

# Somerville Transit to Health program

Compiled by OFAHC & Metropolitan Area Planning Council  
Fall 2023

Data Sources: MAPC, U.S. Census Bureau 2010 Decennial Census  
Date: August 2023

City of Cambridge, Esri, HERE, Garmin, SafeGraph, GeoTechnologies, Inc. METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS, US Census Bureau, USDA

## In these slides:

- A one-year summary of OFAHC's Taxi to Health, ARPA funded program
- A note on alternative models considered with MAPC including a
  - 1) shuttle that runs north – south
  - 2) on-demand group shuttle
  - 3) a transit package

# Background

- Somerville began operating a “Taxi to Health” program in 2020 based on a goal in the 2019 Food Action Plan after hearing from people that getting to the grocery store was a barrier to eating enough, sufficient food.
  - Provides free taxi rides to food, non-emergency medical appointments, and other health-supporting needs for low-income Somerville residents, primarily under 60 years
  - Operated by Office of Food Access and Healthy Communities (OFAHC)
  - Participants are given vouchers that allow them independence in booking their own rides.
- Program initially funded by MassDevelopment grant (administered by MAPC) and now funded by ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funds through October 2024
- The Somerville Council on Aging operates a parallel program for residents 60 and over. Riders must call 48 hours in advance for ride approval. These rides cover food, medical and prescription pick up. (their data not represented in these slides)

# Program Overview with ARPA funds

- Year 1 (March 2022- March 2023) cost: \$92,000, 4132 rides (average cost per ride \$22)
- Year 2 (March 2023 – March 2024) cost: \$207,500, 8592 rides
- Year 3 (March 2024 – May 2024) cost so far: \$70,800 for 2674 rides

# Data

- All data on these slides are data from October 2022 – September 2023, except for the maps, produced by MAPC using data from October 2022-July 2023.

# How do we Classify Client Rides?

- Multipurpose:
  - A trip destination or origin has multiple services at that single location.
  - Examples:
    - Rider takes a trip to First Dental and afterward walks to Dollar General to pick up groceries.
    - Rider takes a trip to a location that offers multiple services, for example Davis Square.
- Multistop:
  - Rider goes to more than one approved destination in a trip
  - Example:
    - Rider takes a trip from Home to the doctor's office for an appointment.
    - While at the appointment the Dr. provides a prescription. The Rider takes a return trip from Dr. to Wegman's to pick up a prescription and go grocery shopping.
    - After picking up the prescription and groceries, the Rider takes a final trip to Home.
- A note on data quality:
  - Taxi to Health program staff receive an invoice from Green and Yellow Cab, the program contractor, every month. The invoice backing includes a list of rides taken with pickup and destination addresses. In many cases addresses do not tell us exactly where the client went and for what reason.
  - Staff do their best to clean up and identify the addresses, but there is still a considerable amount of uncertainty in the data.

# Who are the Regular Users of Taxi to Health?

From Oct 2022-Sept 2023

**349 clients** used the taxi program through referrals or a residential program

**5681 rides total**

What are clients' first languages?

English – 61% (213), Spanish 22% (76), Portuguese 3.4% (12), Haitian Creole 2.0% (7), Unknown 9.1% (31), Other 2.3% (8)

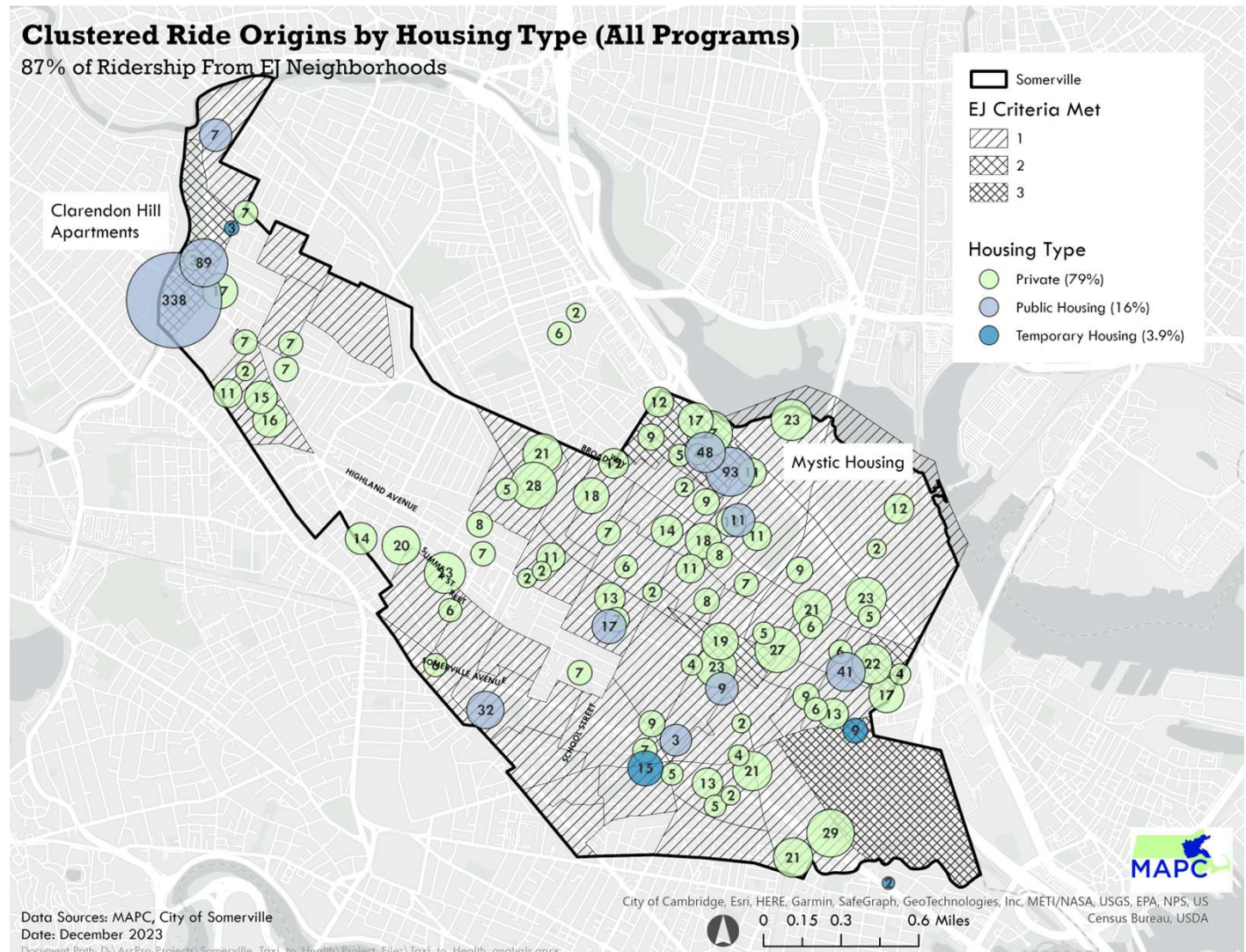
Housing Type	Number of Clients	% of Clients	% of All Rides
Private	176	51.8	55.2
Public or Subsidized	118	34.7	32.6
Temporary	46	13.5	12.3

Zip	Number of Clients	% of Clients	% of All Rides
02143	63	18.6%	18.8%
02144	124	36.6%	33.3%
02145	148	43.7%	46.9%



# Map #1: Ride origins, Oct 2022-Jul 2023

- The most popular origins are Somerville's two concentrations of public and subsidized housing: Clarendon Hill Apartments + Clarendon Hill Towers and Mystic Housing
- 87% of the ridership came from Environmental Justice neighborhoods

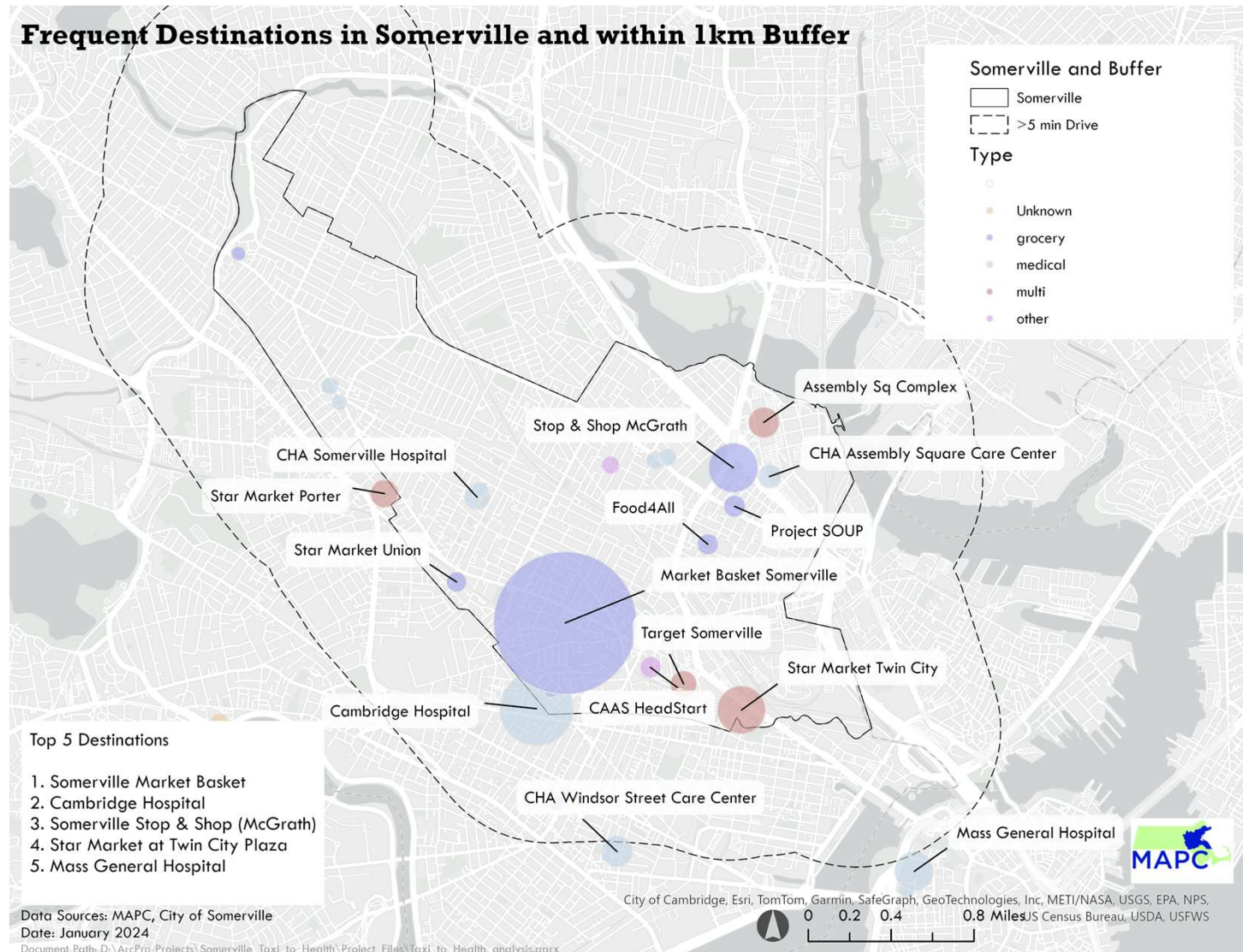




# Map #2: destinations

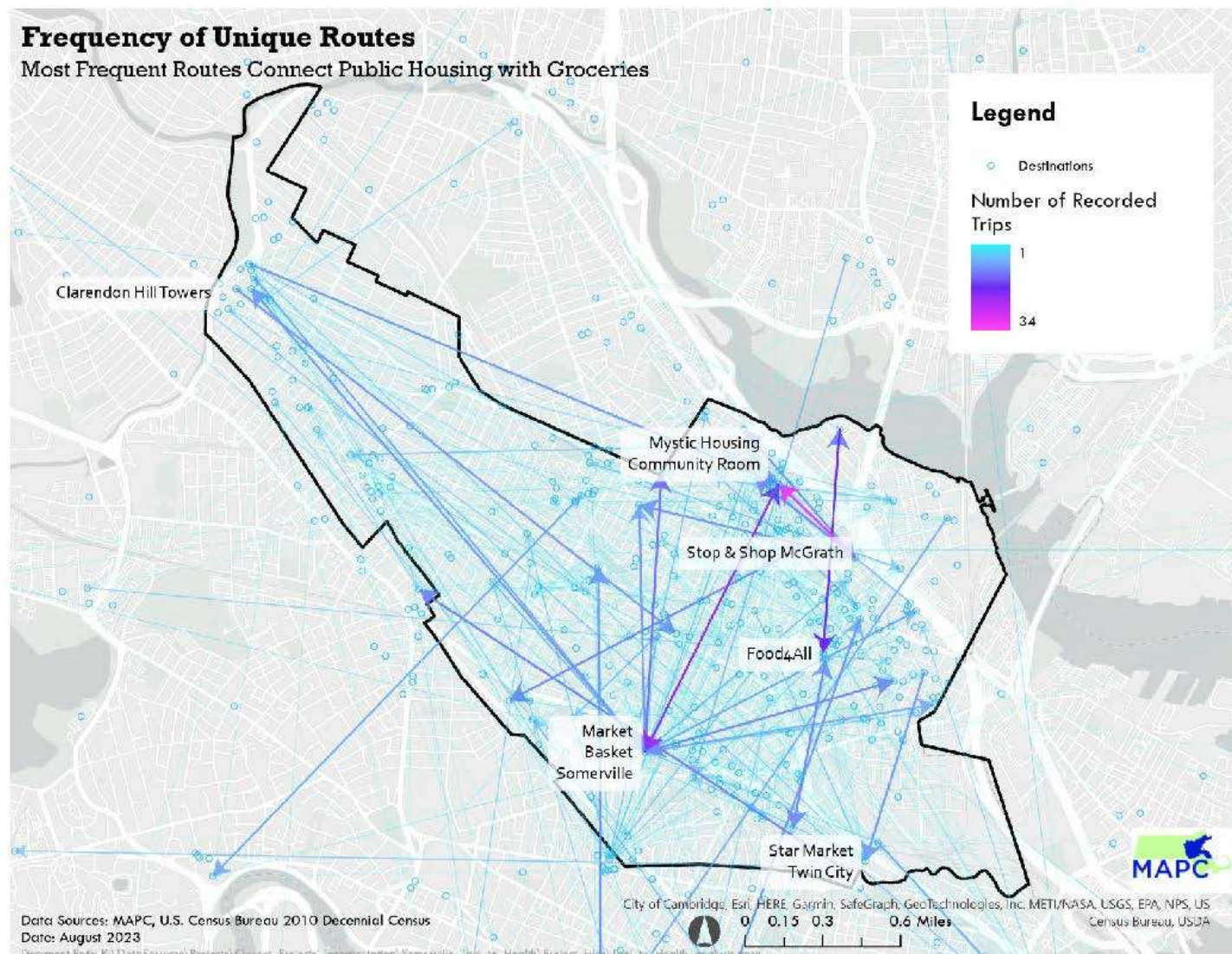
- The top 5 destinations were:
  - Market Basket
  - Cambridge Hospital
  - Stop & Shop on McGrath Highway
  - Star Market at Twin City Plaza
  - Mass General Hospital
- 30% of the destinations were outside of Somerville\*

\*As of May 2023



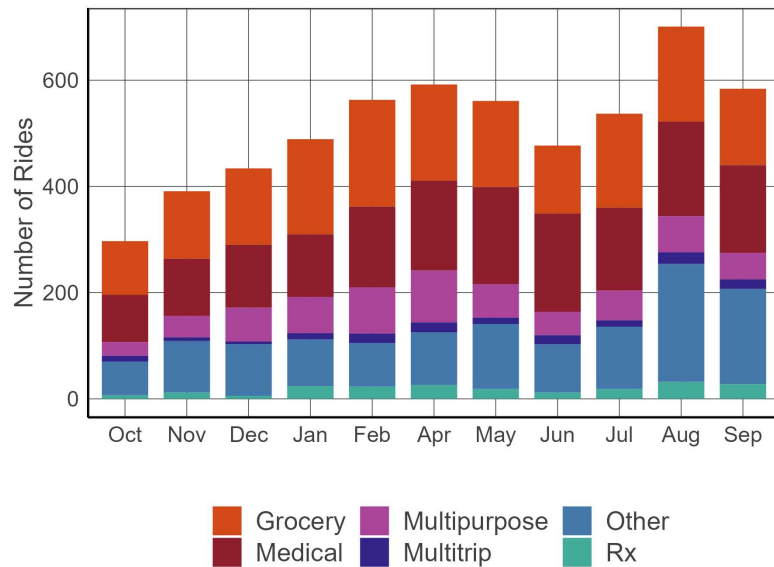
# Map #3: popular routes

- The most popular routes were from public housing in Winter Hill to Market Basket and Stop & Shop at McGrath Highway
- *This map controls for referrals, but it is important to note that Somerville distributed vouchers to Project SOUP, Clarendon Hill Towers, and Short Stop.*





# How is Taxi to Health Used By Ride Type?



Ride Type	Total Rides	Percent of Rides	Total Cost	Percent of Cost	Ave Cost per Ride
Grocery	1746	30.7%	\$34,619.00	26.1%	\$19.83
Medical	1630	28.7%	\$42,456.00	32.0%	\$26.05
Multipurpose	675	11.9%	\$14,353.00	10.8%	\$21.26
Multitrip	154	2.7%	\$3,931.00	3.0%	\$25.53
Other	1266	22.3%	\$32,803.00	24.7%	\$25.91
Rx	210	3.7%	\$4,432.00	3.3%	\$21.10

- Program use has increase on average, despite variation in monthly use.
- March is excluded because rides were artificially low due to a pause in the program connected to the contract.

Note: Figures are based on October 2022-September 2023 ride data. 55 rides in March are exclude for a total of 5626 rides.

# Taxi to Health Use By Geography

Program use is concentrated in Somerville and its border cities of Cambridge, Arlington, Medford, Everett, and Charlestown (part of Boston).

Taxi to Health users can currently travel from Somerville to Cambridge, Medford, Malden, Arlington, Boston, Everett, Brookline, Waltham, Chelsea, Revere, Lynn, Newton, Watertown, Belmont, Burlington, Stoneham, Reading, Woburn, Saugus, and Wilmington as well as between any two of these cities if the trip is less than 20 miles.

Trip Type	Somerville		Somerville + Bordering Cities		All Cities	
	# Rides	\$ Cost	# Rides	\$ Cost	# Rides	\$ Cost
All Rides	2,911	\$52,411	4,586	\$93,470	5,681	\$132,594
Food	1,443	\$25,974	1,664	\$31,365	1,744	\$34,494
Medical	394	\$7,092	1,105	\$24,283	1,618	\$41,960
Multi	433	\$7,807	754	\$15,715	820	\$18,045
All Other	641	\$11,538	1,063	\$22,107	1,499	\$38,095

# Somerville Only Rides

From Oct 2022-Sep 2023, **51% (2,911)** of rides from referrals or residential programs were contained in Somerville.

The total cost of these rides was **\$52,411**, on average **\$4,367.58/month** for **243 rides/month**.

**77.7%** of current clients have **at least one ride** contained in Somerville.

A little more than a **quarter** of unique clients (94) have **80% or more** of their rides contained in Somerville. About **half** of clients (175) have **50% or more** of their rides contained in Somerville.

About a **third** of clients (115) have **25% or fewer** of their rides contained in Somerville.

Rides contained in Somerville include more food-related trips compared with all rides.

Ride Type	Somerville Rides	% of Somerville Rides	Cost of Somerville Rides	All Cities	% of All City Rides	Cost of All City Rides
All Rides	2,911	--	\$52,411	5,681	--	\$132,594
Food	1,442	49.5%	\$25,956	1,746	30.7%	\$34,619
Medical	536	18.4%	\$9,648	1,840	32.4%	\$46,888
Multi	435	14.9%	\$7,843	829	14.6%	\$18,284
Other	498	17.1%	\$8,964	1,266	22.3%	\$32,803



# Somerville and Border City Only Rides

From Oct 2022-Sep 2023, **81% (4,586)** of rides from referrals or residential programs were contained in Somerville and border cities (Medford, Cambridge, Arlington, Everett, Charlestown)

The total cost of these rides was **\$93,470**, on average **\$7,789.17/month for 382 rides/month**.

**90.5%** of current clients have **at least one ride** contained in Somerville and border cities.

About **two-thirds** of clients (229) have **80% or more** of their rides contained in Somerville and bordering cities.

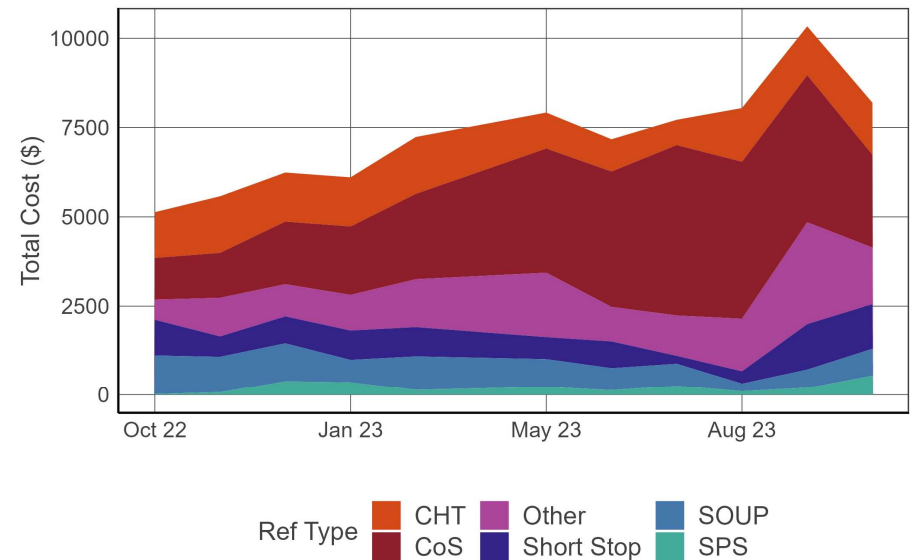
About **four in five** clients (286) have **50% or more** of their rides contained in Somerville.

About an **eighth** of clients (44) have **25% or fewer** of their rides contained in Somerville.

Ride Type	Somerville + Border City Rides	% of Somerville + Border City Rides	Cost of Somerville + Border City Rides	All Cities	% of All City Rides	Cost of All City Rides
All Rides	4,586	--	\$93,470	5,681	--	\$132,594
Food	1,663	36.3%	\$31,347	1,746	30.7%	\$34,619
Medical	1,293	28.2%	\$27,963	1,840	32.4%	\$46,888
Multi	760	16.6%	\$15,857	829	14.6%	\$18,284
Other	870	19.0%	\$18,303	1,266	22.3%	\$32,803

## Total Cost of Program by Referral Type

Referral Type	Unique Users	Total Cost
Clarendon Hill Towers	61	\$14,291
City of Somerville	78	\$31,866
Other	50	\$15,008
Project SOUP	110	\$8,588
Somerville Public Schools	13	\$2,447
Short Stop	24	\$8,460



### Notes:

- Includes ride data from all programs, Oct 2022-Sep 2023.
- City of Somerville includes all city agencies, such as HHS supportive services, OHS, CoHR, and SomerPromise.
- 'Other' includes other referral agencies with smaller volumes, such as Respond Inc, Catholic Charities, Somerville Housing Authority, Somerville Homeless Coalition, and Riverside Early Head Start, among others.

# When do users need Rides?

Within Somerville, weekday mornings and middays (7 AM to 3 PM) are the most popular times to travel. On average, a little over 31 rides occur per week during the timeframe, or about 6 rides per weekday.

Day and Timeframe		Total Rides	Average Per Week
Weekday	Morning: 7 AM-10 AM	647	12.4
	Midday: 10 AM-3 PM	984	18.9
	Afternoon: 3 PM-7 PM	341	6.5
	Evening: 7 PM -10PM	75	1.4
Weekend	Morning: 8 AM-12 PM	265	5.1
	Afternoon: 12 PM-6 PM	243	4.7
	Night: 6 PM-8 AM	356	6.8

Note: Figures are based on October 2022-September 2023 ride data, Somerville-only rides (2911).

# What's next for the Taxi to Health program:

- The Taxi to Health program is ARPA funded and will sunset October 2024.
- Due to “public purpose limitation” it is not possible to continue as a program on the City’s general fund.
- Different external funds would be needed to continue the program and staff have begun researching options.
- Program evaluation is underway to get feedback from existing participants on the current program.

# Exploring Alternative Models:

Alternative ideas included:

- 1) A North-South fixed route shuttle
- 2) An on-demand group shuttle
- 3) A transportation package including a monthly MBTA pass plus some vouchers

An initial cost-benefit analysis with MAPC revealed that any of the above programs would cost more money than what has been spent annually on the Taxi to Health program and serve fewer people.

For more details on this analysis, please email [ofahc@somervillema.gov](mailto:ofahc@somervillema.gov)