



# Kansas RTAP Fact Sheet

A Service of The University of Kansas Transportation Center for Rural Transit Providers

## Get the Most out of Employer Surveys

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**P**lanning new transit service or expanding existing service is most successful when agencies solicit broad-based input from stakeholders that can be included in the planning process; among them, local employers. Local employers can significantly impact the ridership of a transit system, so it's important to include them in community survey efforts. This article will describe a few best practices for creating and implementing an employer survey to help determine the location of new transit service. A recent employer survey in Junction City to determine feasibility for fixed-route service will be provided as a case study.

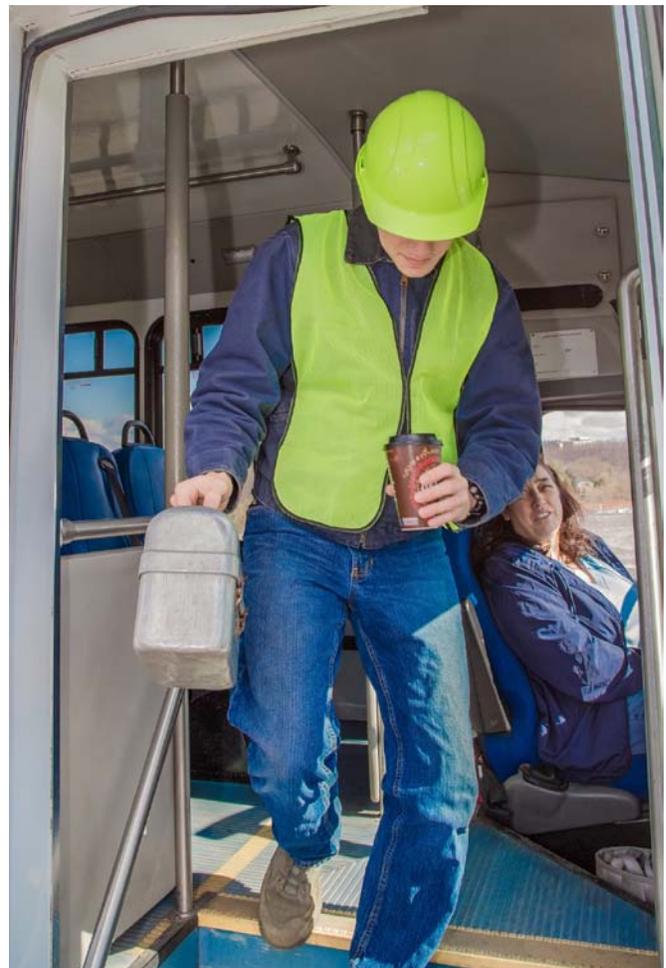
### How can employer surveys improve your planning?

Using employer surveys helps identify not only the commuting and travel habits of employees, but the potential support by the company in transit. Gathering data from employers can be efficient in determining employee travel needs, because generally a human resource manager is aware of employee travel modes and shift schedules. Additionally an HR manager would understand the impact of absenteeism and tardiness resulting from unreliable transportation or the lack of personal transportation.

One survey completed by a company can yield information about travel needs of many or all of their employees. Survey results can help you in defining schedules, stops, and future transportation partnership opportunities. Strong endorsement from local employers can help you gain support for the development or expansion of transit services when seeking approval from your local elected officials. The survey process can also help educate employers about transit availability while you assess both the employee's and the employer's needs.

### Good survey design produces good data

When designing a survey, write it in a way that will encourage respondents to read every word, help them easily understand the questions, and motivate them to finish. To accomplish this, try following these guiding principles:



National RTAP photo gallery

*Employer surveys can help identify employees who would use public transportation to get to their jobs.*

- Write each question in a way that minimizes the need to re-read portions in order to understand how to respond.

**For examples of employer surveys,** visit the following links:

- <http://www.nctr.usf.edu/clearinghouse/pdf/Chicago%20employer.pdf>
- <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/?sm=XHisy7BpsVLzb%2f57qCH7cw%3d%3d>
- <http://www.nctr.usf.edu/clearinghouse/pdf/Translink%20Survey%20Template%2003%2004%2001.pdf>
- <http://www2.ku.edu/~kutc/pdffiles/SampleEmployerSurvey-JC.pdf>

- Place instructions exactly where the information is needed and not at the beginning of the questionnaire.

- Place items with the same response categories into an item-in-a-series format, but do it carefully.

The following question has an item-in-a-series format:

*Do you consider the following issues to be severe, moderate or not a problem?*

—insufficient bus stop shelters

—no benches at the stops

—limited weekend and evening hours.

When you have several questions with the same choices for responses, it can reduce redundancy and reduce space by putting them into an item-in-a-series format that has the same introduction and format. However, by grouping questions together you are creating a comparative framework that leads respondents to think of the questions as a unit. Sometimes this is useful, but if you are wanting the respondents to think of the questions independently from each other, avoid this type of formatting. Instead, ask one question at a time.

- Minimize the use of matrices for the same reason as being careful about using the item-in-a-series format. A matrix is a grid, usually used to ask multiple questions in the same format. Familiar uses are when asking about the satisfaction level for several services, with the top row progressing from “very satisfied” to “very unsatisfied,” and with columns on the left listing services such as “routes,” “bus stop placement,” and “pick up times.”

- Use bolder print for questions and lighter print for answer choices.

- Optional or occasionally-needed instructions should be separated from the question statement by font or the use of parentheses. For example, using a font variation such as italics is an easy way of separating instructions from a question: **Which shopping centers do you feel should have bus stops?** *Choose all that apply.* Or you could use parentheses, to set the instructions apart from the question: **Which shopping centers do you feel should have bus stops?** (Choose all that apply).

- List answer categories vertically instead of horizontally. This has been shown to receive the most positive feedback from participants and provides a more natural way of scanning responses, as many computer mice have a wheel allowing the user to easily scroll vertically.

- Use shorter phrases to prevent words from being skipped by the respondents. (Dillman, et. al., 2009)

### **How to reach your audience**

Communication choices have broadened over time, and mixed-mode surveys have become common. Mixed-mode surveys are those distributed by a variety of methods, most commonly online, in person, or over the phone.

Knowing your community of local employers is essential when choosing which survey methods to use. Also, identifying and targeting your largest employers for responses will help you capture the most employee data with fewer surveys.

In a recent effort to solicit input from employers in Junction City, Ks., the Kansas University Transportation Center used web-based and phone-administered surveys to learn more about the commuter and employer-related transportation needs in Junction City.

**Online.** Web-based surveys have become common and easy to administer, allowing you to easily create, edit and analyze survey results. The employer survey distributed in Junction City was created on the website Survey Monkey™ and was emailed as a hyperlink to local businesses. Clicking on the link automatically redirected employers to the survey web page. Look to partner with local organizations like the Chamber of Commerce that might have an email list of local employers to which they could forward your survey.

**In person.** Some people still prefer face-to-face interactions, while others may not have time to meet with you. This method is the most time-intensive process, so having an idea of how much time you have to allocate to the survey process is useful. It is important that when administering the survey in person you refrain from rewording questions so that the answers you collect are comparable to ones you collect via other methods. This

method also allows the survey administrators to observe where there may be misunderstandings or vague wording within the survey that could be affecting the results.

**Via phone.** Sometimes email messages with a survey link might not make it to the right person, or the employers you are trying to reach might not check their emails regularly. Whatever the case, phone calls may be necessary when trying to secure answers from local employers. It is important that, just like in person, you refrain from rewording survey questions when you administer them over the phone so you keep answers collected by the different modes of survey consistent.

When reaching out to Junction City employers by phone, the callers were given a script to ensure consistency in asking questions from survey to survey.

Phone surveys can be more challenging than the other methods because the employer will not have the survey in front of him or her for reference. Keep this in mind and be careful about writing long questions, having a long list of options for answers, having matrices, or questions that rely on a visual prompt.

### Survey response rates

Keep in mind when creating and distributing your survey that the larger the sample of respondents the better, as it will reduce sample errors and increase the credibility of the survey results. Setting goals for a sample size and response rate can help you measure your progress through the survey process.

A 2002 report from the National Center for Transit Research (NCTR) lists several simple guidelines that can be used to increase response rates, minimize bias, and reduce sampling error. Here are a few tips you might find helpful:

- Use trained and effective surveyors
- Communicate ahead of time with flyers
- Alert customers and transit agency staff that the survey is coming
- Make participation voluntary, anonymous, and confidential
- Produce a professional-looking questionnaire and be professional in every step of the survey process
- Promise to communicate feedback on survey

- findings with customers in newsletter, meetings, etc.
- Make the questionnaire simple and user-friendly
- Provide concise and clear directions about how to complete and return the completed questionnaire
- Inform customers about the what, why, who, and how of the survey effort.

### Conclusion

Plan your employer survey in advance to greatly increase the efficiency and quality of data collected. Knowing how you plan to distribute the survey will influence how you write the survey, as will knowing your audience and their preferred communication methods. Set goals for response rate and sample size, using the listed guidelines as aids. Once you've finished collecting data from your survey, you can conduct a number of analyses to help determine the need for new transit service to serve employees and employers in your area.

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### Sources

- Center for Urban Transportation Research. "Customer Surveying For Public Transit: A Design Manual for On-Board Surveys." January 2002: 45. Web. <http://www.nctr.usf.edu/pdf/On-Board%20Survey%20Manual.pdf>
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