

Strathcona County Transit

On-Demand Transit Pilot Results
Priorities Committee Meeting April 16, 2024

Background

On-Demand Transit services are shared-ride, demand-responsive services that typically use smaller vehicles and mobile app technology to provide mobility to customers.

The service model is similar to Dial-A-Bus, however, leverages technology to provide:

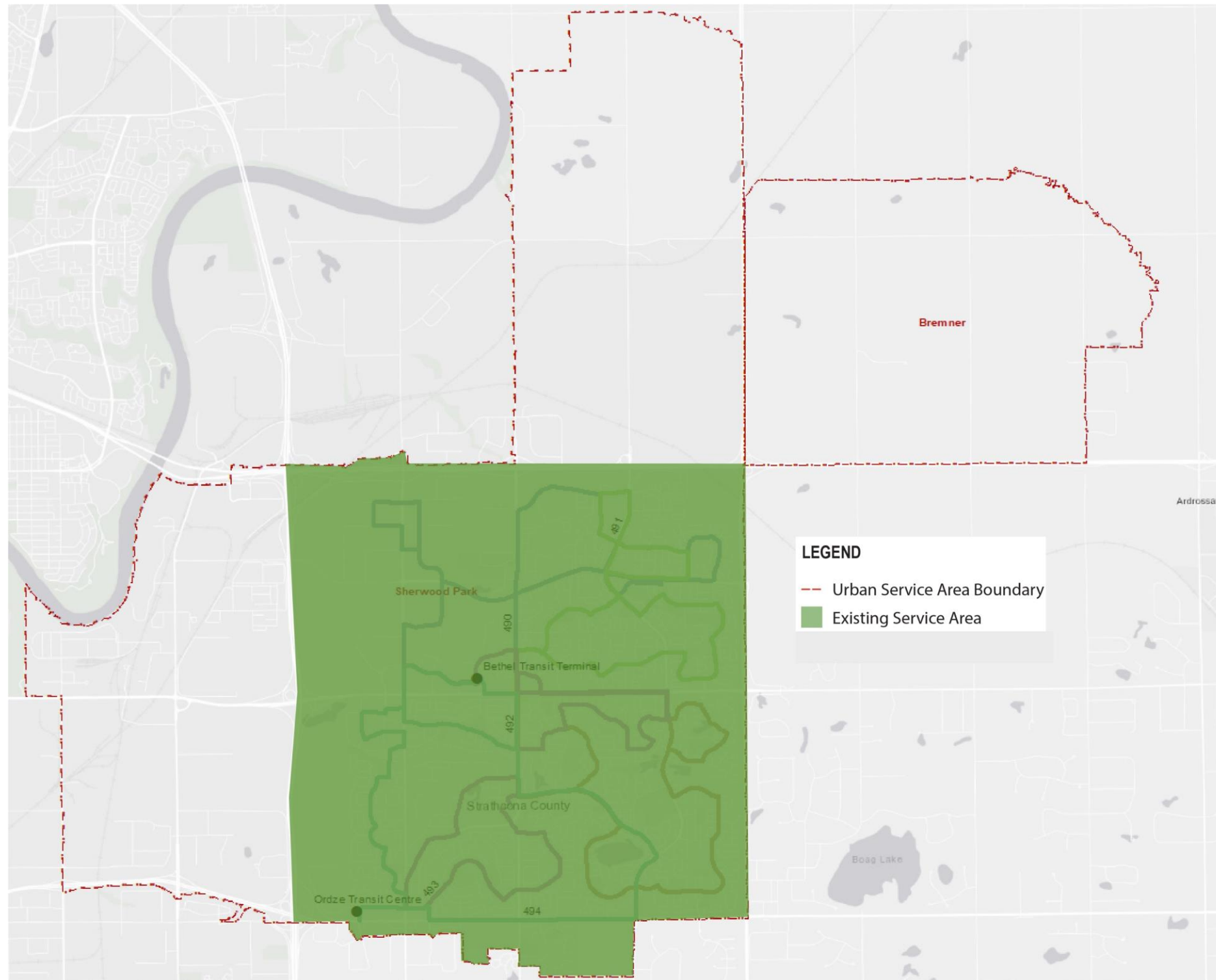
- Instant access to booking services;
- Near real-time tracking of vehicles; and
- The most efficient route to a requested destination.

Background

- The On-Demand Transit pilot replaced fixed route evening and weekend service.
- Conducting an evening and weekend On-Demand Transit pilot was identified in the 2019 Transit Master Plan.
- The 18-month pilot started in June 2022. Last year Council extended the pilot to the end of 2024 to allow more time for administration to make adjustments and collect more data.
- In July 2023, Strathcona County Transit switch vendors to *Via Mobility*.
- On-Demand Transit operates during these service periods:
 - Monday – Friday 7:15pm to 12:15am
 - Saturday 6:15am to 12:15am
 - Sunday 7:15am to 8:15pm

Current service area

Covers the Sherwood Park Urban Service Area with a stop-to-stop service using existing bus stops.



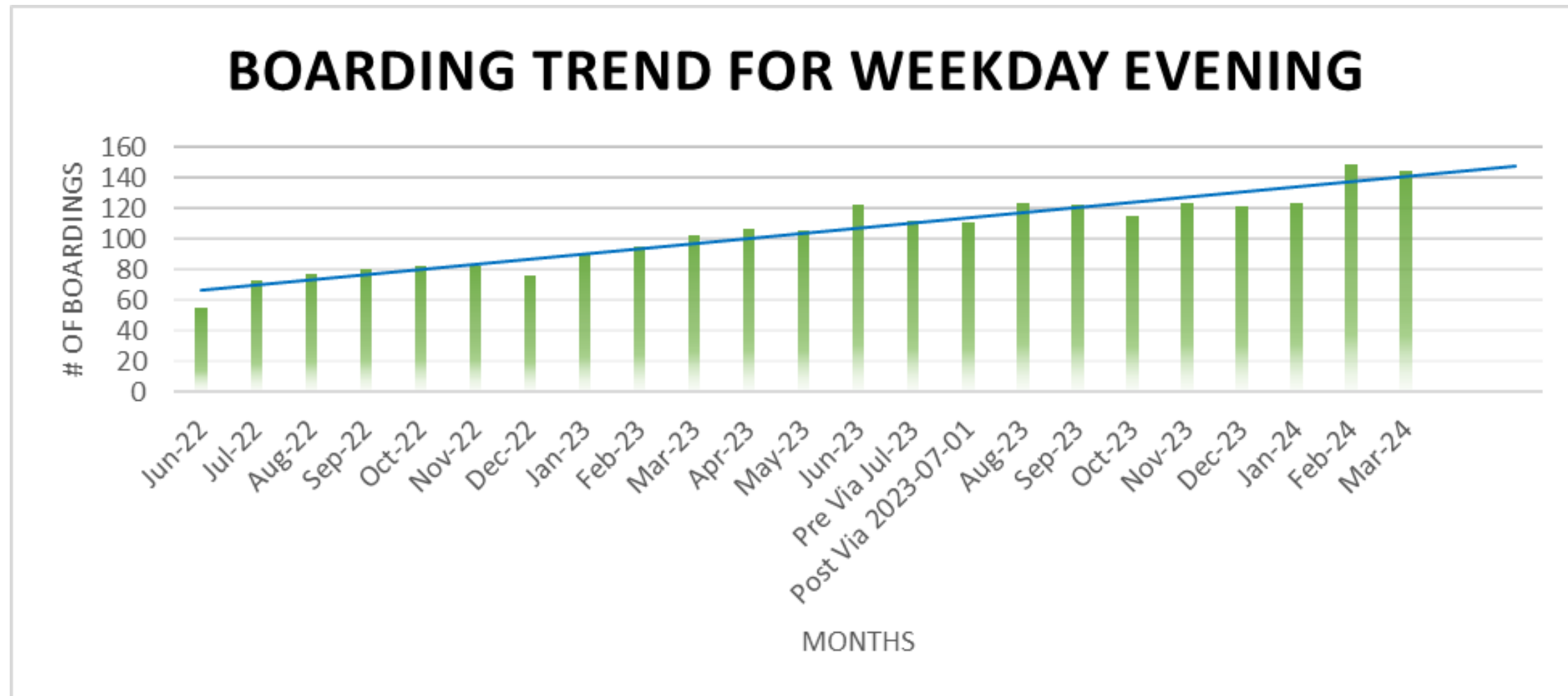
Measuring success

The success of the On-Demand Transit pilot was to be measured using the following performance indicators:

- Ridership – returning to pre-covid ridership levels (using 2019 benchmark);
- Decreased time on-board transit;
- Reduced wait times for transit services; and
- Overall customer satisfaction with On-Demand Transit.

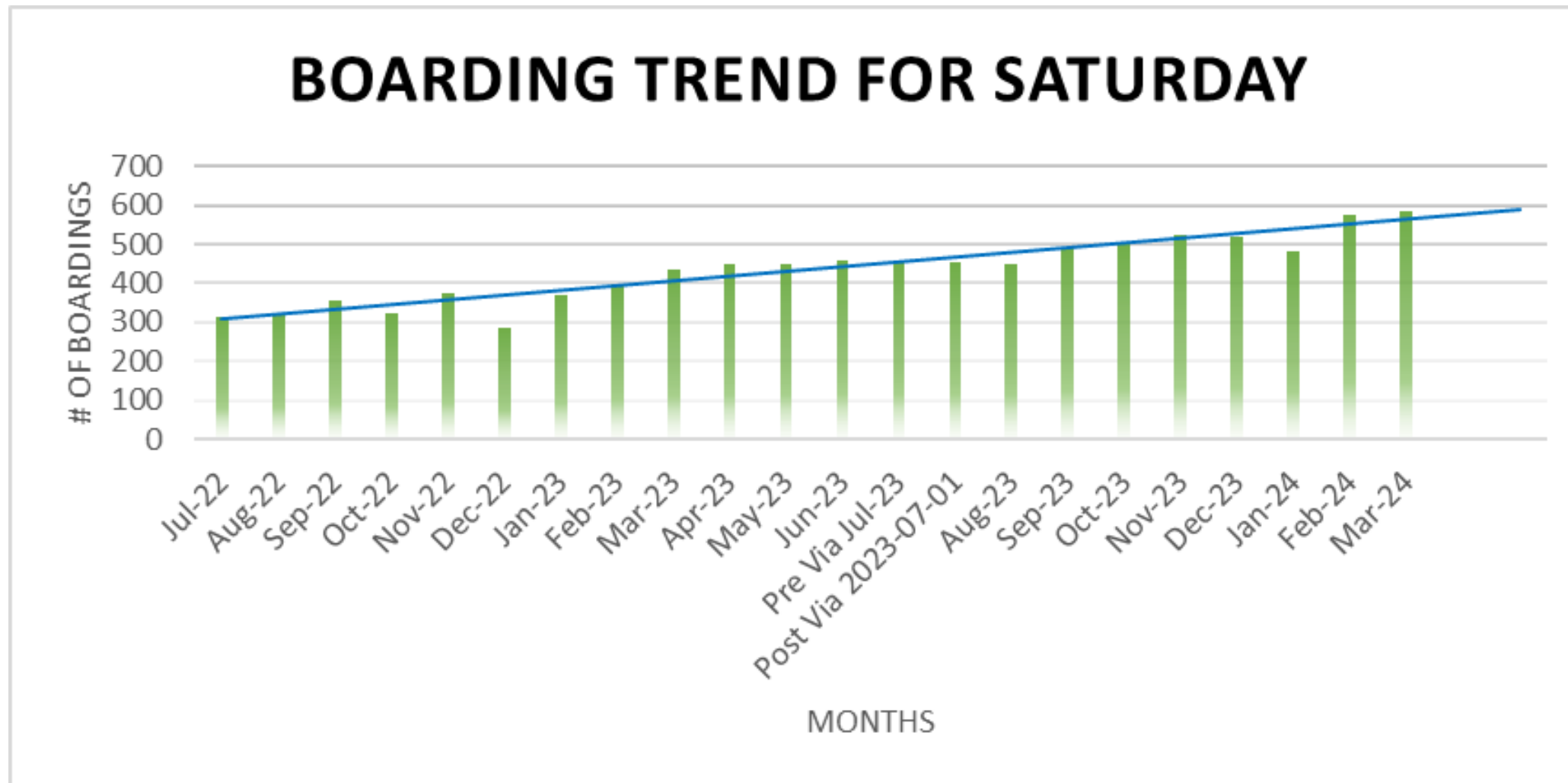
Success measures - ridership

- Average weekday boardings have exceeded 2019 counts with a continuing trend upwards.



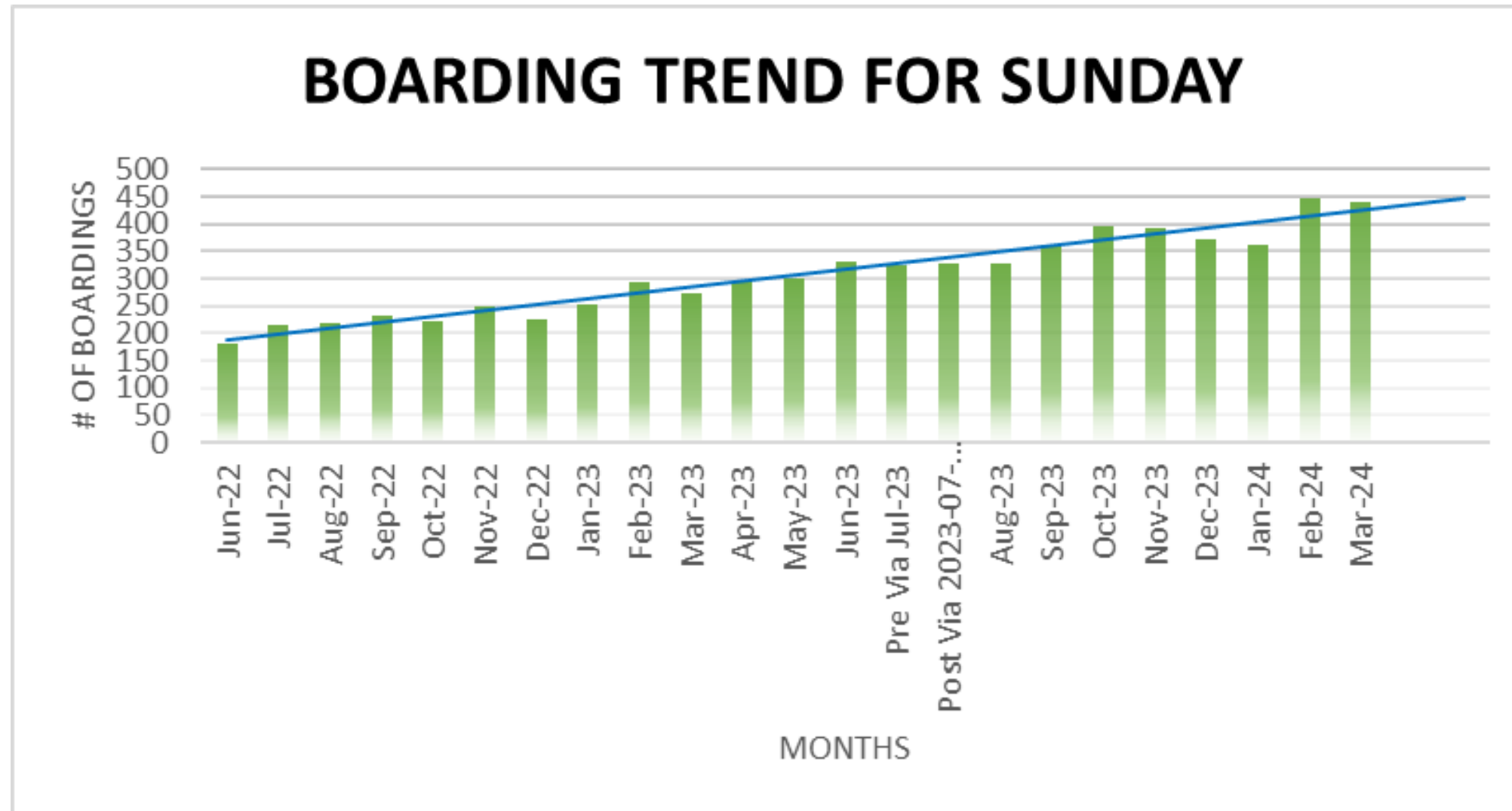
Success measures - ridership

- Average Saturday boardings are slightly below 2019 counts, but with a continuing trend upwards. Recent Saturday's numbers have exceeded 2019 levels.



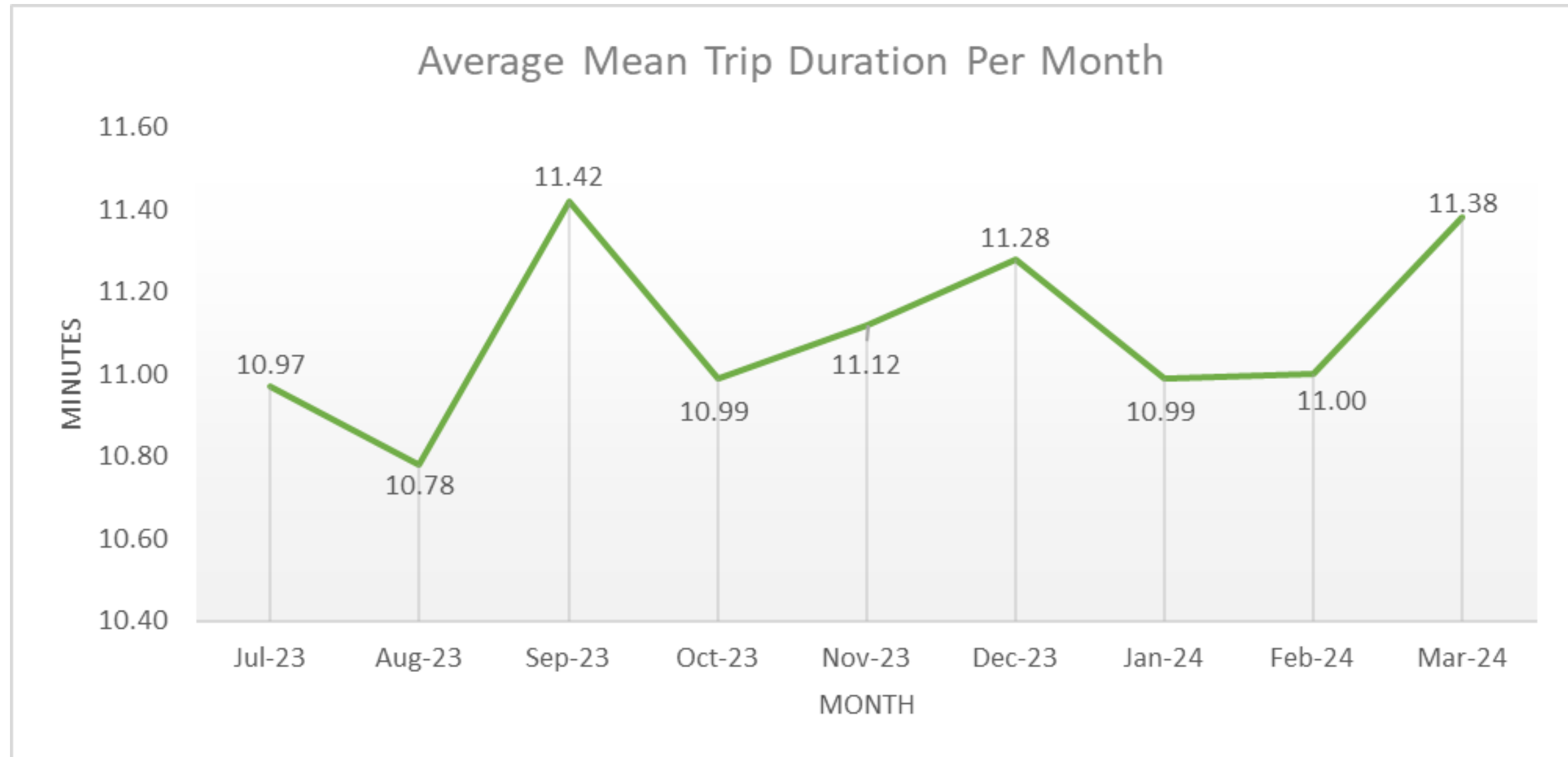
Success measures - ridership

- Average Sunday boardings have exceeded 2019 counts with a continuing trend upwards.



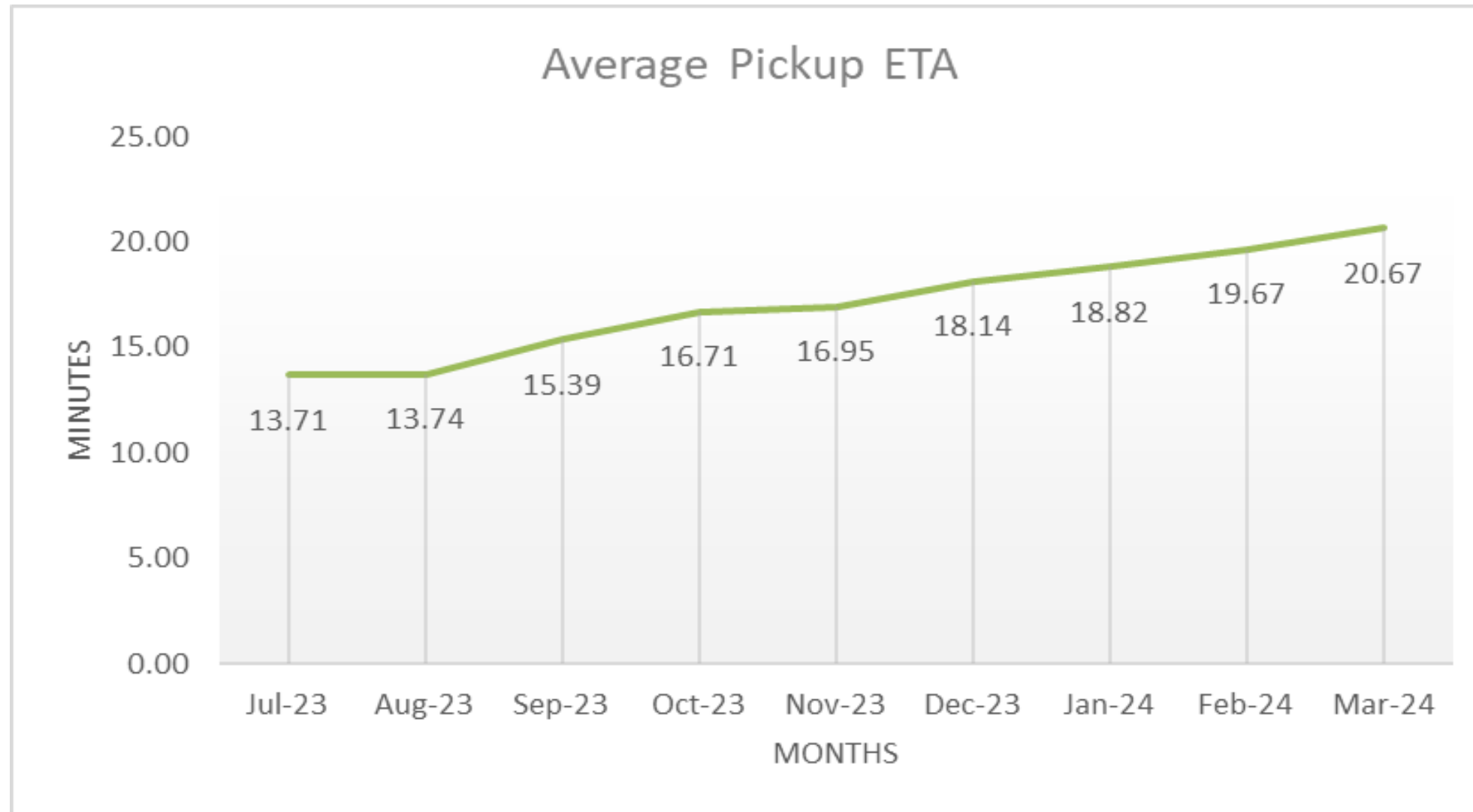
Success measure - time on board transit

Success measure – Less than 30-minute travel times.



Success measure - wait time for service

Success measure - Less than 25-minute wait times.



Success measure – wait times for service

- The previous fixed route services operated hourly with the potential for up to 60-minute wait times and 60-minute on-board times.
- When administration switched vendors to *Via Mobility* in July 2023, the system was set up as truly “On-Demand”
- This means, that during On-demand service hours, a ride can only be requested 30-minutes in advance.
- Therefore, wait times should not exceed 30 minutes.
- The average percentage of trip requests booked within 30 minutes:

Service	Percentage
Weekday evenings	95.4%
Saturdays	97.0%
Sundays	96.5%

Success measure - customer satisfaction

- Two engagement surveys have been completed during the On-Demand Transit pilot. One in January 2023 and another in December 2023.
- When asked for the more recent December survey, below are the results to the question “Do you prefer On-Demand Transit to the former, local, hourly service transit provided?”. Customers indicated:

Responses	Count	Percentage
Yes, I prefer On-Demand Transit.	63	39.9%
Somewhat, I can see the benefit over hourly service.	44	27.8%
No, please go back to hourly service.	51	32.3%
Total	185	100%

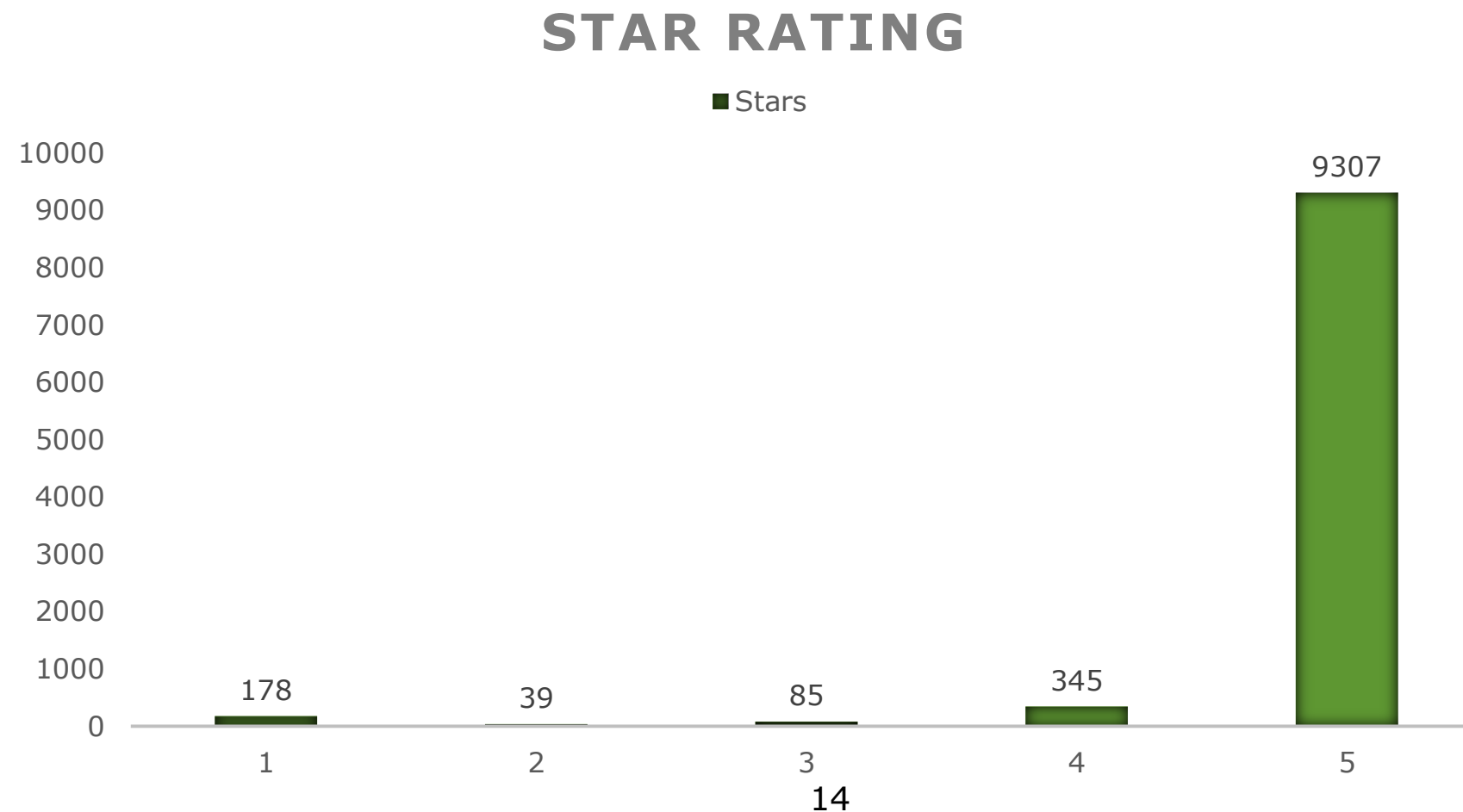
Source: Encl 2 December 2023 On-Demand Transit Customer Survey Report

Success measure - customer satisfaction

- For additional context:
- Since the launch with *Via Mobility* last July, as of the end of March 2024, there has been 3128 unique riders that have used the service.
- Growth in an upward trend has continued.

Success measure - customer satisfaction

- The *Via Mobility* software program will also select at random, the ability for customers to provide anonymous rider ratings out of 5. Below shows the ratings since July 2023. The average rating is 4.8 out of 5.



Cost-benefit analysis

- Since the start of the pilot, the service has used 40-foot conventional buses for On-Demand Transit.
- Using 40-foot conventional buses was shown to have no cost savings when presented to Council on July 6, 2021.
- Cost savings were only expected if the service used Mobility Bus vehicles.
- In recent months, the fleet used for the service has been transitioning from 40-foot conventional buses to Mobility Bus vehicles. Responsible transition to the use of Mobility Bus vehicles is needed to:
 - Monitor logistics of fleet sharing between On-Demand Transit and Mobility Bus;
 - Change management for operators;
 - Change management for customers; and
 - Arc integration.

Cost-benefit analysis

- To increase service efficiency, at the beginning of the pilot, additional service hours were added on the road for the service.
- Since switching vendors in July 2023, the service has become more efficient.
- However, due to continuing trends of increasing ridership on the service, these additional service hours have not been removed.
- Therefore, due to the additional service hours, when the fleet is fully transitioned to using Mobility Bus vehicles, the service will be cost neutral when compared to the previous fixed route evening and weekend service.

Future of On-Demand Transit

- Based on the measures outlined to achieve a successful pilot, administration will be recommending On-Demand Transit become permanent as part of the 2025 budget process.
- The use of On-Demand Transit as a component of our service will continue to be evaluated.
- Future considerations include evaluating On-Demand Transit's use to begin service in the growth areas of Cambrian and Bremner, its use in Ardrossan as the hamlet continues to grow, as well as daytime fixed route service that is underutilized.
- Additionally, there are options for further efficiencies between On-Demand Transit and Mobility Bus.
- More information on the future of On-Demand Transit will be presented as part of the update to the Transit Master Plan.

Next steps

- Make On-Demand Transit for evenings and weekends permanent as part of the 2025 budget process.
- Continue to transition the fleet from 40-foot conventional buses to Mobility Bus vehicles.
- Continue to monitor ridership. The purpose of On-Demand Transit, is to use it for lower ridership times and routes. As ridership continues to grow on the service, especially weekends, there may come a point where the service has difficulty absorbing the high demand.
- A strategy is being worked on through the Transit Master Plan update, on a potential fixed route/ on-demand hybrid model if ridership levels continue to grow. More information on this will be provided through the Transit Master Plan update.

Questions?