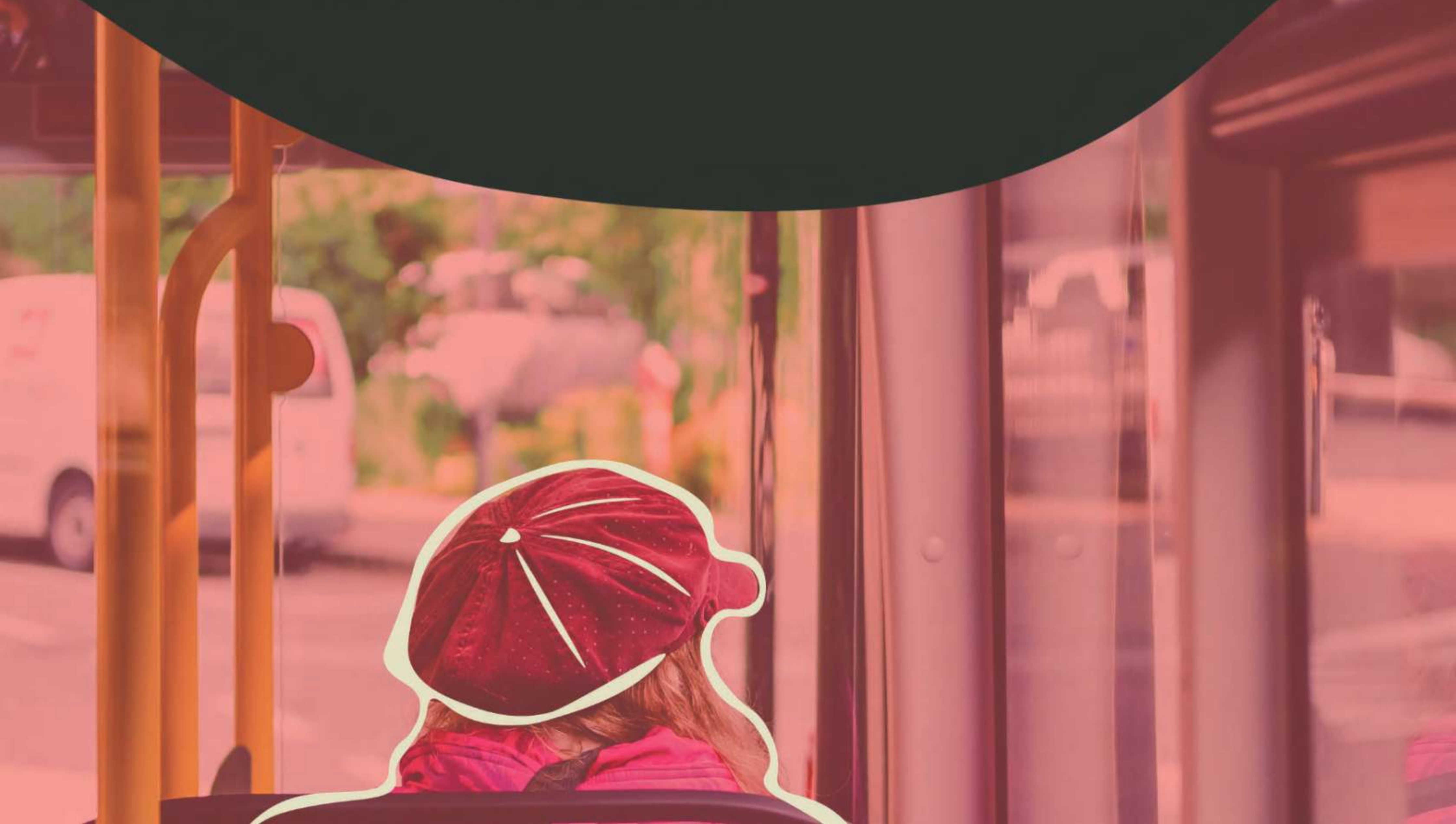


# GET MOVING

The critical need for  
improving seniors  
transportation

on the Sunshine Coast







## Lands Acknowledgement

The Lower Sunshine Coast region is on the traditional, unceded, and ancestral territories of the skwxwú7mesh and shíshálh Nations.

This document was prepared by the Sunshine Coast Resource Centre, in collaboration with the Who Cares? Project. We acknowledge the great privilege and responsibility we have as guests on this land.

## Introduction

It's time to tell the story of seniors' transportation as a story of connections, of community, and of reasonable actions that can provide lasting transportation solutions. *Get Moving* captures those connections: of an aging population, social isolation, and transportation deserts on the Sunshine Coast. It captures the community: from seniors in Egmont who have no transportation options for getting to medical appointments in Pender Harbour when they're no longer willing or able to drive; to older adults in Langdale who cannot safely cross the highway to catch the bus into Gibsons.

*Get Moving* is more than a policy report, it is a call to action and prioritizing for seniors transportation on the Sunshine Coast. The complexity of transportation challenges – particularly in rural settings like the Sunshine Coast – requires an examination of common service challenges and innovative projects for filling gaps and meeting needs in context-specific ways. The recommendations in this report offer real, local solutions for positive change on the Coast. Everything you need to know to get started solving seniors transportation needs on the Sunshine Coast is in here: so Get Moving!



“I believe that if the wider community is aware of the transportation issues of their neighbours, and can find shades of themselves in those stories, the less judgement there will be around the issues and the solutions.” - Shannon Rody, *Who Cares? Project*

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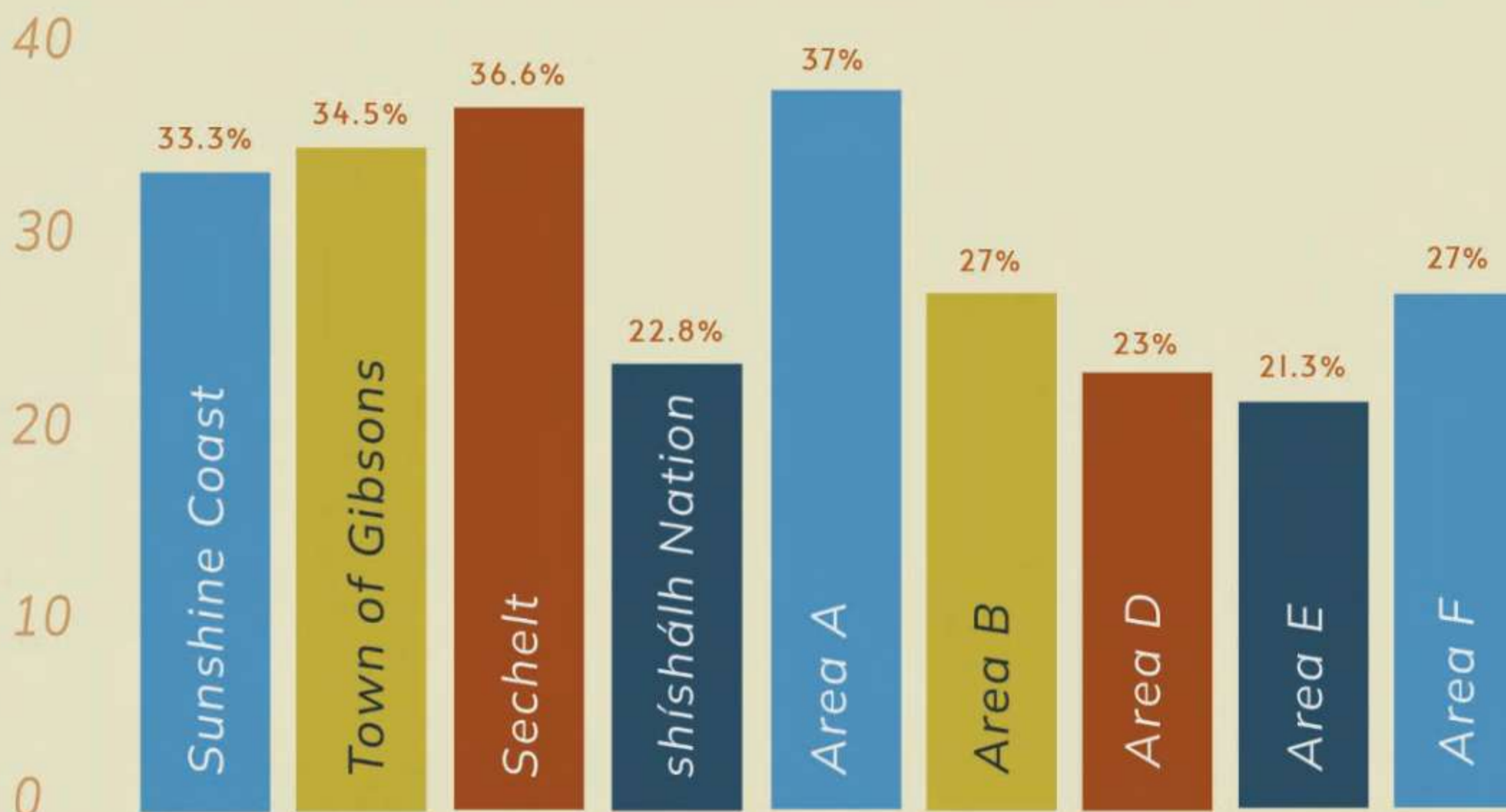


# What We Know

The report used a mixed methods approach to gather and share the story of seniors' transportation needs in the Sunshine Coast region. A scoping literature review revealed the shared challenges that seniors face at the local, provincial, and national levels as well as a range of innovative solutions. Building on this evidence base, we engaged over 1200 individuals between April and October in diverse ways to help us understand the scope, depth and scale of the challenges seniors face in our specific region.

The Sunshine Coast is a mix of municipalities punctuating rural areas. It is a ferry-dependent, ribbon community stretching approximately 100 kms from Port Mellon to Egmont and Earls Cove. The Coast has a population of 32,170, and 10,695 (33%) are seniors. Sunshine Coast Regional District (SCRD) Area A has the highest proportion of seniors living on the Coast, and as we will see later, is the area most drastically underserved by alternatives to driving.

## Percentage of population that are seniors



**Figure 1**

Area A = Egmont / Pender Harbour, Area B = Halfmoon Bay, Area D = Roberts Creek, Area E = Elphinstone, Area F = West Howe Sound



# Transportation = Quality of Life

Transportation is a critical determinant of seniors' quality of life, impacting their independence, social connectivity, access to healthcare and access to other essential services (*Tahir, 2023; Latiff et al, 2023; Wachs et al, 2021*). Literature also consistently reports lack of transportation as being a significant barrier to seniors successfully aging in place – especially in rural communities (*Lahr & Henning-Smith, 2021; Wang et al, 2019; Winters et al, 2016*).

Driving cessation marks a significant transition in seniors' lives, one that is often accompanied by significant stress. Some seniors show a greater propensity to reduce or give up driving if they reside in denser, more diverse, transit-oriented neighborhoods, neighborhoods where the infrastructure, culture and service needs correspond with their individual needs and desires. Other research suggests that many middle aged and senior aged adults don't fully consider the impacts of driving cessation and oftentimes cannot imagine the barriers faced when driving is no longer an option.

## Mixed Transportation Options For Seniors

There are mixed options for public, private, and para transportation in the Sunshine Coast region, including:

- Private vehicle
- Conventional transit (127,120 rides across all routes in 2023; this is up 34% from 2022)
- Custom Transit: HandyDART Service (245 active users representing 7264 rides in 2023)
- Coastal Rides (on demand ride sharing)
- Sunshine Coast Taxi Service(s)



- Sunshine Coast Connector (Seasonal, private inter-regional transit service)
- Care For a Lift (private car service for seniors appointments and routines)
- Active transportation options (cycling, walking)
- Volunteer driver services through social service programs, i.e., Better At Home
- Occasional local bus service through social service programs, i.e., Pender Harbour Health Centre.

## Limited Accessibility

The region has fixed link transit and HandyDART services in the most densely populated areas and these services have high levels of satisfaction from users. Ridership is also increasing and projected to increase further following transit expansion plans (2025-2026 and beyond). There are also two established taxi services as well as a ride sharing program, Coastal Rides, which was introduced in 2020. These services do offer alternatives to personal vehicles to meet transportation needs.

However, seniors face multifaceted challenges in accessing transportation – especially in rural areas. While some of these are senior-specific (including physical and cognitive limitations, and sometimes financial constraints) others could be categorized as barriers facing the more general population.

**In rural areas, there are limited or no available, accessible, affordable, or adequate transportation alternatives to driving.** Evidence suggests that driving (personal vehicles) continue to be the number one choice for seniors and their transportation (*McKenzie, 2023*).



# What We Learned

We engaged over 1200 individuals in diverse ways to help us understand the scope, depth and scale of the challenges seniors face in our specific region. During the month of May, in particular, we supported the convening and conversation of over twenty different transportation organizations that are connected to, working in, and responsible for transportation in our region.

*Listening Tree art installation by the Who Cares? Project engaged over 1000 community members throughout 2024.*



## Mixed methods and participant engagement

*(April-October, 2024)*

|                   |             |         |                                 |
|-------------------|-------------|---------|---------------------------------|
| # of participants | <b>102</b>  | — — — — | Pop up questionnaire            |
|                   | <b>226</b>  | — — — — | Driving cessation survey        |
|                   | <b>28</b>   | — — —   | Transportation convening        |
|                   | <b>1000</b> | — —     | Listening Tree art installation |
| #                 | <b>12</b>   | — — —   | In depth interviews             |

**Figure 2**



## Driving Isn't Forever

Our research revealed that Sunshine Coast seniors experience significant challenges and choices after driving cessation. A lack of awareness and viable and affordable options constrain their choices and alternatives. Our driving cessation survey was answered by 226 senior respondents. We found that:

- 85% of seniors are still driving across the Coast region
- The vast majority of seniors living in rural areas of the Coast without public transit think about how they would move without driving “a lot” or “all the time” versus seniors in proximity to municipalities and/or on fixed linked routes who respond with “not really” or “sometimes”
- 65% of respondents indicated that government and local agencies could be doing “much more” to increase transportation options
- Public transit is the number one choice when and if driving cessation occurs (65%) followed by a mix of “HandyDART” and “asking friends and family for rides”
- 85% of survey respondents indicated that movement to maintain quality of life without driving a personal vehicle would be “challenging” or “extremely challenging” with others noting “pretty much impossible”
- 80% of survey respondents indicated “fair” or “poor” alternatives to driving in the region

## Affording and Finding Transportation

There are geographic, economic, and safety barriers to transportation access as well as limited affordable alternatives to driving for many older community members. The top barriers noted by community members include bus frequency and route gaps (35%) and highway



safety (24%), vehicle and gas costs, transportation costs, distance to shops and activities, and weather and time impacting more active transportation (*Poverty Reduction Project, 2024*).

Lack of income alongside lack of infrastructure restricts transportation and mobility options. On the Sunshine Coast, 13.3% of seniors are living in a low income household– a variable which can drastically restrict already limited transportation options. This can result in reduced economic opportunities, added time and stress, and increased social isolation.

Our research shows that the Sunshine Coast is largely a car-centric region with the vast majority of daily trips (84%) being made by personal, private vehicles followed by walking or bicycle (12%) and then transit (4%). Approximately 4000 people (12.5% of the population) live in a transportation desert, which is an area not served by more affordable fixed public transit. Another 2500 individuals (7.8%) in the Halfmoon Bay area receive limited transit hours and frequency, making transit a less attractive and viable option for work, appointments, or leisure. The average cost of taxi or rideshare services across the region is \$50-80 dollars for a 30-45 minute ride, making a return trip to the doctor from Secret Cove to Sechelt about \$120.

Interviewees mentioned regular small bus routes as desirable and the availability of smaller buses or vans to service transportation deserts, bringing passengers to a main route/centre. Interviewed seniors would also like a service where rides are reserved over the phone or on an app.

**“I’m lucky I can drive my scooter to my doctors appointments and I have the Farmer’s Market nearby to connect to the community.”**





“There are too many things I don’t do anymore because there is no safe way home.”



## Make It Safe

Many of the public transit bus stops are uncovered, unlit, without benches, and along busy stretches of highway without sidewalks. This makes public transit a challenge during fall, winter, and early spring for many community members, with seniors disproportionately impacted and oftentimes it’s impossible for seniors with mobility issues.

Seniors who may have mobility issues face challenges with active transportation (walking and biking). Even those who reside in municipal centers may face safety barriers with scooters and walking on the highway. Highway improvements to support safety are a must.

Respondents cited the need for improved transportation infrastructure to address safety concerns, including well-lit bus stop shelters, bigger/more easily readable signs, and a level step-up to the bus. Safer, more level sidewalks and crossings and fewer stops on steep roads were also mentioned. Changes to bus routes and schedules were noted as particularly confusing for older adults as change can be difficult for them to navigate. Some respondents noted a desire for improved awareness for all bus users to reserve courtesy seats for seniors and other high needs passengers.



# What We Heard

## About The Who Cares? Project


Who Cares? is a three-year arts, design and research collaboration between Deer Crossing The Art Farm, Emily Carr Health Design Lab, and Douglas College exploring the visible, hidden, and emerging networks of elder care on the lower Sunshine Coast. Through pop-up installations, workshops, interviews, co-design sessions and more, we learned from the community **how** we do is just as important as **what** we do. Everything is connected, stories matter, and listening creates change.



“Well, I'm 79. So, next year, motor vehicles is going to want a test. And if they pull your license, then you will have to walk. Or, as a friend of mine is doing, they just keep driving because they have no other option. This one fellow's rather isolated anyway, so he just says, “No, I'm just going to keep driving.” *Guido*

Guido is a very careful and calculating driving elder, not wishing to get in an accident. He maps out his routes, days and times meticulously, sometimes avoiding going out altogether. His connection to others and his ability to run routine errands depends entirely upon the alignment of various driving considerations.





Deanne has lived in Sandy Hook for 27 years. She believes in the goodness of her Sandy Hook community and would like to see a neighborhood rideshare system reinstated with signs and background checks for safety.

“I remember one day going to a house way up in Tuwanek, and there was this elderly lady. I don't think she could get down to the driveway, down the stairs. And I thought, I never want to wind up like that...she was really a hermit. And she probably was too proud to reach out. And you get that way, because, through life, you've never relied on other people. You know, you use your own fortitude to do everything. And then it comes to a point where you need the help, but you don't want to ask for it.” *Deanne*

Jean is a 73 year old resident of Garden Bay, on the Coast since 2008, and concerned with transportation for those needing to get to important medical appointments and procedures.

“If you don't drive, you need somebody to take you. And it's just a really difficult situation. My husband doesn't want to leave, but I think leaving as an elderly person - so I can get where I have to go - is getting to be paramount.” *Jean*



# Moving Forward (Recommendations)

The Sunshine Coast represents a unique and distilled version of the looming 'grey tsunami' that the whole world is anticipating. With almost half of our population over the age of 55, we are already experiencing the vulnerabilities of a community that has not planned sufficiently to be age friendly. Without sufficient diversified transportation options for our seniors, we risk exacerbating social isolation, loneliness, and health challenges, especially in the Coast's more rural areas.

Accessible and reliable transportation is paramount for seniors' autonomy and social participation. **Adequate, affordable, available, accessible and safe** transportation options enhance inclusion, increase a sense of belonging, and positively influence health and mental health outcomes, and a diversity of options means that seniors can navigate their communities effectively.

The following five recommendations for improved transportation systems and infrastructure will contribute not only to better health, social connections, and happiness for our seniors, but for our entire community.

## Push Public Transit

Public transit is the number one choice for nearly 70% of seniors up and down the Coast as an accessible, affordable alternative to driving.

- Integrate **new service routes** and frequency within our public transit system, in line with the strategic goals of the Sunshine Coast Transit Future Plan (2014).
- Insert new **transit stops** near seniors living facilities and seniors activity hubs.
- Implement a **'travel pass'** for seniors that mimics and aligns with the SCRD's Youth Travel Pass (2024) offering free transit use for youth.



- Fund **ride-sharing** services targeted at seniors:
  - Pender Harbour Health Centre’s transit pilot program servicing the upper Coast with two daily connections.
  - Shuttles/vans (i.e., seniors center shuttle) being explored for use in other facilities and/or making them dual purpose (e.g., supporting Silverstone residents) rather than sitting idle.

## Improve Transportation Infrastructure

- Implement greater highway safety measures through the proposed active transportation corridor, removing barriers to use for those who are able and interested
- Improve and develop transportation infrastructure, safety, and accessibility, including walking and biking paths, crosswalks, level sidewalks, and lighting.
- Improve bus stop shelters, benches, and lighting to increase the attractiveness of public transit use outside of spring and summer.
- Limit route changes and the confusion of navigating changing schedules and locations.
- Ensure courtesy seats on buses are available to seniors.

Ruth didn’t expect to have a stroke at the age of 58. Her husband Mike didn’t expect to get his vehicle totalled in a car accident months later. Suddenly they live with accessibility issues and no vehicle. Ruth and Mike are thankful they live right in Sechelt. She can use her scooter to get to the mall or the hospital from home, if the sidewalks are clear. She feels unsafe going any further or driving her scooter on the highway.



## Build Collaboration

There is a positive history and appetite for collaboration and coordination between local governments, social service organizations, and transportation actors and agencies on the Sunshine Coast. The Seniors Transportation Working Group has begun the work of coordinating some of the community-based transportation voices. Identifying shared objectives, outlining a structure for collaborative work, and defining the top and timely priorities are critical parts of a collective Transportation collective moving forward.

- Support the development of a renewed Sunshine Coast Transportation committee and Regional Transportation Coordinator role that will facilitate the collaboration, planning, research, and coordination of collaborative, community-based transportation research and advocacy.
- Improve partnership-building with local NGOs, health centers, and businesses to support transport services.
- Advocate for senior-friendly transportation policies within local government and healthcare services.
- Enhance the quality and frequency of communication between key transportation initiatives, agencies and stakeholders to enhance the successful roll out and sustainability of any new initiatives.
- Support organizations already working with and for seniors to offer and support transportation initiatives.

## Develop Transportation Education

- Promote the use of mobile apps and real-time information to improve access to on-demand services and ridesharing and offer training sessions for app use (e.g., Coastal Rides app, Sunshine Coast Transit app).



- Support public and para transportation understanding, education, and assistance for seniors, including assisting seniors with identifying and navigating transit options and orienting them to bus riding through bus buddies and practice sessions.
- Develop public awareness campaigns to encourage and support seniors mobility and transportation needs in a positive framework, one that de-stigmatizes ageism as it relates to seniors and transportation.
- Develop public awareness materials for seniors that educate and support the transition from driving to public, para, and other modes of transportation.

## Involve Community

Transportation innovations for seniors that also tackle multiple community priorities contribute to implementation, support, and excitement for transportation solutions.

- Engage high schools in “buddy programs” for student involvement in seniors transportation, i.e., students training seniors on transportation apps.
- Establish school bus-sharing programs with seniors during school off-hours.
- Educate community connectors on transportation options and navigation programs, e.g., social workers, social service navigators, and seniors-serving organizations.
- Support volunteer driving and ride-share programs within neighbourhoods and transportation deserts.



# Get Moving (Calls to Action)

Transportation ties a community together and creates opportunities for belonging, support, and inclusion – transportation is one of the biggest drivers of quality of life. **Adequate, affordable, available, accessible and safe** transportation options are critical to seniors' social participation and health and are essential to building resilient communities. With the data pointing to an increase in our aging population, we know that the demand for diverse transportation options for older people will only increase. We have no more time to waste: let's Get Moving!

- **Share** this document with your community, colleagues, and changemakers! Help to encourage a better understanding of seniors' transportation needs, barriers, and solutions.
- **Urge** local governments, businesses, and community organizations to implement transportation strategies for the largest population group on the Sunshine Coast! Affordable, safe, and accessible transportation for seniors is good for all of us.
- **Contribute** by sharing your story with us – the more we know about the local people and their issues, the more we can build solutions that work for our community.
- **Advocate** for improved transportation education and awareness that reduces the stigma of seniors transportation and supports driving transitions for older adults.
- **Participate** by sharing a ride or offering to help an older adult in your community navigate transit options.





# Key References

*Age Friendly Community Plan – a Sunshine Coast Seniors Planning Table presentation for the District of Sechelt, March 2017*

*Island Coastal Inter-Community Transportation Study – What we heard report, July 2023*

*Sunshine Coast Regional District Regional Growth Framework – Phase 3 Report: Data Synthesis and Strategy Recommendations, January 2023*

*Sunshine Coast Transit Service Presentation by Transportation Choices Sunshine Coast, June 2023*

*Sunshine Coast Transit Future Plan, 2014*

*Sunshine Coast Transportation System Convening – A report from the Sunshine Coast Transportation and Collaboration Convening, May 2024*

*Transportation Lower Sunshine Coast – A resource guide, May 2024*

These and other literature can be found on the project website at [www.resourcecentre.ca/program/get-moving](http://www.resourcecentre.ca/program/get-moving)

## Project Partners:

**Sunshine Coast Resource Centre**  
[www.resourcecentre.ca](http://www.resourcecentre.ca)

**Who Cares Project**  
[www.whocaresproject.org](http://www.whocaresproject.org)

**Sunshine Coast Regional District**  
[www.scrd.ca](http://www.scrd.ca)

**Transportation Choices Sunshine Coast (TraC)**  
[www.transportationchoices.ca](http://www.transportationchoices.ca)

**Vancouver Coastal Health**  
[www.vch.ca](http://www.vch.ca)

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