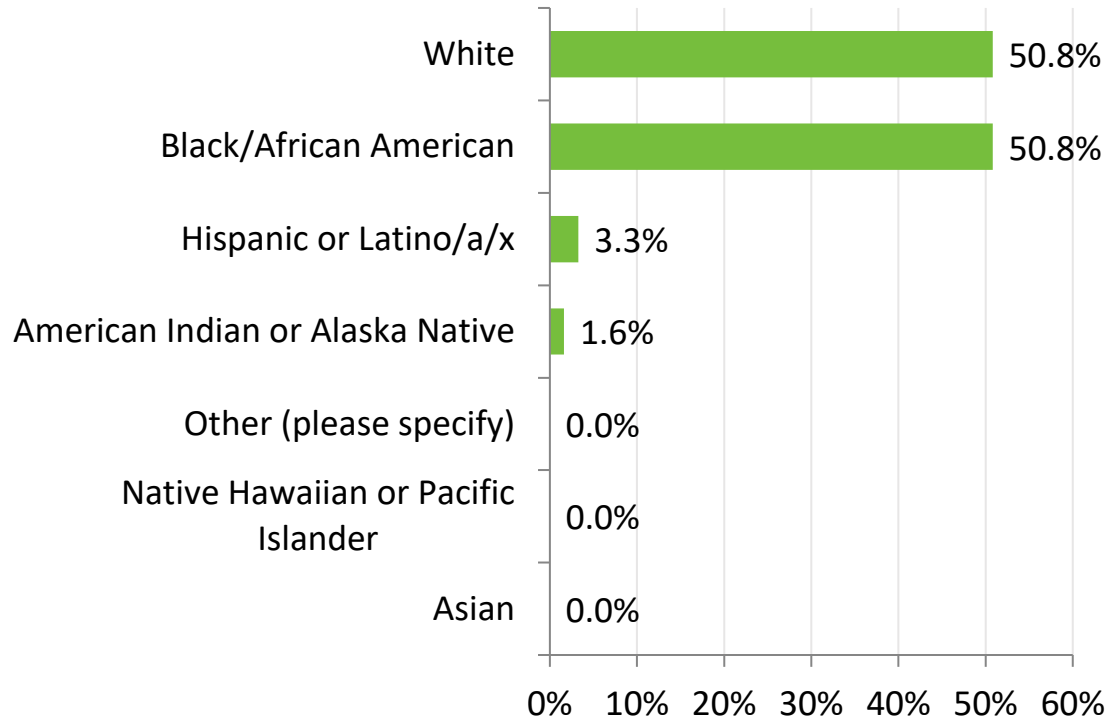
- Increase awareness
- Improve stop infrastructure
- Enhance service frequency and reliability
- Enhance geographical coverage
- Support rider safety

What would best improve awareness of Best Friend Express service?



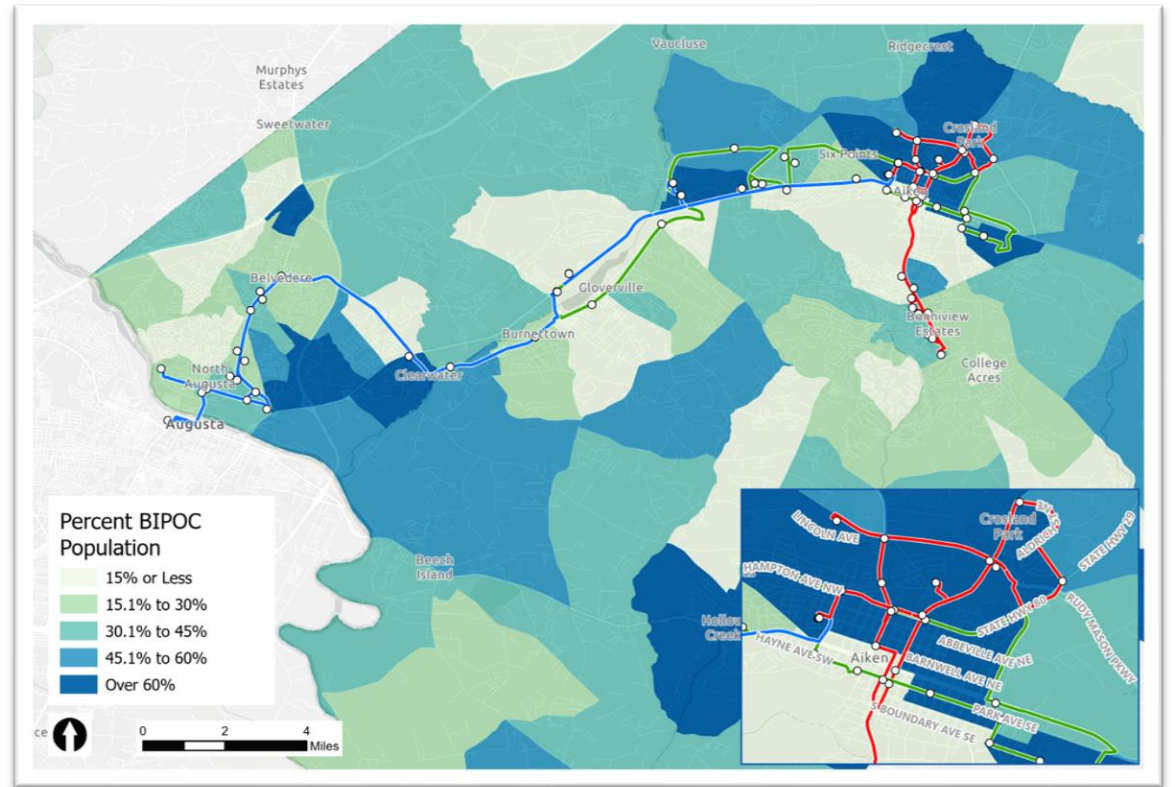
Rider and Community Survey Findings

Survey respondent race/ethnicity



Respondents were invited to select more than one race/ethnicity.

Full breakdown may add up to more than 100%.



BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, People of Color



MOVING FORWARD



QUICK POLL:
HOW WOULD YOU PRIORITIZE IMPROVEMENTS?
HOW CAN BEST FRIEND EXPRESS BEST HELP YOU AND YOUR BUSINESS?

- Menti.com
- Code is **2886 1583**

 Mentimeter



Look Ahead

February

- On-going stakeholder discussions
- Development of service alternatives (fixed-route, on-demand, other models)

March

- Complete service alternatives and conceptual operating plans
- Develop public communications for engagement materials
- Public meetings – Aiken & North Augusta

April

- Refine service alternatives based on public and stakeholder feedback
- Summarize engagement activities
- Identify a preferred alternative for additional evaluation



THANK YOU!



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