



Northwest Ohio and the Need for High-Speed Passenger Rail Connections

Survey Report 2023



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Introduction

About the Ability Center of Greater Toledo

The Ability Center of Greater Toledo is a Center for Independent Living located in northwest Ohio serving Lucas, Wood, Ottawa, Fulton, Henry, Defiance, and Williams counties. The Ability Center advocates, educates, partners, and provides services supporting people with disabilities to thrive within their community. The Ability Center's programs are aimed at creating greater independence and stronger connection to the community. Programs include Advocacy, Assistance Dogs, Community Living, Assistive Technology and Medical Equipment, Home Accessibility, Information and Referral, and Youth and Transition Services.

Participant Groups and Partners

We would like to thank those individuals and partners who participated in this survey. The following organizations partnered with us to promote our survey:

- Destination Toledo
- City of Toledo
- NOPRA
- All Aboard Ohio
- Jerry Wicks; BGSU Sociology Professor
- TMACOG Passenger Rail Committee
- Disability Advisory Council
- The University of Toledo: Disability Studies Program
- The Sight Center of Northwest Ohio
- The Access Center for Independent Living (ACILs)
- The Center for Disability Empowerment
- The Center for Independent Living Options (CILO)
- The Independent Living Center of North Central Ohio (ILCNO)
- Linking Employment, Abilities, and Potential (LEAP)
- Mid-Ohio Board for an Independent Living Environment (MOBILE)
- Services for Independent Living (SIL)
- Society for Equal Access (SEAILC)
- Southeastern Ohio Center for Independent Living (SOCIL)
- Tri-County Independent Living Center (TCILC)
- Western Reserve Independent Living Center (WRILC)

Passenger Rail System First Steps

In 2023, Governor Mike DeWine approved an application for funding from the Biden Administration to study and develop a passenger rail system in Ohio. A Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, and Dayton corridor has been designated; and though we believe this corridor will be extremely beneficial to Ohioans with disabilities who currently struggle to access transportation systems and services, we developed a survey that collected data on the need to increase more connections across Northwest Ohio. The Ability Center of Greater Toledo is hoping, with the help of disability advocates across NW Ohio, that more corridors will be designated for study while funding opportunities for inter-city passenger rail development is available.

Executive Summary

From April to the end of June of 2023, The Ability Center of Greater Toledo conducted a study to determine the need for more passenger rail connections throughout NW Ohio. The goal of the survey was to investigate the public's interest in having a passenger rail system that connects to more regions of NW Ohio, as well as to analyze the benefits of greater passenger rail connections for Ohioans with disabilities.

The survey focuses on the development of a passenger rail system that connects NW Ohio to other major cities in our region, and feedback was gathered on a mix of 10 close and open-ended questions. The survey was conducted for little over two months and grossed over 500 responses from both individuals with and without disabilities across all age groups.

Conclusions

Upon reviewing the open—ended survey results, NW Ohio's need for a modernized transportation system (high—speed passenger rail) was broken down into four general conclusions: 1) There is a strong interest in increased passenger rail in NW Ohio from residents with and without disabilities amongst adults aged 25 through 65+. This is true even from respondents who do not use public transit regularly.; 2) NW Ohio Residents with and without disabilities would like to be connected by inter-city rail to all major cities in Ohio and Southern Michigan, **especially Columbus**; 3) Increased Inter-City Rail Connections would benefit NW Ohio's Cultural, Social, and Economic Connections; 4) The current Inter-City Rail Connections do not meet those needs because they are limited in availability, slow, expensive, and not accessible to people with disabilities.

Question Results

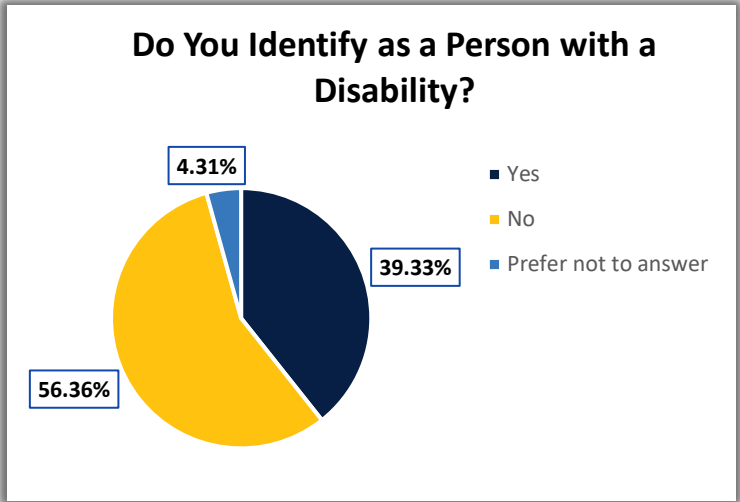
The Ability Center of Greater Toledo received 513 responses to 10 questions and all respondents are residents of the Northwest Ohio region.

The survey sought to identify the need for high—speed passenger rail connections across Northwest Ohio to increase transportation access for individuals with disabilities in our communities, as well as to provide benefits to all Ohioans living within the targeted region (NW Ohio). Historically, Ohio’s transportation systems and services have been underfunded and underserved, and barriers to current transportation systems and services in NW Ohio continue to limit the ability of individuals with disabilities to participate fully in community life. Therefore, we conducted this survey to gauge the public’s interest and need for high—speed passenger rail connections across NW Ohio that would combat the current barriers to transportation access.

The major conclusions identified through quantitative and qualitative data collection indicated the following: 1) There is a strong interest in increased passenger rail in NW Ohio from residents with and without disabilities amongst adults aged 25 through 65+. This is true even from respondents who do not use public transit regularly.; 2) NW Ohio Residents with and without disabilities would like to be connected by inter-city rail to all major cities in Ohio and Southern Michigan, **especially Columbus**; 3) Increased Inter-City Rail Connections would benefit NW Ohio’s Cultural, Social, and Economic Connections; 4) The current Inter-City Rail Connections do not meet those needs because they are limited in availability, slow, expensive, and not accessible to people with disabilities.

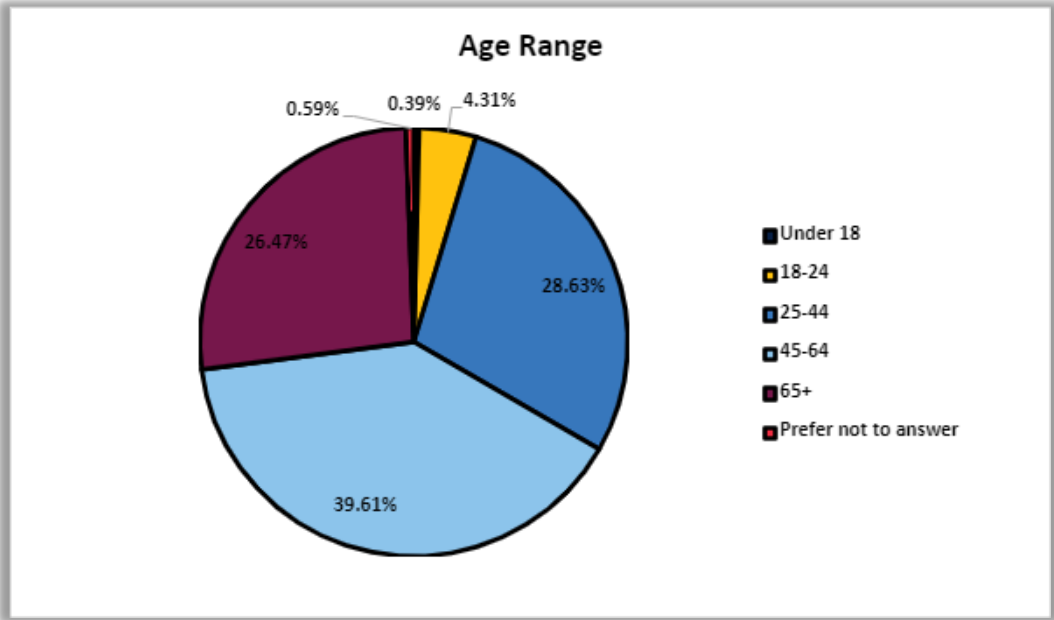
Disclosure of a Disability

According to the survey results, 39.33% (201 respondents of 513) stated they identify as having a disability. 56.36% (288 respondents of 513) stated they do not identify as having a disability. 4.31% (22 respondents of 513) stated they preferred not to answer.



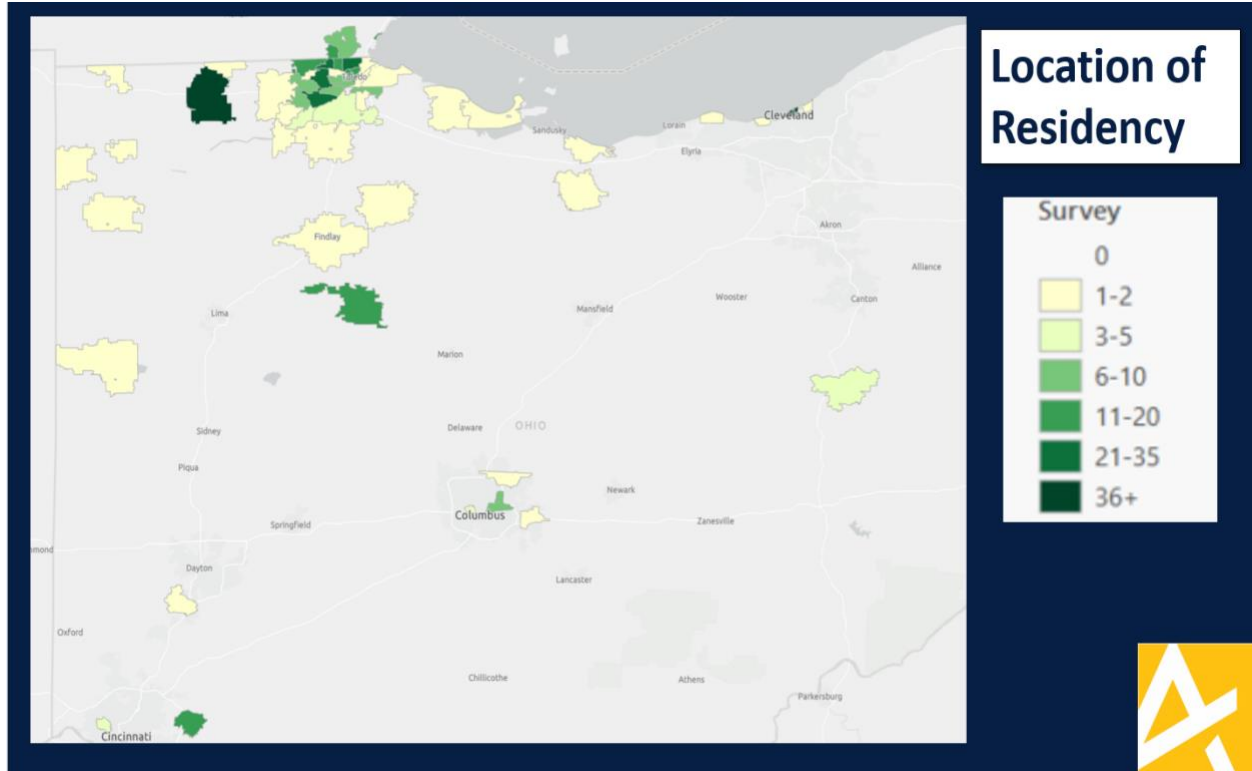
Indication of Age

According to the survey results, 0.39% of respondents were under the age of 18; 4.31% of respondents were between the ages of 18-24; 28.63% of respondents were between the ages of 25-44; 39.61% of respondents were between the ages of 45-64; and 26.47% were aged 65 and older.



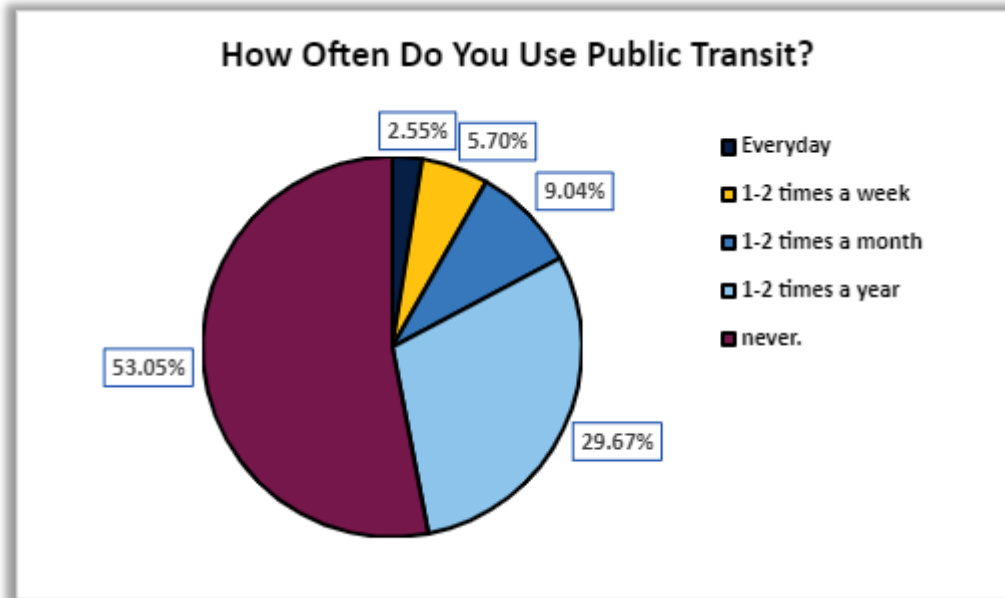
Zip Code

According to the survey, 506 of the 513 respondents indicated they lived within the NW Ohio region.



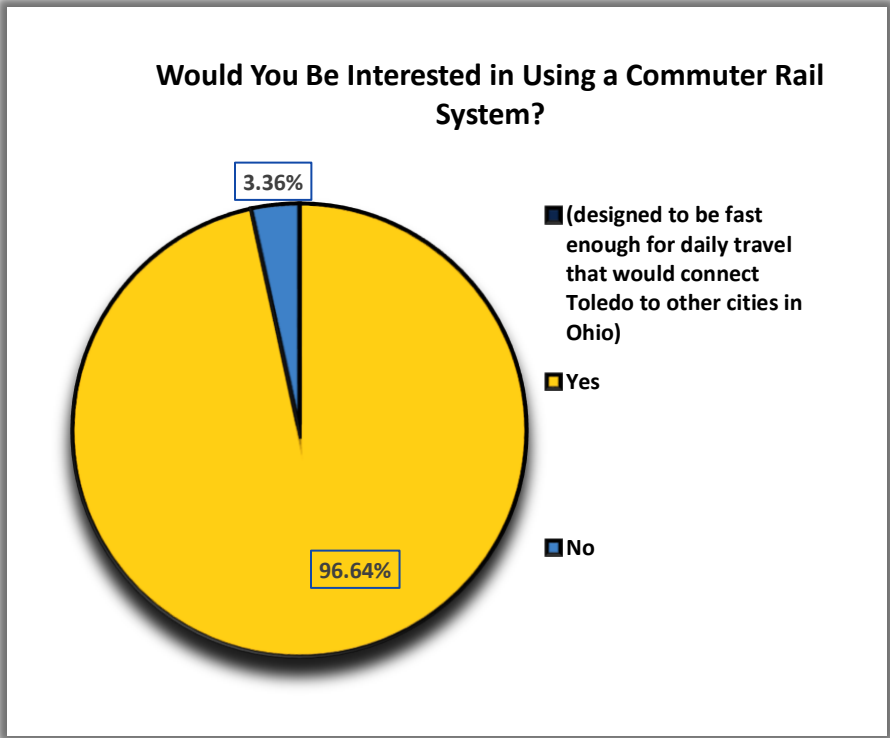
Current Trends in Usage of Public Transit for Individuals with and without Disabilities in NW Ohio

According to the survey results, 2.55% stated they used public transit every day; 5.70% stated they used public transit 1—2 times per week; 9.04% stated they used public transit 1—2 times per month; 29.67% stated they used public transit 1—2 times a year; and 53.05% stated they never use public transit.



Interest in Utilizing a High—Speed Passenger Rail System that would Connect Toledo to Other Cities in NW Ohio

According to the survey results, 96.64% of respondents stated they would use a high—speed passenger rail system that would connect Toledo to other cities in NW Ohio if it was available to them. Only 3.36% stated they would not use a high—speed passenger rail system if it was available to them.

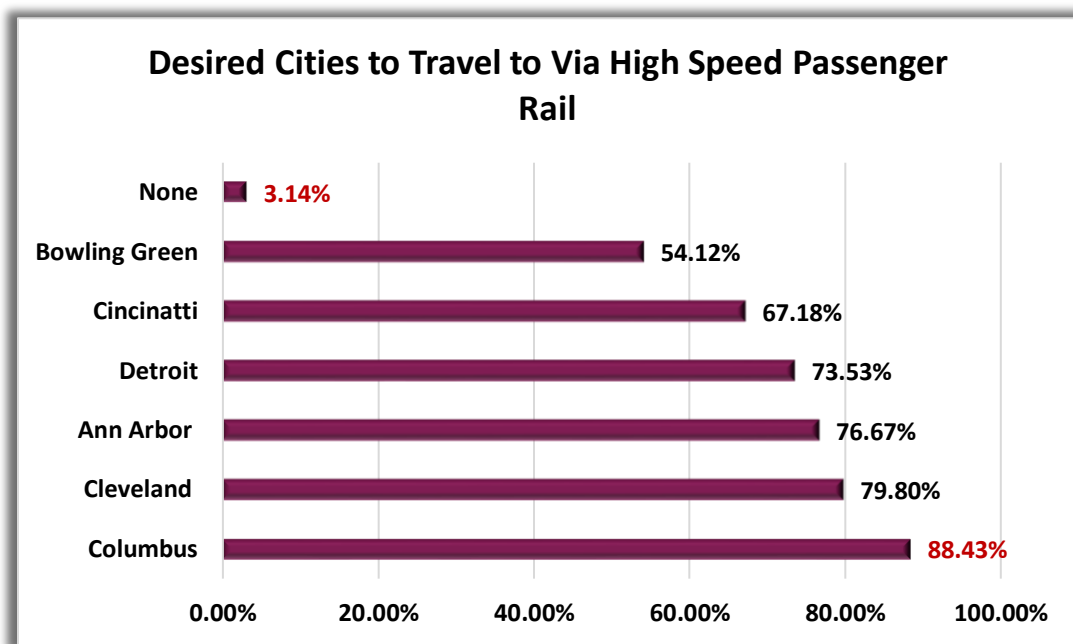


Representative Quotes:

- "I would seriously use it all the time."
- "I would use it as a part of a broader transportation system."
- "I would actually take the passenger rail for almost everything!"

Desired Cities to Travel to via a High—Speed Passenger Rail System Throughout NW Ohio

According to the survey, 88.43% of respondents want a high-speed passenger rail connection from Toledo to Columbus; 79.80% of respondents want a high-speed passenger rail connection from Toledo to Cleveland; 76.67% of respondents want a high-speed passenger rail connection from Toledo to Ann Arbor; 73.53% of respondents want a high-speed passenger rail connection from Toledo to Detroit; 67.84% of respondents want a high-speed passenger rail connection from Toledo to Cincinnati; 54.12% of respondents want a high-speed passenger rail connection from Toledo to Bowling Green; And 3.14% do not want a high-speed passenger rail connection to any of the cities previously listed.

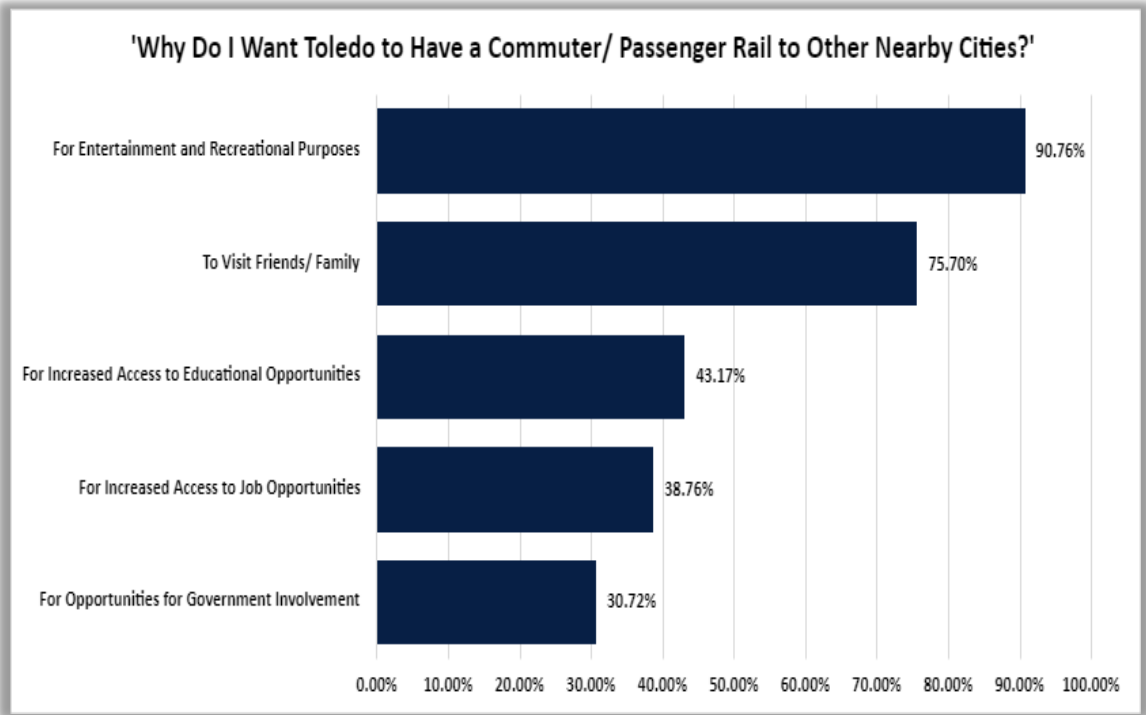


Representative quotes:

- “I would love to travel to other cities in Ohio for the weekend. I would like to travel for my adult son with a disability who does not drive.”
- “Going to Columbus for government involvement opportunities.”
- “To visit the capital to engage in state politics. To visit Cleveland/Cincinnati for conferences and to network with other activists.”
- “I would take it to Columbus routinely, along with other major cities.”
- “Primarily, I would likely use a passenger rail system to make it easier to get to other areas in Ohio—to see friends and family and explore more of Ohio. Currently, there are very few direct routes to the different cities in Ohio. I cannot get from Bowling Green to Columbus easily at all.”

Reasonings for Wanting/Needing a High—Speed Passenger Rail Connection to Nearby Cities in NW Ohio

According to the survey, 90.76% of respondents want a high-speed passenger rail connection to nearby cities in NW Ohio for entertainment purposes; 75.70% of respondents want a high-speed passenger rail connection to nearby cities in NW Ohio to visit family and friends; 43.17% of respondents want a high-speed passenger rail connection to nearby cities in NW Ohio for access to educational opportunities; 38.76% of respondents want a high-speed passenger rail connection to nearby cities in NW Ohio for better access to job opportunities; And 30.72% of respondents want a high-speed passenger rail connection to nearby cities in NW Ohio to be more active in state government.



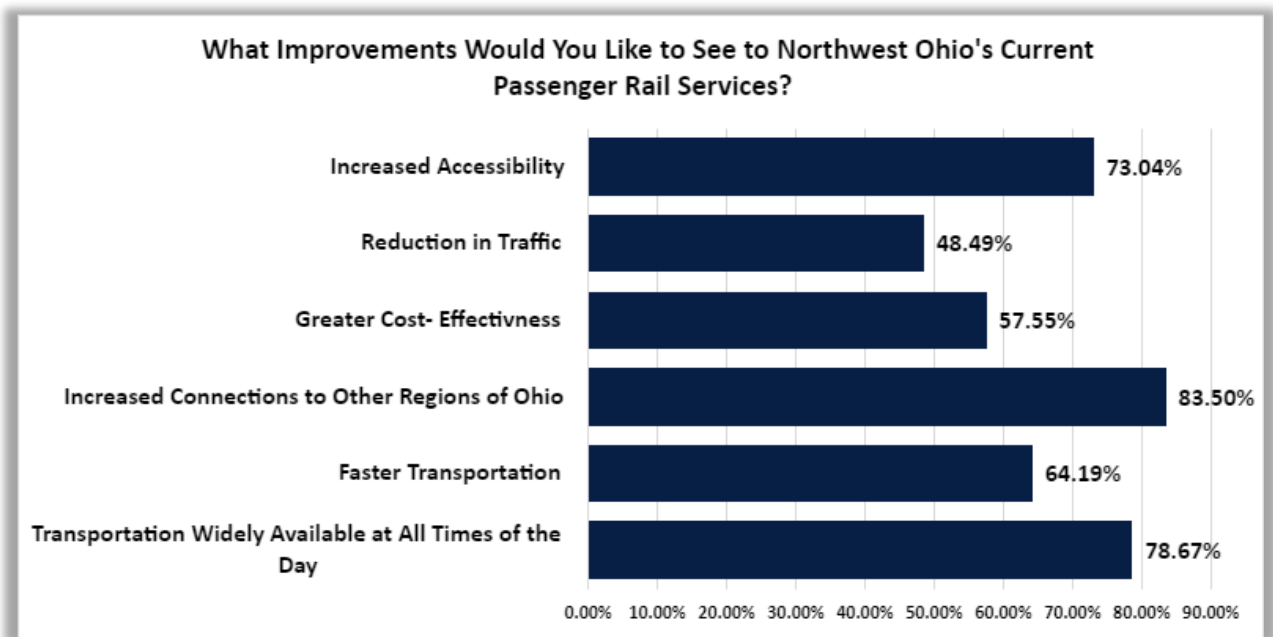
Representative Quotes:

- “I would utilize it for transportation to and from professional conferences and meetings in other cities in Ohio, such as Bowling Green and Columbus.”
- “To travel beyond Toledo.”
- “If I had easier and inexpensive access, I would get out more, have more opportunities to make money, and access to additional education.”
- “We have a young man with cerebral palsy who travels in a wheelchair. Having available rail transportation would make our frequent visits to doctors and therapists less stressful.”

- “I would rather take the train for meetings in the capital than drive. I would be able to visit family without driving as well.”
- “It would be very cool to have public transportation to other major cities in NW Ohio to reduce our driving time and be able to travel more freely without the use of vehicles.”
- “Commute to work, encourage friends both able and disabled to join me on trips to visit places for entertainment purposes, we could all travel together!”
- “It would make visiting relatives easier, especially the ones who don’t drive or don’t have a car.”
- “Travel more often for job opportunities, educational opportunities, and renewing connections with friends and family.”

Improvements to NW Ohio's Current Passenger Rail Systems and Services

Question 8 asked what improvements respondents would like to see to northwest Ohio's current passenger rails services. According to the survey, 83.50% of respondents want increased connections to other regions of Ohio; 78.67% of respondents want transportation that is widely available at all times of the day; 73.04% want increased accessibility to current passenger rail systems and services in Ohio; 64.19% of respondents want faster transportation; 57.55% of respondents want a passenger rail system that is more cost-effective; and 48.49% of respondents want a passenger rail system that would reduce traffic.

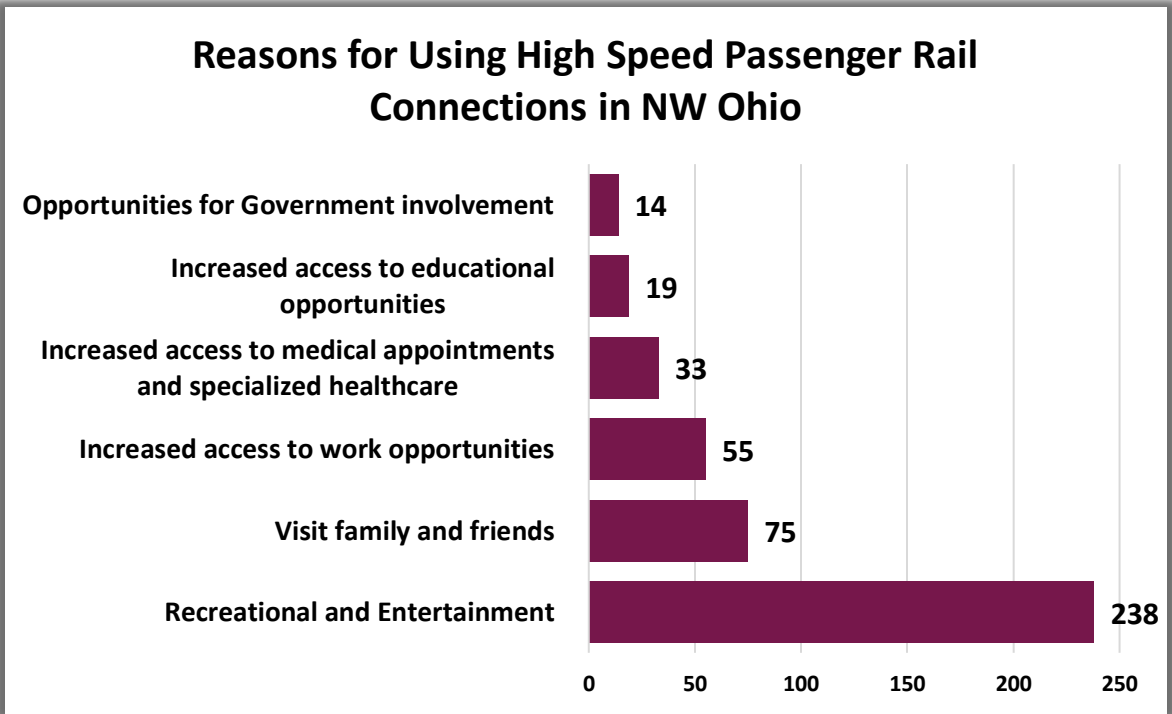


Representative Quotes:

- “I would use it to travel without the hassle of the expressway.”
- “Less road travel, traffic, congestion, risks of road rage, save wear and tear on my vehicle, and better for the environment.”
- “I seriously would use it every day, lack of public transit is honestly horrifying to me. I can't afford coastal living but the cities, especially on the east coast, make life without a car possible. Right now, in Ohio I feel very limited and trapped. Getting better public transit will help everyone.”

Reasons for Using a High-Speed Passenger Rail System

This portion of the survey was an open-ended question. We gathered 338 responses in this section and 6 key trends were highlighted as the most stated reasons why respondents would use a high-speed passenger system if it was developed across NW Ohio. The most common responses gathered were as follows: 1.) Respondents would utilize a high-speed passenger rail connection across NW Ohio for recreation and entertainment purposes; 2.) Respondents would utilize a high-speed passenger rail connection across NW Ohio to be able to more frequently visit family and friends in nearby cities; 3.) Respondents would utilize a high-speed passenger rail connection across NW Ohio to have increased access to work opportunities; 4.) Respondents would utilize a high-speed passenger rail connection across NW Ohio to have increased access to medical appointments and specialized healthcare in nearby cities; 5.) Respondents would utilize a high-speed passenger rail connection across NW Ohio to have increased access to educational opportunities; 6.) And respondents would utilize a high-speed passenger rail connection across NW Ohio to have access to opportunities government involvement.



Increased Access to Medical Appointments and Specialized Healthcare: After evaluating the responses given in the open-ended questions of the survey, we identified this theme to be included in the overall theme(s) of the survey despite it not being an option in our closed-ended questions.

Representative Quotes:

- “I would use it to get to areas of the state that I haven’t been able to get easily. If I want to attend an opportunity in Columbus, I don’t have a driver to get me there.”
- “Access to Cleveland Clinic, OSU, and U of M Health facilities, so don’t need to hire drivers and bill Medicaid for medical transportation. Also—entertainment options for those who can no longer drive safely or afford the gas.”
- “I would use the passenger rail system for my daughter with a disability to travel, visit family and have better access to other locations in Ohio for vacation.”
- “Ohio has so much to offer. As a homeschool parent, I would travel with my child to see other areas of the state more easily in one day. I also work, so I don’t have a lot of time to take extended trips.”

Interest in Participating in a High—Speed Passenger Rail Coalition

This portion of the survey was to gather individuals interested in advocating for a high-speed passenger rail system across NW Ohio. Of 186 individuals who responded to this question, 145 indicated they would join a passenger rail coalition to advocate for high-speed passenger rail connections throughout NW Ohio.

Closing

Methods

The Ability Center of Greater Toledo conducted a survey that focused on public interest and need of high-speed passenger rail connections in NW Ohio to understand how this modernization of transportation systems would benefit Ohioans with and without disabilities. The survey consisted of 10 questions total, of which 3 were open-ended and 7 were closed-ended questions. See Appendix A for a copy of the survey.

The survey was created using Survey Monkey. A link to the survey was emailed to various organizations and promoted via The Ability Center of Greater Toledo's social media accounts to increase respondent engagement. The survey was promoted for little over two months and grossed over 500 responses from residents of NW Ohio.

Data Analysis

Our study used both quantitative and qualitative methods: we promoted a survey that consisted of 10 questions total. The survey was promoted for little over two months from end of April to June of 2023, and collected over 500 responses from residents of Northwest Ohio.

This report was analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods with the assistance of SurveyMonkey. The survey consisted of 3 open-ended questions and 7 closed-ended questions, for a total of 10 questions. The open—ended questions were thoroughly read and analyzed for conclusions. The four main conclusions are as follows: 1) There is a strong interest in increased passenger rail in NW Ohio from residents with and without disabilities amongst adults aged 25 through 65+. This is true even from respondents who do not use public transit regularly.; 2) NW Ohio Residents with and without disabilities would like to be connected by inter-city rail to all major cities in Ohio and Southern Michigan, **especially Columbus**; 3) Increased Inter-City Rail Connections would benefit NW Ohio's Cultural, Social, and Economic Connections; 4) The current Inter-City Rail Connections do not meet those needs because they are limited in availability, slow, expensive, and not accessible to people with disabilities.

Recommendations and Analysis

After analyzing the survey for themes, four main conclusions emerged. These include: 1) There is a strong interest in increased passenger rail in NW Ohio from residents with and without disabilities amongst adults aged 25 through 65+. This is true even from respondents who do not

use public transit regularly.; 2) NW Ohio Residents with and without disabilities would like to be connected by inter-city rail to all major cities in Ohio and Southern Michigan, **especially Columbus**; 3) Increased Inter-City Rail Connections would benefit NW Ohio's Cultural, Social, and Economic Connections; 4) The current Inter-City Rail Connections do not meet those needs because they are limited in availability, slow, expensive, and not accessible to people with disabilities. Based on the results, we make the following recommendations:

Ohio needs to designate more corridors to connect Northwest Ohio region for the development of high—speed passenger rail connections so individuals with and without disabilities can have increased access to all aspects of community life, including but not limited to: For entertainment and recreation opportunities; To visit family and friends; For increased access to medical appointments and specialized healthcare in nearby cities; And for increased access to work opportunities in nearby cities.

Recreation and Entertainment

- Access to recreational and entertainment opportunities is the backbone of community life and integration. All people, with and without disabilities, benefit from access to recreational opportunities as it fosters feelings of belonging and decreases the negative impacts of social isolation. With a high—speed passenger rail system that connects all of NW Ohio, individuals with disabilities and those who currently are limited in their ability to participate in community life due to lack of current transit options, would be able to have greater choice in where they want to travel and where they spend their money and personal—time. Not only would increased high—speed passenger rail connections across NW Ohio increase the number of individuals traveling within the state, but it would increase the economic benefits of each region of NW Ohio as more individuals could quickly and freely travel from city to city for recreation and entertainment purposes.

Visit Family and Friends

- Having access to transit systems and services to visit family and friends is important to both individuals with and without disabilities. However, individuals with disabilities on average are more likely to go for longer periods of time without seeing family and friends due to the current barriers to transportation access that exist in Ohio's communities.
- A high—speed passenger rail system with connections across all of NW Ohio, would allow individuals with disabilities greater transportation access to more regions across the state; and consequently, increase their ability to independently visit family and friends in other cities in Ohio.

Increased Access to Medical Appointments and Specialized HealthCare

- Access to health care in the community is the center of independence for many people with disabilities. Barriers to healthcare access often begin with barriers to transportation; and therefore, it is important that Ohio consider how high—speed passenger rail connections across more regions of NW Ohio will provide individuals with disabilities with access to specialized healthcare in nearby cities.
- For example, many of our respondents indicated they would like high—speed passenger rail connections throughout NW Ohio to get to specialized healthcare services available in the Cleveland Clinic, OSU, U of M, The Capitol, and Cincinnati.

Increased Access to Work Opportunities

- Lack of transportation access has historically limited the ability of individuals with disabilities to choose where they want to work. If high—speed passenger rail connections were established across more regions of NW Ohio, individuals with disabilities would have increased access to work opportunities outside of the communities in which they live. In addition, the ability of high—speed passenger rail systems to connect people to one downtown from another would increase the work opportunities available to people with disabilities by allowing them to commute from home to work in a more accessible, efficient, and cost-effective manner.

Conclusion

The results of our survey indicated the public’s need for increased passenger rail connections across NW Ohio for access to recreational and entertainment purposes, to visit family and friends in nearby cities, for increased access to medical appointments and specialized healthcare in nearby cities, and for increased access to work opportunities. In addition, based on data we analyzed, the four main conclusions that emerged overall were broken down into four categories, each with a purpose statement and subsequent description. They are as follows:

Interest in Passenger Rail

There is a strong interest in increased passenger rail in NW Ohio from residents with and without disabilities amongst adults aged 25 through 65+. This is true even from respondents who do not use public transit regularly.

- The first conclusion suggests that there is a significant level of interest in passenger rail among residents of NW Ohio. This interest spans across individuals with and without disabilities and includes people who do not regularly use public transit. This indicates a

widespread desire for improved transportation options beyond what is currently available.

Inter-City Rail Connectivity:

NW Ohio Residents with and without disabilities would like to be connected by inter-city rail to all major cities in Ohio and Southern Michigan, especially Columbus.

- The second conclusion highlights the specific desire for inter-city rail connections that link NW Ohio to major cities in Ohio and Southern Michigan, with a particular emphasis on Columbus. This indicates a regional perspective on transportation needs, where residents want to be better connected to urban centers and economic hubs in the neighboring regions.

Cultural, Social, and Economic Benefits:

Increased Inter-City Rail Connections would benefit NW Ohio's Cultural, Social, and Economic Connections.

- The third conclusion underscores the belief that increased inter-city rail connections would bring significant benefits to NW Ohio, including improvements in cultural, social, and economic aspects. This suggests that residents see passenger rail as a means to foster cultural exchange, strengthen social ties, and enhance the economic prosperity of the region.

Challenges with Current Rail Services:

The current Inter-City Rail Connections do not meet those needs because they are limited in availability, slow, expensive, and not accessible to people with disabilities.

- The fourth conclusion discusses the current limitations and challenges with the existing inter-city rail services. These issues include limited availability, slow speeds, high costs, and insufficient accessibility for people with disabilities. This reflects the dissatisfaction of residents with the status quo and their motivation for advocating for improved rail options.

In summary, these conclusions reflect a strong desire among NW Ohio residents, including those with disabilities, for enhanced passenger rail services that offer improved connectivity to all major cities. These rail services are seen as a means to boost cultural, social, and economic well-being in the region. However, the current state of inter-city rail connections falls short of meeting these needs, as it is perceived as costly, slow, and inaccessible. These themes collectively indicate a need for investment and improvements in regional passenger rail

infrastructure to better serve the diverse transportation needs and aspirations of the local population.

Next Steps

While public transit is key to the independence of Ohioans with disabilities, Ohio's transportation systems and services have historically been underserved and underfunded. Due to systemic barriers that result from no or limited access to public transit services, Ohioans with disabilities continue to suffer in their communities without fair and equal access to independent living. To combat barriers to accessing public transit in NW Ohio by creating high-speed passenger rail connections, the following action steps must be implemented:

Immediate Action Steps:

- **Implement a Passenger/Commuter rail system that connects Toledoans with disabilities to Detroit, Cleveland, Bowling Green, and Columbus by rail;**
- **Designate an Ohio-based source of funding for passenger rail systems and services;**
- **Ensure the rail system is accessible to individuals with disabilities.**