

## Chapter Three – Public Involvement

A key component of the TDP update is engaging the community. It is difficult to plan for enhancements to a transit system without knowing what the users and potential users of the system want and need. As part of this update, a Public Involvement Plan (PIP) was developed and reviewed by the transit provider, St. Johns County, and FDOT. The PIP noted that input would be collected through four primary means, including:

- Stakeholder Meetings
- Household Telephone Survey
- On-Board Ridership Survey
- Staff Meetings

The PIP is included in Appendix A.

### Sunshine Bus On-Board Ridership Survey

On-board bus surveys were conducted between January 18<sup>th</sup> and January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011. The purpose of these surveys was to gauge satisfaction with current Sunshine Bus service and to elicit opinion from current system users regarding service improvement(s). Each bus route was ridden a minimum of once, and every rider was asked to complete a survey. The time of day that the surveys were collected varied, with the earliest surveys collected on the 8:20 am Teal route and the latest surveys collected on the 5:30 pm Teal route.

A total of one hundred and twenty four (124) surveys were collected from Sunshine Bus riders. Table 3-1 shows the number of surveys collected on each route.

*Table 3-1: Number of Surveys Collected by Route*

Route	# of Surveys Collected	% of Total
Teal	13	10%
Purple	30	24%
Green	14	11%
Orange	15	12%
Blue	19	15%
Red	24	19%
Connector	9	7%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>100%</b>

Riders were given the option of having the survey administered to them or filling out the survey individually. The majority of riders chose to take the survey; however, some riders declined to provide their input. Some surveys had missing responses. All input provided were incorporated into this analysis.

The results of the surveys have been aggregated in order to uncover patterns in how the Sunshine Bus service is being used, what improvements riders would like to see in the service, and how satisfied riders are with the current service provided. These results are discussed more in-depth below.

**RIDERSHIP DEMOGRAPHICS**

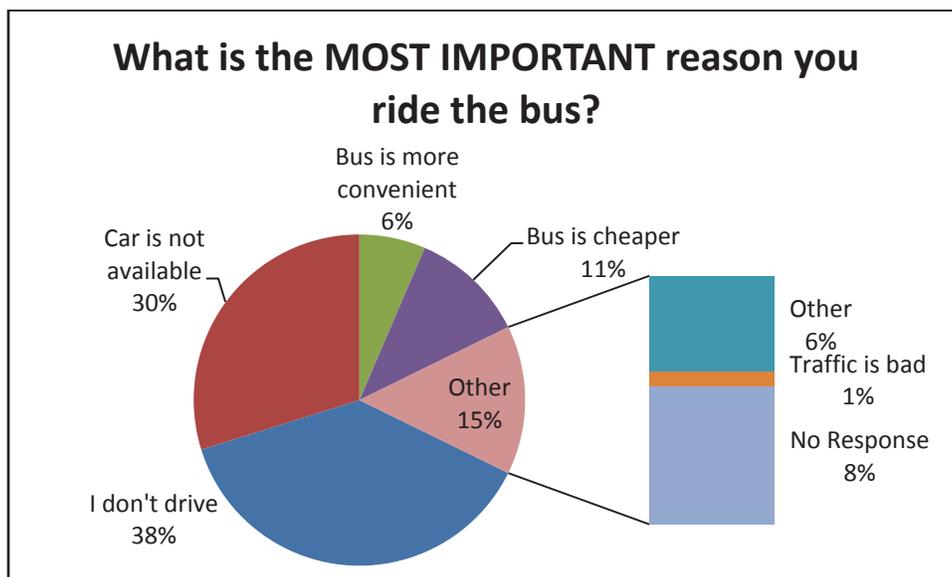
When asked about their ethnic heritage, the predominant answers were: 55% of riders said they are ‘White’ (68 respondents); 37% answered ‘Black/ African American’ (38 respondents); 6% said ‘Hispanic’ (8 respondents); and 2% said they are ‘Native American’ (3 respondents).

The majority of riders (75%) said they don’t speak any other languages besides English at home. Of those that do speak other languages at home, Spanish was the most commonly listed language.

**WHY USE SUNSHINE BUS?**

Almost 70% of respondents said that the *most important reason* they use Sunshine Bus is because they either don’t drive or do not have a car available. Less than 10% of riders are using the bus service for convenience reasons, including the bus being a more convenient mode or because of traffic. Eleven percent use the bus because of its cost-effectiveness. This data is summarized below in Figure 3.1.

*Figure 3.1: Most Important Reason for Using Sunshine Bus*



So how would riders make their trip if Sunshine Bus was not available? There was a mixture of responses to this question: 27% said they would travel by taxi; 18% said they would ride with someone; 23% said they would walk; 10% said they would bicycle; and 5% said they would drive. Fifteen percent of respondents would not be able to make their trip if not for Sunshine Bus, as shown in Table 3-2.

Table 3-2: Alternative travel modes riders would use

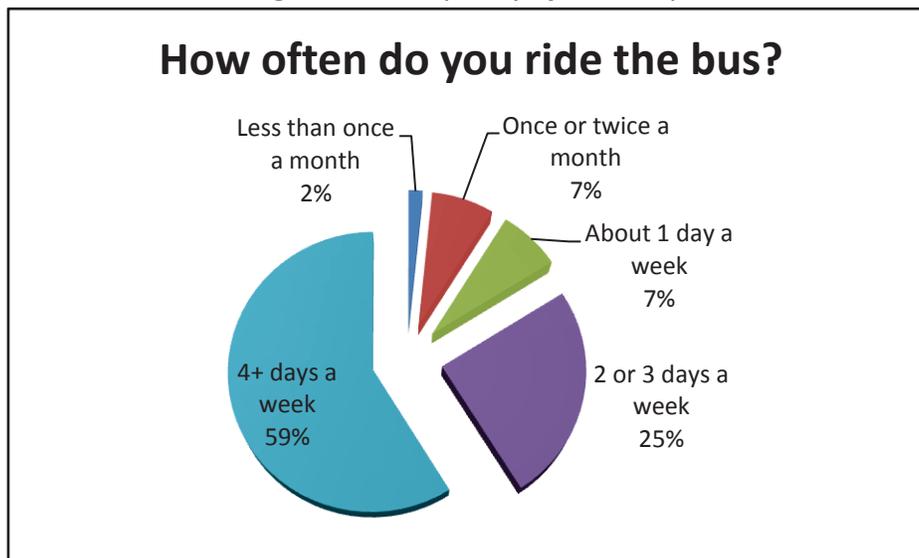
How would you make trip if not for Sunshine Bus?	
Taxi	27%
Walk	23%
Ride With Someone	18%
Wouldn't Make Trip	15%
Bicycle	10%
Drive	5%
Other	2%
No Response	2%

USE OF SUNSHINE BUS SERVICE

*Frequency*

As shown Figure 3.2, the majority of the riders (59%) are frequent riders, riding 4 or more days a week. Twenty five percent ride the Sunshine Bus 2-3 days per week. Twenty five percent ride the Sunshine Bus 2-3 days per week.

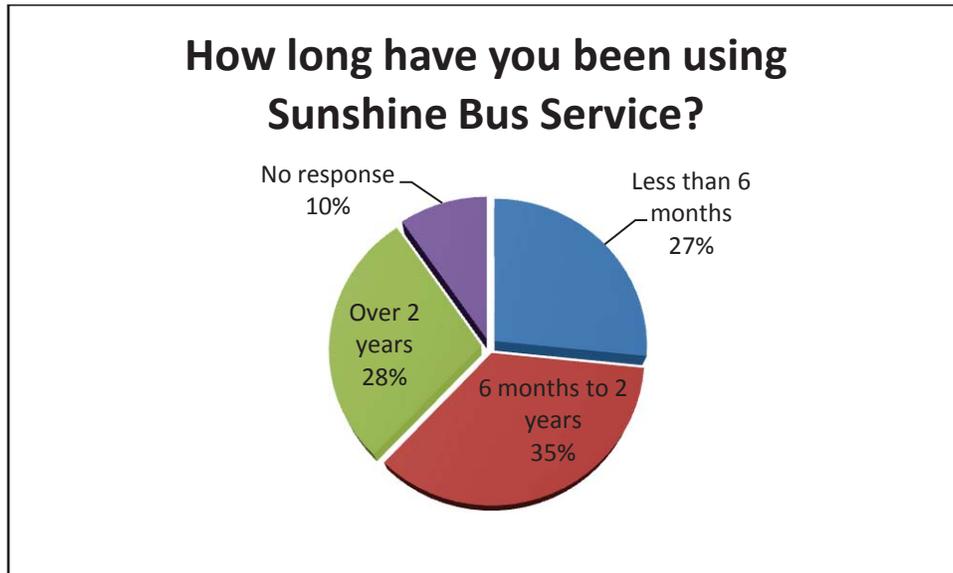
Figure 3.2: Frequency of Ridership



### *Length of Use*

Approximately a third of respondents (35%) have been using the Sunshine Bus service for between 6 months and 2 years. 28% have been using Sunshine Bus for more than two years and about the same amount (27%) have used the bus service for less than 6 months, as shown in Figure 3.3.

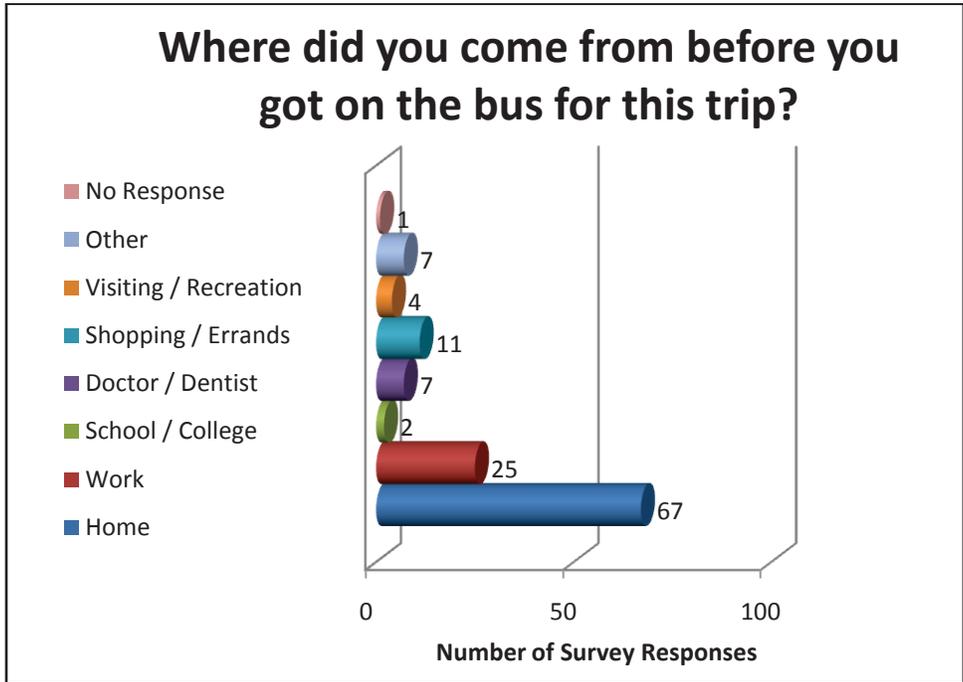
*Figure 3.3: Length of Time Using Sunshine Bus*



### *Trip Origin & Destination*

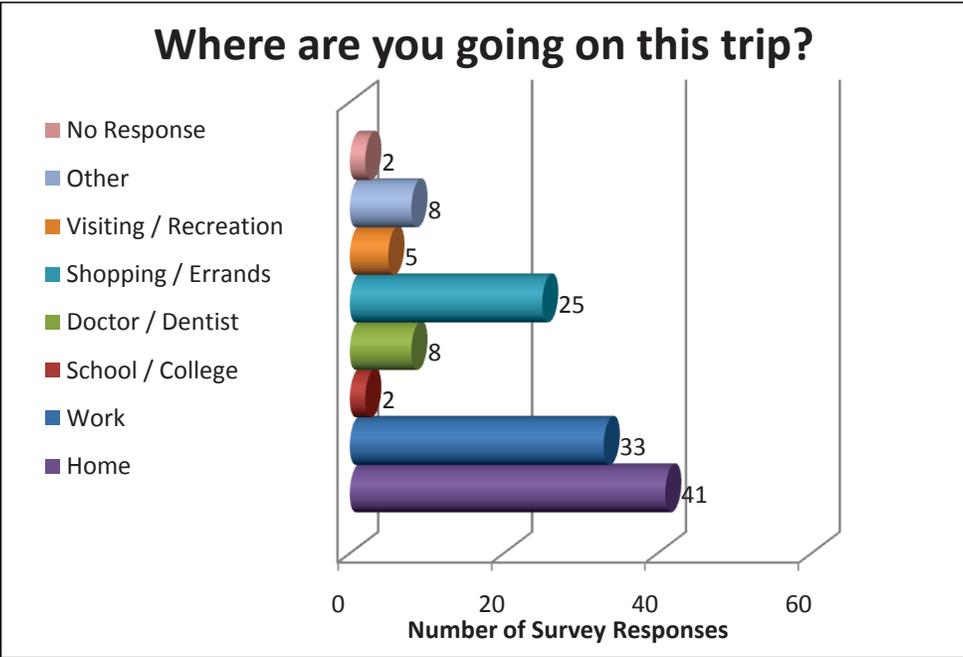
Most of the riders (54%) came from home before getting on the Sunshine Bus. Twenty percent of riders came from work, and 9% came from going shopping or doing errands, as shown below in Figure 3.4.

*Figure 3.4: Trip Origination Responses*



Approximately a third of riders were going home, 27% were going to work, and 20% were going shopping or running errands. This data is shown below in Figure 3.5.

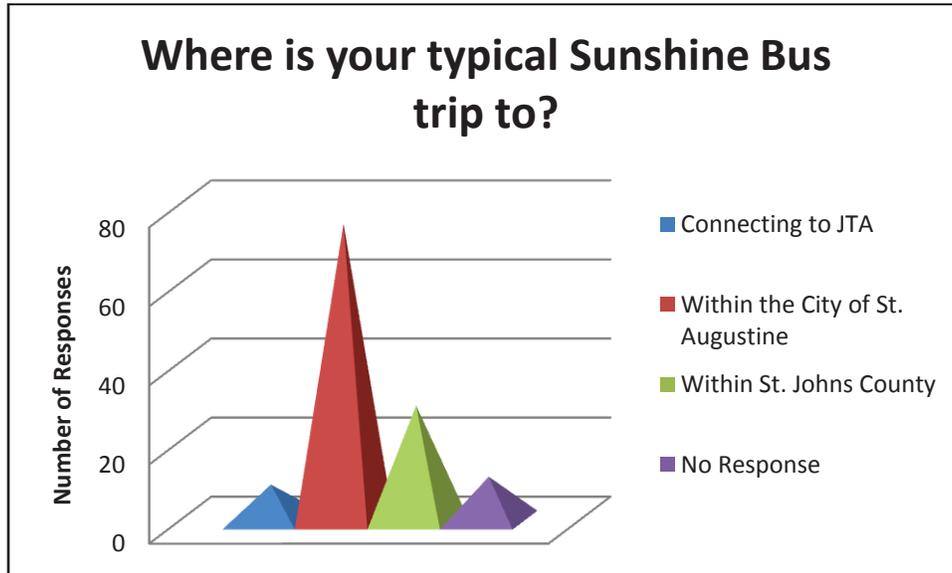
Figure 3.5: Trip Destination Responses



*Trip Geography*

Riders were asked whether their typical trips were in the City of St. Augustine, St. Johns County, or connecting to the Jacksonville Transportation Authority (JTA), and of the 90% that responded, the majority said they were within the city (60%). Approximately a quarter (23%) said their trips were within the county. Only seven percent said they typically connect to JTA. These results are depicted below in Figure 3.6.

Figure 3.6: Typical trip destination



### Customer Service Contact

The vast majority of riders are not contacting Sunshine Bus' Customer Service for a route deviation. Only 13% said they contact Sunshine Bus' Customer Service for a route deviation for 25% or more of their trips.

### SATISFACTION WITH CURRENT SERVICE

Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with various aspects of the Sunshine Bus service on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very unsatisfied, 3 being neutral, and 5 being very satisfied. Therefore, the lower the aggregate score is for a particular aspect of service, the lower the overall satisfaction is from survey respondents.

An average score was calculated for each service characteristic. This calculation excluded any missing responses, which yields a score that is easy to compare between service characteristics. Below is the listing of average scores for each characteristic from highest to lowest. As stated above, a 5 (very satisfied) is the highest number of points possible and a 1 (very unsatisfied) is the lowest. The results are shown below in Table 3-3.

Table 3-3: Satisfaction Ratings for Bus Survey Characteristics by Average Score

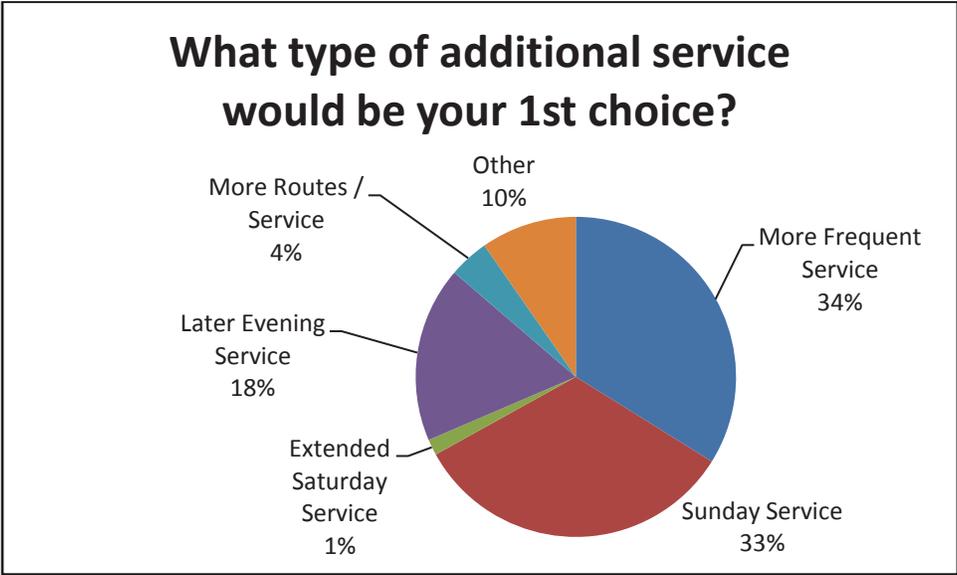
Characteristic of Bus Service	Average Score
Value of bus fare (service you get for what you pay)	4.80
The bus driver's ability to drive the bus	4.61
How easy it is to GET bus route and schedule information	4.58
Temperature inside the buses	4.54
The bus driver's courtesy	4.43
Overall Satisfaction with Sunshine Bus	4.46
Safety at the bus stop	4.40
How easy it is to USE bus route and schedule information	4.37
How clean the buses and bus stops are	4.32
The ability to get to where you want to go	4.28
The number of designated bus stops along the route	4.24
The time of day the EARLIEST buses run	4.11
The time a bus trip takes	3.94
How easy it is to transfer between Sunshine buses	3.93
Sunshine Bus' telephone customer survey	3.76
How easy it is to transfer to Jacksonville Transportation Authority	3.75
How often buses run	3.44
The time of day the LATEST buses run	2.98

The averaging of the scores show that in general, participants are at best very satisfied with the Sunshine Bus service (score of 5) and at worst neutral (score of 3) about some characteristics of service. However, no characteristics of service scored below the neutral range, indicating general overall satisfaction from bus survey respondents.

#### DESIRED SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

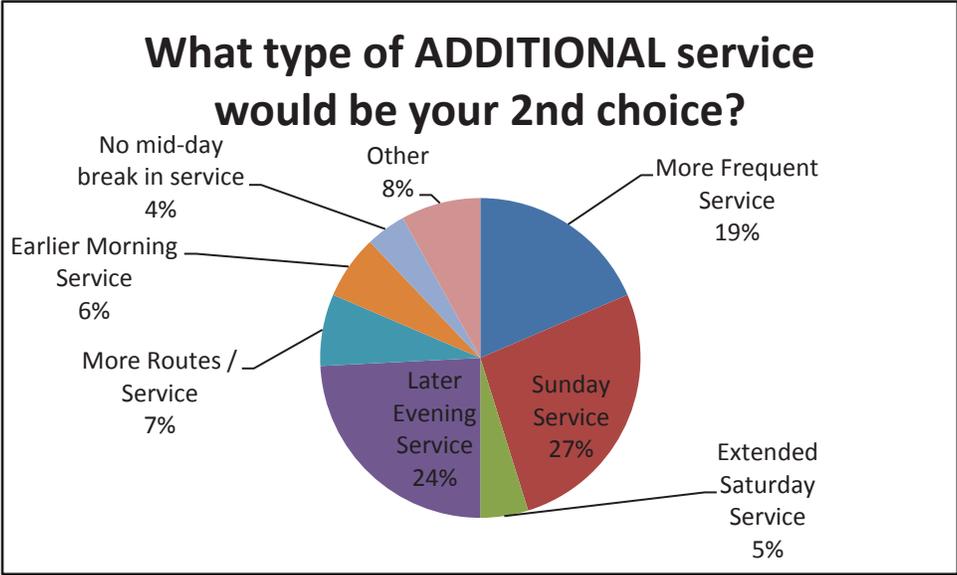
As illustrated in Figure 3.7, when asked what additional service would be their first choice, the leading responses were more frequent service and Sunday service. The next most popular response was later evening service. (Ending times suggested varied between 7 p.m. to 11 p.m.). Ten percent preferred extended Saturday service.

Figure 3.7: 1<sup>st</sup> Choice for Additional Services



When asked what additional service would be their second choice, 24% said later evening service; 15% said more frequent service; 13% said Sunday service; 9% said more routes; and 7% asked for no mid-day break in service. This is illustrated in Figure 3.8.

Figure 3.8: 2<sup>nd</sup> Choice for Additional Services



The primary purpose of this study was to discover the public's knowledge about and attitudes toward the St. Johns County Council on Aging and the Sunshine Bus Company and the services these entities provide. The research can be divided into several more specific areas:

- Measuring the level of awareness within St. Johns County for both the Council on Aging (COA) and the Sunshine Bus Company
- Determine the level of usage for the services that the COA provides
- Determine reasons for not using the services provided
- Find which ideas are more likely to increase the use of these services
- Evaluate the levels of importance regarding public transportation
- Determine how the COA and Sunshine Bus Company are regarded in terms of service and value to entire community
- Measure advertising effectiveness
- Determine attitudes about public transportation in general
- Create a demographic profile of the respondents

A research consultant, Ulrich Research Services of Orange Park, Florida, was contracted to conduct the survey. Data was collected via telephone surveys between February 24<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of 2011. The requested sample size was 150 respondents, of which they all were required to be age 18 or older. The average interview lasted between 8 and 15 minutes and consisted of 33 questions. The results were compiled using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software, and the range of error is +/-8% at a 95% level of confidence.

A summary of the respondent profile is below:

- A total of 150 St. Johns County residents were interviewed
- Respondents were generally white (86%), with 6% African American, 5% Asian, and 3% other minorities
- Nearly all (96%) reported to be year-round residents
- Nearly two-thirds (64%) are not employed outside the home, which is reflective of a high retirement population residing in St. Johns County
- The majority (86%) have an annual household income of \$30,000 or more
- The overall level of education is high, with 71% had attended at least some college, 42% achieving an Associate or Bachelor degree and 12% holding a Masters or PhD
- Most respondents did not have a child 8-18 in the home (74%)
- The majority have someone 65 or over living in their household (72%)
- Nearly all respondents (95%) have an automobile available for their use, indicating a population that is not dependent on public transportation

## Summary of Findings

The St. Johns County Council on Aging (COA) and the Sunshine Bus Company both are well-known within St. Johns County. The Sunshine Bus Company easily had the highest unaided awareness of any transportation company in the survey (58%) as well as the highest total awareness (90%). The COA had the second highest unaided awareness of organizations serving St. Johns County (30%) and had a total awareness of 89%.

59% of respondents were able to name at least one service provided by the COA or Sunshine Bus Company. The services most likely to be mentioned were Sunshine Bus Company (25%), Elderly Transportation Service (17%), and Bus Service (16%). The level of awareness mentioned above is especially impressive considering that only 11% of those surveyed had ridden on a COA vehicle previously and only 10% of those surveyed had a family member who had used COA services.

However, this is contrasted against 80% of those surveyed not being able to recall any ads for anything relating to public transportation. Of those that recalled seeing advertising, 8% were in magazines, 5% in newspapers, and 4% the sides of transit vehicles.

COA services were rated highly by those who felt comfortable rating said services, with 39% rating the services as 'good' or 'very good,' while only 3% rated the services as 'poor' or 'very poor'. 51% were unable to give a general overall rating of COA services

Respondents looked very favorably on the value of a \$1 fare for a one-way ticket on the Sunshine Bus. 60% of those surveyed stated it was a 'very good' value and 19% stated that the value was 'good'. No respondent stated the value was 'poor' and only 6% rated the value as 'average'.

There was strong consensus on three strategies as the best way to improve St. Johns County's transportation system. The strategy that was most often thought of as the most important was "Expand public transportation services" (30%), however only 83% of respondents found this strategy to be 'very important' or 'somewhat important'. "Improve pedestrian facilities...and safety features" was the strategy most likely to be found 'very important' or 'somewhat important' (92%) but was only the second most likely strategy to be thought of as the most important (28%).

Among those surveyed, 90% agreed public transportation is an important service, 87% agreed that it should be improved to reduce congestion, and 86% agreed that it is important to the local economy. As expected, those surveyed were much more likely to agree with the importance of having a good public transportation system than to agree with the need to pay taxes to support such a system. But, even so, 52% agreed that taxpayer funding for transit services should be increased.

The telephone survey questionnaire can be found in Appendix A and a summary of the survey results are included in Appendix B.

## **Stakeholder and Staff Meetings**

As part of the TDP update, meetings were held with Sunshine Bus operators, St. Johns County Council on Aging (COA) staff, the local workforce board (WorkSource), and St. Johns County Commissioner Ken Bryan, who chairs the Transportation Disadvantaged Local Coordinating Board. Comments received during these meetings were similar to those collected from the public, with one key exception. While many in the public like the current flag-down system, the bus operators are very concerned about the safety of the passengers and schedule adherence and feel that designating stops is a necessity.

## **Public Meeting**

Finally, a general open-house style public meeting was held on June 21<sup>st</sup> to present the findings of the study and proposed enhancements to the transit system. The meeting was held at the COA's River House from 4pm – 6pm with notices posted on buses, on the North Florida TPO website, and in the Str. Augustine Record (advertisement included in Appendix C). In addition, a copy of the presentation made for the meeting was posted on the North Florida TPO website and the comment period was left open until July 5<sup>th</sup>. No comments were received on the website, at the meeting, or through any of the contact persons.