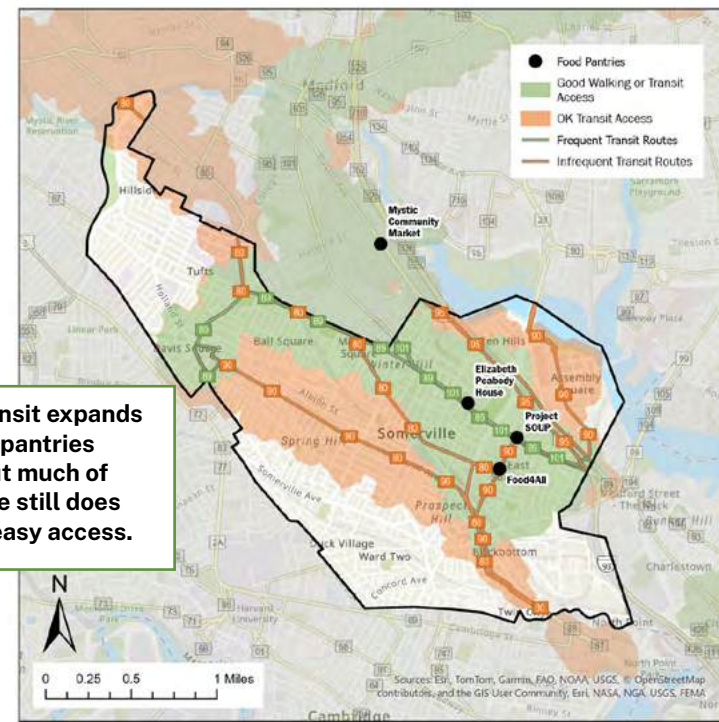
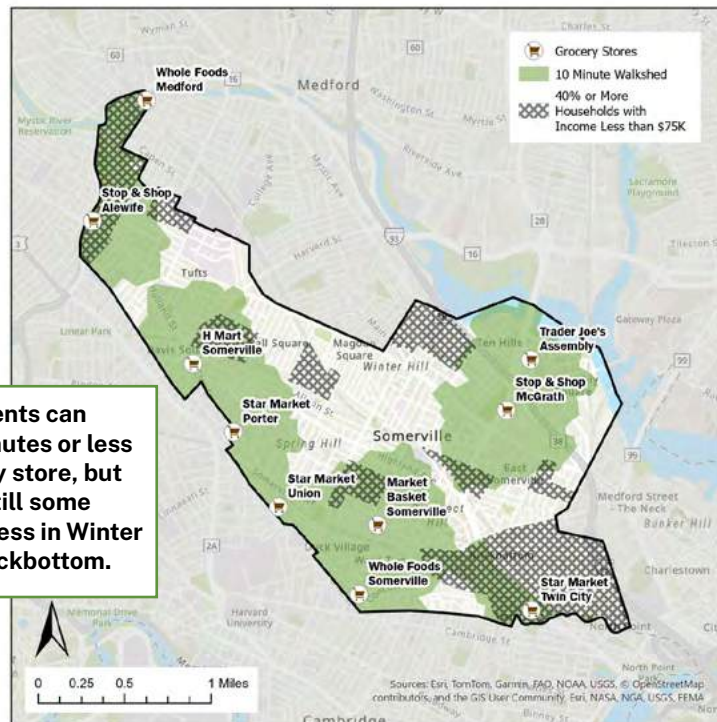


# Landscape and Preferences

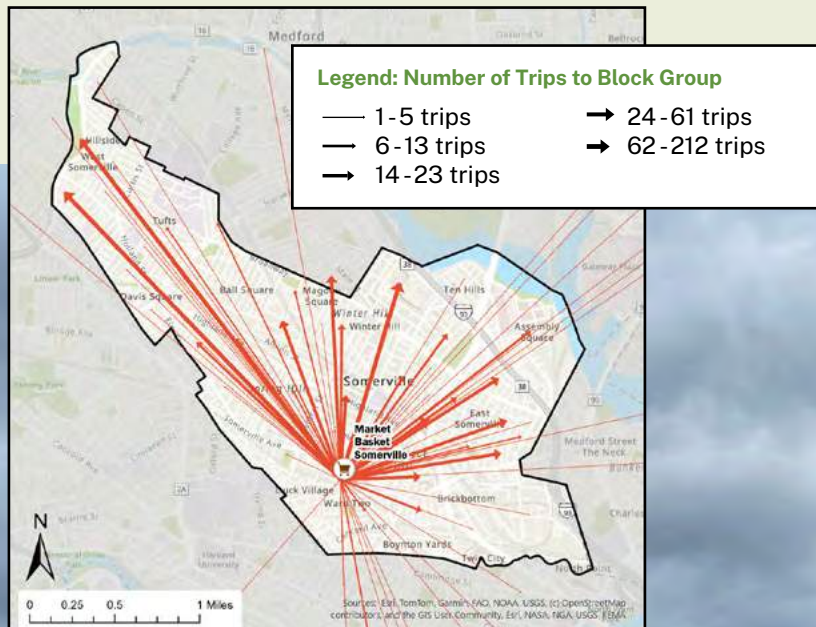
- **Transportation remains a barrier** to accessing fresh, culturally-relevant, and cost-effective food options.
  - » Winter Hill, including the city's largest public housing site, does not have a full-service grocery store within walking distance.
  - » Union Square and far West Somerville are without easy access to a food pantry.

“I can go nearby with a cart, but to go farther I have to pay for the bus or get a ride from someone. But which bus? And with bags...I mean, for those who are of older age, I think it's nice to have transportation to take them and drop them off with their food.”

-Resident of East Somerville  
[translated from Spanish]

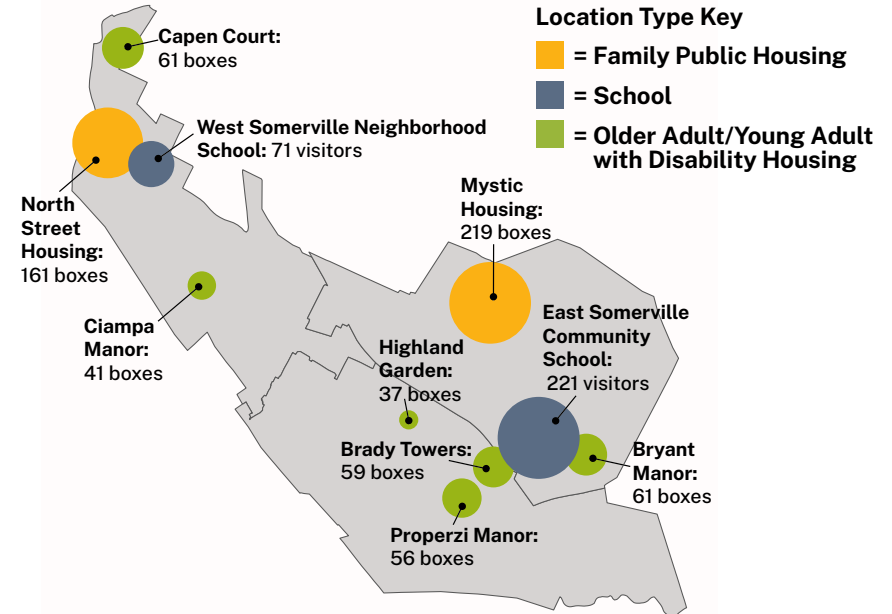


The Taxi to Health program gave low-income residents free rides to health needs, including grocery stores. Market Basket was by far the most popular grocery shopping location. The many trips from the Mystic public housing show an access gap. The heavily traveled routes from the Clarendon Hill area of West Somerville duplicate a reliable bus route, suggesting that bus is not preferred for grocery shopping among Taxi to Health users.



- **Local control over grocery store placement is limited.** Transporting food to people or transporting people to food may be more feasible.
- Pantries and mobile food distribution programs successfully offer alternatives to **address access gaps by bringing food to people**, but gaps remain within this network.

## Food For Free, Somerville Housing Authority, and Somerville Public Schools Bring Food to People, Including Many Who Cannot Easily Access Pantries



Sites that receive Just Eats boxes and the Free School Market sites as of November 2025 shown above. The number and size of the circle indicates the average number of boxes distributed per month from October 2022-June 2024 for Just Eats and the average number of visitors per month at each school market from November 2024-June 2025. Housing Authority sites include Somerville's two family public housing sites, marked in **yellow**, and six older adult/young adult with disability buildings, market in **green**. The two schools with school-year free markets are marked in **blue**.

“ I use the food pantry they bring here, to Clarendon Hill...for Project SOUP I have seen they have a variety of open hours, so I think that’s not an obstacle, more than anything it’s the transport, that it’s far”.

– Resident of West Somerville [translated from Spanish]

“ The food they give here is not going to be enough, one thing, and the other thing, it doesn’t have everything that we eat. We go shopping, to the market to shop, to Market Basket or BJ’s or Super 88...Market Basket because it’s a little cheaper, for beans, rice. Then at Super 88, meat, and BJ’s water, cooking oil, laundry soap.”

– Resident of West Somerville [translated from Haitian Creole].

“ But we also use the school market because it does help us with our economics because it’s a whole week of food. Sometimes also more. Sometimes it’s almost two weeks.”

– Somerville High School student



A Food For Free Just Eats box

- **Use of emergency food assistance has increased.** Food pantries are experiencing sustained or growing demand, underscoring the need for consistent and predictable financial support to maintain operations and service quality.
- Emergency food providers function as an **interconnected system**. Food pantries, distributions, and community fridges operate as a de facto network despite differing management structures.



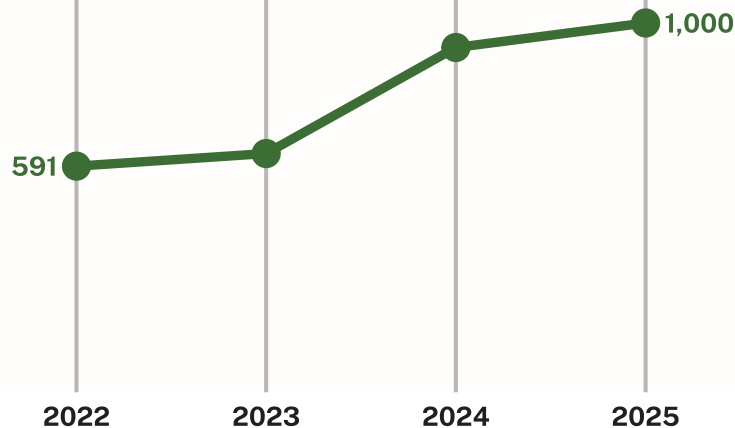
East Somerville Community School Free School Market

**Figure 6.7a and b: Visits steadily increased to pantries whose operations did not change significantly from 2022-2025.**

**a. Project Soup Pantry Visits**



**b. Shepherd's Kitchen Pantry Visits**



Numbers shown are the total visits per year for each pantry, including multiple visits for households who used the pantry more than once in that year. Project SOUP was open 4-5 days a week and allowed 2 visits per month during this period. Shepherd's Kitchen was open once a month and visitors could come each month for 10 months. Source: Program data shared by Shepherd's Kitchen and Project SOUP/SHC.

“When I go to the food pantry, if I have this [at the pantry], I say, Okay, I have this. I don't need to buy it. If I have the oil, I say, Okay, it's going to make me [spend] less.”

– Regular visitor to Project SOUP



### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE THE FOOD ACCESS LANDSCAPE:

- Use Taxi to Health data to elevate transportation access as a key driver of health with food access an important component.
- Improve permanent, reliable free and affordable food access in the Union Square area and West Somerville.
- Increase awareness and uptake of SNAP online shopping, prioritizing homebound residents.

Want to learn more?  
Find the full  
assessment here:

