



## The viability of and demand for a public transport pilot for the township of Ashburton



Prepared for Safer Mid Canterbury and Ashburton District Council  
by  
Sarah Wylie and Sharon Gardner  
Social Research and Evaluation  
[swylie@socialresearch.co.nz](mailto:swylie@socialresearch.co.nz)

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## Executive Summary

### Background

Ashburton District Council, working in collaboration with Safer Mid Canterbury, sought to commission community research with the public and with local community groups concerning a possible public transport service for Ashburton Township. The purpose of the research was to evidence and understand public transport need, gauge public demand, and potentially inform development of a pilot transport service for the town. Depending on findings, these may be used to support funding allocation in Ashburton District Council's LTP for a trial service and to provide the beginnings of a Business Case to ECAN and Waka Kotahi to rate for a public transport service for the township further downstream.

This research was undertaken in early 2024, led by Sarah Wylie and with assistance from Sharon Gardner. Sarah has conducted a number of social and community research projects in Ashburton District over the years.

### Approach

The research utilised a mixed methods approach, including a brief literature scan and presentation of relevant Total Mobility and Stats NZ Census data, 18 phone interviews with key informants (with strong engagement and knowledge of Ashburton township's disabled communities, older adult residents, youth and refugee and migrant population, and/or significant insights into transport provision, needs and options for Ashburton), including 10 representatives of community provider organisations, 5 key Ashburton District Council and ECAN representatives and 3 transport providers. As an alternative to interview and to widen the reach of participation, a workshop was held on 21 February 2024 at Hakatere Marae, attended by 23 people, representing Safer Mid Canterbury, Ashburton Community Alcohol and Drug Service, Ashburton Hospital, Age Concern / Senior Citizens Ashburton, Grey Power, Ashburton Taxis, YMCA, Hakatere Marae, Ashburton Multicultural Council, Environment Canterbury, Sport Canterbury and Tangata Atumotu Trust.

A public survey was executed with strong promotion and engagement through both digital and hard copy, with 450 responses received and analysed.

### Findings

#### *Current transport provision*

At the time of the 2018 census, just under 20,000 lived within the town of Ashburton. While 2023 Census findings were not available at the time the present report was prepared, moderate growth is expected to have occurred since that time. At present, Ashburton is served by the following transport options additional to personal means (self-drive or driven in car by family / friends / colleagues etc, bike, walk, scooter, wheelchair, mobility scooter etc.):

- **The Mid Canterbury School Transport Service** coordinates daily school bus operations for enrolled students from 16 schools in Mid Canterbury, undertaking 28 school runs (along with local charters/ trips within school hours).
- **Mid Canterbury Connector:** Currently there is one volunteer-driven, on-demand vehicle in Ashburton that runs booked return trips from Mt Somers, Methven, Rakaia, Wakanui,

Chertsey, Fairton and Hinds to delegated drop off points in the Ashburton township, Monday to Friday from 9 am to 4:30 pm. Cost is set between \$5-20 depending on the distance travelled. The service cannot service transport needs for people living within Ashburton.

- **Health Shuttle:** A shuttle service is available in Ashburton to provide transport to health-related appointments in Christchurch.
- **Beckley's Coachlines** provides a charter-based service.
- **Courtesy Cars** are provided by a some of the not-for-profits and licensed premises locally.

#### *Likely level of demand for public transport offerings in Ashburton*

There was strong community engagement around the subject of public transport options for Ashburton, though not all of it positive. It is clear from the present research that there are strong feelings opposing more than minimal ratepayer contribution to any public transport solutions. The willingness to engage in the research from a wide range of community stakeholders was unsurprising given that transport barriers have been highlighted in various social and community research in Ashburton over many years.

Presented with a range of different bus/van public transport solutions, the survey utilised in the present research identified a moderate level of demand for public transport within the town, with slight preference for a **regular timetabled bus/van service using designated bus stops**.

Just under a third of the survey respondents thought they would use a scheduled (timetabled with fixed pick-up/drop-off points) weekday bus service at least weekly, while two-fifths expected to never use such a service. Demand was lower for a service on Saturdays. There did seem to be relatively strong demand for bus services connecting people with special events in the town while a reasonable proportion of respondents thought they would use a dining / entertainment bus at night, but this would be likely to amount to only infrequent use.

Alongside scheduled bus/van services, there does appear to be some appetite for public e-scooters. Findings of the present research suggest that a commercial pay-to-ride e-scooter service (eg. Lime) within Ashburton town boundaries would be relatively well-used and address some of the existing transport needs, and especially for young people, people who work in Ashburton, and for people with disabilities (especially around mental health or with psychological or learning impairments) who do not drive but do not qualify for Total Mobility. A trial of such an operation could also be put in place without cost to Council.

When the survey in the present research asked respondents what difference public transport would make to the quality of their lives if available, reported mean differences were largest for people with psychiatric, psychological or learning disabilities (less likely than people with other disabilities to have a Total Mobility card) and recent refugees, followed by recent migrants (especially Asian and Middle Eastern, Latin American or African migrants) and young people, echoing what health, social and community workers have been telling us for years.

#### *Needs and desires of the community and transport options best-suited to address these*

Most commonly, people appear to want to use public transport to do their shopping, followed by socialising / meeting friends, attend health appointments, and fourth-most commonly, be able to

enjoy alcohol without driving. Overall, mornings appear slightly favoured over afternoons and weekdays over weekends, but this is likely to vary between different age groups and trip purposes.

Because the survey respondent group was not representative of the whole population of Ashburton in every respect, it is not appropriate to extrapolate from survey findings regarding level of use to anticipated numbers of users: applying the survey-suggested usage levels to population figures is highly likely to overstate use.

The research findings do suggest that there is some level of demand for public transport within Ashburton to get people to and from work or school / after school activities: restricting a service just to mid-morning – mid-afternoon would dramatically reduce the potential user group for the service. Key destinations include all supermarkets, the town centre (key retail, banking, government agency and Council service locations, hospitality), suburban shopping centres and medical centres (Tinwald, Allenton and Netherby), the hospital, EA Network sports complex and the College. A bus or van on a scheduled route with fixed stop times and pick-up/drop-off points and especially during weekdays, from around 8am to 5:30pm (to ensure usefulness for getting to and from school and work) is worthy of trialling. A bus route would need to connect these as well as extending outwards from the furthest-spread points to ensure that nobody was more than a few blocks from a bus stop. To maximise its chances of successful uptake, this would need to be well-promoted, catered well to disabilities, connected to the key destinations identified, and be trialled over a long enough time period to enable behavioural change around transport to occur: for people to find the chance to try the service, find that it worked for them, and start considering the bus as a viable alternative means of making certain types of trips.

The majority of users of public transport options are likely to be erring on the side of less frequent use, so there is a much stronger case for a bus/van service using one or two vehicles continually travelling on a circuit than multiple bus routes services by several vehicles. With preference for buses/vans that collect users from designated stops rather than for users to have to pre-book their ride, findings point more strongly to a contracted service than a Community Vehicle Trust – type service, reliant on volunteer drivers: feedback regarding volunteering capacity in Ashburton is highly relevant. For a bus service to work, it needs to be reliable. Another option could be a Community Vehicle Trust model utilising paid drivers.

User-pays e-scooters or bikes are likely to meet other needs at no cost to Council.

The present research identified a willingness to pay more for public transport options than is charged for the buses in either Greater Christchurch or Timaru.

- Mean expected cost per trip for community-e-scooters or bikes was around \$4.60-4:80, with some respondents expecting this to be free, but a large number suggesting this should be user-pays, in line with costs of Lime scooter or bike hire elsewhere.
- Mean expected costs for a bus to / from special events in Ashburton was just under \$5, for a bus on a designated route on weekdays \$4.60 and around \$4.80 for a booking-based, door to door service.

- Expected bus rates were similar for weekends, while for an evening bus service to access dining and entertainment was expected to cost around \$6.25 on average.

Potential users seem prepared to pay a larger proportion of the real costs of public transport in Ashburton, with Council therefore needing to pay less (if public transport is put in place) than is the case in other nearby centres.

#### *Potential impacts on existing service providers (local taxi service) and mitigation*

Ashburton Taxis hold the only Total Mobility contract in the district, and feedback regarding how this is working was largely positive. In 2023, the 641 Total Mobility users in Ashburton District took over 13,000 trips on the scheme, with 9.5% of the trips made by wheelchair users. It seems though that in peak times, late at night and in wet weather, taxi demand exceeds supply.

Based on the findings of the present research, introduction of a bus service to Ashburton is unlikely to negatively impact on the taxi service.

- Older adults who can no longer drive and have a Total Mobility card appear to enjoy the service the taxi drivers afford them, not only getting them to where they want to go in a door-to-door fashion but also helping load and unload their shopping, helping them access buildings and the like, and generally providing a relatively holistic service.
- Travel within Ashburton would fall within the parameters of full the 75% subsidy rate.
- For people with disabilities who do not qualify for Total Mobility, many are on low incomes, and are unlikely to be able to afford to use taxis except on rare occasions.
- The same is true for young people, and for at least some migrants who do not drive.
- Given that the taxi service appears over-subscribed a lot of the time, redirecting some passengers to public transport is likely to free up their capacity to meet the needs of Total Mobility users, to pick up people choosing to avoid drinking and driving and people who use/prefer to use taxis for other reasons, including those who really value and need the personalised service that taxi drivers are able to provide.

#### *Things to consider alongside public transport*

- **Cycling** - For around 14% of the survey respondents, cycling was one of the main ways they got around the town currently, a similar proportion as those cycling to school or work in the Council's Walking and Cycling Strategy survey in 2020. Approaches to encourage more people to cycle and to remove/address barriers around cycling should be considered alongside public transport options. With a bike skills park under development at Ashburton Domain through efforts of Ashburton District Council, Safer Mid Canterbury and local service clubs, such initiatives seem timely. Ashburton District Council's Operative District Plan (2022) highlighted sustainability as a consideration for long-term planning around public transport, and also highlighted the importance of efficient pedestrian links and cycleways as a key component in addressing transport needs.
- **Traffic volumes and congestion** - A key reason why many older adults in Ashburton do not / prefer not to drive into the town centre is that the main roads carry high traffic volumes, and some intersections are perceived as complex to navigate. Frustration with levels of congestion on SH1 through town is clearly high, and many people want to see a second bridge and/or a

bypass through the town: some of the survey respondents were keen for this to be Ashburton District Council's priority ahead of public transport.

Addressing traffic volumes and congestion through the town was seen to indirectly address transport need for some sectors of the population. Reduced traffic volumes would make the town more appealing / safer for cyclists and would be easier for older drivers who are nervous / have lost confidence at the wheel or are suffering reduced mobility. Others want to see rates spent on improving the condition of roads and footpaths. Again, such improvements are likely to make the town more walkable and bikeable, addressing transport barriers for some, though road works in themselves also seem to be a source of considerable frustration for some members of the community.

## **Note to readers**

The researcher acknowledges the assistance provided by all those individuals who gave up their time to be interviewed, or provided information as part of the present research.

While due care was taken throughout the research process, the author accepts no liability for errors or incorrect statements in the report arising from information supplied to the author during the research process. It should be noted that the researchers are social scientists: content relating to detailed transport planning is based on what has been reported to the researcher, and requires the consideration of transport planners.



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## 1. Background

While no specifics are identified, public transport for Ashburton is mentioned in the Environment Canterbury's Draft Regional Land Transport Plan (RLTP) 24-34, which is due for public consultation in January 2024. Lack of public transport serving residents within the town boundaries of Ashburton, along with lack of choice in transport options for people who do not drive, for young people and for Total Mobility users has repeatedly emerged as a gap in community needs-focused research conducted for/by Safer Mid Canterbury.

Canterbury Regional Council staff are currently working on a review of the Regional Public Transport Plan (RPTP) which follows on after the RLTP. This may provide an opportunity for further discussion on better understanding the transport needs of the Ashburton community. The Canterbury Regional Council Long-Term plan is currently also in development and due for Councillor review soon, with public consultation expected mid-2024.

At the 27 November 2023 Canterbury Regional Transport Committee, Mayor Neil Brown agreed to be on the hearing Committee and involved in the development of the 'rest of region' section in the RPTP, and accordingly ECAN advised that staff will reach out to Ashburton Council Transport staff in early 2024 requesting early feedback on this section.

The Regional Public Transport Plan is expected to go out for public consultation mid-late 2024, at which time the Ashburton public will have a further opportunity to submit on the matter. Ashburton District Council and Safer Mid Canterbury wish to enter this process well-informed regarding the public transport needs in the town Ashburton, with a solid evidence base around:

- what transport options are best likely to meet local need - options could include privately or in (collaboration with ADC) run cars, vans or buses, organised for specific large community events, provision of Community Vehicle Trust services for specific groups and uses, council community vehicles being used for multiple trips and causes (such as a van doing a school run in the morning, a shoppers' run to key shopping centres, and taking people to and from licensed premises in the evening), and community E-bikes and/or Scooters for last mile trips or shorter trips around the city centre;
- level of demand - potential numbers of users, and the needs and desires of the community – what trips they make that could be done using alternative modes; and
- how much they are willing to contribute to the operation of any public funded services.

Impacts on existing service providers, particularly the local taxi service, also need to be factored in.

Ashburton District Council, working in collaboration with Safer Mid Canterbury sought to commission community research with the public and with local community groups concerning a possible public transport service for Ashburton Township. The purpose of the research was to evidence and understand public transport need, gauge public demand and potentially inform development of a pilot transport service for the town.

Depending on findings, these may be used to support funding allocation in Ashburton District Council's LTP for a trial service and to provide the beginnings of a Business Case to ECAN and Waka Kotahi to rate for a public transport service for the Township further downstream.

This research was undertaken by Sarah Wylie, sub-contracting components of the data gathering and qualitative analysis to Sharon Gardner. Sarah Wylie MA (hons) - psych. has considerable prior experience in undertaking social and community research in Ashburton District, and brings with her a background in transport. Sharon Gardner (MA Clinical Psychology) is an experienced researcher having worked in academic and community research on a wide range of topics, both qualitative and quantitative. The research was conducted from late January – March 2024.

## 2. Research questions

*The research sought to address the following questions:*

1. What is the likely level of demand - as far as can be determined, how many potential users live in Ashburton township? (young people 10-14 years, 15-16 years, people with known disabilities (vision, mobility, significant cognitive disability etc.) which impact on their ability to drive, current Total Mobility scheme members, other older adults who do not drive, adults including refugee and migrants who do not have a licence or access to a vehicle).
2. What are the needs and desires of the community?
  - What trips do members of the target populations and other hope to be able to make that are currently difficult for them (in terms of existing transport options – walking, private scooter or cycle, private motor vehicle, existing taxi service)?
  - When (time of day, day of week) / how often?
  - How much they are willing to contribute to the operation of any public funded services?
3. What transport options are best likely to meet local need?
4. What potential impacts might there be for existing service providers, and particularly the local taxi service? How can negative impacts be mitigated?

### 3. Method

A mixed methods approach was employed in the research, utilising both qualitative and quantitative data gathering techniques and triangulating findings from a range of sources to yield robust findings that span the full scope of the project. The following components of the research were delivered:

#### *Literature Review*

Rapid review of relevant prior research / documentation regarding public transport needs within Ashburton township.

#### *Quantitative data analysis*

- Data was sought from ECAN regarding Total Mobility scheme membership in Ashburton.
- 2018 Census data and more recent projection data was utilised to evidence as far as is possible the youth and older adult populations within the town.

#### *Interviews with Key Informants*

Telephone interviews were conducted with 18 key informants identified in collaboration with Safer Mid Canterbury, Ashburton District Council and Environment Canterbury, with strong engagement and knowledge of Ashburton township's disabled communities, older adult residents, rangatahi and refugee and migrant population, and/or significant insights into transport provision, needs and options for Ashburton.

Interviews sought the views of stakeholders on transport needs in Ashburton District, solutions and shortcomings of the current transport options, specific locations within the township that required connecting, what cost service users were willing to incur, what a trial of public transport would look like and if it would impact the existing taxi service.

Interviews were conducted in February-March 2024 and ranged between 25 – 50 minutes averaging about 35 minutes.

The following key stakeholders were interviewed:

- *Community Providers*

Key representatives from 15 community provider organisations were contacted for interviews and of these, 10 were interviewed, representing:

- CCS Disability Action
- Age Concern Ashburton
- Grey Power
- Presbyterian Support
- Comcare Trust
- Rural Support
- ADC Youth Coach
- Salvation Army (Driving Programme)
- Citizens Advice Bureau

- Safer Mid Canterbury Refugee and Migrant Driver Scheme
- *Ashburton District Council and Environment Canterbury Regional Council Kaunihera Taiao ki Waitaha ('ECAN')*

Phone interviews were conducted with 5 key Ashburton District Council and ECAN representatives in February. Those consulted via phone interview were:

- Neil McCann (Infrastructure and Open Spaces Group Manager, ADC)
- Mark Chamberlain (Roading Manager, ADC)
- Len Fleet (Senior Strategic Advisor, ECAN)
- Tiara Thorby (Strategic Advisor – Air Quality, Transport and Urban Development, ECAN)
- Bianca Kathan (Community Transport Advisor ECAN)

(Councillor Ian MacKenzie presented his views via email)

- *Transport Providers*

Phone interviews were conducted with Andrew Beckley from Beckley Coachlines, Mark Cook from Pearsons Coachlines and Terry Darvill from Ritchies Transport. Representatives from Ashburton taxi service attended the workshop.

### *Workshop*

As an alternative to interview and to widen the reach of participation, a workshop was held on 21 February 2024 at Hakatere Marae, attended by 23 people, representing Safer Mid Canterbury, Ashburton Community Alcohol and Drug Service, Ashburton Hospital, Age Concern / Senior Citizens Ashburton, Grey Power, Ashburton Taxis, YMCA, Hakatere Marae, Ashburton Multicultural Council, Environment Canterbury, Sport Canterbury and Tangata Atumotu Trust. It followed a conversation café format and ran for 90 minutes.

### *Survey*

A survey was developed in Survey Monkey for promotion via link and QR code. With Council and Safer Mid Canterbury assistance, this was also made available in hard copy at Ashburton Library and Ashburton District Council's main service counter, at Senior Citizens and Age Concern, at Ashburton Community House reception and at Safer Mid Canterbury (with collection boxes at each distribution point). The survey was widely promoted through flyers / posters at a range of locations around the town, and via Council's social media and community social media pages. The survey was also promoted via a Council article in The Ashburton Guardian. Base and YMCA, along with Ashburton College were directly encouraged to promote the survey. The survey ran from late January to early March 2024. All completed hard copy survey forms were data-entered into Survey Monkey and analysed together with electronic responses. In total, 450 responses were received and analysed.

## 4. Context

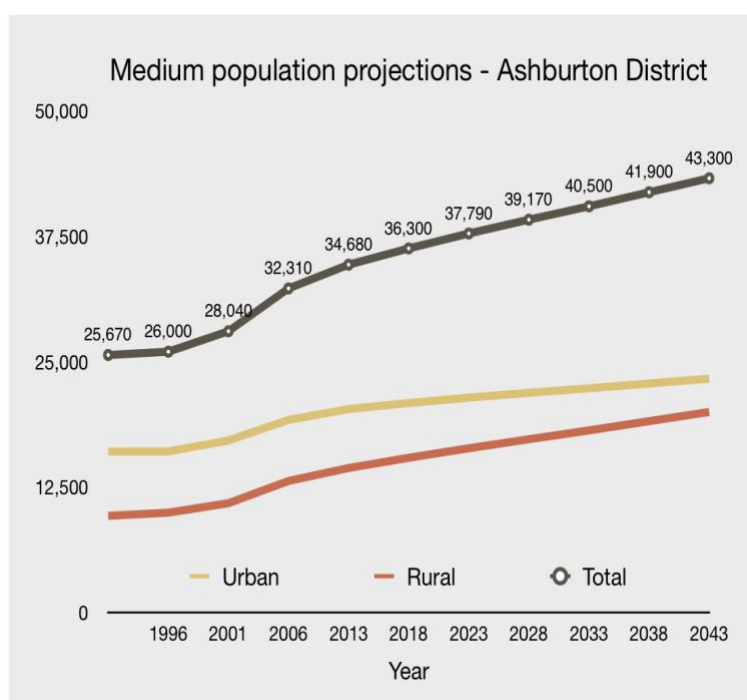
### 4.1 Population

With 2022 Census data not due for release for some months, the following demographic data has been drawn from the research conducted by the author for Safer Mid Canterbury and Ashburton District's Caring for Communities Welfare Recovery Group in 2020 (Wylie, 2020). Just under three-fifths (57.7%) of Ashburton district's population resides in urban Ashburton (19,236 in 2018) and just over two-fifths (42.3%) live in rural Ashburton District: Winchmore-Wakanui, Chertsey, Ealing-Lowcliffe (Hinds) Cairnbrae (Methven), Ashburton Forks (Mt Somers and Mayfield), Rakaia, Ashburton Lakes, and Eiffelton (the latter taking in Lake Hood).

The 2018 population of Ashburton District, 33,333, was up 3.2% on the 2013 Census population, 32,300, an increased lower than had been projected.

Ashburton district's population is predicted to experience steady growth for the next 30 years, although the rate of growth was expected to slow.

Over the coming decades, strongest population growth is predicted to occur in rural areas of the district, and especially Ealing-Lowcliffe (which takes in Hinds), Chertsey, and Ashburton Forks (Mt Somers and Mayfield). Growth is predicted to be slower for urban areas of the district, including Ashburton town.



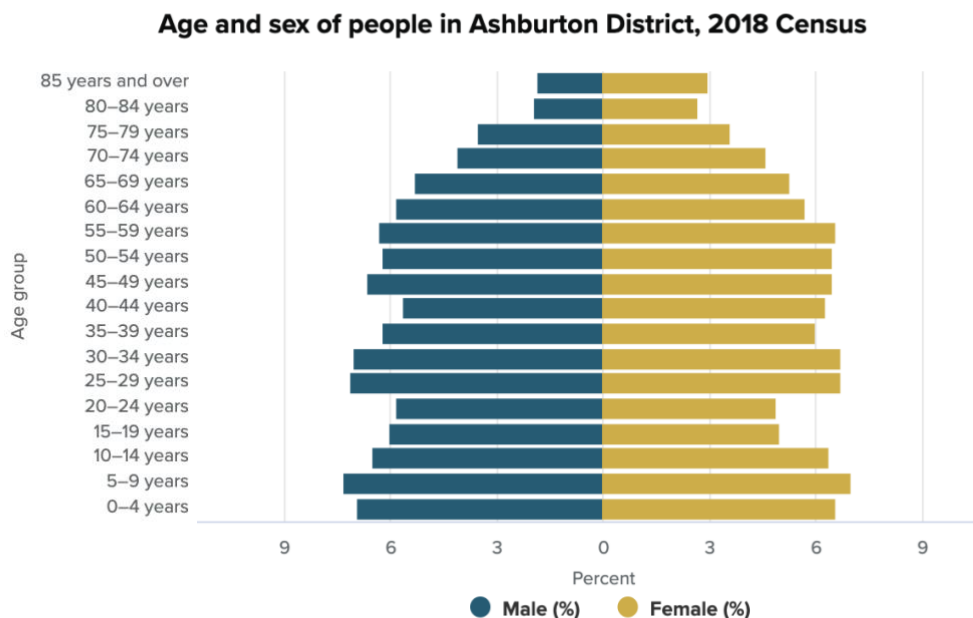
Statistics New Zealand sub-national population projections (2017)

The composition of Ashburton District's population is changing, and demographics are expected to continue to change in the future. Like the rest of New Zealand, the district's population is ageing. The median age in Ashburton District as at 2018 was 39.1 years old, slightly younger than the 2013 median age of 39.8 but older than the median age for New Zealand as a whole, 37.4 years. 17.9% of people in Ashburton District were aged 65 years and over, compared with 15.2% of the total New Zealand population. 20.4% of people were aged less than 15 years in Ashburton District, compared with 19.6% for all of New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2020).

The district's population in 2018 was predominantly European (83.8%), while Māori comprised 8.2% of the 2018 population, up from 7.3% in 2013, 7.4% of the district's 2018 population were Asian (up

from 3.9% in 2013), 5.1% of the district’s usual residents were Pacific people (3.4% in 2013) and 1.3% Middle Eastern / Latin American / African (MELAA).

18.8% of people in Ashburton District were born overseas, compared with 27.1 % for New Zealand as a whole, and 15.3% in 2013.



## 4.2 Total Mobility Service: Ashburton

The Total Mobility service is provided by ECAN for people with long-term impairments and disabilities who cannot use public transport services easily. Eligible users can use the Total Mobility operators to access door-to-door transport at a heavily subsidised rate to meet their everyday needs and engage in community. The scheme takes 75% off the fee of a door-to-door taxi trip up to a maximum of \$52.5 per trip. Ashburton Taxis are the sole Total Mobility provider for the district. In the 2022/23 financial year there were 641 Total Mobility card holders registered in Ashburton. Data obtained from the *ECAN Canterbury Regional Transport Committee Agenda 2023* shows an increased trend in Total Mobility service usage over five years. The table below indicates the most recent numbers from Ashburton District for the financial year 2022/2023.

Total Mobility Service Usage Ashburton 2022/2023	
Number of Trips	13,183
Number of Passengers	16,380
Number of Wheelchairs	1253

*ECAN’s Total Mobility Research Report 2021* is based on survey data that was conducted with Total Mobility users (n=381) in Greater Christchurch, Ashburton, Timaru, Waimate, and Geraldine. 11% of the Total Mobility users interviewed were from Ashburton and registered in organisations like Age Concern, CCS Disability, Ashburton Senior Citizens, Blind Foundation Ashburton, and others. Wherever possible, detailed findings from Ashburton are mentioned, however the report does not identify a

specific breakdown from Ashburton in every section. Some key results from the 2022 report are also included. The results from overall findings are indicative of the views of people from Ashburton.

**Key findings from this report:**

- 96% of all the participants (n=381) were satisfied or very satisfied with the Total Mobility service as reflected in the 2018 and 2020 survey findings for this region. 93% of the Ashburton survey (n=43) respondents were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the service in 2021. Survey results from Ashburton saw a 4% drop in the satisfaction rates from 2020 to 2021, but the most recent 2022 report found an increase in satisfaction (97%). (Figure 2 in 2022 Report)
- Some of the main reasons for satisfaction of the service in the 2021 report (n=381) was it was a good service (18%) which had good drivers (17%) and price (14%). The service was invaluable and necessary for 13% of the sample and they didn't have any problems or issues with it. 9% of the sample thought the service was punctual and had good, friendly staff. (Table 6 in 2021 Report)
- The most common use for Total Mobility service in 2021 was to visit hospitals or doctors (40%) and the next-most common reason was shopping (38%) and social trips (10%). (Table 2 in 2021 Report)
- Total Mobility continues to score highly in terms of the frequency of certain service attributes. In 2021, over 93% of the users felt that the service was available 'always' or 'most of the time' and had the right equipment needed to help them get in and out of the vehicle. 94% felt that the service 'always' or 'usually' kept to promised arrival and departure times. There were no significant differences between the different operators in Greater Christchurch, Ashburton, and South Canterbury. (Figure 5 in 2021 report)
- 98% of the users (n=381) felt safe in the vehicles and 97% were happy with the quality and comfort of the vehicle in 2021. 94% of the sample thought there was 'good' to 'very good' value for money for the service. (Figure 6 in 2021 report)
- A high proportion of service users (43%) were content with the existing service and did not want to make any changes to the service.
- Most clients (95%) book for the service using the phone and almost two thirds of the population were not interested in booking or paying for the service using digital methods like a mobile app or online.
- In 2021 and 2022 around a quarter of the customers were interested in ride sharing if it meant a 40% to 75% discounted rate with interest increasing as the discounted rate becomes higher. However, the 2022 results saw more than half (66%) of the respondents saying they were not interested in ride sharing even if it meant a cheaper rate.

Prior to the change of government, a review of Total Mobility was commissioned by the Ministry of Transport at national level: this work was underway at the time the present research was conducted.



### 4.3 Existing transport options in place in Ashburton

The following transport options are currently available in Ashburton, additional to personal transport options such as private / business motor vehicle, cycle, scooter, mobility scooter, walking etc.:

1. **The Mid Canterbury School Transport Service** coordinates daily school bus operations for enrolled students from 16 schools in Mid Canterbury. Pearsons Coachlines is owned by Ritchies and has been contracted to the school bus runs from the wider Ashburton area to the township. It undertakes 28 school runs in the week and carries out local charters/ trips to Christchurch between school hours. There is no fee for the service for students who are eligible. Eligibility is based on Transport Eligibility Zone (TEZ) guidelines that are set by the Ministry of Education. For the district of Ashburton, it is students in Year 9 and above who live more than 4.8 km and students' year 1-8 who live more than 3.2 km from their nearest school. A bus fee of \$320-400 per year applies to those who are not eligible, subject to capacity.

2. **Mid Canterbury Connector:** Currently there is one vehicle in Ashburton that runs return trips from Mt Somers, Methven, Rakaia, Wakanui, Chertsey, Fairton and Hinds into the Ashburton township. The service is run by volunteers of the Mid Canterbury Community Vehicle Trust. Bookings need to be done by phone the day before intended travel. This is an on-demand service which has become very popular and runs Monday to Friday from 9 am to 4 30 pm.



There are delegated drop off points in the township – Ashburton Hospital, Ashburton District Council/ Library, EA Networks and the WINZ/Community House. The driver is paid a set price between \$5-20 in cash depending on the distance to be travelled, with a higher price for further distances. The service has around 25 passengers a month, which is low as it does not service inbound areas of Ashburton. (ECAN Data

2023) The service attempted to operate within Ashburton but reportedly met with resistance from a local transport operator.

3. **Health Shuttle:** A shuttle service is available in Ashburton to provide transport to health-related appointments in Christchurch. This service is donation (koha) based and operated by St John Health Shuttles. It is run by volunteers and transports people to health and wellbeing related appointments in Christchurch and then brings them back again. The service operates Monday to Friday and has designated pick up points in Ashburton and Rakaia. It departs around 9am and returns at around 4pm.
4. **Beckley's Coachlines** provides domestic travel for those in the 50 years plus age group including day trips, short stays, and long trips. They operate more as a travel company more than a bus company and function on a caring model of looking after their clients. They run charter jobs, travel and tourism and other local trips. They have operated for more than 30 years in Ashburton District.

## 5. Courtesy Cars

- a. Age Concern offers a courtesy driving for elderly on a case-by-case basis. The client must pre-book the service and in most cases must provide their own car for the service to be viable.
- b. Elizabeth Street Day Centre/ Presbyterian Support offer a courtesy car for people attending their programmes.
- c. Ashburton RSA has a courtesy van for members running Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights.
- d. Hakatere Marae provides a courtesy van that must be pre-booked.

6. **Cycling/Walking-** The Ashburton District Council’s Walking and Cycling Strategy 2020 reports on an online survey for walking and cycling in the Ashburton District that was conducted in 2019. The survey asked respondents what purposes they walked or cycled. The table below is an indicator of the percentage of the respondent group (n=164) who walked or cycled to work/school.

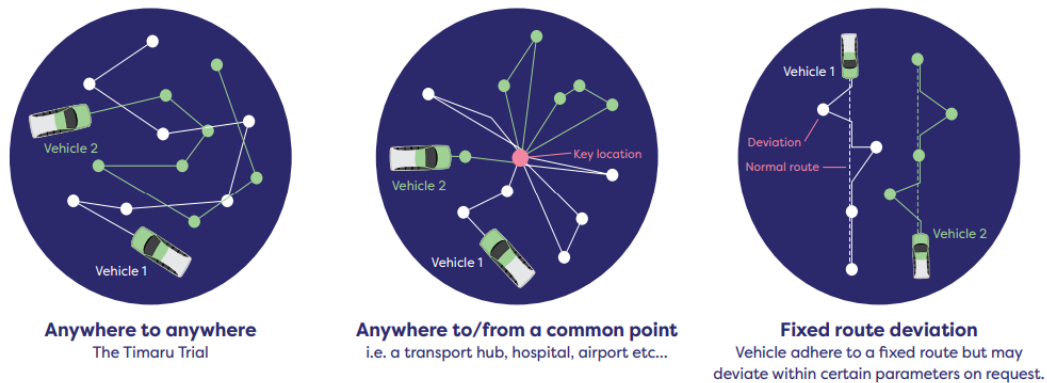
Reasons for Cycling	Reasons for Walking
9% travelled to and from school (including as parents)	14% walked to and from school (including as parents)
4.5% travelled to and from work	7% walked to and from work

## 4.4 My Way Timaru

Timaru District Council and ECAN ran a 12-month trial of a ride sharing, on demand public transport system in 2020 when they received feedback from the residents that the existing scheduled, fixed route bus service was not meeting their needs. The proposed transport system was very different to the existing traditional bus service and used a software VIA to connect people to available transport. Trials of this technology-based system have been successful in Australia (eg. [Queensland On-Demand Transport](#)).

Mid-sized buses and cars replaced traditional public transport to ensure a flexible system. A Central Dispatcher (either software or a real person) receives a booking and then maps out journey options that are available based on the client’s location and destination. The average pick-up time during the trial was less than 15 minutes. There were 1,649 virtual bus stops and an average walking distance of 50m to the nearest bus stop. Bookings and payment can be done via a smartphone or the call centre. The price per trip was \$2.50 for an adult, \$1.50 for a child and \$5 for late night and driveway to driveway service. There were 3 Super Low floor 12-seat vehicles and 4 11-seat minivans that operated the on-demand service in Timaru in 2021.

There are three most common operating modes which are depicted in the graphic below. (Graphic obtained from Timaru My Way Summary Report 2021)



These modes can be varied or mixed based on the needs and outcomes of transport desired. Some modes are more viable during peak times, whilst others can be used at off-peak times. For example, the 'fixed route deviation mode' is more effective at peak times than the 'anywhere to anywhere mode'.

The review of My Way in Timaru highlighted the following key points to consider for future applications:

- **Behaviour change and community engagement:** The project team worked extensively with community groups during a pilot from February to April 2020. Engagement took the form of Pop-Up Shops, talks with agencies/ community groups, community events, free/reduced fares at implementation and drop-in sessions at key locations. This helped people engage and enabled behaviour change as it was very different to traditional public transport. It also helped prevent public negativity and misinformation around the service and generated interest from existing and new users. The community engagement activities started in 2018 but carried on until 2021 to help people who were unsure of the service.
  - 'Booking on behalf': was a system used to engage community when a customer could drop into identified business or public facilities and ask staff to book a ride on their behalf by calling the My Way call centre.
  - 'Rider Assistance': tools were designed to help people navigate a new system - App download instructions, videos, and leaflets with key service information were distributed widely in the community.

It is important to understand, respond to, and design the service to solve the specific transport issue of the community. On demand services could be the primary or feeder service, depending on the needs of the community. Community engagement and behaviour change are important in the success of the service.

- **Cost:** My Way cost approximately \$1.8 million in 2021 and was subsidised heavily by grants from Waka Kotahi and by rate payers (1.5 million dollars) with the remaining \$300,000 coming from fare revenue. 88% of the costs of running the service were in paying operators, 8% in paying the call centres and only 4% in the technology. On-demand services that are flexible

and accessible come at a price which is more expensive than traditional fixed route services that have a set hour and kms. It is important to consider an adequate fare structure when planning for this kind of service.

- **Accessibility:** My Way Timaru is accessible in any part of Timaru with 1,649 virtual bus stops and an average walking distance of 50m to the nearest pick-up point. The on-demand system is flexible with no fixed route and responds in real time to passenger demand operating a corner-to-corner service across the majority of Timaru. Three of the vehicles are wheelchair accessible and assigned to customers based on their profiles. The driveway-to-driveway service made the service accessible for Total Mobility passengers. A third of the customers book for the service using the call centre whilst the rest use the mobile app. While the app can be an obstacle to accessibility, the project team found engaging and assisting people with technology was very helpful. Some groups of individuals require more assistance to engage with the service. It is important to be aware of these groups in designing the service. Results from the Timaru trial show that concerted effort around technology engagement was associated with subsequent use.
- **Environmental impact:** There was a proposed mode shift as most customers utilising My Way (57%) were employed and the proportion of car owners who never used public transport was slowly declining. Car owners were also giving public transport a try fortnightly or at least once a month. The Timaru trial also considered environmental impacts of having fewer empty vehicles in 'off peak' times.
- **Patronage:** Weekly patronage grew substantially from between 500-100 passengers at the start of the pilot in March 2020 to over 2500 passengers per week in April 2021. Nearly two thirds of the customers were employed and a third were in the 60 plus age group. On-demand services cannot replace school bus services as they are constrained by size of the vehicle. It is more appropriate that the Ministry of Education run these services.
- **Collaboration:** The authors of the My Way review noted that collaborative work between transport operators, transport vendors and local authorities will lead to a more successful solution.

## 5. Qualitative findings regarding public transport needs and options in Ashburton township

### 5.1 Perspectives of community stakeholders

#### 5.1.1 Interview findings for community providers

##### *Transport needs and gaps*

Interview participants were asked about the transport needs of the clients that visited their services within the township of Ashburton. They were asked what transport solutions they currently had, how well this was working for them or if there were any shortcomings and issues in their current transport solutions.

Needs highlighted for different groups within the population were as follows:

##### **Young people:**

Interviewees identified that the greatest transport needs of young people between 16-25 years were in their connections to and from work and study in the township. Currently the Mid Canterbury School Transport Service offers bus rides to and from schools in the area. Students who are not eligible for this service must rely on family and friends for transport.

Cost was another significant barrier in young people having their own transport. Community providers recognised that not only was it harder for those who were in the lower socioeconomic bracket to afford a vehicle but also the associated costs with owning a vehicle – car registration, car insurance etc made it harder for young people to access transport. One interviewee said, “*Owning a vehicle is a luxury for some*”. Another interviewee stated that even a basic bike was around \$500 and unaffordable for some young people. There was a big gap in public transport for young people who found taxi services to be very expensive for them.

Driver’s Licensing and the process of obtaining a licence also presented some issues for this age group. One informant stated that potentially most young people on their learner’s licence have the greatest transport needs, while another person working with young people said that obtaining a driver’s licence was a 2-year process and was inhibiting some young people who were keen to work but had no way to get to work. Interviewees were also aware of some young people who get their learner licence and then do not bother to get their full/restricted licence or go to a defensive driving course as they are not motivated or engaged.

Safety was one of the issues and shortcomings of young people’s current transport solutions. One interviewee stated that it wasn’t safe or legal for unlicensed/learner licensed young people to travel in a group in a car - which is what some resorted to.

Organisations like Presbyterian Support have offered fuel vouchers and volunteer rides based on need, but transport is not the main service they offer and is given on a case-by-case basis only, to those young people who need to access their services. They recognise that there is a growing need for

young parents who required public transport to try to get ahead, especially in the winter months when bills added up. They also recognise that transport was a big barrier to engaging with services like seeing a youth coach or connecting with budgeting/parenting advisors.

Young people required transport to get to work and some were at a risk of becoming unemployed as they struggled to find transportation solutions from friends and family. Some of them opted to walk or to bike.

If public transport options were available, then community providers predicted that young people would use these options anywhere between 3-5 times a week. It was also suspected to be more affordable than owning a car or purchasing a bike, and something that parents would be able to pay for.

Interviewees highlighted the need for transport to Timaru and Christchurch as well as other rural areas.

#### **People with disabilities / mental health issues:**

Transport needs for this group were identified as quite specific to their disability. The CCS Disability Service informant stated that there were many who they worked with who had Total Mobility cards, and taxis were their main transport system. Cost of the taxi rides was an issue for some as there were many additional costs of living for people with disabilities. Another challenge highlighted was the limit to the size of wheelchair that the taxis could carry.

Some of the disabled clients owned their own wheelchairs, mobility scooters and vans that were wheelchair accessible. This was a cost that they met individually. CCS Disability Action sometimes organised transport/ service delivery of support workers in the community when needed. A transport need for this cohort is another wheelchair accessible vehicle providing the Total Mobility service with a properly trained driver who knew the legal requirements for anchoring a wheelchair, was a competent and experienced driver and who worked with people with disabilities. The CCS informant said that some of his clients would use public transport if it was made available.

Service providers for individuals with mental health or alcohol and other drugs (AOD) issues said clients were reliant on health services to transport them to and around the township. There were currently no other options for them, and many qualified health workers were acting as taxis for trips to Ministry of Social Development, shopping centres and to health appointments. Service providers stated that people were struggling: many were on the benefit and others were struggling with motivation. Cost of the taxi service was significant for this population, and they were relying on health services for transport. Service providers highlighted that this system was not sustainable for them and that it was not their role to transport clients. Sharing their frustration at the unsustainability of their service providing transport to clients, one service provider commented *“This is ongoing, and it takes up health service time, but people really need it!”*

Lack of transport was another reason why people felt isolated, which in turn exacerbated their mental health issues like anxiety and depression. A grocery delivery service and a medication delivery service would really help people this cohort. If a public transport was made available, then individuals in this

group would use it at least twice a week. Mental Health and AOD service providers stated that health appointments would be more accessible to them, and they could schedule visits around a timetabled transport service.

**Older people:**

Interviewees identified the needs of some in this group who had lost their licences and were unable to access amenities and services in the town. There were various reasons for elderly being unable to drive: because of declining age, cognitive issues like dementia or other physical/mobility issues.

Some also identified that this group of people had specific transport needs of being picked up and dropped off at their door. Those in this group who had access to a Total Mobility card found the existing taxi services meeting their need of door-to-door service. Feedback from the community organisations regarding Ashburton taxis was largely positive: they were seen to be doing a very good job and the best solution for those who qualified for a Total Mobility card. However short trips with a taxi, for example from Tinwald to the town centre proved to be expensive for those who did not qualify for a Total Mobility Card.

Interviewees also identified gaps in transport solutions for this age group. Age Concern offers a courtesy driving service where the client must prebook the service and in most cases must provide their own car for the service to be viable. This service was not used very often as providing their own car often proved to be a barrier. Some other services like Presbyterian Support also offer a minivan for elderly to and from their day programmes, however these rides are specific to the programmes run by the organisation and not for supermarket runs or doctors' appointments which have been identified as important. Organisations stated that transport was not the main service they offered and often it proved to be challenging to run the service, as there was a shortage of volunteers or vehicles. Others were reliant on rides from family and friends to get around the township. However, it was noted that some in this age group chose to retire in Ashburton and often have family who live far away from them, making it difficult to call for help.

Interviewees also stated that there were some who owned mobility scooters and others who walked to town. The cost of mobility scooters ranges from \$2500 for a second-hand scooter to around \$10,000 for a brand-new mobility scooter. Cost is a significant factor in this population's access to owning their own mobility vehicle. Walking into town could be an issue when it was raining or in the colder winter months.

Another barrier which has been consistently presented in past Annual Residents Surveys of Ashburton are the quality of the footpaths and roads for walking – including using mobility vehicles. In the most recent annual survey, 61% of respondents believed that Ashburton District Council should allocate more funds towards safer roads, bridges, footpaths, culverts and cycleways. 18% of respondents were dissatisfied with Council staff because of roading / footpaths (Ashburton District Council Annual Residents Survey 2022-23).

Community providers were unsure of how often people in this age group would access public transport if options were made available, as the local taxi service was helping many of them around 1-2 times per week currently: they couldn't see a change in behaviour towards public transport unless



the service picked them up at the door. Bus services in the past that had been set up in Ashburton were not utilised well by this cohort. However, interviewees also recognised that people were often isolated and didn't go out much because they didn't have options for transportation. If public transport options were available, they believed that this cohort would likely use the service once or twice a week however they would require some additional support being dropped to the door and helping them get in and out with their shopping bags/walking aids etc.



### **Refugee and migrants:**

Individuals from all age groups in this cohort were identified as having transport needs to get to school, work, to shopping centres and medical appointments. Those who did not drive were dependent on being picked up by volunteers or service providers. However, as with other service client groups, this was identified as not a sustainable and flexible system as it depended on volunteers to agree and be available. There are 21 refugee families who are in Ashburton – a total of around 80 individuals who access help and services from Safer Mid Canterbury as well as from other providers.

Connection with other refugee and immigrant families was very important for this group. The relevant interviewee identified the important need for them to connect with other refugee families in different parts of Ashburton, in order to settle in better and preserve their language and culture. Many of the social events that refugees and migrants needed to get to happened in the evenings outside volunteer driver hours. Getting around Ashburton, and especially from Netherby to Tinwald to visit other families was a long walk for many. Safer Mid Canterbury offers bicycles to refugees which are donated from the community. The interviewee stated that it was hard for many who have never rode a bike to get used to this mode of transport as they transition into life in Ashburton. Accessible bike skill training is lacking locally. For many refugees, walking was the only option available to get around town.

The Rural Driver Licensing Scheme for Refugee and Migrants often takes anywhere from 6 months to two years to obtain a driver's licence. For many, language was a significant barrier as English was their second language, making the process longer for them to be able to learn how to drive. There are



migrants from different parts of the world – Asia, Pacific Islands, South America – some of them knew how to drive but needed to familiarise themselves to New Zealand driving conditions and laws. The Safer Mid Canterbury Volunteer Coordinator for Migrants indicated that they often got calls from migrants saying they needed to learn to drive as they couldn't go to work, drop their children to school or go see a doctor. Some husbands were working night shifts and having to drop their wives off to work in the morning and then pick them after work - if women could access public transport to get to work, it would improve the quality of the family's life.

Public transport was expected to help this cohort significantly and they were expected to use it regularly. They did not use the taxi service as it was too expensive and priced out of their reach.

#### *Important locations identified*

Interview participants were asked about where in the town the people they worked with who had greatest transport needs within the township lived. They were also asked where people most wanted assistance to get to. Findings for different target populations were as follows:

#### **Young people:**

Ashburton's youth population is widespread, with those requiring more services often residing on the outskirts of town. Hampstead, Allenton and Tinwald were some areas where a slightly larger concentration of people who had transport needs were identified as residing. Some of the places that young people were identified as requiring assistance to get to included supermarkets, banking, shopping including Warehouse and Kmart, library, gyms, and the community pools. They are also more likely to shop at supermarkets in town as smaller suburban shops were more expensive.

Most of the services that were identified as important for young people to access such as Work and Income, the Food Bank, and Council offices are all in the main town centre of Ashburton. Healthcare services that provide free healthcare to young people like Hype Youth Health Centre / Hype Sexual Health Centre, along with Base Youth Centre and the youth services contracted to Presbyterian Support and other social service agencies are also all located in the main township.

#### **People with disabilities/ mental and physical health issues:**

Allenton, Tinwald and rural areas like Chertsey, Hinds were some of the locations identified for this cohort. There is no pharmacy in Tinwald, so people have to come into the town to access a chemist. Fairton has no local shopping centre and was another area identified by interviewees as having transport needs for those with disabilities etc. People required easy access to doctors and groceries to be able to live well in a community and many have no options of transport to get them to these places. Getting to the hospital laboratories and medical centres that are not in their area of residence were other important transport destinations identified. Medical centres are often full, forcing people to register in other locations far away from their area of residence. Some also visit doctors with particular strengths / interests and have to travel for this. For example, GP's with strong skills around mental health issues are located at Three Rivers.

Those facing higher levels of socioeconomic deprivation were identified as commonly living in rural areas because of cheaper rent and have to travel into the town to shop. Interviewees identified that some of these people shop at the local petrol station as they have no transportation into town, and

this was costing them “a fortune”. Others shop “all over town” at locations like K Mart, Countdown (now Woolworths), and access the new library. Public transport was identified as potentially helping this group connect with services and businesses, gyms across the town and allow them the opportunity to take different choices with their lives, for example, volunteering at organisations which in turn would improve their sense of wellbeing. Interviewees said some clients have no access to the internet at home, and a public transport service to the library could help them stay connected and access internet there.

**Older people:**

Interviewees also identified the older adult population as relatively spread-out across the district. Some people in Tinwald, Allenton and even rural areas in the district like Fairton are reportedly having trouble with transport. The most common places that people needed assistance getting to are supermarkets, health appointments, socialising (eg. RSA club) and other administrative tasks in the township like accessing banks and the library. As with people with disabilities and health issues, it was identified as common for older people to be enrolled in medical centres that are not in their own areas of Ashburton. Interviewees identified that some who live within the township are enrolled in medical centres in rural areas and vice-versa. This occurred as older people often moved out into smaller houses but remain registered to their primary care. It was also common for this cohort to shop in suburban shopping areas outside their neighbourhood of residence. Some older people shop at the nearest suburban shopping area as it is convenient for them, but would use public transport to access bigger supermarkets if this was made available to them.

**Refugees and migrants:**

Refugees and migrants live all around the township. They require transport to get their children to and from school, to be able to get to work, to get to health appointments and access the town centre to shop or visit the library. Netherby, Hampstead, Tinwald and Fairton were some locations that were highlighted via interview. Many were enrolled in medical practices that are not in their area of residence, as their practices were often full and there was no guarantee that they would be enrolled there. They also preferred to shop at the bigger supermarkets in town as they found smaller shops expensive. Some would go to the fruit and veggie shop in Tinwald. They would require transport even to get around the main town area, for example, from the shops to the library. Whilst many need to come into the main town area, others also require transport to go visit friends in locations throughout the town. They would benefit from public transport that stops at different suburbs, for example, visiting friends Allenton to Netherby.

**The following tables summarise feedback from community provider interviewees regarding most popular pick-up and destination places and expected type of destination for trips via public transport for key users groups:**

Key locations / areas identified in interviews for public transport connection (in no order of importance)

Within the township	Rural areas
Town Centre	Fairton
Tinwald	Chertsey
Netherby	Hinds
Hampstead, Allenton	

Key locations / places identified in interviews that different groups require transport connection to (in no order of importance)

Locations	Young People	People with Disabilities/ Mental Health Issues	Older People	Refugees and Migrants
Work/School	√			√
Health appointments	√ HYPE/ BASE Youth Centres, Hospital	√ Hospital Laboratories/ Medical centres/ Pharmacy	√ Medical Centres, Ashburton Hospital	√ Medical Centres
Supermarkets in the township and other shops (Warehouse/ K Mart)	√	√	√	√
Library/ Council Offices	√	√	√	√
Socialising – meeting friends at cafes/ restaurants/ walk or browse in town	√	√	√ (RSA, clubs, cafes)	√ Suburban stops (visiting friends in different suburbs)
Gyms/ Community Pool	√	√		√ (Wkd Sports)
MSD/ Social Services/ Support Services	√	√		√

#### *Viable Solutions (Cost for the User and Impact on Current Providers)*

Those interviewed were asked what they thought a most viable and useful solution would look like for the groups and individuals that they worked with. They were also asked about the costs they thought that the user would be able to afford and what a trial of public transportation in Ashburton should look like. Responses gathered via interview are summarised as follows:

**Young people:** One interviewee stated that e-bikes and e scooters would be a good option for young people. They were regular and reliable and could be used in the outskirts as well – areas that a bus would not get to. Most young people are digitally fluent and would be able to easily access this mode of transport via their phones to book a vehicle and to pay for it. Two other interviewees did not think that e-bikes or e-scooters were a viable option as safety was an issue, their usage was seen as weather-dependent and it was expected to serve only those who were more financially well-off. For them, e-bikes were limited in what they could offer, and they believed that schools might not permit students to ride them for safety reasons.

A minibus or a van that had a regular service was also considered to be a viable option. The route of the service should be predetermined and include key areas like schools, supermarkets, town centre, industrial stops. It would be ideal to have more than one van travelling, creating a rotation every 2-3 hours. A circuit route around main suburbs and even some of the outskirts of the township was considered a good option. Some stated it would be more cost effective to book the van instead of catching it at predetermined stops.

The cost of the service had to be affordable for young people. The price could range from \$2-3 per trip so that a return trip would cost up to \$6 and weekly expenditure could be around \$30. Interviewees said if public transport was expensive, then it was less likely to be used by this cohort.

A successful pilot transport service for young people was seen as ideally lasting for a significant length of time with good education and advertising prior to it commencing. A service running during the daytime (morning and afternoon) that made school/work/ and health/wellbeing services accessible was expected to lead to higher usage from this cohort.

Interviewees saw no impact on the taxi service if a public transport system was introduced as young people did not use taxis. Interviewees stated that the taxi service was more for older people and others who had jobs and could afford them.

**People with disabilities/mental health issues:** A viable solution could be a van/minibus which is smaller and more personable and ran a regular route at fixed times. There were some logistical and practical issues that were raised by interviewees who worked with disabled people and those with mental health issues. These included the following:

- They needed a service that was not entirely dependent on technology to book or pay. Booking for the service was seen as needing to be accessible with a call-in option and no complicated answering machine responses. Technology often excluded people who were more in need of help. Payment for the service should be accessible for this cohort – the driver should be able to handle cash, or the provider should be able to work around people with disabilities if there was a prepaid metro card, like Christchurch. For example a card that loaded credit to be used on a bus or use of technology/app to book transport was a barrier for sight impaired or those with dyslexia.
- Bus stops should have shelter and seating available for disabled individuals.
- The vehicle should be wheelchair accessible, seating needed to be spacious, access in and out of the vehicle had to cater to those with mobility issues.
- Many who had disabilities required a door-to-door pick up and drop off service.
- Many in this group would require a support person to help them get on and off/ help them with bags. An interviewee said some with mental health issues would require additional support for the first few trips till they felt confident to travel by themselves.

Interviewees assumed that individuals in this group were able to pay anywhere from \$1-2 up to \$5 per trip. Some of them had challenging living conditions and were living in houses on the outskirts of Ashburton as they had more affordable rent. If public transport was more affordable, then individuals were expected to feel capable of using the service 2 to 3 times a week.

People in the cohort would benefit from a transport system that was regular, reliable and ran from Monday to Friday from 9am to 4pm, stopping at key locations throughout the township. The route could be determined by public demand and should be well thought of. Regularity and reliability were key for the service to be successful.

The trial should include good advertisements – flyers, announcements that highlight the route and timings. If the duration of the trial was short, then the interviewees were afraid people would not

change their behaviour or travel patterns and adopt to the new public transport. They also warned of making users unhappy if they provided a service and then cancelled it in a short duration of time. The duration of the trial should be a year at minimum but also that allowed changes and was flexible to demand during the trial.

An interviewee emphasised that the taxi service was meeting the needs of many in the disabled cohort who had Total Mobility cards. *“They are doing a brilliant job, and we don’t want a new public transport system to impact them.”* However other interviewees noted that the taxi service would not be impacted and was not meeting the needs of those without Total Mobility cards as it was too expensive. *“The service is a niche on its own and has a very specific client base. The bigger community has a bigger need and there is a gap that needs to be filled.”*

**Older people:** A viable solution for older people was identified as a 10–15-seater van/ minibus that did 2 runs in the morning and 2 runs in the afternoon. Special needs to be considered for this cohort were the height in and out of the vehicle, wheelchair access and longer time taken to load and unload people. Some people would require extra help to get in and off the bus. The taxi services were working very well for this group of people who had Total Mobility cards. Many users would require additional support and would not be able to walk to predesignated bus stops but require a door-to-door service.

The cost of the service had to be reasonable and affordable. Many would want the service to be free but would be willing to pay \$2-3 per trip. SuperGold card users over 65 years old can travel free on metro buses in Christchurch after 9am, and on most public transport nationally. A review of the SuperGold card scheme is planned but is yet to be scheduled. Interviewees also emphasised that the taxi service was affordable for many with the Total Mobility card discounts and that the service was door-to-door. *“Honestly, I couldn’t see clients change to public transport unless it picks them up at the door.”* They didn’t want the taxi service to be impacted and to stop as older people preferred the taxis.

They were hoping for a My Way style of public transport that exists in Timaru, but that was scaled back to Ashburton, as it was easy to access. However, interviewees were unsure if older people would book the service with an app/ mobile phone as they were not confident in their use, and this could be a barrier to usage.

**Refugees and Migrants:** A regular, reliable service that helped people in this group get to school and health appointments would be a viable solution. The interviewee with specialist knowledge on this population could not identify one solution but highlighted the need that this cohort would require transport every day including social events and sports on the weekends. A service that was straightforward and ran 2-3 routes in the day with regular stops throughout the town would be helpful during the week. The interviewee stated the route would be around the township bringing people into the town centre and to get around to areas like Tinwald and Fairton.

For a trial to work for refugees and migrants, it needed to run for a decent length of time as it could have a slow uptake and take time for people to get used to it. English is a second language for many in this group, but language was not seen as a barrier if there were options to use a top-up card or a service that made it easy to book. It was important to be able to advertise the service in their own

language and have a timetable of the service in other languages. The interviewee stated “*Language is the least of their problems*” indicating a need for transport was high.

The cost of the service had to be minimal – people would be able to afford \$2-3 for a single trip. This cohort would be regular users of public transport in Ashburton if it was available. A public transport trial would not impact the taxi service as refugees and migrants currently do not use taxis.

### 5.1.2 Interview findings for Ashburton District Council and Environment Canterbury representatives

#### *Transport needs:*

Public transport has been brought up as a need from the community and presented to the Council and ECAN. Some of the key groups previously identified as requiring public transport were school children, young people, migrant workers, and the elderly and others without vehicles in Ashburton. Council members had heard from community groups because of the success of My Way in Timaru. There was perceived enthusiasm around the council table for implementing some solutions for transport in the township.

#### *Transport considerations:*

**Cost:** Funding from Waka Kotahi, Central Government and Canterbury Regional Council was important for the solution to be viable. My Way in Timaru and bus services in Christchurch were subsidised by grants from Waka Kotahi and by ratepayers. A solution in Ashburton would not only require an initial significant investment to get the service running but there would be constant operational costs that needed to be accounted for. Those interviewed agreed that the entire community needed to be on-board if a new public transport service meant an increase in rates. If implementing a public transport service in Ashburton only helped a small percentage of the population, then they would have to consider if the operation was worth it.

My Way in Timaru has been very good for the Timaru community, getting people using public transport and made travel accessible to people. However it has been very expensive to operate, more so than a standard bus service and is subsidy-reliant.

**Demand:** Interviewees stated that the demand for the service needed to be high if a trial was to be worthwhile. A service like My Way could be an option as demand would be determined by bookings and not a set route. It has taken 12 months to 2 years for behaviour to change and demand to increase in Timaru, so it is important to recognise that demand may increase over time. Peaks and troughs in demand would naturally occur. The trial for public transport would have to be long enough to get good results. Council should also take into account the size of the population and estimated growth of population due to people moving to Ashburton over the next 5 years.

**Availability:** A public transport system would need to be available when people needed it, regular so that it did not make people wait. There would have to be a minimum of two services so that it was manageable and the urban boundaries for usage would have to be properly determined. It was suggested that average wait time should ideally be no longer than 15-20 minutes.

### Operational considerations:

- There would have to be signage on the streets and makeshift bus stops / places where people can wait. Roads in Ashburton were generally flat, and there were no issues with the roading network so mapping out a route would pose no issues.
- How the user would pay would need to be considered – cash or a travel card.
- Technology is key to be able to help people to connect, pay for the service and get updates. However, this was recognised as a barrier for some groups of people eg. older people. Investigations into other means of booking, advertising, and paying for the service needed to be considered.
- Staffing a service and cost of staff would have to be considered.
- The type of vehicle had to meet the government set guidelines for public transport. It also had to have a low floor so that people on wheelchairs or with disabilities could have easy access.

All interviewees were clear that the existing taxi service should be part of the solution. Communication lines needed to be open between the taxi company and the council in developing a solution.

### *Possible Transport Solutions*

Council and ECAN representatives interviewed identified the following potential options:

**Community Vehicle Trust (CVT):** This would be run by volunteer drivers and is not very expensive to operate. An annual grant of \$10,000 is given to CVTs by ECAN to help with running and operational costs. It has a social/community element of caring for the community and runs on a not-for-profit model. This type of transport was identified as working well for older people, refugees and for getting people to work: booking a service like this would use the same process as booking a taxi. Community Transport Advisor for Timaru Bianca Kathan said the taxi company had Total Mobility customers and there was often a high demand for them: a service like a CVT would help meet the demand of others requiring transport within the town. Taxis were seen as better for those with accessibility issues. There were 641 registered Total Mobility clients in Ashburton in the 2022/2023 financial year.

CVTs have reportedly been very successful in Geraldine and Waimate, with the service seen as user-friendly and having a community feel which suits smaller towns. The Geraldine CVT service is operated by volunteers and there are three parts to the operation of the trust: a day taxi, an on-demand service, as well as a day hire of a minibus for self-drive hire. The Waimate CVT service is also operated by volunteers between 9-4, with requests for outside hours. Cost is not more than \$5-7 per trip for a local trip.

It was estimated that Ashburton would require around 4 vehicles to service the population, that expense for this service could be minimal but would need to consider insurance, WOF and fuel for the vehicles. However, CVTs do require more volunteers to run it and there is a volunteer shortage in Ashburton. More CVTs could be added to the fleet to cater to people for those with accessibility needs. It was suggested that care must be taken to not take over the Total Mobility card users as the taxi service caters to those clientele. A paid coordinator could take bookings – a cost that could be covered by a government subsidy. Currently the Mid Canterbury Vehicle Trust pay a small fee to Safer Mid Canterbury Ashburton for part-time work to oversee bookings for the out-of-town Canterbury Connector service. However, an on-demand service within the town would require a paid full-time employee/s to be able to take bookings and enquiries.

### **Bus/ Minibus/My Way**

Interviewees were aware that My Way was a popular form of public transport in Timaru. However, cost of a service like My Way was an issue raised by many of the interviewees as the service would increase the cost of ratepayers. The Funding Assistance Rate (FAR) for the 2021-24 National Land Transport Programme for Ashburton is 51% (Waka Kotahi, 2024). As the farebox recovery for this service is low, the rest of the cost would fall on Ashburton ratepayers if a My Way type service was introduced there, and the more popular the service, the more it costs because it is an on-demand service. For a regular bus service, interviewees thought Ashburton would require 1-2 buses, would have to be not too expensive and have around 6-7 stops. They would need to run according to a timetable at certain times and require bus stops / bus shelters for people to wait. Some interviewees were not sure of the viability of a bus service as a previous trial of a bus system in Ashburton was not successful.

There was a single bus that operated locally within Selwyn between Lincoln and Burnham whose operational cost was shared between ECAN and the District Council. Selwyn District Council is responsible for providing and maintaining bus stops, bus shelters and seats to support the public transport system, while Environment Canterbury is responsible for managing the bus services. Users who had access to a metro card paid discounted rates on this bus ([Selwyn District Bus](#)).

An easy access shopper's minibus operates in Rangiora on Tuesdays and Thursdays for older and disabled people. Booking must be done the previous day, and the service is advertised as a way to feel connected to the community. The North Canterbury Minibus Trust operates this service and charges \$2 for a round trip that is local ([Shoppers Bus Rangiora](#)).

**E bikes/ E Scooters** – Some of the interviewees stated the success of introducing e-scooters in areas like Rolleston and Rangiora. Selwyn District Council approved Lincoln based e-scooter company Lava Scooters to operate 50 e-scooters in Rolleston, Lincoln and Prebbleton in 2019 after an initial trial period. After a successful 6-month trial, Lime and Lava Scooters were given a licence to run 220 scooters in Rolleston, Lincoln and Prebbleton in 2020. Around 3800 rides a month are taken and no significant accidents or injuries reported. All day-to-day operations of the scooters are the responsibility of the companies, and any questions or complaints are directed to the companies first. NZTA rules are that e-scooters can be ridden on the footpath, shared paths, on the road, or on cycleways. Selwyn District Council has prepared a map of the boundaries of operation and accounted for safety and parking issues in their plan to implement e scooters to the district ([Selwyn District E Scooter Plan](#)).

Waimakariri District Council trialled Flamingo e scooters in November 2021 until April 2022 where 400 e-scooters were available for hire across Rangiora, Kaiapoi, Woodend and Pegasus. The Council tried to incorporate the feedback and concerns of people in the community in the trial with the inclusion of speed restrictions and no-go zones in the busiest pedestrian areas. The e-scooter company had a community training day that included free rides. As with Selwyn District Council, the operational and infrastructure costs were covered by the scooter company ([Waimakariri District Scooter Trial](#)). The Waimakariri District Council are currently reviewing options for e-scooters in the district and had a public survey that ended on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2024.



Interviewees identified E-scooters and E-bikes as a fantastic way to enable communities to make short, quick trips, or “last mile trips” to and from a public transport stop / hub. They were seen to assist in reducing transport emissions and to enable “transport-poor” members of the community to move around.

#### **Other solutions to meet community needs that do not have to be led by Council**

- Online grocery shopping and delivery (operational in Rangiora, Christchurch).
- Health Bus funded by Canterbury District Health Board or the District Health Board to doctors.
- Employers providing transportation to migrant workers who need to get to outskirts of Ashburton – some already provide transport and accommodation for their fruit pickers as an example.
- Increase the fee for liquor licenses in bars and restaurants to provide a shuttle to get people home after dining out/ entertainment.
- Uber Eats / other food delivery services.
- Rest homes providing their own transport to elderly residents to enable shopping days in town.

#### **5.1.3 Interview findings for transport providers**

Beckley’s Coachlines, Pearsons Coachlines and Ashburton Taxis provide different and diverse transport solutions to the township.

Beckley’s Coachlines approached the Council in 2018 with a proposal to have a bus service in the district as they saw the need for public transport growing. However, they did not receive the backing from Council and currently do not wish to be a part of the public transport solution for the district.

Ritchies Bus, which provides the My Way service to Timaru, has indicated that they would like to be a part of a public transport solution for Ashburton. Ritchies Bus currently own Pearsons Coachlines, and are willing to have a pre-engagement process with the council with no expectations of a contract.

Ashburton Taxis have a personalised approach to their service and often know their clients well and look out for them. They stated that they do much more than merely picking up and dropping people off, also helping those with mobility issues get into elevators, front doors, and help elderly with their grocery shopping. There is a great demand for taxi services in the district. They struggle to recruit new drivers.

#### **Key points from transport providers**

- **Pricing/ Routes/ Availability** - The price needs to be affordable for people to use the service and the price cannot be so low that there is little or no returns from running the service. The service had to be cheap and attractive. Will the Public transport system also offer discounts to young people and gold card holders like Christchurch city and other cities? The best method of paying also needed consideration -were people going to use bus cards or cash as many did not have PayWave.

A route must service all the main areas that will be useful to all including schools, restaurants, getting people to work and areas like Tinwald and Allenton. A daytime loop service would be a good option and one interviewee mentioned the Queenstown bus service had a better model than My Way. People also like to be informed how far the vehicle is from their stop – something that bus systems in other cities offer. The routes must be clear and timetables easy to read.

The trial would have to consider if it was a 7 day all day service or if there were variations in the times the service was available. There would be a significant cost for a service that was available 7 days a week. The schedule of the service and the availability at certain points was important.

- **Vehicle Specifications** - Vehicles needed to have wider seats and handrails for older people, a wheelchair/ Total Mobility option would be beneficial for many. The 16-seater Mercedes Benz Sprinter was a common option used in other towns/cities, but these were also difficult to get hold of. The possibility of leasing LDV vans should also be considered.

It was important to have back-up vehicles to keep a service running, as repairs can take time. Electric buses were a popular option, as they had a lower impact on the environment but were also costly. One interviewee said it would be best to source locally-available vehicles for the trial period. Reconfiguration and certification of vehicles were a cost that needed to be considered.

- **Staffing** - Staff would have to be experienced or require training to deal with the needs of different passengers and would have to be engaging and polite. Staff also had to know how to deal with aggressive behaviour. Some people required extra help getting on and off the bus so an extra staff member on the bus could be useful. One interviewee stated that the service provider also had to consider how to keep people employed if a trial was to be only 6 to 12 months or only for a few hours a day.
- **Impact on services** – The bus providers said that a public transport trial would have no or little impact on their services as they were operating a to specific groups and transporting them to and from specific places in the town – school runs and day trips for the elderly. They were concerned about the impact of a public transport trial on the taxi company.

#### 5.1.4 Community stakeholder workshop

A workshop was held on 21 February 2024 at Hakatere Marae, attended by 23 people, representing Safer Mid Canterbury, Ashburton Community Alcohol and Drug Service, Ashburton Hospital, Age Concern / Senior Citizens Ashburton, Grey Power, Ashburton Taxis, YMCA, Hakatere Marae, Ashburton Multicultural Council, Environment Canterbury, Sport Canterbury and Tangata Atumotu Trust.

Asked what motivated them to prioritise getting to the workshop, a number of service providers present indicated that it was often hard or time consuming getting people to health appointments, and that transport had been a known challenge and service barrier in Ashburton for a range of sub-groups within the population for some time. Community transport was identified as vital, with one person flagging this as a health and safety issue, given that many people drive unlicensed in the absence of public transport options within the town. Lack of affordable transport options was flagged as a key issue for older people, while for children and young people, it negatively impacted on access to recreational and sporting activities. While many services have developed volunteer driver services or use key workers themselves to overcome transport barriers, lack of transport to enable social connection (eg. meeting a friend for a coffee, being able to get out-and-about at the shops and enjoy the sense of social connection that comes with this) was identified as a need that is harder to tackle and a key reason why attendees felt public transport was a priority to explore.

As a group, participants were asked to respond to the following question:

*From what you all know about the town of Ashburton and the people with transport needs within the town, what do you think is/are the most viable transport solutions – those that will be used most, meet the needs well and be most sustainable?*

**The following points were highlighted:**

A possible transport solution would be a minibus. Signposts are already up for bus stops from when this service operated in the past. A large number of attendees expressed the view that this should be looked into. The bus would need to be accessible for those with mobility issues. ECAN representatives at the meeting indicated that buses and minivans operating in Christchurch and Timaru were accessible.

Some of the locations that it was expected people wanted to access were:

- Supermarkets
- Getting to and from Work
- Getting around to socialize – meet friends/ cafes. Social connection was identified as a significant need
- Library
- Bank
- Netherby Meats
- WINZ office

There was a bus system in late 1970's that went to Allenton, Tinwald, Hampstead and on a Friday night to Fairton. This service ran until the mid 1990's.

Some attendees talked about how My Way has been successful in Timaru, used by all age groups and they are now extending this to Caroline Bay as well. They wondered if this could be trialled in Ashburton.

There has been a safety issue with mobility scooters at the Ashburton bridge – no clear direction/signs and many scooters going together. Ashburton was identified as “split by the river”.

For older drivers, Ashburton was identified as difficult to drive in, with a State Highway, one-way systems, the very congested bridge and railway crossings all making driving stressful for some older people.

Having considered one key question as a group, participants split into six focus groups (young people, refugees and new migrants from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people with disabilities, older people, socioeconomically disadvantaged, people who work within the township) to answer three questions for their target population:

- 1) What are the most common transport needs for your group within Ashburton Township that are not currently addressed by existing solutions?
- 2) What are the barriers to creating a successful solution to the key transport needs you’ve identified?
- 3) What will overcome the barriers you identified, enabling a successful and sustainable transport solution(s)

**Findings are presented as follows:**

*Young people*

1. What are the most common transport needs for your group within Ashburton Township that are not currently addressed by existing solutions?

- Getting to educational facilities particularly those with social anxieties
- Making sporting and other activities available and accessible
- Link between the library, He Whare Whakatare to Tinwald etc
- Transport to training/ sport venues as young people are missing team sports
- Transport needs to be accessible – via phone, apps, texts
- Safety of returning home from events – timetable and My Way type would work
- Council plan of active transport to encourage bike use (community safety network)
- E scooters and E bikes would be used by young people (\$1.40 minimum in Auckland) Can there be a card that carries funds so people can prepay/load up? These can be used for fun but also to get to work
- More bike stands/ lockability/ (camera? For safety) To encourage people to use bikes

2. What are the barriers to making a solution to the key transport needs you’ve identified successful?

- Money
- Education/Awareness – safety
- App-associated barrier to younger/ those lacking funds / neurodiverse
- Barrier to e bikes and e scooters = disabilities / cost / technology
- Parental responsibility and approval to use the service

3. What will overcome the barriers you identified, enabling a successful and sustainable transport solution(s)

- Education on safety/availability and use of different options

- Access/proximity to where resources are placed (Bus stop, e scooter or bike sites)
- Money/ Funding support from Ashburton District Council
- Advertising and Education at educational facilities, workplaces, health and social services

### *Refugees and new migrants from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds*

1. What are the most common transport needs for your group within Ashburton Township that are not currently addressed by existing solutions?

- Affordability
- Easily accessible
- Transport that starts early and finishes late
- Transport that suits school start and finish time for parents and kids
- Scheduled route rather than on-demand covering the whole of Ashburton District because of language barriers

2. What are the barriers to making a solution to the key transport needs you've identified successful?

- Cost
- Communication (language)
- Setting up a timetable that covers the needs
- Health and safety for bus drivers (eg. not handling cash)

3. What will overcome the barriers you identified, enabling a successful and sustainable transport solution(s)

- Subsidies
- Consider an electric van to keep the cost of fuel low
- Multilingual app with timetables with information about how to pay and what are the locations of pick up and drop off.

### *People with disabilities*

1. What are the most common transport needs for your group within Ashburton Township that are not currently addressed by existing solutions?

- Timing and availability
- Cost
- Shuttles that do not take wheelchairs
- Freedom of choice – to get out whenever and wherever they want to
- Some want a ride out of town – eg. to the beach

2. What are the barriers to making a solution to the key transport needs you've identified successful?

- Shopper shuttle bus won't help people with disabilities in and out of the vehicle or with access into the shopping building eg. Eastfield shopping has a lift. Taxi drivers currently assist people with disabilities into their destination.
  - This group of people require a door to door service
  - Taxi drivers play an important role and have a personal touch.
- Regular contact with taxi drivers makes them able to see a decline in the mental or physical health of clients with disabilities or other health needs.

- It is hard to recruit drivers for taxis (especially on the weekend where there are drunk people)
- Drivers for taxis need training (P licence, how to strap a wheelchair in properly, have a good attitude of patience and go the extra mile with clients eg. drop clients off door to door)

3. What will overcome the barriers you identified, enabling a successful and sustainable transport solution(s)

- More trained empathetic drivers – for any service not just for people with disabilities
- Taxis pick up broken-down mobility scooters
- There could be a Hospital shuttle – for example Elizabeth Street Day Care offers rides for people to hospitals. ([Elizabeth Day Care Centre](#))

### *Older people*

1. What are the most common transport needs for your group within Ashburton Township that are not currently addressed by existing solutions?

- Type of vehicle needs to be accessible – 20 seater that is timetabled
- Appointments for shopping, banking, meeting people, social interaction
- A day out to do all these things (eg. Tuesdays Pension Day Specials)
- Lifestyle villages have some of their own shuttles but not those in independent living situations (for retirement villages, depends on the village)

2. What are the barriers to making a solution to the key transport needs you've identified successful?

- Affordability
- Digital access can be a problem - Booking that isn't done online
- Can the transport option take cash?
- Information in multiple languages and targeted communication
- Times of use
- Physical and psychological safety
- Medical and health concerns
- Many roads are not fit for purpose and require maintenance

3. What will overcome the barriers you identified, enabling a successful and sustainable transport solution(s)

- Vehicle type
- Circular run rather than having to wait for the booking to turn up
- Stops at particular spots ( Netherby Meats)
- Timetabled and as simple as possible – maybe 3 times a week
- Total Mobility would be a different clientele
- Affordability and predictability
- Good communication for the people not digitally savvy
- Better mobility scooters (\$9,500 brand new)

### *Socioeconomically disadvantaged*

1. What are the most common transport needs for your group within Ashburton Township that are not currently addressed by existing solutions?

- Getting to work, to the gym/sport, to appointments / WINZ, to get food/kai, to attend church or other social events
- Cannot afford to run a vehicle or pay for the taxi. Rely on community volunteers and the goodwill of other services
- Loss of licence (DUI etc) can mean loss of employment and increased isolation/vulnerability
- Accessible and cheap or free – a circuit every hour to Tinwald, Netherby, Allenton, Hospital, EA Networks, Warehouse, K-Mart, CBD, Library.
- Getting to specialists outside of Mon – Fri beyond the health shuttle service.
- Passenger train to Christchurch reinstated for workers and appointments

2. What are the barriers to making a solution to the key transport needs you've identified successful?

- Cost and affordability
- Not one size fits all – people still have to get to pick up points and know a service is available
- Technology – how to book etc, credit phones might be required
- The service being sustainable
- Language barriers

3. What will overcome the barriers you identified, enabling a successful and sustainable transport solution(s)

- Investment from the Regional Council/ Sponsorship
- Government departments contribute to transport for clients eg MSD/ Corrections/Health
- A service that runs 7 days a week as work hours have changed and people need to get to church and social events, library on the weekends
- Build an existing service eg. fund the taxi service to operate a minibus like My Way with subsidised ticketing
- Trial a pick up shuttle until it is too big to manage and then go to plan B

### *People who work within the township*

1. What are the most common transport needs for your group within Ashburton Township that are not currently addressed by existing solutions?

- Defining what "walkable" means for Ashburton
- Main roads are congested, seen as difficult to cycle and negative perceptions of safety
- Climate considerations to active modes within township
- What is the population that actually work in town?
- Taxis at peak times are busy/ expensive – can ask for a fixed cost
- Could consider young people starting work – starting habits
- Loop in town, hop on hop off – 30 to 45 minute loop
- Health appointment service

2. What are the barriers to making a solution to the key transport needs you've identified successful?

- Willingness to change is a big barrier. Behavioural change is difficult
- No data on this group - need more exploring on the need
- Cost would have to be free to make it more attractive than driving in town
- Can we use car sharing? Social connections and climate mitigations

- Cannot charge for parking in CBD but don't want to disadvantage older people

### 3. What will overcome the barriers you identified, enabling a successful and sustainable transport solution(s)

- Car sharing app – low costs to rate payers
- My Way service – only work hours service while the middle of the day could do health pick ups
- Business connections – band together for trips, fleet management, cost sharing agreement for an administration coordinator.

As the final activity in the workshop, participants gave a rating of how heavily utilised they felt different forms of transport would be in Ashburton township. Ratings are presented in the following table. Ratings were not sought for weekend bookable or timetabled van/bus services. The task did present a space for people to share any better ideas they had for transport options that would be heavily used, but nothing was added in this space. The most-used option was expected to be a van/bus on a circuit running before, during and after school/workday, running to a timetable, followed by increased accessible options for Total Mobility users.

Transport option	Rating					Mean rating
	1 very little	2 little	3 moderate ly used	4 quite well used	5 Heavily used	
E-bikes – user pays	2	7	7	4	-	2.65
E-scooters – user pays	3	6	4	5	2	3.45
Van/bus on a circuit within school hours - timetabled	1	2	3	5	9	3.95
Van/bus on a circuit running before and after school/workday	-	-	5	2	14	4.65
Van/bus on a circuit Friday + Saturday evenings-timetabled	1	2	13	3	1	3.05
Increased taxi options – Total Mobility	-	3	6	4	9	3.86
Increased accessible transport options – Total Mobility	-	-	3	7	10	4.35
Van/bus on a circuit within school hours – My Way / booking-based service	-	3	12	-	5	3.35
Van/bus on a circuit before and after school/workday - My Way / booking-based service	-	5	8	3	3	3.21
Van/bus on a circuit Friday + Saturday evenings-My Way / booking-based service	1	1	3	11	2	3.61



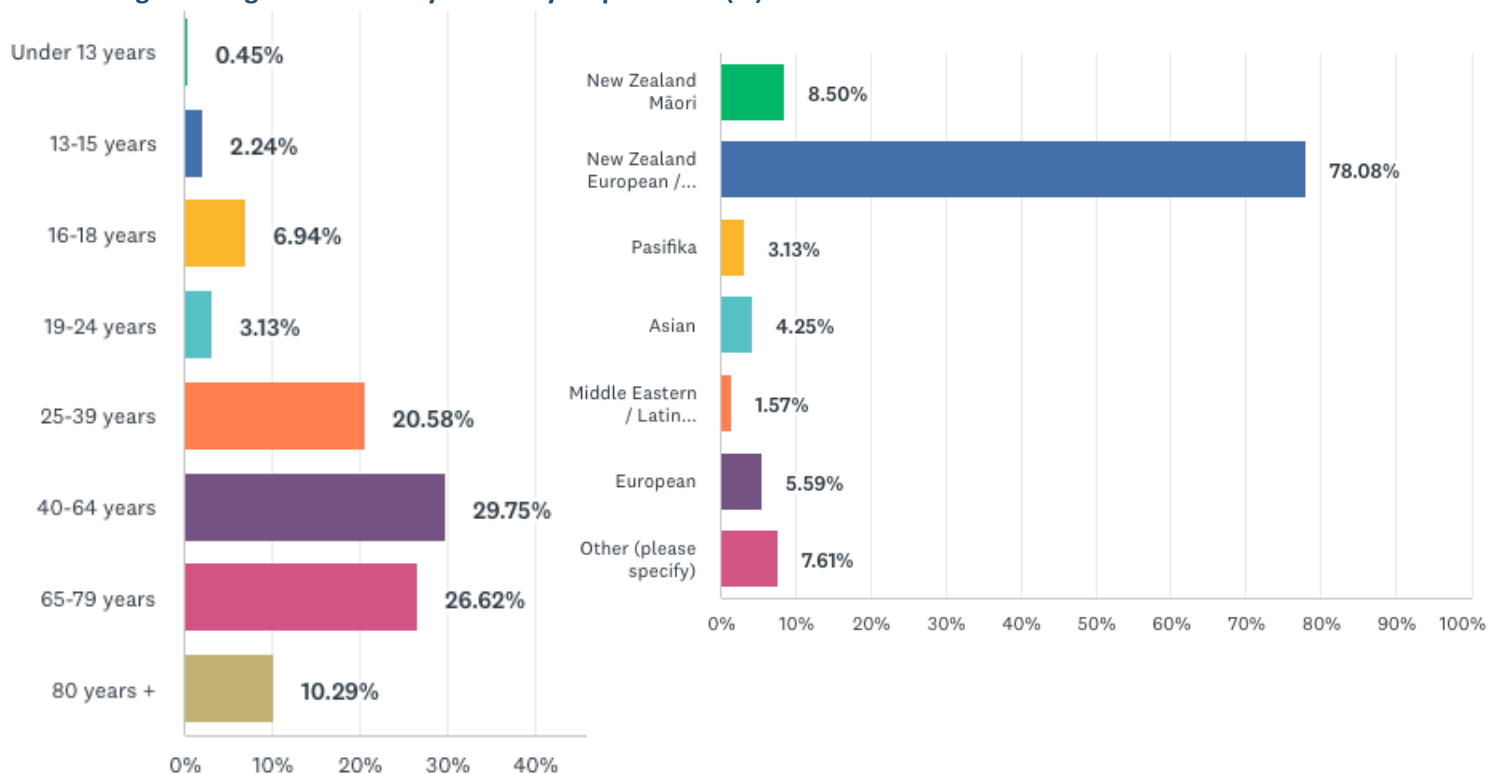
## 5.2 Survey findings

### 5.2.1 The respondent group

The public survey received 450 responses, with the majority of respondents completing it for themselves (n=400, 88.8%), 38 people (8.4%) completing it on behalf of a family member, and 5 people (1.1%) completing it on behalf of someone they care for, the remainder completing it for other reasons.

Despite the efforts of the researchers and the community stakeholders, the response rate from young people was low. The survey had strong uptake from older residents. Age of respondents is presented in the following graph. Over three-fifths of survey respondents were female (n=282, 63.5%), with 35.6% (n=158) male and 4 respondents identifying as other gender. Ethnicity of survey respondents, presented in below right, is representative of the population of the district based on the 2018 Census data, the most recent available.

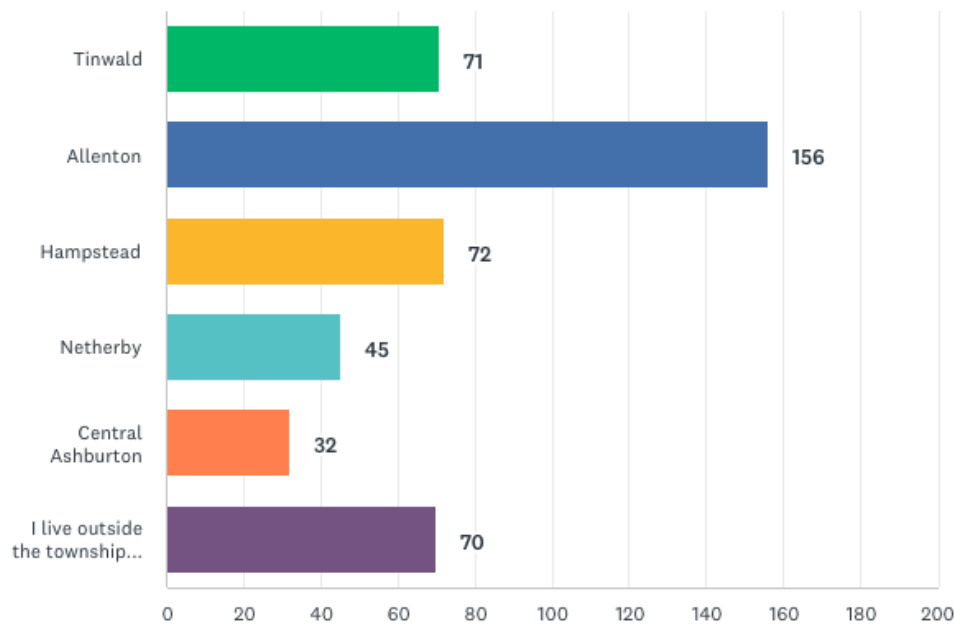
**Figure 1. Age and ethnicity of survey respondents (%)**



Of the people who responded to the survey, 7.1% were either a recent migrant (n=26) or a refugee (n=6).

Of those 450 people who responded to the survey, just over a third (n=156, 34.9%) live in Allenton, 16.1% (n=72) live in Hampstead, 15.9% (n=71) lived in Tinwald, 15.7% (n=70) live outside the township but have travel needs getting around Ashburton town, 10.1% (n=45) live in Netherby and 7.2% (n=32) live in central Ashburton.

### Area in Ashburton where Respondents live (n)

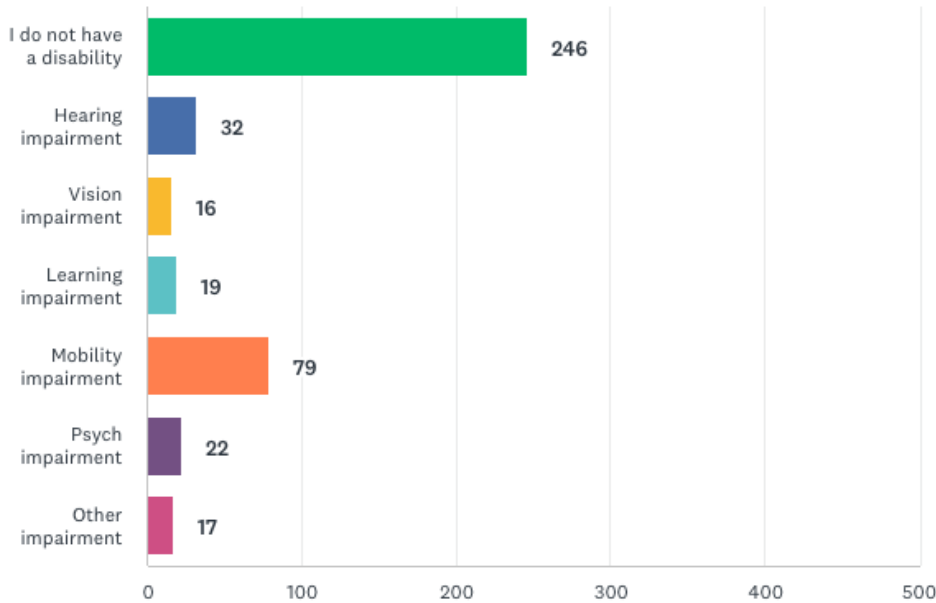


Of the 450 survey respondents (or the person who the survey was completed on behalf of), 23.8% (n=105) have a disability, with the respondent group therefore fairly representative of the general population (24% of New Zealand's population have a disability according to the Office of Disability Issues). A further 7 people reported having a Total Mobility card but not having a disability, potentially being older people no longer able to drive but not equating their condition to a disability. The survey asked the respondent to categorise their disability, using categories drawn from the Stats NZ Disability survey:

- Hearing impairment: you cannot hear, or have difficulty hearing what is said in a conversation with one other person and/or what is said in a group conversation with three or more people, even when using an assistive hearing device such as a hearing aid.
- Vision impairment: you have difficulty seeing, or cannot see, ordinary newsprint, and/or the face of someone from across a room, even when wearing glasses.
- Learning impairment: you have a long-term condition or health problem that makes it hard for you to learn.
- Mobility impairment: you have difficulty with or couldn't do one or more of the following:
  - walk about 350 metres without resting
  - walk up or down a flight of stairs
  - carry an object as heavy as five kilograms
  - move from room to room within the home
  - stand for 20 minutes
  - bend down without support
  - get in and out of bed on your own.
- Psychological/psychiatric impairment: you have a long-term emotional, psychological, or psychiatric condition that causes difficulty with everyday activities or difficulty communicating, mixing with others, or socialising.
- Other impairment: includes difficulties with speaking, learning, and memory.

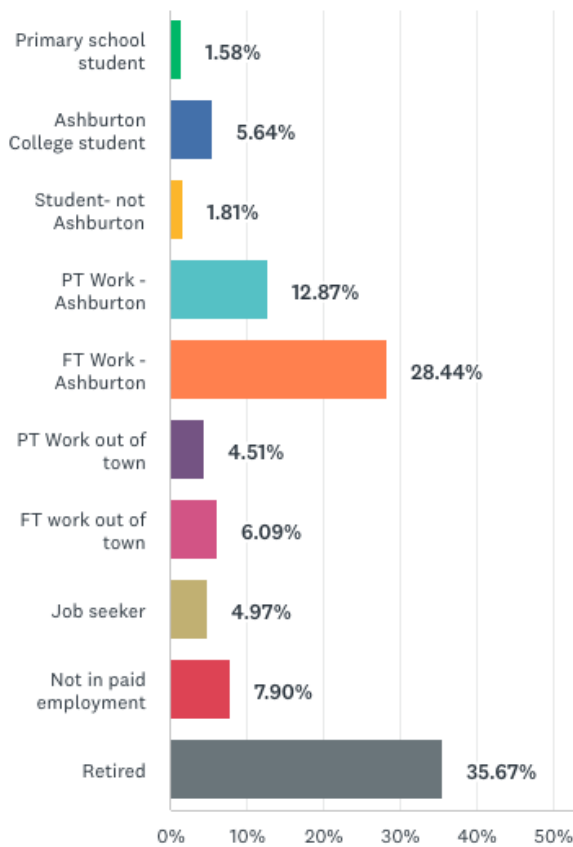
Most commonly, those with a disability had a mobility impairment (21.9% of all respondents, n=79) followed by hearing impairment (8.9% of all respondents, n=32) and Psychological or psychiatric impairment (6.1%, n=22). Findings are shown in the following graph.

### Number of respondents presenting with different kinds of disability



12.8% of the total respondent group (n=55) have a Total Mobility card, and 43.8% of disabled respondents with a disability/ies (n=46 out of 105) have a Total Mobility card, less than half of this group. 71.0% (n=316) have a current restricted or full driver's licence and access to a motor vehicle.

### Work / education involvement of respondent group



As the age data regarding the respondent group suggests, a large proportion of people who completed the survey are retired: 35.7% of respondents (n=158), with people in full-time work within Ashburton township the second-most common group to respond to the survey (28.4%, n=126).

Forty students responded to the survey. Of those working part-time (paid or voluntary) within Ashburton township, 9 were also attending school or studying.

### Current modes of travel

The survey asked respondents what the main ways they get around Ashburton township currently (used in the past two weeks). 448 people answered the question, with findings presented in the following table. Two-thirds of those who responded to the survey had driven

themselves within the town in the past two weeks, with walking the next-most common means of getting around the town. Nearly a quarter had been driven by a family member. Around one respondent in seven had cycled within the past two weeks.

Main ways respondents get around Ashburton township currently	n	%
Drive self in car / van / truck	299	66.7
Walk	204	45.5
Driven by family member in car / van / truck	111	24.8
Bicycle / e-bike	63	14.1
Taxi / taxi van – Total Mobility	27	6.0
Taxi – full fare	19	4.2
Driven by volunteer – Cancer Society, Age Concern etc.	18	4.0
Wheelchair / mobility scooter	16	3.6
Scooter / skateboard	7	1.6
Courtesy van – pub / club	5	0.1
Motorcycle	2	0.04

### 5.2.2 Transport challenges

Respondents were asked what the biggest challenges were (if any) that they faced trying to get to where they needed or wanted to be within Ashburton township, with 314 people identifying a barrier(s). Open-ended responses were thematically analysed and are summarised below, illustrated with quotes.

The most-identified barriers to getting to where they needed to go in town related to **traffic volumes and congestion**, especially through SH1, to and from Tinwald and across the bridge, with traffic and congestion identified by 70 respondents. Many of those highlighting this were older drivers, some identifying a loss of confidence in such situations.

*“I find the amount of traffic through Tinwald very challenging most of the time, hard to get out onto main road. Not always easy to find a close enough park in town. Miss out on events in the Domain as can’t get a park close and can no longer walk a long distance.”*

*“Traffic through State Highway 1 from Tinwald into & past Ashburton. 45 minutes from Graham Street to the Ashburton bridge is quite common.”*

*“Traffic in central city, traffic lights by Mitre 10 / McDonald’s are often congested.”*

*“Traffic flow, the traffic lights have made things so much worse. Getting over and back from Tinwald is horrid. Sort the traffic lights out.”*



Next-most commonly, **parking issues** were highlighted, often by older people with mobility issues, but also less commonly by workers who struggle to find well-located parking with good time limits, or appropriate to their vehicle. Parking issues were highlighted by 36 respondents.

*"I am ok but for people that cannot walk far the parking here in Ashburton is terrible. I have problems parking myself but for many of my friends who have mobility problems its very stressful and often they just drive away."*

*"Parking near to places I need to go to seems to be getting less and less."*

**Roadworks** were identified as a challenge by 23 respondents.

*"Quality of Allens road is poor after being ripped up three times in a row."*

*"Road work delays. Sometimes sections of the footpath are left unfinished for months making it dangerous to skate to work."*

**Poor roading design**, commonly with comments around the traffic light sequencing on West St or one-way roads and narrow streets was identified by 18 respondents.

*"Traffic light synchronization delays in east-west direction across West and East Streets."*

*"Traffic on West Street is mental in the afternoon."*

**Cost of taxis** in Ashburton was highlighted as unaffordable and a barrier to access by 13 respondents. A further 4 Total Mobility users noted that costs were too high even with the subsidy.

*"Taxis can be quite expensive if you need to use it often. At the moment I cannot partake in education as any campus is too far for me on foot + can't afford regular taxis."*

*"The taxi fares are too dear for when I'm unable to get a lift by someone else I know, and I live too far to walk into town when I really need to be at a certain place on time."*

*"Barely any taxis and previous times when I've called, they drove away when I tried to call them over. It's very expensive to get somewhere even if it's close as I cannot walk due to Endometriosis as I'm always in pain daily from it."*

*"I have a back injury and am on the benefit, I cannot afford taxis or to get my food delivered. This makes life extremely difficult to navigate and having a public transport option would really help everyone in the community."*

*"No public transport available for other family members to get to work in Ashburton other than taxis which are price prohibitive unless absolutely necessary - one taxi company in the area means a monopoly so they can charge what they like which is astronomical."*

*"Lack of options/availability with just one taxi company. Often the phone is not answered when needed."*

*"At the moment, the current taxi company has a monopoly on public transport: - it costs \$18 to go from Netherby shops to Allenton shops. - You can be waiting for over 30 minutes for a taxi - They don't let you book in advance, just for a few days before It's quite difficult for people who rely on it as their distance transport."*

**Ashburton's walkability** was highlighted in a range of ways. Being quite a spread-out town with different **destinations far apart** from each other was identified as a challenge by 11 respondents. Related to this, 26 respondents indicated that they commonly walk to get to where they need to go, but that destinations are often quite some distance from home / between each other and they don't always have the time to do this or the energy.

*It's not a huge town, but walking distance, it takes a long time to get places - about 40 minutes. And when I get called into work when they're short staffed that's a bit of a problem because I need to get there quick as possible but it's a 40-minute walk. Even going out to town with friends it's a mission because we're walking everywhere we want to go.*

*"Essential services spread around town eg. supermarkets, pharmacies, medical centres, legal firms. Not all within walking distance for the elderly."*

*"Live off Morris Road and lack of some sort of path makes it hard to walk into town."*

Eleven respondents indicated that they **struggle to walk to the places they need to due to health conditions**. Eight respondents raised concerns around **pedestrian safety** in the town, and **concerns around footpath and crossing conditions** were part of this.

*"Sometimes not having the car leaves me at home, unable to walk into town due to arthritis."*

*"Footpaths are not even. People on electric scooters can be reckless."*

*“The gutters when crossing the road. Even the shallow ones, as I came out of my chair because of the lump of tarseal where it joined the concrete curb/gutter. This is in the town centre too so you'd think the roading would be a lot better quality since the council is so intent on making the town look pretty. There needs to be more mobility car parks especially that leave enough room for getting in and out on the driver's side as I drive and am wheelchair bound. Footpaths in Ashburton suck. They are like the ones in Chch after the earthquakes, but we don't have that excuse down here so why are they so bad?”*

*“Road work delays. Sometimes sections of the footpath are left unfinished for months making it dangerous to skate to work.”*

18 respondents identified **lack of public transport in Ashburton** as a challenge in itself.

*“I'm more of a driver for many people who have no transportation to do their grocery shopping, doctor appointments or get to their jobs and sometimes I don't have enough petrol to help others get around as well as getting around myself with my children. Having public transport will really help the development of Ashburton as people will have more access to get around conveniently.”*

**Costs of running a car** were identified as a challenge by 17 respondents.

Being one-car households, 12 respondents indicated that **car availability** presented a challenge to getting where they needed to be.

*“One car in the family, if my husband has been called into work, I am stuck at home.”*

Taxis were identified as **hard to secure at night and costly**, and finding transport safely home after drinking was identified as a challenge for 8 respondents.

*“After work services. Taxis are far too expensive when you've had a drink. It costs us a whopping \$35 from the centre of town.”*

*“Being able to safely get home after a few drinks in town, only a small handful of places offer a courtesy van and the poor taxi service that is very rarely available and if it is there usually at least a 30-minute wait.”*

*“Ashburton is small enough that it is easy to drive or walk around. Although there is a huge lack of affordable taxi's, ubers, lime scooters or anything late at night. The 3 taxis in the town are charging outrageous prices and have very limited availability.”*

Seven respondents described challenges faced by not being licensed to drive either because they were too young, a newcomer to New Zealand or they had lost their licence due to declining health.

*"I work with people who don't have a licence or a vehicle and their options for transportation are very limited."*

23 respondents indicated that they **relied on taxis and family / friends or others** to take them to where they need to be, and a strong theme in their feedback centred on regret / resentment that they had to rely on others, and did not have the freedom to be spontaneous in their outings, having to plan to combine trip purposes, and having to fit around availability of other people, sometimes at a cost of time off work etc.

*"Finding someone who has the time to drive me to an appointment."*

*"My biggest issue is finding alternative transport to and from work in Ashburton if someone I know is unable to take me."*

*"Doctors, swimming (rehabilitation) It would make a huge difference as I can't physically drive my car at the moment, and I am stuck relying on others for help and it's getting hard."*

Other less common themes included the following:

- Hard for young people to get to after school commitments if parents work or into town from Tinwald at weekends (n=7)
- Poor weather (impacting on biking or walking) (n=7)
- Bad drivers (n=7)
- 30 km/hr speed zones in play even in weekends outside schools (n=5)
- Want to reduce car usage – especially for single person trips so keen for alternatives (n=5)
- Bike and walking are not ideal when transporting goods etc. (n=4)
- Potholes (n=3)
- Lack of secure bike stands and mobility scooter parking (n=4)
- Hard sorting transport to school if children all attend different schools (n=2)
- Lack of public transport connection to Ashburton Business Park (n=1)
- Loss of privacy when have to get someone to take you to an appointment (n=1)
- Multiple challenges at play (n=1)
- Lack of a back-up option if car breaks down (n=1)
- Hard to navigate existing transport options with limited English language (n=1)
- Trips limited by scooter battery range (n=1)
- Taxi is only alternative to driving for Lake Hood residents (n=1)
- Bike and scooter safety on SH1 (n=1)
- Lack of appropriate wheelchair-friendly mobility car parks (n=1)
- Lack of safe bike lanes in Ashburton or encouragement of bike use (n=1)

### 5.2.3 Potential usage of different types of public transport

The survey presented respondents with a range of transport options and asked them to rate how often they would use each if available in Ashburton township.

Feedback on each is presented in full in Appendix A and summarised below.



A range of scenarios were presented for a “shopper’s bus”, as follows:

- A. Shopper’s bus / van to/from main shopping areas in town centre and suburban areas of Ashburton – weekday mornings – regular pick-up / drop-off points through township
- B. Shopper’s bus / van to/from main shopping areas in town centre and suburban areas of Ashburton – weekday afternoons – regular pick-up / drop-off points through township
- C. Shopper’s bus / van to/from main shopping areas in town centre and suburban areas of Ashburton – weekday mornings – pre-book door-to-door within township
- D. Shopper’s bus / van to/from main shopping areas in town centre and suburban areas of Ashburton – weekday afternoons – regular pick-up / drop-off points through township
- E. Shopper’s bus / van to/from main shopping areas in town centre and suburban areas of Ashburton – Saturdays – regular pick-up / drop-off points through township
- F. Shopper’s bus / van to/from main shopping areas in town centre and suburban areas of Ashburton – Saturdays – pre-book door-to-door within township

**A bus/van running on a route with regular stops on weekdays was the option most likely to be used at least weekly** (i.e. either 1-2 times per week or 3+ times per week selected), option A (mornings) with 32.1% indicating such use and B. (afternoons) 32.4% of such use, so very similar. Two-fifths of respondents indicated that they would NEVER use such a service.

**A door-to-door bus/van operating on a pre-booked service basis (like My Way in Timaru)** was anticipated to be used at least weekly (i.e. either 1-2 times per week or 3+ times per week selected) during mornings by 25.3% of respondents, and by 29.9% of respondents during afternoons. Just over half (50.8%) anticipated NEVER using a bookings-based bus service during a weekday morning and 44.9% during afternoons.

**A bus/van running on a route with regular stops on Saturdays** was likely to be used at least weekly (i.e. either 1-2 times per week or 3+ times per week selected) by 22.8% of respondents, with just under half respondents (49.7%) indicating that they would NEVER use such a service, while a door-to-door bus/van operating on a pre-booked service basis (like My Way in Timaru) on Saturdays was anticipated to be used at least weekly (i.e. either 1-2 times per week or 3+ times per week selected) by only 16.7% of respondents while 56.2% anticipated NEVER using a bookings-based bus service on a Saturday.

More than 60% of respondents thought they might use a **van/bus with designated pick-up / drop-off points to get to large community events such as the A & P Show, Market Day, Waitangi celebrations** etc.

Just under two-thirds of respondents thought they would ever use a **dining / entertainment bus or van** to/from designated pick-up / drop-off points Monday – Friday evenings. Only 17.1% though they would use this at least weekly (i.e. either 1-2 times per week or 3+ times per week selected).

If **community e-bikes** were available for low/no cost hire in Ashburton township, 17.5% of respondents indicated that they would use these at least weekly (i.e. either 1-2 times per week or 3+ times per week selected). 9.5% thought they would use these 3 or more times per week, 8.0% 1-2 times per week, and 65% thought they would NEVER use these.

Expected uptake of **community low/no-cost e-scooters** was slightly higher than for e-bikes but was still low. 22.5% anticipated using these at least weekly (i.e. either 1-2 times per week or 3+ times per week selected). 12.4% thought they would use these 3 or more times per week, 10.1% 1-2 times per week, and 60.9% thought they would NEVER use these.

Two-thirds of respondents thought they would NEVER use a **car or van available for trip-by-trip use**, 11.4% would use it at least weekly, and 16.6% less than monthly.

Looking specifically at young people under driver licence age, demand was much higher for scooters, and to a lesser extent e-bikes, but numbers of respondents in these age groups are low so findings need to be treated with caution.

Demand for a **bus to and from schools in Ashburton on a schedule from pre-determined stops** was quite low, reflecting to some extent low survey participation of young people, and engagement in the survey from young people attending courses and not enrolled in school. Just over three-quarters of respondents would never use this, and 15.1% would use this at least weekly. Of the 40 respondents aged 18 years and under, 37.5 expected to use these at least weekly and for those aged under 16 years, 70 % expected to use these at least weekly.

**For people who responded to the survey who had a disability:**

- 79% did not think they would ever use a community e-bike
- 77.5% would never use a community e-scooter
- 9.9% expected they would use an e-bike at least weekly
- 12.5% expected they would use an e-scooter at least weekly

Their demand for a scheduled shopper bus was higher than for the total respondent group (46.6% would use a morning bus at least weekly and 40.8% an afternoon bus). A service like My Way was less likely to be used by disabled respondents than a scheduled bus on a pre-set route (36.3% would use a morning service at least weekly and 38.4% an afternoon service).

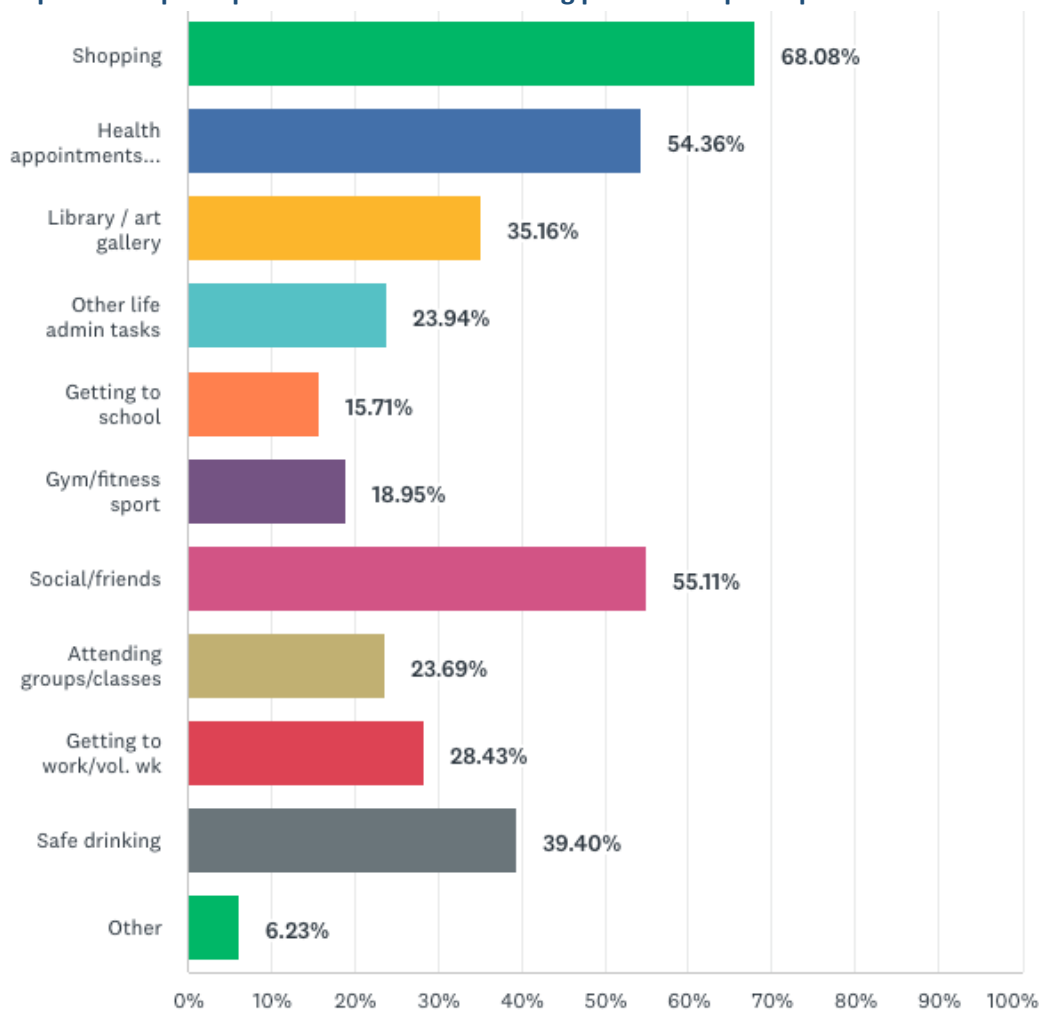
- 61.5% of disabled respondents indicated wanting to increased Total Mobility taxis, with 26.8% expecting to use these at least weekly, and 61.5% at least sometimes.
- Three-quarters would never use Ministry of Education – funded taxis for them/their dependents.
- 67.6 would never use a taxi on a full fare, and 12.6% would use a taxi at least weekly.
- 17.5 would use a courtesy van at least weekly and 59.5% would never use these.

13.2% (7 out of 53) of **respondents with a mobility impairment** expected to use a wheelchair taxi if more were available, while 62.3% would never use these. 29.1% of these respondents (16) expected to use a taxi at least weekly via Total Mobility if more were available, and a further 13.2% (n=7) once every 2-4 weeks and 11.3% (n=60) less than once per month.

For those **respondents aged 80 years and over**:

- 37.1% expected to use a scheduled bus on weekday mornings and 35.5% afternoons at least weekly.
- 46.6% would use a My Way- type morning service.
- 18.5% would use a scheduled morning / afternoon Saturday bus at least weekly.
- There was very low demand for an evening dining / entertainment bus.

#### Purpose of trips respondents would make using public transport options



The survey asked respondents what the purpose(s) of the trips they would make would be for those public transport options they indicated they would use in the previous question. The most common trip purpose was shopping (68.1%) followed by socialising (meeting friends at cafes, restaurants, to browse/walk in town), identified by 55.1% of respondents, and health appointments (54.4%)

Findings for all respondents are presented in graph form above.

Looking specifically at feedback from respondents who identified having a disability, trip purposes were as follows:

Shopping	83.2%
Health appointments	77.9%
Socialising	54.7%
Library / art gallery	42.1%
Attending groups / classes	36.9%
Life admin	29.5%
Gym / fitness etc.	17.9%
Getting to work – paid or voluntary	16.8%
Being able to drink and not drive	16.8%
Getting to school	5.3%

Young people aged 18 years and under identified the following purposes for using public transport:

- Getting to school 65.9%
- Shopping 61.0%
- Socialising 58.5%
- Getting to work – paid or voluntary 46.3%
- Health appointments 43.9%
- Attending groups / classes 41.5%
- Being able to drink and not drive 34.1%
- Library / art gallery 24.3%
- Life admin 9.8%
- Gym / fitness etc. 17.9%

All 6 refugees who responded to the survey indicated that they would use public transport for shopping and getting to school and most would use it to get to health appointments, to the library / art gallery, to the gym, fitness or other physical activity, while two-thirds would use it to attend classes/groups.

The 96 recent migrants who responded to the survey identified the following purposes for trips via public transport:

- Shopping 21.9%
- Getting to school 15.6%
- Getting to work – paid or voluntary 15.6%
- Health appointments 14.6%
- Attending groups / classes 14.6%
- Socialising 13.5%
- Library / art gallery 13.5%
- Gym / fitness etc. 12.5%
- Being able to drink and not drive 10.4%
- Life admin 5.2%

## 5.2.4 What difference would public transport make to people's lives?

The survey asked respondents *What difference would it make to the quality of your/their life if the transport options you selected as likely to use were available?*, with respondents giving a star rating from 1 star to 5 stars.

**The average rating was 3 out of 5**, with a fifth (20.9%, n=86 of the 412 people who completed the question) responding with 1 – *No difference*, 13.4% (n=55) rating it 2 out of 5, a third (33.5%, n=138) selecting 3 - *Quite a difference*, 8.0% (n=33) rating it 4 out of 5 and just under a quarter (24.3%, n=100) rating the difference it would make in their lives as 5/5 - *A huge difference*.

**Breakdowns of ratings for different target groups are as follows:**

<b>Recent refugees</b> Average rating = 4.3 / 5 0% = no difference, 66.7% = a huge difference	<b>Recent migrants (excluding refugees)</b> Average rating = 4.0 / 5 4.1% = no difference, 45.8% = a huge difference
<b>Young people under 16 years</b> Average rating = 3.2 / 5 0% = no difference, 18.1% = a huge difference	<b>Young people 16 - 18 years</b> Average rating = 3.3 / 5 24.1% = no difference, 37.9% = a huge difference
<b>Young people 19 - 24 years</b> Average rating = 3.8 / 5 7.1% = no difference, 42.9% = a huge difference	<b>Older people aged 80 years and over</b> Average rating = 3.2 / 5 18.0% = no difference, 25.6% = a huge difference
<b>Māori</b> Average rating = 3.5 / 5 10.5% = no difference, 36.8% = a huge difference	<b>Pasifika</b> Average rating = 3.7 / 5 16.7% = no difference, 33.3% = a huge difference
<b>Middle Eastern / Latin American / African</b> Average rating = 4.1 / 5 14.3% = no difference, 71.4% = a huge difference	<b>Asian</b> Average rating = 4.1 / 5 5.6% = no difference, 55.6% = a huge difference
<b>People with a disability</b> Average rating = 3.5 / 5 11.5% = no difference, 37.5% = a huge difference	

The average ratings by disability type were as follows:

Hearing impairment	3.0
Vision impairment	3.3
Learning impairment	4.0
Mobility impairment	3.5
Psychological or psychiatric impairment	4.2
Other impairment	3.5

Of those people with disabilities most-commonly indicating that public transport would make the greatest difference, people with learning and psychological / psychiatric impairments, 42.3% of those with learning disabilities had a Total Mobility card and only 31.8% of those with psychological / psychiatric impairments.

### 5.2.5 Expected cost for different types of public transport

An open-ended question asked respondents “For the options of transport that you indicated you/they would use, how much \$ would you/they expect and be able to pay per trip (each way)?”

The mean expected cost for community-e-scooters or bikes was around \$4.60-4:80, with 10-12 respondents expecting this to be free, but a large number suggesting this should be user-pays, in line with costs of Lime scooter or bike hire elsewhere.

Mean expected costs for a bus to / from special events in Ashburton was just under \$5, for a bus on a designated route on weekdays \$4.60 and around \$4.80 for a My Way -type bus that is booking based and door to door. Expected bus rates were similar for weekends, while for an evening bus service to access dining and entertainment was expected to cost around \$6.25 on average.

### 5.2.6 Trip start and end points

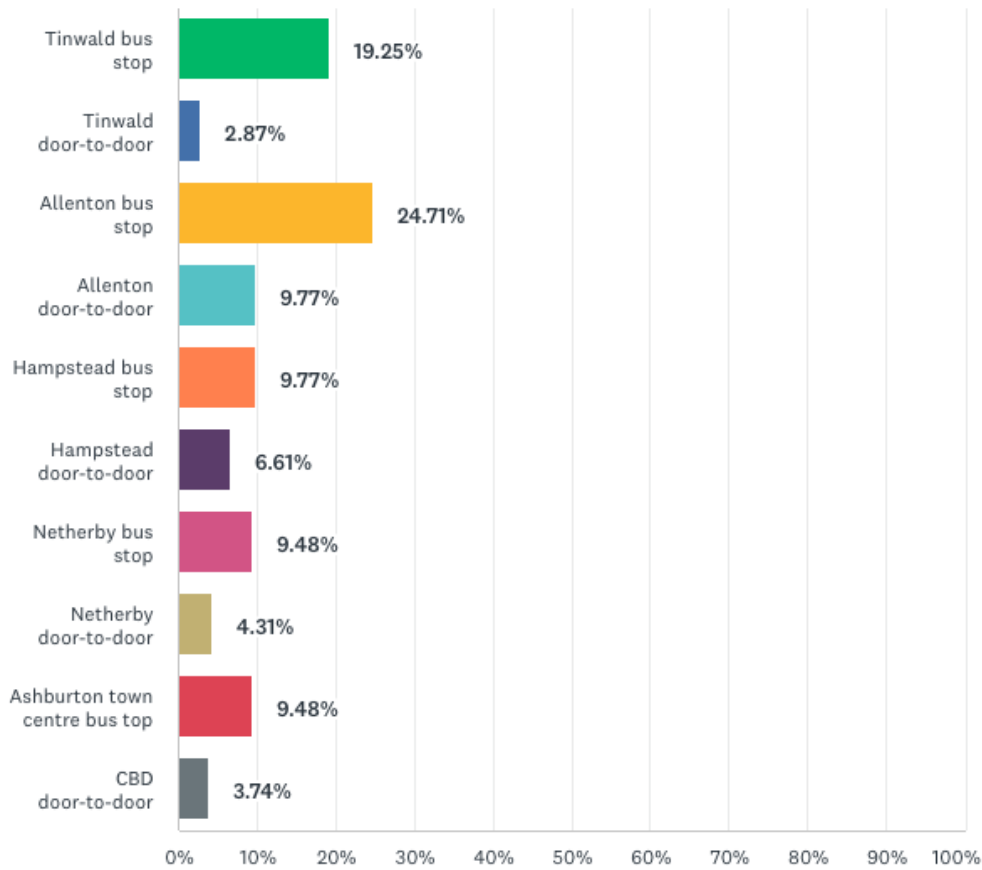
The survey asked respondents where they would most commonly want trips via public transport to start and end. Bus stops / designated pick-up points were favoured over door-to-door services, with Allenton (24.7%) the most commonly identified start point followed by Tinwald (19.3%).

In terms of **destination**, the town centre of Ashburton was by far the most popular destination, identified by over three quarters of respondents. Next-most popular were the shopping centres of Allenton (16.4%) and Tinwald (13.9%).

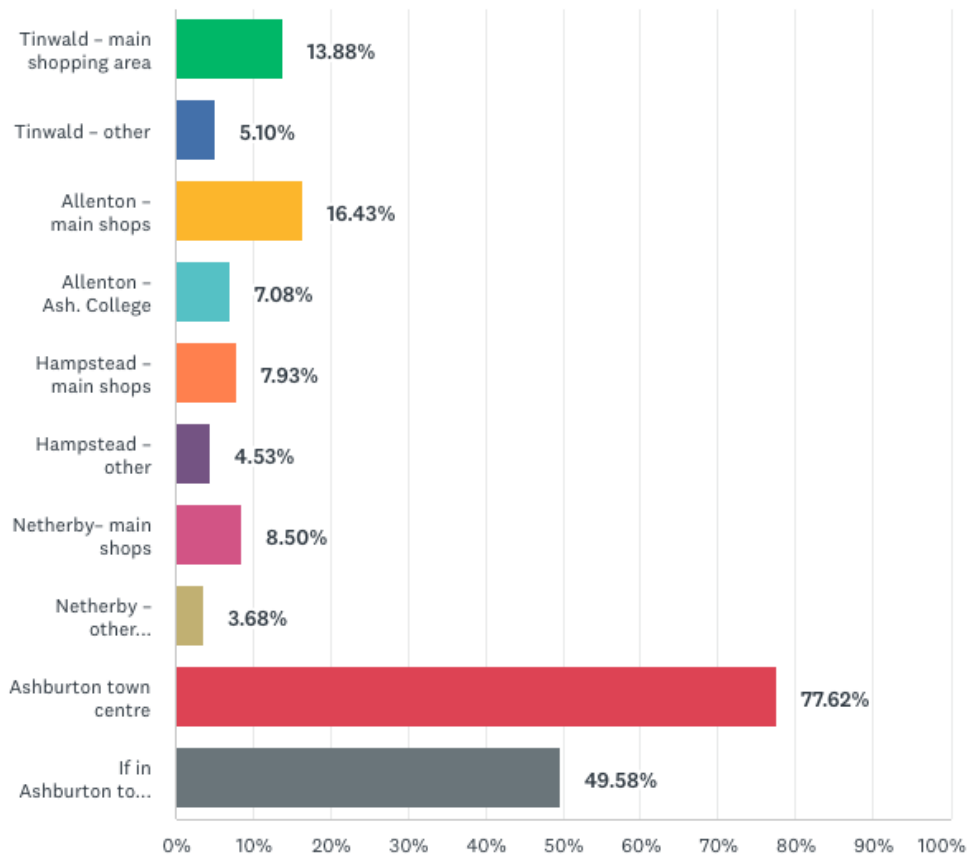
For those who specified a destination in the town centre (those counted in the grey bar at the bottom of the graph), the following destinations were identified, grouped geographically where they are very close to each other:

- Locations in the main street and immediate area for shopping, cafes, restaurants and bars, hairdressers, banking, cinema, Briscoes, Farmers, bookshops etc. (n=80)
- Library/ADC (n=29)
- New World / Mitre 10 / McDonalds / Harvey Norman etc (n=24)
- Supermarkets (n=23)
- K Mart (n=16)
- Various medical centres, dentists, physios, optometrists (n=14)
- Countdowns (Woolworths) (n=10)
- Warehouse and adjacent complex (n=8)
- EA Networks complex (n=6)
- Hospital (n=5)
- Art gallery (n=4)
- West St (esp. Cleavers) (n=4)
- MSA club (n=4)
- Domain (n=3)
- Friends’ homes (n=2)
- Ashburton Intermediate School (n=1)
- Ashburton Christian School (n=1)
- Ashford Village (n=1)

### Most common desired trip starting point on public transport



### Most common desired trip destination on public transport



### 5.2.7 Other feedback

The survey gave respondents the chance to offer other comments at the end of the survey. Some reiterated their responses to the question around transport challenges or what they would expect to pay for public transport. Other feedback was thematically analysed, and is summarised as follows, with some illustrative quotes provided.

- Affirmation of idea of some form(s) of public transport in Ashburton, and especially a bus option, especially important for older people and a town with growing elder population, for people with disabilities or socioeconomically disadvantaged, and important in connecting people with the things that uphold wellbeing (n=38)

*"I work with clients who have medical reasons why they can't drive , are too young to be able to drive, can't afford a bike or car etc. They struggle to be able to get to the doctors' appointments, supermarkets, gyms, work, hospital, socialising when there is no one to take them or they can't afford petrol, or the weather is bad. A local bus/van on common bus routes would be so beneficial."*

*"I think these are some great options. I might not use them all now but as I grow older and my use of driving slows I would use. I have also just had an operation and can't drive for 2 weeks so it would be great to have transport options around town. It is also great for teenagers getting around."*

- Want a public transport connection between Ashburton and Christchurch (and lesser extent Timaru) – including consideration of rail link (n=10)
- Council's priority should be fixing the state of roads, traffic flow, congestion and efficiency (n=8)

*"Sort your roads out."*

- Need a public transport link to Fairton, Hakatere, Lake Hood (n=7)
- Want a bus on a circular route (including past rest homes, medical centres) on a timetable, even just some days (n=6)
- Public transport is not a council responsibility and a waste of ratepayer money (n=6)

*"NO PUBLIC TRANSPORT in Ashburton. Please spend the money on something else. PLEASE."*

- Want My Way – type service like Timaru has (n=5)
- Demand would be too low for public transport to be viable (n=4)
- Need more taxis at night and at peak times (n=3)



- Ashburton needs a second bridge and SH bypass as soon as possible (n=3)
- Lime scooters and bikes would be the easiest public transport option to implement (n=3)
- Public transport needs to extend to rural towns (n=3)
- Public transport should be subsidised (n=3)
- Public transport needs to be accessible (n=2)
- Public transport should be user-pays (n=2)
- Help needs to be targeted to those who do not drive / have disabilities (n=2)
- Need more options so people can drink alcohol and get home safely (n=2)
- Any solution needs flexibility (n=2)
- Lack of public transport means some people cannot live an independent life (n=1)
- Help transporting bulky items would be useful (n=1)
- Council could look at a public – private partnership funding model (n=1)
- Make Ashburton more car-friendly and stop catering for cycles (n=1)
- Get Uber into Ashburton (n=1)
- Need enhanced promotion and enforcement of speed limit=s on town fringes (n=1)
- Do not want community / for-hire e-bikes and scooters (n=1)
- Would prefer more car parking (n=1)
- The taxi service is great (n=1)
- Taxis are too high off the ground to get in (n=1)Cycle safety in town should be improved (n=1)
- Public transport would reduce congestion (n=1)
- Public transport needs to be dog friendly (n=1)
- Taxi costs need to be reduced (n=1)

## 6. Discussion

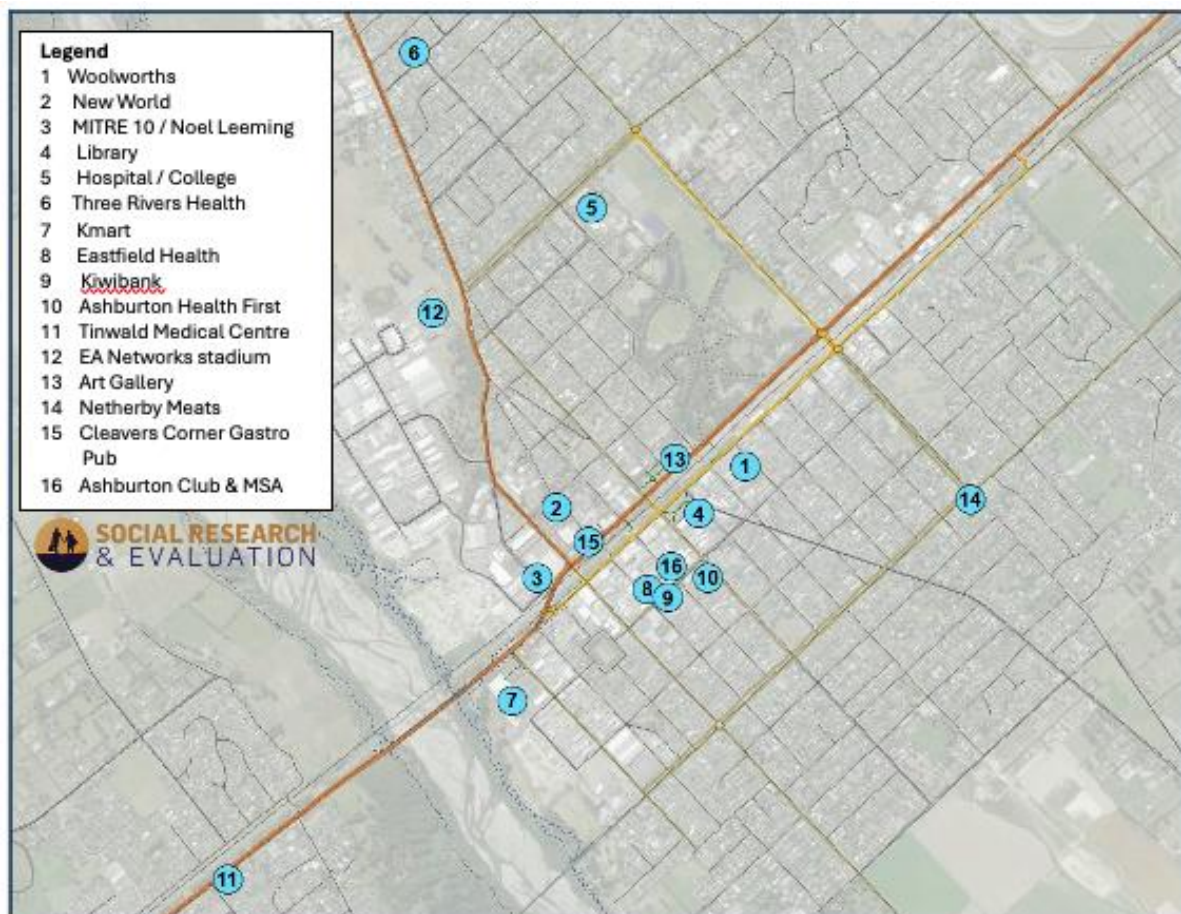
With 450 people taking the time to complete the public transport survey, there was clearly a high level of community engagement around the subject of public transport options for Ashburton. The researchers also experienced a strong willingness to engage in the research from a wide range of community stakeholders via interview or workshop. This is perhaps unsurprising given that transport barriers have been highlighted in various social and community research in Ashburton over many years (eg. Wylie, 2007, identifying service barriers for newcomers; Wylie, 2020, identifying transport barriers for frail older adults, young people, people with disabilities and the socially isolated).

Presented with a range of different bus/van public transport solutions, the survey identified a moderate level of demand for public transport within the town, with slight preference for a regular timetabled service using designated bus stops over a service akin to My Way in Timaru: the latter a much more expensive transport proposition. Just under a third of the survey respondents thought they would use a scheduled (timetabled with fixed pick-up/drop-off points) weekday bus service at least weekly, while two-fifths expected to never use such a service. Demand was lower for a service on Saturdays, with this apparently impacted by the large proportion of older respondents preferring to socialise and do their shopping/errands during the week. There did seem to be relatively strong demand for bus services connecting people with special events in the town (eg. A and P Show), while a reasonable proportion of respondents thought they would use a dining / entertainment bus at night, but this would be likely to amount to only infrequent use.

Lack of access to transport has long been identified in Ashburton as a barrier to service access, and a factor negatively impacting on wellbeing, particularly for Ashburton's most socioeconomically deprived residents and for people whose disabilities and income prevent them from driving but who do not qualify for Total Mobility. Because of the lack of public transport, it is common for health and social service workers to spend a portion of their time transporting clients, rather than delivering core services: this is an inefficient use of resource, but also means that services reach less clients / provide clients with a reduced service because of time spent "playing taxi".

When the survey in the present research asked respondents what difference public transport would make to the quality of their lives if available, reported mean differences were largest for people with psychiatric, psychological or learning disabilities and recent refugees, followed by recent migrants (especially Asian and Middle Eastern, Latin American or African migrants), followed by young people, echoing what health, social and community workers have been telling us for years. Of the survey respondents with learning and psychological / psychiatric impairments, 42.3% of those with learning disabilities had a Total Mobility card and only 31.8% of those with psychological / psychiatric impairments: while some may not qualify for Total Mobility, it is possible that a proportion of this population do not know about the scheme, or have been assessed as not needing it / meeting criteria for it. It would be worthwhile ECAN reminding Ashburton-based Total Mobility assessors of criteria and in which cases people with learning disabilities and psychological and psychiatric impairments do qualify for the scheme, and much more strongly promoting Total Mobility to health and social service providers in Ashburton, including Work and Income so that people who do meet the criteria are connected with the scheme.

Feedback from key informants consulted in the present research largely affirmed value in a trial of a weekday scheduled, fixed route bus service, as long as this was well-promoted, catered well to disabilities, connected to the key destinations identified in the following map, and utilised a fare structure similar and perhaps slightly higher than that used for Christchurch’s Metro bus service and that of other main centres. The trial would also need to run for long enough to enable behavioural change around transport to occur: for people to find the chance to try the service, find that it worked for them, and start considering the bus as a viable alternative means of making certain types of trips. Survey findings suggested that demand for bus / van public transport was stronger for people with disabilities, people aged 80 years and over, and refugees and migrants than other groups, affirming feedback from key informants interviewed as part of the research. However there was some level of demand from people wanting to bus to work and reduce their car use, and from young people keen to use the bus to get to extracurricular activities or work after school, or just to travel home. Low response rate from young people limited the capacity to interpret survey findings for this group, and especially young people of school age. Given strong promotion of the survey within Ashburton College though, this low response could also be interpreted as indifference.



Alongside scheduled bus/van services, there does appear to be some appetite for public e-scooters. The survey focused on low to no-cost e-scooters and did not explicitly explore appetite for commercial user-pays e-scooters such as those operated by Lime, Flamingo and several other companies, but a number of respondents made reference to these in their comments. Findings of the present research suggest that such a service within Ashburton town boundaries would be relatively well-used and

address some of the existing transport needs, and especially for young people, people who work in Ashburton and for people with disabilities (especially around mental health or with psychological or learning impairments) who do not drive but do not qualify for Total Mobility. A trial of such an operation could also be put in place without cost to Council.

Demand seemed to be higher for e-scooters than for public e-bikes. For around 14% of the survey respondents, cycling was one of the main ways they got around the town currently, a similar proportion as those cycling to school or work in the Council's Walking and Cycling Strategy survey in 2020. Approaches to encourage more people to cycle and to remove/address barriers around cycling (eg. access to affordable refurbished cycles through schemes similar to RAD in Christchurch ([www.radbikes.co.nz](http://www.radbikes.co.nz)), free adult bike skills classes like those delivered in Christchurch by a range of providers contracted to Christchurch City Council (<https://ccc.govt.nz/transport/getting-around/cycling/bike-skills-and-tips/bikeskills>)) utilising funding from Waka Kotahi, (potentially negatively impacted by recent policy changes) came through only very rarely in the present research. This is somewhat surprising for a largely flat town where many of the roads are wide and with good shoulders in place, and with separated cycle / pedestrian lane on its bridge. While not strongly highlighted in the present research, such solutions should be considered alongside public transport options. With a bike skills park under development at Ashburton Domain through efforts of Ashburton District Council, Safer Mid Canterbury and local service clubs, such initiatives seem timely (<https://www.ashburtondc.govt.nz/news/2023-news/new-bike-park-aims-to-grow-cycling-skills>). Safer Mid Canterbury already has an initiative in place securing bicycles for refugees who settle locally. Ashburton District Council's Operative District Plan (2022) highlighted sustainability as a consideration for long-term planning around public transport, and also highlighted the importance of efficient pedestrian links and cycleways as a key component in addressing transport needs.

The respondent group was representative of Ashburton's population in terms of ethnicity composition and prevalence of disability, but not in age. Further, it can be assumed that people would have felt more motivated to respond to the survey where they were more passionately for or against public transport solutions for the town, and not indifferent to it. It is therefore not appropriate to extrapolate from survey findings regarding level of use to anticipated numbers of users: applying the survey-suggested usage levels to population figures is highly likely to overstate use. What the survey does tell us, as does the feedback from those interviewed who have strong insights into either particular sectors of the population and their needs around transport or around transport per se, is that there is some level of demand for a range of options. A bus or van on a scheduled route with fixed stop times and pick-up/drop-off points and especially during weekdays, from around 8am to 5:30pm (to ensure usefulness for getting to and from school and work) is worthy of trialling. User-pays e-scooters or bikes are likely to meet other needs at no cost to Council. The majority of users of public transport options are likely to be erring on the side of infrequent use, so there is a much stronger case for a bus/van service using one or two vehicles continually travelling on a circuit than multiple bus routes services by several vehicles. With preference for buses/vans that collect users from designated stops rather than for users to have to pre-book their ride, findings point more strongly to a contracted service than a Community Vehicle Trust – type service, reliant on volunteer drivers: feedback regarding volunteering capacity in Ashburton is highly relevant. For a bus service to work, it needs to be reliable. Another option could be a Community Vehicle Trust model utilising paid drivers, if possible.

A trial of a community van within the Ashburton township in 2021 proved to be complex as funding grants are provided to service the population outside the areas of public transport networks. The taxi company receives the Total Mobility funding grant from ECAN to operate within the township, so reportedly the Community Vehicle Trust could only receive a grant to operate in areas outside this even though prospective users of the van lived within the town. In Timaru, Total Mobility users have a choice of providers through which they can access 75%-subsidised fares – Driving Miss Daisy and Timaru Taxis, while Timaru Metro offers timetabled buses between Temuka and Timaru on weekdays as well as the bookable My Way service. In comparison, Ashburton seems short-changed in its public transport options.

Ashburton Taxis hold the only Total Mobility contract in the district, and feedback regarding how this is working was largely positive. In 2023, the 641 Total Mobility users in Ashburton District took over 13,000 trips on the scheme, with 9.5% of the trips made by wheelchair users. For the most recent satisfaction survey for Total Mobility across Canterbury, 2022, satisfaction levels in Ashburton had increased to a high level, with 97% of the Ashburton respondents satisfied or very satisfied with the service. It would be great to see additional wheelchair vans added to their fleet to increase capacity, and it seems that in peak times, late at night and in wet weather, demand exceeds supply.

Based on the findings of the present research, introduction of a bus service to Ashburton is unlikely to negatively impact on the taxi service. Older adults who can no longer drive and have a Total Mobility card appear to enjoy the service the taxi drivers afford them, not only getting them to where they want to go in a door-to-door fashion but also helping load and unload their shopping, helping them access buildings and the like, and generally providing a relatively holistic service. Travel within Ashburton would fall within the parameters of full the 75% subsidy rate. For people with disabilities who do not qualify for Total Mobility, many are on low incomes, and are unlikely to be able to afford to use taxis except on rare occasions. The same is true for young people, and for at least some migrants who do not drive. Given that the taxi service appears over-subscribed a lot of the time, redirecting some passengers to public transport is likely to free up their capacity to meet the needs of Total Mobility users, to pick up people choosing to avoid drinking and driving and people who use/prefer to use taxis for other reasons, including those who really value and need the personalised service that taxi drivers are able to provide.

It is clear from the present research that there are strong feelings opposing more than minimal ratepayer contribution to any public transport solutions. A key reason why many older adults in Ashburton do not / prefer not to drive into the town centre or across SH1 is that the main roads carry high traffic volumes and some intersections are perceived as complex to navigate. Frustration with levels of congestion on SH1 through town is clearly high, and many people want to see a second bridge and/or a bypass through the town: some of the survey respondents were keen for this to be Ashburton District Council's priority ahead of public transport. The project has fortunately been retained in the Draft Government Policy Statement on land transport, published in March 2024, with the statement *"The Government has identified a number of other projects it wants to progress in this GPS period. These include a number of Roads of Regional Significance, such as the Second Ashburton Bridge "* (p. 12, Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa, March 2024). Addressing traffic volumes and congestion through the town was seen to indirectly address transport need for some sectors of the population. Reduced traffic volumes would make the town more appealing / safer for cyclists and would be easier for older drivers

who are nervous / have lost confidence at the wheel or are suffering reduced mobility. Others want to see rates spent on improving the condition of roads and footpaths. Again, such improvements are likely to make the town more walkable and bikeable, addressing transport barriers for some, though road works in themselves also seem to be a source of considerable frustration for some members of the community.

Any public transport solution for Ashburton is likely to be more favourably received if it requires minimal financial input from Council rates and can be enabled through a combination of user pays, regional council (ECAN) and any other available central government resourcing via Waka Kotahi.

As indicated earlier, the present research identified a willingness to pay more for public transport options than is charged for the buses in either Greater Christchurch or Timaru. Survey findings indicated that the mean expected cost per trip for community-e-scooters or bikes was around \$4.60-4:80, with some respondents expecting this to be free, but a large number suggesting this should be user-pays, in line with costs of Lime scooter or bike hire elsewhere. Mean expected costs for a bus to / from special events in Ashburton was just under \$5, for a bus on a designated route on weekdays \$4.60 and around \$4.80 for a My Way -type bus that is booking based and door to door. Expected bus rates were similar for weekends, while for an evening bus service to access dining and entertainment was expected to cost around \$6.25 on average. Potential users seem prepared to pay a larger proportion of the real costs of public transport in Ashburton, with Council therefore needing to pay less (if public transport is put in place) than is the case in other nearby centres.



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## Appendix A

### Demand for different transport options – Survey findings

	NEVER	3 TIMES+ PER WEEK	1-2 TIMES PER WEEK	ONCE EVERY 2-4 WEEKS	LESS THAN ONCE A MONTH	TOTAL
Community e-bike (low / no cost)	65.00% 260	9.50% 38	8.00% 32	8.25% 33	9.25% 37	400
Community e-scooter (low / no cost)	60.86% 241	12.37% 49	10.10% 40	7.58% 30	9.09% 36	396
Van or bus with designated pick-up / drop-off points to get to specific large community events (eg. A & P Show, Market day, Waitangi Celebrations)	37.98% 158	9.86% 41	13.22% 55	12.02% 50	26.92% 112	416
Shopper's bus / van to/from main shopping areas in town centre and suburban areas of Ashburton - weekday mornings - regular pick-up / drop-off points through township	40.48% 168	13.25% 55	18.80% 78	11.81% 49	15.66% 65	415
Shopper's bus / van to/from main shopping areas in town centre and suburban areas of Ashburton - weekday afternoons - regular pick-up / drop-off points through township	41.41% 164	11.87% 47	20.45% 81	13.38% 53	12.88% 51	396
Shopper's bus / van to/from main shopping areas in town centre and suburban areas of Ashburton - weekday mornings - pre-book door-to-door within township	50.78% 195	10.16% 39	15.10% 58	8.07% 31	15.89% 61	384
Shopper's bus / van to/from main shopping areas in town centre and suburban areas of Ashburton - weekday afternoons - regular pick-up / drop-off points through township	44.90% 176	11.48% 45	18.37% 72	11.22% 44	14.03% 55	392
Shopper's bus / van to/from main shopping areas in town centre and suburban areas of Ashburton - Saturdays - regular pick-up / drop-off points through township	49.74% 190	7.07% 27	15.71% 60	12.30% 47	15.18% 58	382
Shopper's bus / van to/from main shopping areas in town centre and suburban areas of Ashburton - Saturdays - pre-book door-to-door within township	56.23% 212	6.10% 23	10.61% 40	13.00% 49	14.06% 53	377
Dining and entertainment bus / van from various pick-up/drop-off points through town, running to centre of Ashburton town in evenings - Friday-Saturday	40.31% 156	5.68% 22	11.37% 44	18.86% 73	23.77% 92	387
Increase number of existing Taxi / taxi vans- Total Mobility	57.22% 214	5.61% 21	8.02% 30	10.96% 41	18.18% 68	374
More wheelchair taxi vans - Total Mobility	81.52% 300	3.26% 12	2.72% 10	3.80% 14	8.70% 32	368
Existing Taxi / taxi van- Ministry of Education	79.61% 289	5.51% 20	2.75% 10	3.58% 13	8.54% 31	363
Existing Taxi - full fare	61.48% 225	3.83% 14	2.73% 10	6.28% 23	25.68% 94	366
Existing courtesy vans	56.55% 203	5.85% 21	3.62% 13	8.08% 29	25.91% 93	359
Van / bus to and from schools in Ashburton township from key drop-off / pick-up points throughout township	75.68% 280	11.89% 44	3.24% 12	3.78% 14	5.41% 20	370
Car or van available for trip-by trip use by individuals, whānau/families or community groups	66.21% 243	5.72% 21	5.72% 21	5.72% 21	16.62% 61	367