



# DIFFERING VOICES ON TRANSIT, PARKS, AND THE BUDGET

Usually when I look at survey results I see a fairly well-developed consensus. But as a community we have several different strong views about transit; those views overlap with our views on parks and on the budget.

## Who we are

It's always a risk to assert that any one of us holds a specific viewpoint. But, as I analyzed the results of this survey, responses fell into general categories.

The first group (46%) strongly supported both the expansion of transit into the County and the possibility of increased passenger rail service. They were less committed to the idea that all parks must remain parks and only be used as parks.

The second group (39%) opposed the expansion of transit into the County as well as the idea of increased passenger rail service. This group asserted that the current rail station location was fine.

The third group (27%) took a nuanced path. They tended to support increasing transit options, but remained unconvinced that the City had selected the best possible location for a new train station. Many opposed the use of park land, but others in this group were willing to consider the Fuller site if it proved to be the best location.

### Your words

*The hospital is a HUGE commuter destination and always will be. Constructing transit infrastructure around it makes sense and is a good move for town&gown too. And I say this as a frequent Amtrak rider who will have to walk twice as far if the station is moved! It (the Fuller site) is pointless as parkland, surrounded by parks. Make the deal and make it happen; It's not leadership if everyone is happy. No use of parkland for a transit center.*

*The current location is a disaster. I am woefully uninformed on this issue, but tend to agree with keeping the current train station as the focus for an improved "new use" addition. There are good arguments for a Fuller Road station, but no need for a huge, land use sharing, WTF transit station. There are also very nice, vacant, existing buildings along North Main Street, next to the ArtTrain and easily converted to such use - adjacent to M-14 and everything.*

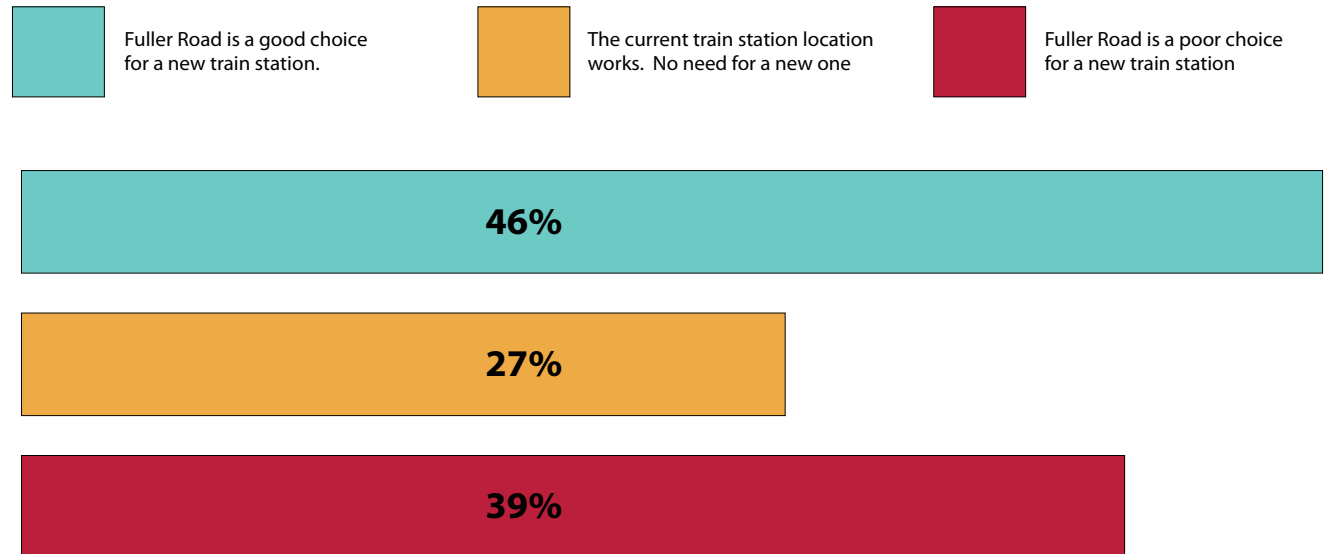
*I would like to see the current station upgraded. The location is ideal, IMO. I understand it's in a flood plain? Perhaps surface amendments can be added to deal with rain water. The current station has very good access to downtown and Kerrytown, and could have shuttle buses to UM quite easily.*

### Graphs

*I've used both cross-tab and simple graphs to show the relationship between our viewpoints. This has been valuable for me to see and understand our divided community.*

#### How to read cross-tabs

*The percentage for each group answer represents 100% of those who gave a specific answer to the initial question. Initial questions are identified by the colored boxes on each chart.*



## Survey design

I won't pretend to design surveys for a living. But for me, this is one more way to hear from you — and hear from you anonymously.

I created ample options for providing comments instead or in addition to checking boxes. I've read every comment, and selected some to highlight that I believe reflect the various messages you sent.

Easy, short surveys do provide feedback, but many of you want to qualify your answer, reinforce it, or make a stronger point. It's that type of response I sought; thank you for responding so clearly.

I also don't limit the number of responses any computer user can provide. Different people living in the same household can hold strong opinions that don't overlap. Everyone gets the same chance to respond.

Those who took the survey on their phones or other electronic devices learned that 'important' and 'unimportant' became '1' and '2'. I'll try to learn how to fix that glitch.

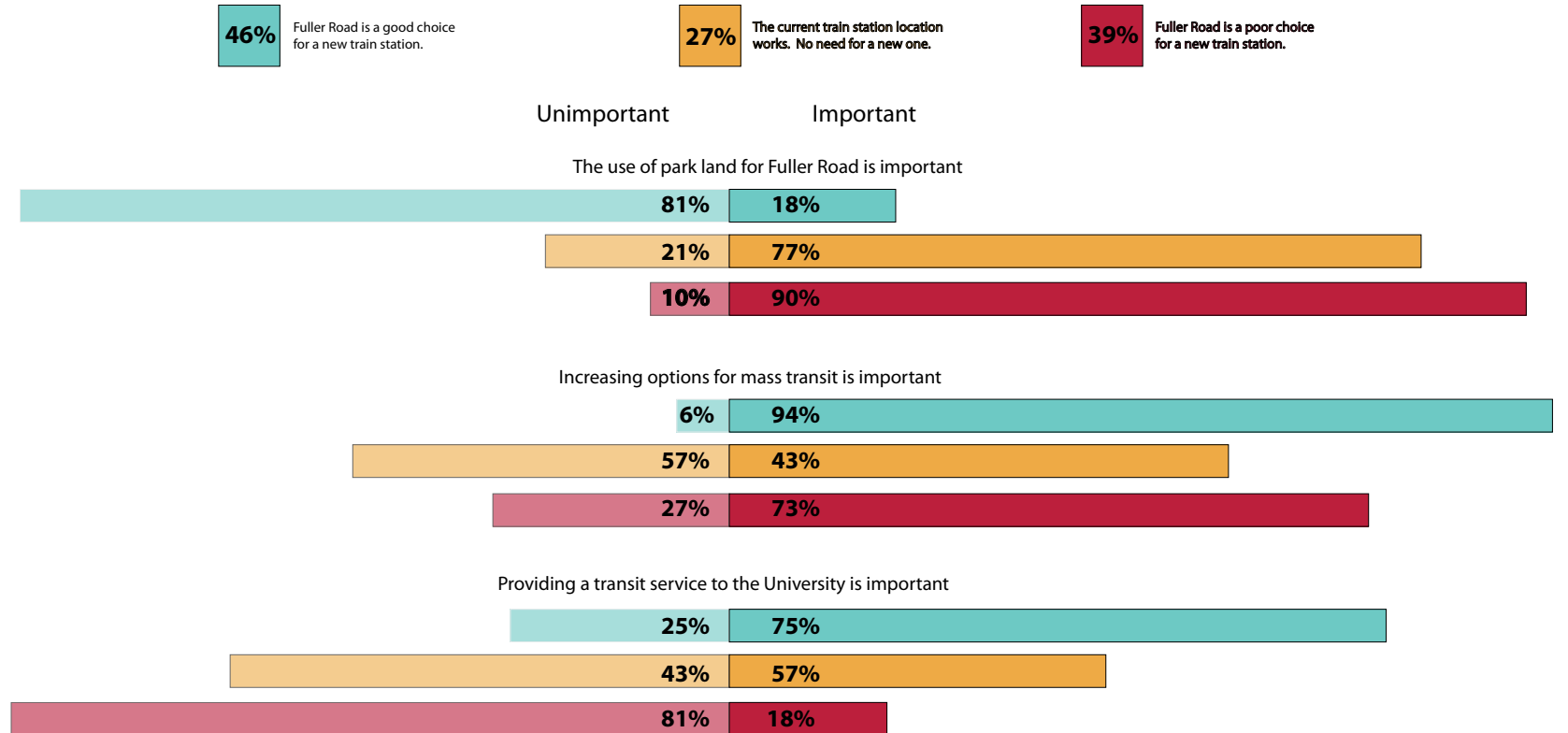
**“Way too long a survey!”**

## What I learned

It's no news to me that many Ann Arbor residents place a high value on the concept of park land. Some people also look at specific parks and think that the land could be more valuable used in a different way.

It's also no surprise that many of us value our public services, want a better transit system, and want to be prudent with public dollars.

I was surprised at how differently we view our options.



## Your words

*Let's leave the parks alone*

*Do Not use park land*

*Do NOT use parkland for non-park purposes. Plus the Fuller Road location seemed out of the way to me for where people need to go--except for the medical campus it's not near anything.*

*I would love to see a site that isn't park land.*

*This is ok to use in this situation. It exists within the city limits and there is already PLENTY PLENTY PLENTY of park space available within a one mile radius of that site.*

*NOT ON PARK LAND*

*There's no shortage of parks. The location is designated as parkland, but the fact is that it's a paved surface parking lot. This ain't a case of development versus nature. If people want to put it to a vote, great, I'll vote YES.*

*The Fuller Road location is not that valuable as parkland. The city needs to be selective in adding more parkland to the system.*

*The city has too much park land of marginal recreational value, including the Fuller Road property proposed for the transit station. A transit station here will provide far more public benefit than the current parking lot, or the open field it would likely become if the parking lot is removed.*

*Park land should be avoided when possible*

*With a caveat - lots of things here are important. Citizens need to have confidence that if land is dedicated to parks, we can count on that. Parkland should not be able to be reduced for exigencies without a compensating return of other parkland or similar offset. But if the project otherwise makes sense, including environmental sense, and parkland is involved, I do not see that as an absolute bar.*

*Maybe...unsure*

*There isn't enough "mass" high density of people to effectively fund without increasing tax burdens on people.*

## On transit

We want to ensure that transit is there for us — or, if we don't use it, that it is there for our neighbors and our family members.

We aren't as confident that residents of Ann Arbor are getting their money's worth today. Many comments reflected a genuine desire to see better transit options for non-commuters: those folks using the bus to go shop, or to the doctor, or to the library.

Some of us felt strongly that the City would impose more taxes for transit on property owners, and that those dollars would be used to provide services to those who don't live in Ann Arbor.

Some were also deeply concerned that local tax dollars would be used to fund a regional (Detroit to Chicago) train system.

**My conclusion:** Ann Arbor residents support public transit, but may not be convinced that they will benefit from a local transit authority serving a larger district.

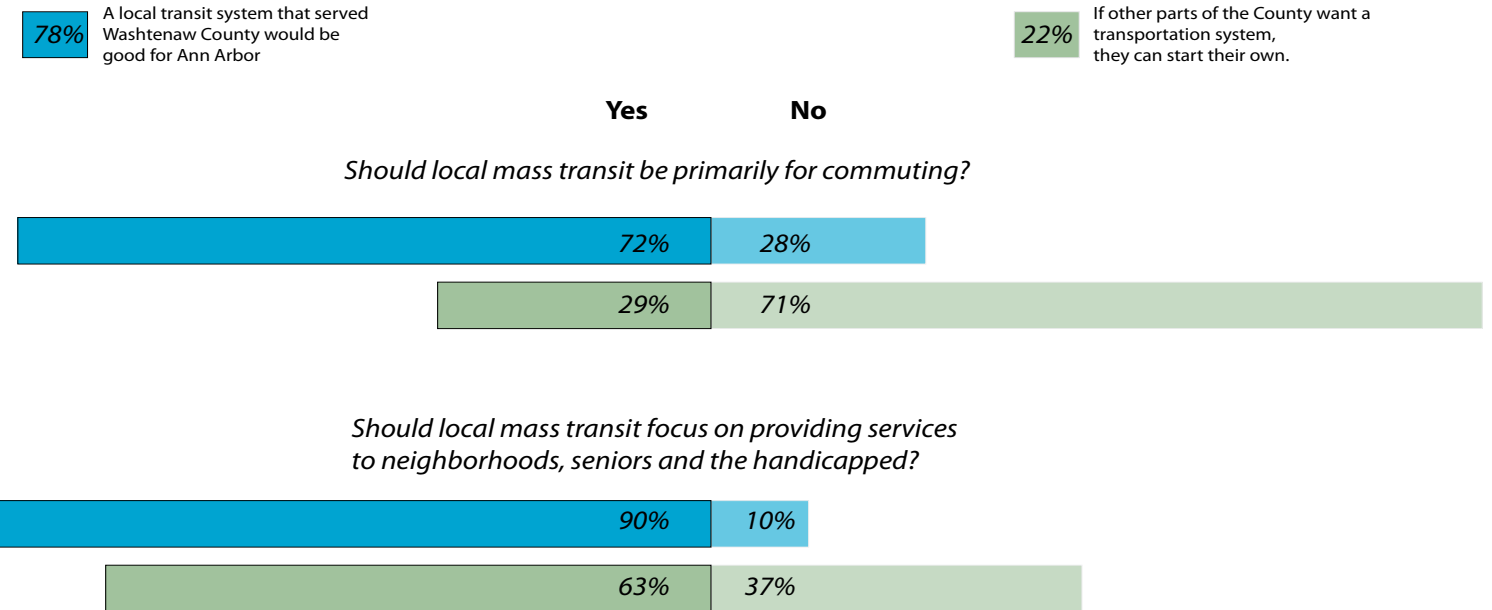
**Fact:** I don't know what mechanism may be selected to fund the proposed NEW transit system. But whether it's taxes or fees, nothing will change if we and our Ann Arbor neighbors decide that there isn't enough benefit to us from a new transit authority. The final word is ours, at a vote to be taken sometime in the next two years.

**Fact:** The Transit Master Plan includes both the east-west rail and the north-south rail *concepts* but the financial report points out that money for this activities comes from sources outside our community. **They took this out of the planned budget.** When folks responded to the opportunity to select options for transit, these (among others) were selected. But transit services in Ann Arbor are guaranteed to remain at the same level or improve — they won't diminish. And no new services will be added unless there is additional funding for those services.

78% of respondents to a question about the proposed expansion of services into other parts of Washtenaw County support a broader transportation authority district that increases and extends services in the County.

A significant majority of survey responses — whether they supported or opposed new transit options — wanted local mass transit to provide services to neighborhoods, seniors and the handicapped more than focus primarily on providing commuters with transportation.

AATA has been considering whether to consolidate several transportation systems (AATA, WAVE, People's Express) into one system that will serve Washtenaw County. They have also been discussing expanding services into areas not currently covered by mass transit. The impact would be felt both inside Ann Arbor and in more rural parts of the county, but would require additional funding. What do you think?



### Your words

*If [transit] exists at all it should only be to support basic services, jobs and getting to core shopping needs. Publicly underwritten mass transit should NOT be concerned with servicing restaurants and entertainment in any fashion other than legitimately coincidental support.*

*Sure, most surface travel is work-related. but I'd use the system more on weekends with better weekend service.*

*Commuting, yes, but also service within the city, which needs improvement.*

*It should be for everything that someone would use a*

*car for -- shopping, commuting, visiting friends, going to a park.*

*I'd have to be seriously convinced if I'm to vote for funding to increase services for commuters that live elsewhere, when I find my own neighborhood service to be lacking.*

*Mass transit should focus on providing services where there is a high density (mass) of people and should include services for seniors and the handicapped.*

*Individual towns in the country can provide their own special needs services as appropriate and how they wish to fund it.*

*Mass transit should focus on providing an affordable alternative to private motor vehicles for those who can't afford a car, and those who choose not to drive to avoid adding to traffic congestion and/or finding a place to park. Bus routes should be arranged such that riders originating in neighborhoods don't have to walk more than about 1/4 mile to a bus stop.*

*That's what local transit is for. Regional transit (i.e. commuting) should be funded regionally.*

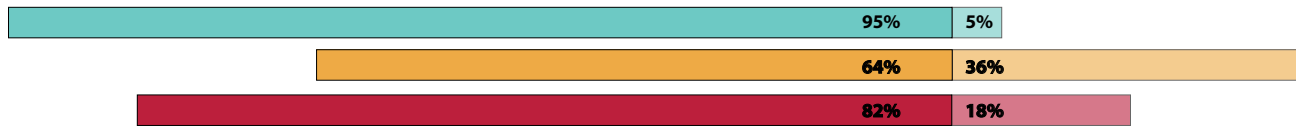
*But, there is a limit to this, since providing full service to neighborhoods with no ridership is wasting money.*

**46%** Fuller Road is a good choice for a new train station.

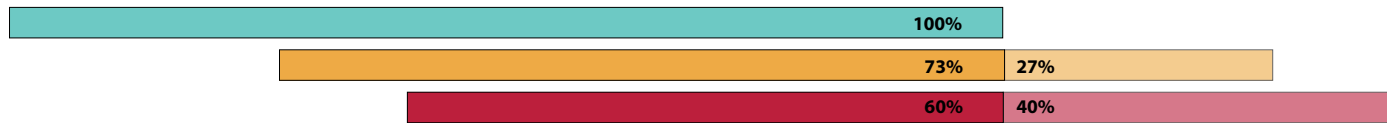
**27%** The current train station location works. No need for a new one

**39%** Fuller Road is a poor choice for a new train station

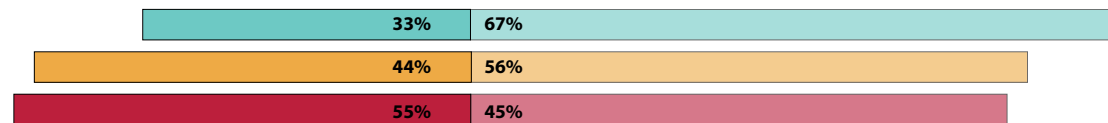
**Yes**      **No**  
**Should local government support mass transit?**



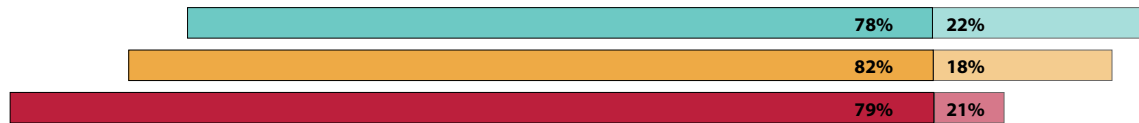
**Should mass transit go to WCC, St. Joe's, the Meijer's on Jackson Road, and other places outside Ann Arbor?**



**Should local mass transit be primarily for commuting?**



**Should local mass transit focus on providing services to neighborhoods, seniors and the handicapped?**



## Your words

We need more options for getting people into town. Driving is and has been crazy at rush hours for a while now. We need to begin more zealous work in increasing mass transit.

The region would benefit from transit options other than buses, such as light rail. Buses are more valuable as a feeder system to get people to/from a high-capacity transit backbone.

For this size city we should look at systems that mitigate existing sprawl patterns of development...it should gradually become more expensive to flee the tax rates that pay for desirable neighborhoods served by frequent, flexible and foot-friendly transit such as buses.

Regional transit is essential.

We do not have a large enough density of people within Wash. country to really have a true mass transit system. A mass transit system works well in large cities and metropolitan areas covering areas of high density. The Ann Arbor - Ypsilanti system is viable as a mass transit.

...but AATA should focus on delivering service in their current service area and millage. countywide transit makes no sense when the demand and tax base are in the cities. people living in townships are making a choice to live with limited public transit options.

You don't ask if AA should shoulder most of the cost of non AA rider. IT SHOULD NOT!

Well connected mass transit could make the city a better central destination for the region.

...funding and governance should recognize the dominant investment Ann Arbor taxpayers have made to AATA.

Mass transit should help make it possible for people who work in Ann Arbor, but can't afford to live here, get to their jobs without the need to own and maintain a car. Walking and biking are not a viable option for these people.

Include [Washtenaw County] destinations, but not Jackson, Howel, Dearborn, Brighton or other commuter points.

## The University and the City

Some of us see commuter transit as a service provided to the University. Depending on one's point of view, that's a good thing — or not.

57% of us believe providing transit services to the University is important, but of those, several do not support changing the transit system to meet the needs of University employees. So, it's an important factor, but not necessarily a *positive* factor.

*"The University is a part of the community - though this also means it should pay its fair share.*

*The University should pay its own way...I'm sick of them getting city services for free.*

*UM should service its own staff and students. UM should build more housing and stop tearing it down all over town."*

**One other point:** Several of us remain convinced that, even though the University has pulled out of building a parking structure at the Fuller Road site, it's still something the University will do.

## Sprawl

I didn't ask about sprawl or about transit oriented development. But these concepts were on the minds of some of us.

Does improved transit cause sprawl, or control it? Should we want everyone who works in Ann Arbor move here (creating a denser, taller, more compact community)? Should we tax cars as they enter town? Should we limit parking in the near downtown and push parking structures to the fringes?

These are not questions I thought about for this survey. Clearly we need to discuss this further.

## On the budget

The City Council recently heard from the Chief Financial Officer, Tom Crawford, that last-year's budget estimates were off. The City spent less than it anticipated, and brought in more revenue. He recommended that surplus dollars be used to rebuild the General Fund Reserves.

It's his job to be prudent. But it's our money.

Increasing the amount in the fund balance reserve would allow the City to plan ahead for large expenses and would also allow City government to smooth out any unexpected declines in revenue.

The City Administrator will provide his draft budget to the Council and the public in mid-April. The Council will review that budget and provide guidance on priorities.

*"I do not believe the city has brought its labor costs into the real world yet in terms of benefits, efficiency, etc. I think the city can do more with the existing staff rather than adding more."*

*"Bring staffing of police and fire-fighters back up to standards."*

*...Government employees should not be earning more in wages, benefits, and pensions than those working in the private sector with comparable skills, training, and education. Pension and healthcare costs are out of line with what people get in private business. It is both a matter of equity and fiscal responsibility to get this imbalance corrected.*

62% of respondents to this survey would prefer to prioritize increasing staff in order to improve service levels. But others question whether the City has the cost of labor and benefits under control, and whether the administration can be trusted to use dollars wisely in the future.

38%

Increase the Fund Balance reserves

62%

Hire more staff to return to prior service level

Priority is safety services. Put any additional dollars here.



Parks look ragged. Improve the parks



Community support for those in need.



Cut the administration and add staff and services.



### Your words

*Parks: the community pruners are a great idea! Use more such volunteer programs. Streets: a wreck & embarrassment.*

*We should spend way less on parks. We should have a rational approach to park acquisition and maintenance. We have acres and acres that are hardly used at all. Put money into transportation and people (direct community service).*

*and lower our property tax burden!*

*Priority is basic services that citizens pay via property taxes! Stop the "art funding" -- and LIMIT the funds spent on "consultant services!"*

*Fix the roads. It's dangerous to drive on many streets. We spend plenty on parks. If they're ragged, we should sell some of the crappier, closer-together ones. But we need more beat cops if we're going to continue to be SE Michigan's dumping ground for the destitute.*

*Core services... if want to make parks look better. Divert NAP funding instead of chasing livings plants and killing them. Burning the woods and adding greenhouse gases to the atmosphere. Parks should have less grass lawn area and more trees which take co2 out of the atmosphere. Better for the environment. Hey let's save the planet.*

## Your final words

Thank you for asking more than one, simple question.

This survey is much better constructed than those which have been distributed by the DDA, AATA, Parks and other authorities. Just like essay tests vs true/false, the information perhaps more difficult to analyze, but more worthy of the effort--both to respond and to analyze. Thank you.

No more back room deals that spend our Taxes.

**NO MORE PARK CONVERSIONS WITHOUT A VOTE!**

Thanks for providing this survey. It took me over an hour to respond, because I found it impossible to say simply "yes or no." These are complicated issues, and I appreciate that you are asking for input!

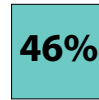
Thank you for even asking these questions. Even if I curse your eventual votes, I applaud your willingness to find out what people think. Let's hope this virus is catching.

Vote no to go any further with the Washtenaw transit system. Since we do not have a real "mass" high density in the county this will only cost lots of money going forward.

## My final words

Does this survey reflect your opinion accurately? Although the survey is closed, I'm not.

Are you interested in seeing all the answers to all of the questions? Send email or call; I'll send you the raw data.



Fuller Road is a good choice for a new train station.



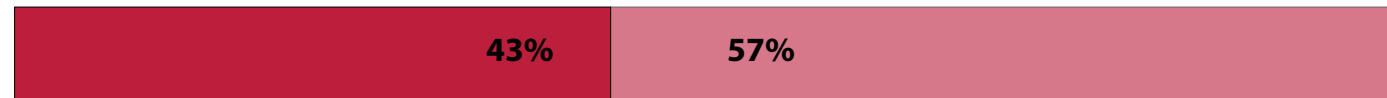
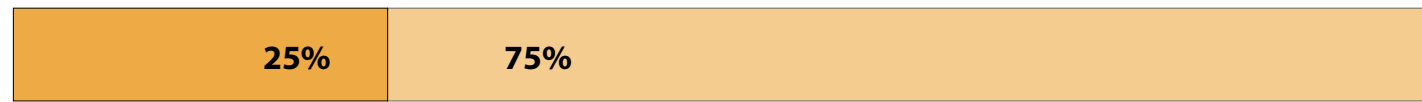
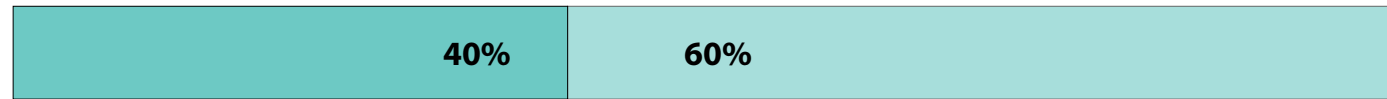
The current train station location works. No need for a new one



Fuller Road is a poor choice for a new train station

Increase the Fund Balance reserves

Hire more staff to return to prior service level



## Your words

Money should go to improving core government services... police, fire, roads. Nothing else. Otherwise give it back to whom it belongs. Us! We have families (children - parents) to care for!

Frankly, I don't trust the city to spend employment dollars wisely. Contracted benefits are unsustainable. Leaf collection is the only service I miss, I would pay a fee for it gladly.

Restore police and fire staffing and protection/service levels. Avoid non-essentials, like ambitious new building projects. Why do we fund a staff position for municipal arts?

Some of the surplus should be used to reinstate fall leaf collection. The cost to the city as a whole is less than the combined cost of thousands of residents bagging their own leaves, or hiring others to do it for them. Outsourcing of basic city services to the residents is something I would expect from a Libertarian government, not a government of liberal Democrats.

I do not believe the city has brought its labor costs into the real world yet in terms of benefits, efficiency, etc. I think the city can do more with the existing staff rather than adding more.

Bring staffing of police and fire-fighters back up to standards.

Basically the City should provide basic and neighborhood-enhancing services to maintain a vibrant city population as well as entice visitors.

We need to get rid of those who are hiding what they are doing from the public and have a council that listens to real people.