



City of Baker, Louisiana
Rebecca Bond
Office of Communications
3325 Groom Road
Baker, LA 70714
(225)364-6041

April 10, 2023

Re: Louisiana Municipal Association Community Achievement Awards

Project: City of Baker Micro-Transit – LYNX by CATS

Overview

The City of Baker has undertaken the first metro-area micro transit pilot program in partnership with the Capital Area Transit System (CATS) to enhance transportation options for residents in and around Baker. This program was determined a beneficial addition to the modes of transportation when evaluating both the current needs and plans for the city in conjunction with feasible models utilizing existing infrastructure in a holistic, responsible, and timely manner. The benefits of this project are replete. Serving the broadest possible spectrum of citizens and businesses is demonstrated by the assessments of the market area, existing and future customer base, and a broad range of socio-economic factors.

To understand the basis for which this is supported, we must first understand how a socio-economic class is defined. A common definition, such as the one by Investopedia is **a group of people with similar characteristics. These characteristics can include social and economic standing, level of education, current profession, and ethnic background or heritage. Certain goods or services may be unavailable to specific socioeconomic classes based on their ability to afford them (as a result of their income). These goods or services can include access to more advanced or complete medical care, educational opportunities, and the ability to buy food that meets specific nutritional guidelines.** They are directly correlated to income, education, employment, community safety, and social support(s).

Within East Baton Rouge Parish itself, there are four cities. The “Tri-City Area”, which resides in the northernmost part of the parish, is comprised of the cities of Baker, Central, and Zachary. Of the three, Baker is the only city that currently utilizes CATS services and seeks to expand upon this mode of transportation. This is solely due to the majority of the population voting in the affirmative to retain CATS services within the city limits of Baker, a service they have continued to support through the ballot box. This is a strong statement regarding public opinion of public transportation in Baker.

To understand the majority support public transit currently holds in Baker, it is necessary to understand the history and dynamics of the people of East Baton Rouge Parish and the greater metropolitan area. Baker and the majority of the East Baton Rouge Parish (EBRP) Metropolitan Area were originally Colonial Land Grant properties that evolved through years of being plantations, which were later inheritances, gifts, and purchases. From the colonization of the land until now, history has shaped the city and region we are living in today now known as the EBRP Metro Area. The entire region was once known for large plantations, various cash crops, and slavery. Baker was established as a stop in 1884 on the Illinois Central Railroad within the Louisville, New Orleans, and Texas routes. Following the establishment of this train stop the addition of a sawmill, cotton gin, and post office followed. When big industry came to the area, Baker grew. Many families settled in the area due to employment with industrial plants located on or near the Mississippi River. Over the years, Baker, like much of Baton Rouge, has experienced a pattern of shifting population demographics which has resulted in systemic disinvestment. This disinvestment can be linked to broad societal issues which we face daily, and which have fueled changes in population trends.



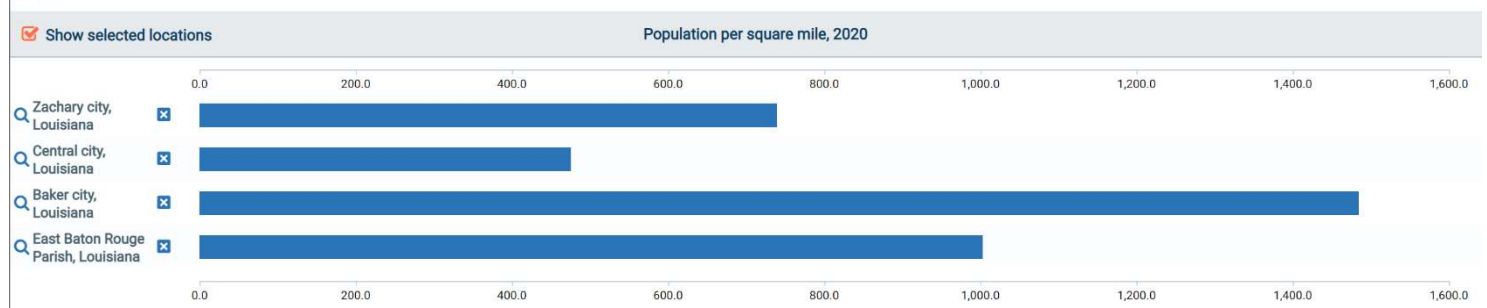
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While many may wish to attribute this disinvestment to a variety of reasons, the fact that the industries which created population booms in the area have remained consistent in their locations, with others being added in the same geographical locations, simply does not account for the local demographic shifts. These demographic shifts have resulted in the systemic devaluation of properties, environmental injustices, and a plethora of other offenses that are not witnessed when looking at similar properties adjacent to similar neighborhoods with differing demographics across this metropolitan area.

There is a long history relative to public transit in Baton Rouge, specifically buses and bus services, which requires addressing. There also is a negative stigma associated with public transportation in the south which must be resolved to address pressing issues of equity, the environment, and the related financial and infrastructure costs taxpayers bear with the current state of transportation.

At present, the City of Baker is the most densely populated micropolitan of the Tri-City in East Baton Rouge Parish (Table 1). Microtransit is of benefit to communities in several ways. Gary Becker, Nobel Prize winner, said *“A large population translates into a greater domestic market, stimulating investment in knowledge and attracting investors and multinational companies in areas that previously lacked them. More people mean a greater pool of individuals who can generate new ideas for improving productivity in a wide range of fields.”*

Table 1
Chart



Understanding the opportunities ahead, we are leading the area in redesigning Baker as a modern community to serve the needs of its members, planning for the future, protecting the environment, and creating sustainable infrastructure, while seeking to create the highest quality of life and place.

A key component in the quality-of-life calculation for both businesses and residents is transportation options. Transportation, like affordable housing, parks, recreation opportunities, and other local amenities have become standard benchmarks for large businesses actively seeking locations for new facilities. Their searches routinely look for sites that have broad labor pools with access to the best workers, as they seek to also evaluate the quality of life and place of a location. Businesses recognize the need for a community to offer access to transit as one of the many qualifying factors in talent retention. Transportation options help drive decision-making for individuals and businesses. Therefore, as we seek to attract high-quality talent and high-caliber employers offering careers where individuals can earn above-average wages we must take action to ensure the public amenities which attract them are implemented in our communities.

Ultimately, the goal of providing the best possible public transportation options, which meet the needs of people of all demographics, all lifestyles, all incomes, and all travel needs is the duty of the public entities charged with managing resources and coordinating with parallel or complementary agencies.



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How does micro transit work? Users request a ride on a mobile phone app, by phone, or computer, or by calling a customer service agent. They pay a \$1.75 standard fare, a \$0.35 senior citizen fare, or provide a copy of a valid student ID for a free fare. The user gets picked up in a small van. If other users also request a ride along the way, they are also picked up. Then each of the users gets dropped off at their destination.

Benefits of Microtransit

Economies of scale. Although Baker is the most densely populated, the overall population is small in comparison to the City of Baton Rouge, which is the other primary user of CATS Transit services. Baker does enjoy several fixed-route services, however as demand grows the need to better serve smaller and more distant populations demands more modern and better means of providing services to the people. This is where micro-transit became the logical choice.

Understanding the shift in public desire for transit options is best demonstrated by reviewing data on the matter. In the 2017 paper *"Who Rides Public Transportation"* authored by Hugh M. Clark, Ph.D., Author of CJI Research Corporation for the American Public Transportation Association (APTA)¹ many key factors influencing transit decisions were taken into account such as the items relayed in the executive summary:

- **Age** - Of all transit riders, 79% fall into the most economically active age range from 25 to 54. The balance is divided between those younger than 25 (14%) and those in the age range generally thought of as the retirement years, 65 or older.
- **Ethnicity** - The single largest group of riders consists of white or Caucasian riders; (40%). Communities of color make up a majority of riders (60%), with African-American riders comprising the largest single group (24%) within communities of color. However, there are considerable variations in these characteristics among urban areas of differing sizes.
- **Household size** - Transit riders come from a wide mix of household sizes. A two-person household is more common (31%) than other household sizes. However, single-person households are also very common, with 26% of riders reporting households of that size. The balance consists of households of three persons (18%) and households of four or more persons (25%).
- **Employment** - Of all riders, 71% are employed, while 7% are students. Thus more than three-fourths of transit riders (78%) are either currently employed or preparing for employment. The balance includes 7% retired persons, 6% unemployed, and 3% homemakers. Another 6% were classified as "Other" in the reports.
- **Workers in the Household** - Most transit user households (77%) include one or more working persons. This consists of 43% with one working person and another 34% with two or more working persons.
- **Income** - According to the Census Bureau, a total of 13% of U.S. households have household incomes of less than \$15,000, but among transit-using households, the comparable figure is 21%. On the other hand, at the top level of the income spectrum (\$100,000 or more), the percentage of all U.S. households (23%) and transit-using households (21%), is very similar.

1. APTA is a nonprofit international association of 1,500 public and private sector organizations, engaged in the areas of bus, paratransit, light rail, commuter rail, subways, waterborne services, and intercity and high-speed passenger rail. This includes transit systems; planning, design, construction, and finance firms; product and service providers; academic institutions; transit associations, and state departments of transportation. APTA is the only association in North America that represents all modes of public transportation. APTA members serve the public interest by providing safe, efficient, and economical transit services and products.



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- Education - More than half (51%) of transit riders hold a bachelor's degree or some level of graduate education. Relatively few (8%) have less than a high school education. One percent (1%) was classified as "Other" in the reports. The 40% balance, completed high school or some college.
- Gender - Most transit riders in the United States are women (55%).
- Vehicle Availability - Among all riders, 54% indicated there is a vehicle available to them on an ongoing basis, while 46% said there was no vehicle available.
- Driver's License - Almost two-thirds of transit users, 65%, have a driver's license, an indication that they have some flexibility in travel mode even if a vehicle is not immediately available for a given trip.
- Language - Among all transit users, 85% speak English as their primary language, while 12% speak Spanish and 3% speak other languages.
- Trip Purpose - A total of 87% of public transportation trips involve a direct economic impact on the local economy. This includes getting to or from work (49%) or shopping (21%) and recreational spending in the local economy (17%). Since we know that 71% of the riders are employed, clearly the fact that 49% of riders' trip purposes were getting to or from work means that many employed riders happened to be making trips for other purposes when surveyed. One indicator of these other uses of transit is an increase in trips for shopping since the 2007 study when only 8.6% of trips were for shopping. Shopping trips increased to 21% in the current study.
- Reasons for Using Public Transit -When asked to describe in their own words their reasons for using public transit, a total of 60% of the reasons given involve either a preference for using transit for the economy of it (16%) or just a preference for intangible benefits such as convenience (44%). The most frequent response (44% of reasons given) was that they simply prefer transit for a variety of intangible reasons, including that they find it more convenient than driving, that they save time or help the environment, or they simply say that they "prefer it" without elaborating. In addition to these reasons, other motives cited involve a transit preference based on cost savings (16%). In particular, they mention saving on gasoline and parking costs. Finally, 40% say they have no real alternative because they lack money or lack a vehicle, or that transit is the only transportation available to them.
- Frequency of Using Public Transit -More riders use public transit five days a week (50%) than any other usage pattern. In addition, another 13% use it six or seven days a week. Studies tend to find that among the five-day riders, commuting is the primary trip purpose, but it is among the primary trip purposes for many others as well.
- Access Mode - More than two-thirds of transit users (69%) walk to their stop or station. Another 11% drive to their stop, while 10% indicate that they use another form of transit. The balance is either dropped off (6%) or used in another mode.
- Egress Mode - On alighting from their transit vehicles, most transit passengers walk to their destination (76%). Another 16% transferred to another transit vehicle, while 4% drove, 3% get a ride, and 1% could not be classified except as "other."
- Alternate Mode - Riders were asked what alternative mode they might use if transit services were not available. The most frequent responses were that they would not make the trip (22%) or that they would use other transit options (20%). The balance, 57%, say they would find a means of travel other than public transportation. More (17%) would drive than any other non-transit mode. However, a total of 16% would either car/ vanpool, get a ride, or take a taxi.
- Fare Media Used - Most transit riders, 86%, use a passing medium of some type to pay their fares. The use of cash, once the common fare medium, has diminished to only 11% of the ridership nationally.
- Transfer Rate - Annually, half of the trips made (50%) require a transfer during those trips, and half do not.



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- Duration of Using Transit -Most riders (a total of 53%) are long-term riders in that they have used transit for five or more years. This includes 29% who have used transit for five or six years and 24% who have used it for seven or more years.

During Mayor Waites' administration, continuous assessment of the vital needs of the community has been the driving force behind developing short, medium, and long-term strategic goals. Understanding these needs has been a result of ongoing engagement and outreach.

The steps that the City of Baker underwent in partnership with CATS were to assess the current fixed-route bus service usage, the growth patterns of the city alongside the economic growth of key commercial points within the city limits as well as popular, short-distance destinations from Baker for current riders. Evaluation of these key criteria, coupled with the desire to provide a more robust service better suited to the needs and wants of the community, led to the decision to implement the micro-transit option.

Upon unanimous agreement that this option was the most beneficial due to its flexibility, scalability, ease of implementation, and funded by the CATS tax which Baker citizens voted for in 2021, it was determined that the project could take place immediately and be implemented in under twelve months, thus offering a highly improved transit service for the citizens of Baker.

Marketing materials for the service, which were implemented on June 7, 2022, are attached to this document in Appendix A. As can be seen, the cost of service is economically reasonable: \$1.75 for everyone with special fares for Seniors and Students - \$0.35 for Senior Citizens, and free for students with a valid student ID.

This micro-transit service provides a more robust service than fixed-route bus services. By meeting the rider at or near the location they need transportation to/from and connecting them to the larger metro area transportation system more effectively.

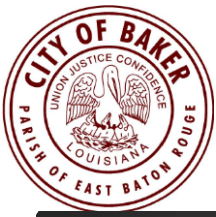
Deployment Statistics

LYNX deployed 5 Toyota Sienna vans with the operating hours of Monday – Friday 5:00 AM, Saturday 6:30 AM – 8:00 PM, and no service on Sunday.

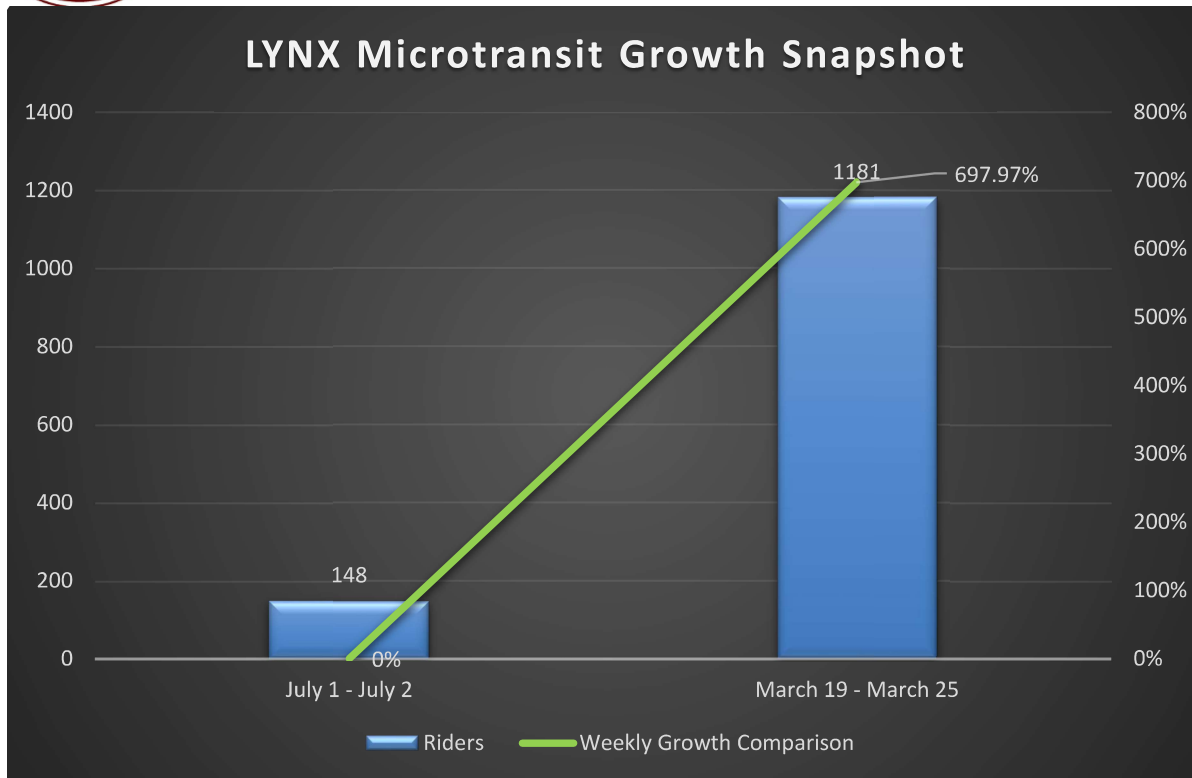
In the first week of service, there were 466 total ride requests, 459 of which were completed. This is a 98.5% met-demand rate. Four hundred fifty-nine completed ride requests equal 91.8 trips in and around the city, per day in the first week of service. This is 18.36 trips per van unit per day or one ride every 1.3 hours being completed on-demand.

At the eight-month mark, this service has seen incredible growth and positive feedback.

As of the week ending March 25, 2023, which is the nine-month mark of the pilot program, the service has provided 21,539 rides, with 2,615 monthly (average) completed rides from launch through March 25, 2023.



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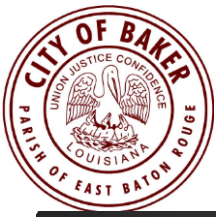
The highest-performing month so far is January 2023 with 5,165 completed rides and the highest-performing week was in November 27-December 3, 2022 with 1420 rides provided in one single week.

Comparing LYNX to Baker bus route 52, the Baker Circulator shows how this demand response service is integral in the mobility of this city. In 2018, route 52 had about 12,000 Unlinked Passenger Trips (UPT) annually. Compared to LYNX, which in 6 months provided 24,480 rides, we see an approximate 408% increase in the use of public transit when calculating utilization of LYNX vs route 52 during a six-month window.

- Unlinked Passenger Trips (UPT) are defined as the number of passengers who board public vehicles. Passengers are counted each time they board vehicles no matter how many vehicles they use to travel from their origin to their destination.

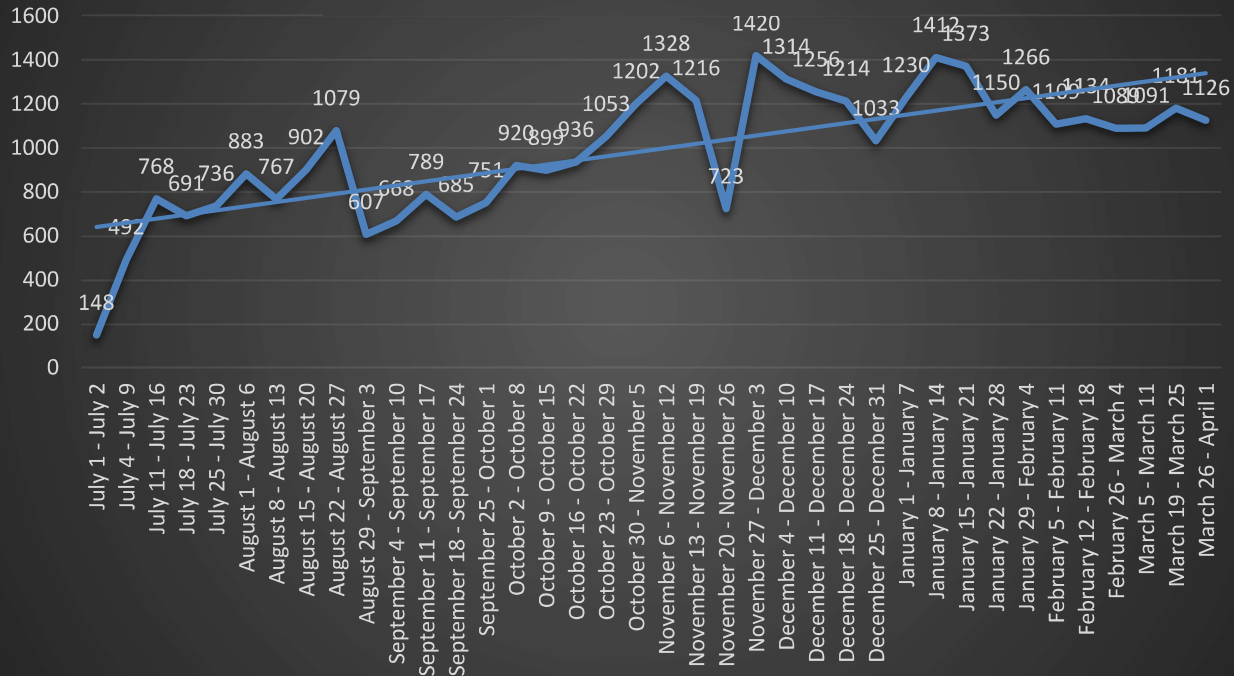
Citizens also can transfer to other fixed route services in Scotlandville, at the transfer hub, in an easier and faster way.

The weekly review shows us that the current average rider is seeing an 18-minute wait time for a pickup trip at the point of initiating a request.

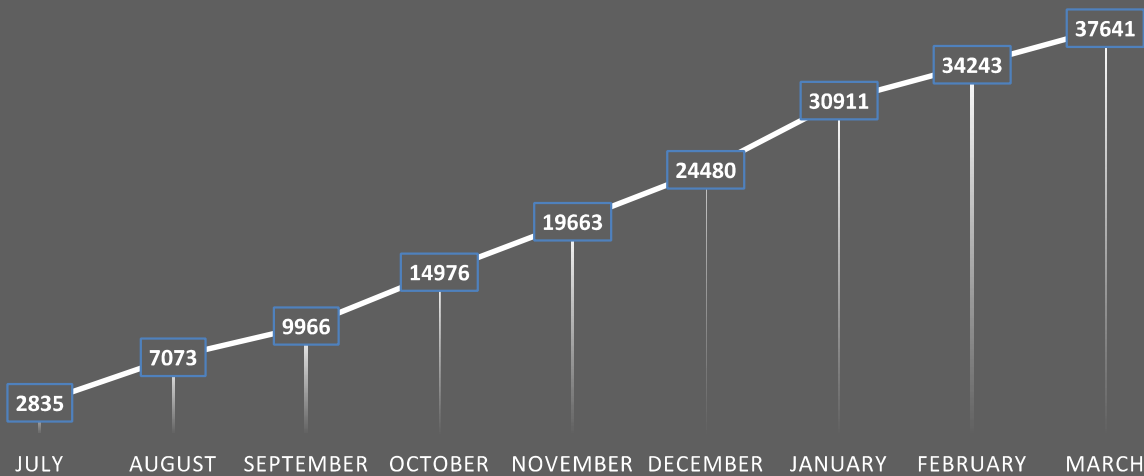


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Completed Trips (by week)



TOTAL RIDES MONTHLY





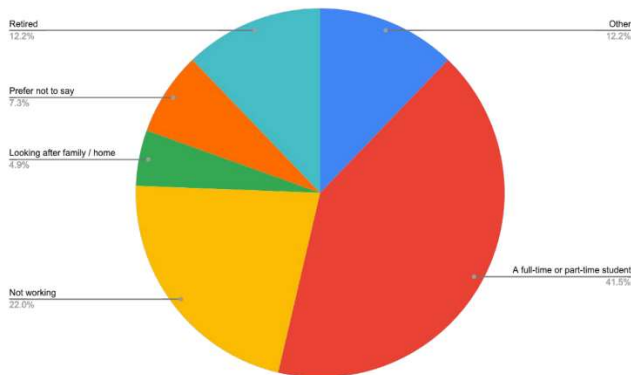
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Public Opinion

Notably, customer satisfaction with this public transit option is very high with the service receiving an average pickup customer trip rating of 4.9 out of 5 stars for all trips taken since launching through the end of 2022. The key takeaways from the EOY 2022 rider surveys were:

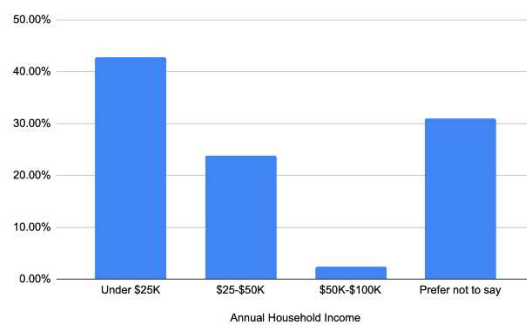
- Affordability is key.
 - 66% of riders report a household income of \$50k, 42% of riders report a household income under \$25K, and 37.5% report affordability as the primary reason why they use the service.

Most respondents are not employed full time, and 2/3rds have a household income below \$50k



*41 total responses

 Proprietary & Confidential.

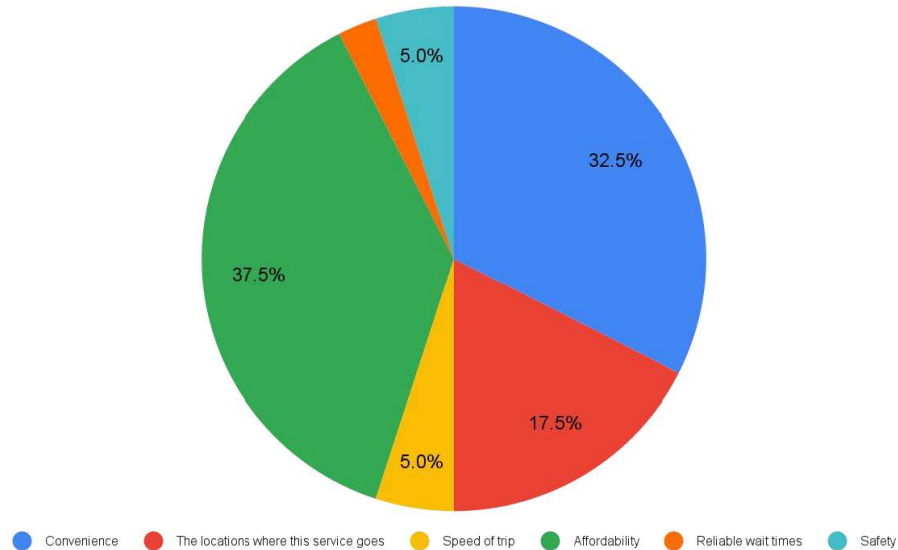


*42 total responses



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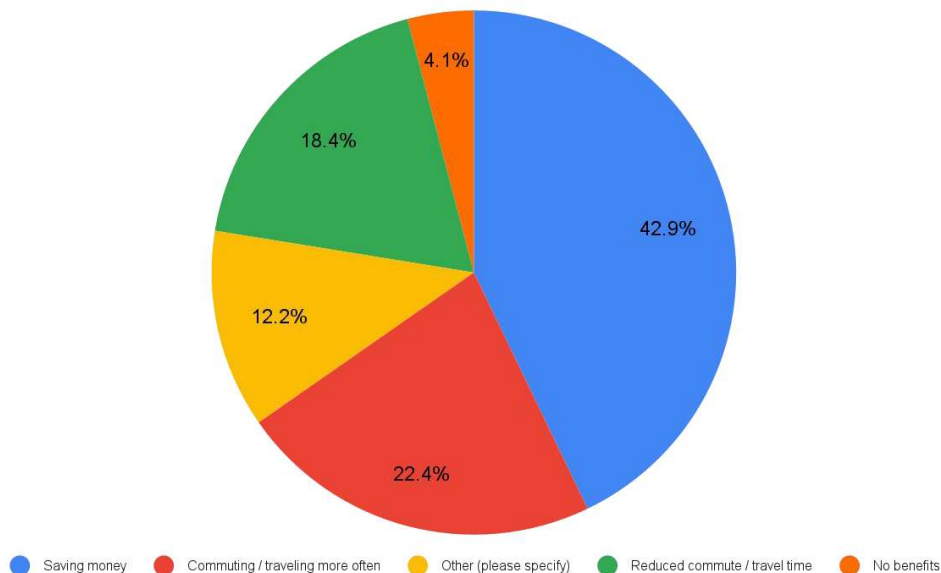
Most riders use the service because of its affordability and convenience



*41 total responses

 Proprietary & Confidential.

43% of respondents listed saving money as the main benefit of the service



*49 total responses

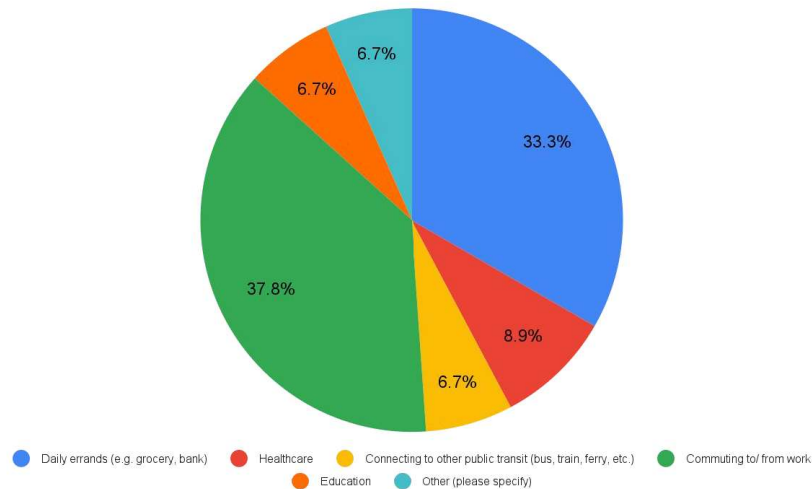
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- LYNX helps riders get to where they need to go. 37.8% of riders report that they most frequently use the service to commute to/from work, and 33.3% use it for daily errands.



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More than 70% of respondents most frequently use the service to commute to/from work and run daily errands

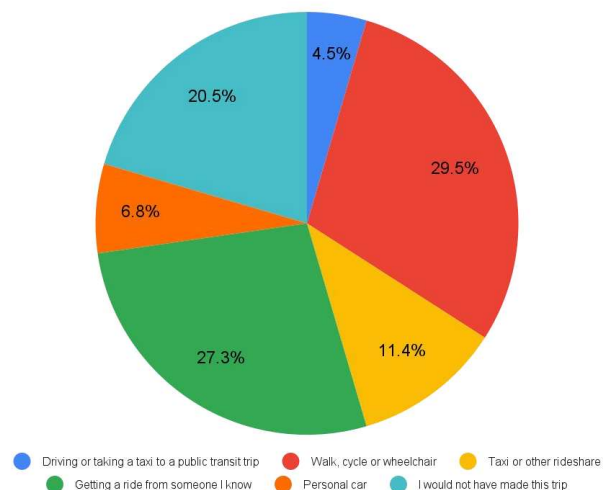


*45 total responses

Proprietary & Confidential.

- Riders are highly dependent on the service. 93% of riders do not have access to a personal car.

50% of respondents said that without this service, they would have to walk, cycle or wheelchair, or would not have made the trip at all



*45 total responses

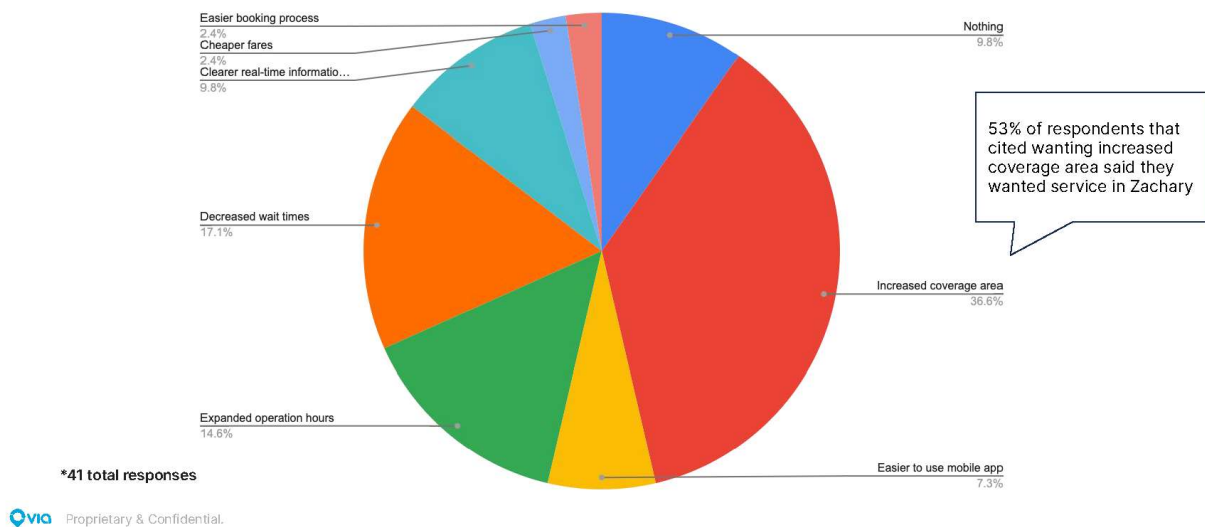
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- Riders want more LYNX! The top requested service improvements are expanded coverage area (36.6%), operation hours (14.8%), and decreased wait time (17.1%) which are 68.5% of the desired improvements.

When asked what respondents would like to see changed, most chose increased coverage area, expanded hours, and decreased wait times



The most notable advantage of on-demand service is increased ridership at a lesser cost than adding more fixed-route buses, which provide greater service coverage and efficiency.

Current feedback indicates that the project is exceeding expectations, that there is great demand for the service in the Baker area, and that demand will continue to increase as businesses and the community become more accustomed to using this service.

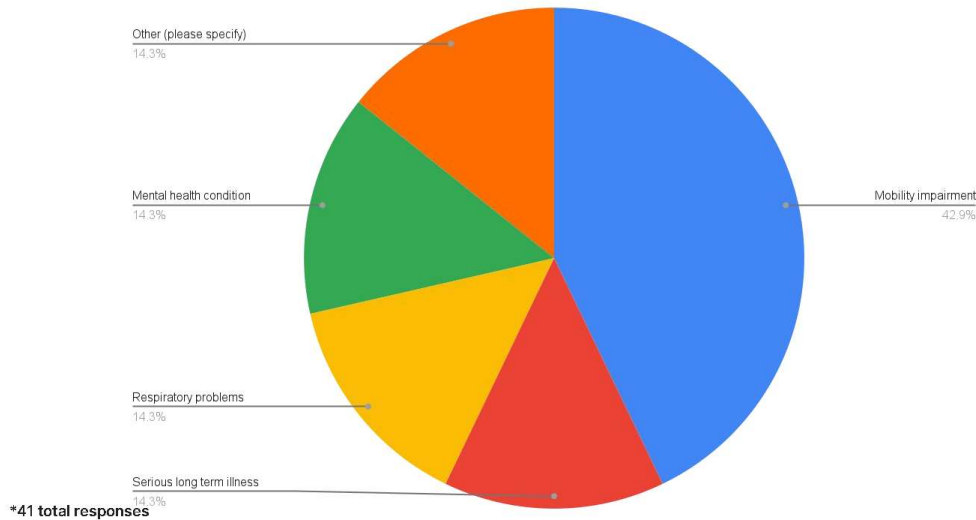
Transportation Equity

Equity in transportation seeks fairness in mobility and accessibility to meet the needs of all community members. Respondents to the rider survey have indicated that this program is a great boost to equity in transportation.



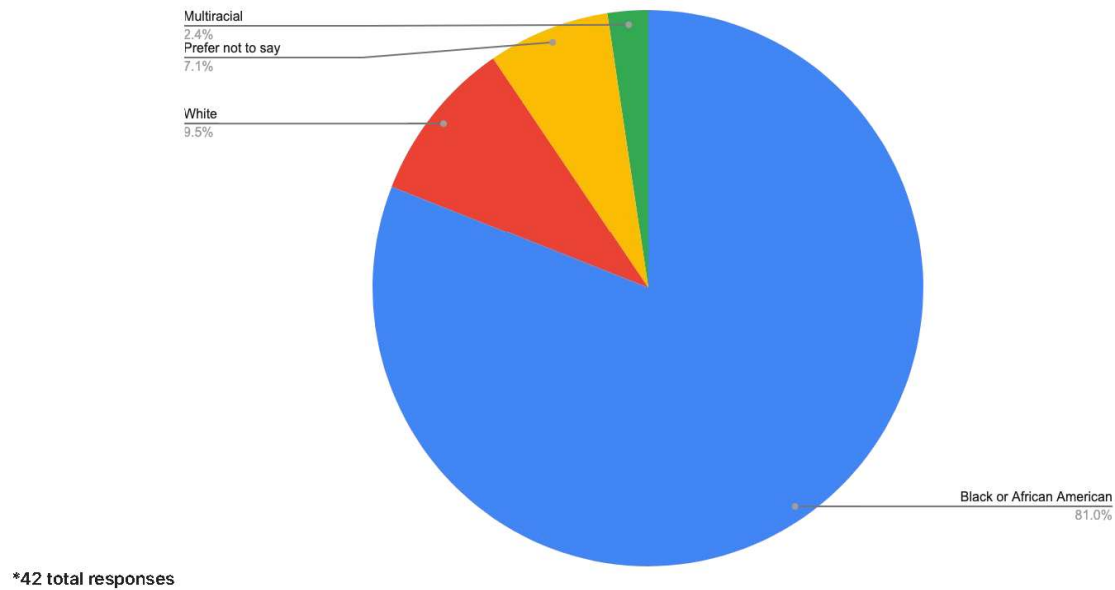
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17% of respondents have long-term physical or mental disabilities, as described below



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More than 80% of respondents are black or african american

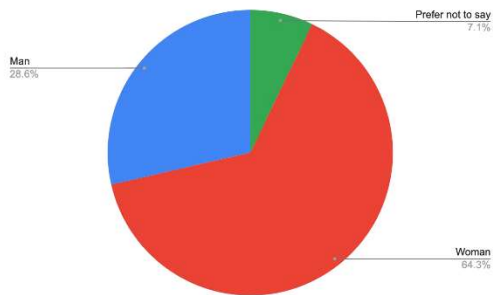


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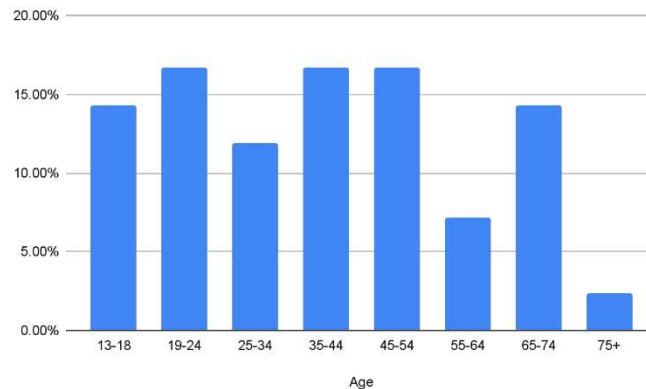
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A majority of respondents are women, and ages vary from 13 to 75+



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In comparison to the existing Fixed Route Service in the Baker area for the same service window, we find that the average daily ridership of roughly 52 riders per day in a comparable week (June 2021 which had 83 on average on weekdays, 38 on average Saturdays, and 35 on average Sundays). In its first-week micro-transit ridership was roughly 56.6% more utilized than the existing Fixed Route Bus Service. At the time of the six-month service review, the service is proving to be 306% more utilized than Fixed Route Bus Service which is indicative of a highly successful program with a positive outlook. (Statistics provided by Via and CATS). This program has been deemed so successful that the second-year appropriations were approved by the CATS Board well in advance of the end of the pilot year. Thus clearing the way for continued micro-transit service in Baker.

The City of Baker is proving that by rethinking how they handled city transit with a focus on mobility we can drive economic development for businesses, individual citizens, and the city itself.

The way this happens is:

- Businesses across the city leverage easier access to a broader pool of employees of all ages and backgrounds, as well as greater access to consumers.
- Citizens enjoy a wealth of benefits, from greater access to jobs to easier and more secure access to shopping, exploring, dining, and running everyday errands—without the frustration of congested roads and packed parking lots.
- Cities take tax dollars further by combining more efficient right-sized-capacity transit systems with agile mobility options through creative public and private partnerships.

Conclusion

Microtransit is useful to public transit agencies in several different ways, such as replacing existing low-usage bus routes, providing linking access to main bus route terminals, and providing public transportation for smaller municipalities that currently have little or no access to fixed-route bus service without sacrificing overall service coverage.

It can also act as a first- and last-mile system, enabling riders to make better use of other high-capacity transit networks around them.



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The flexibility of micro-transit allows the service to both relieve stress from crowded routes during peak hours and provide efficient demand-responsive service during less-busy hours.

It can be a cost-effective solution for providing paratransit service.

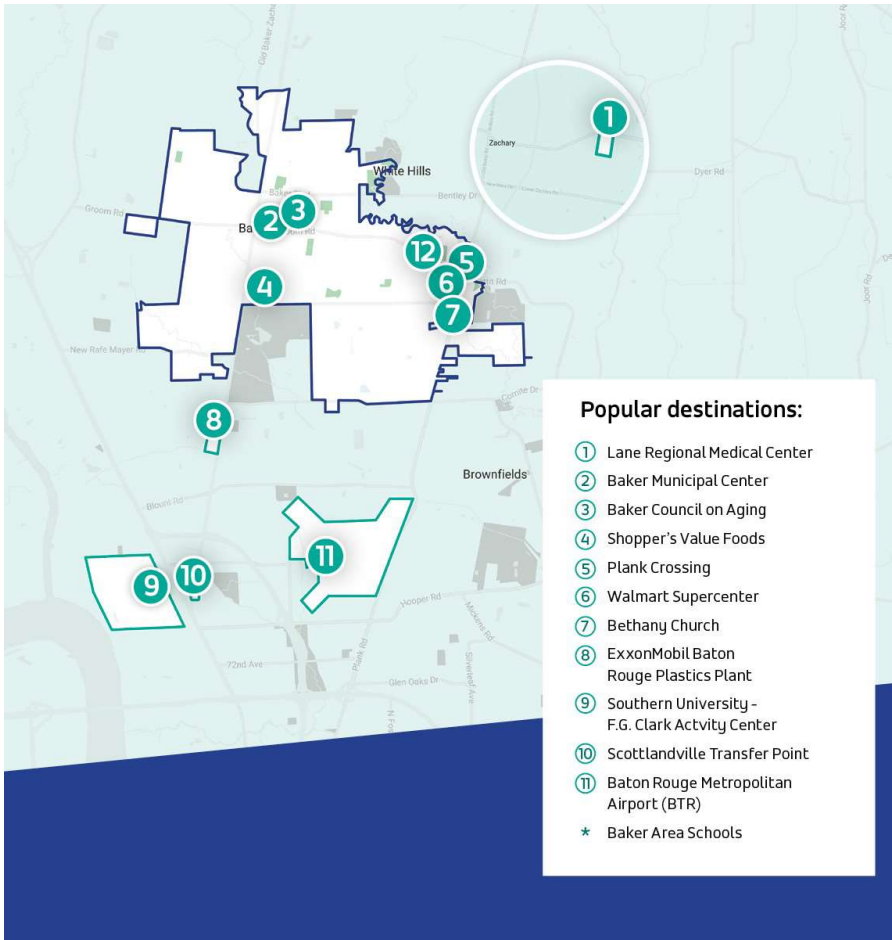
It improves the quality of life and place for all residents.



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Appendix A

Marketing Material



The basics.

LYNX by CATS is Baker's shared ride service. Book trips in the app or call in to get picked up in minutes, and get around the city without needing to drive.

Service hours:

Monday-Friday: 5am-9pm
Saturday: 6am-8:30pm

Price:

\$1.75 per ride. Add extra passengers to your trip for \$0.35 each. High school and university students with a valid school ID ride for free.



Download the
LYNX by CATS app
or call 225-267-9080
to get started.





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LYNX
BY CATS

**\$1.75 or less
to get around
Baker.**

Powered by **OVIA**

brcats.com/lynxbycats

**ALL trips
are FREE
until July!**





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Popular destinations:

- ① Lane Regional Medical Center
- ② Baker Municipal Center
- ③ Baker Council on Aging
- ④ Shopper's Value Foods
- ⑤ Plank Crossing
- ⑥ Walmart Supercenter
- ⑦ Bethany Church
- ⑧ ExxonMobil Baton Rouge Plastics Plant
- ⑨ Southern University - F.G. Clark Activity Center
- ⑩ Scottlandville Transfer Point
- ⑪ Baton Rouge Metropolitan Airport (BTR)
- * Baker Area Schools

Download the **LYNX by CATS** app or call 225-267-9080 to get started today.

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Saturday: 6am-8:30pm

Price:

Seniors (62+) ride for \$0.35 one way. Add extra passengers to your trip for \$0.35 each.



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LYNX
BY CATS

**Get around
Baker for
just \$0.35!**

brcats.com/lynxbycats

Powered by VIA



*Wheelchair
accessible
vehicles
available.*

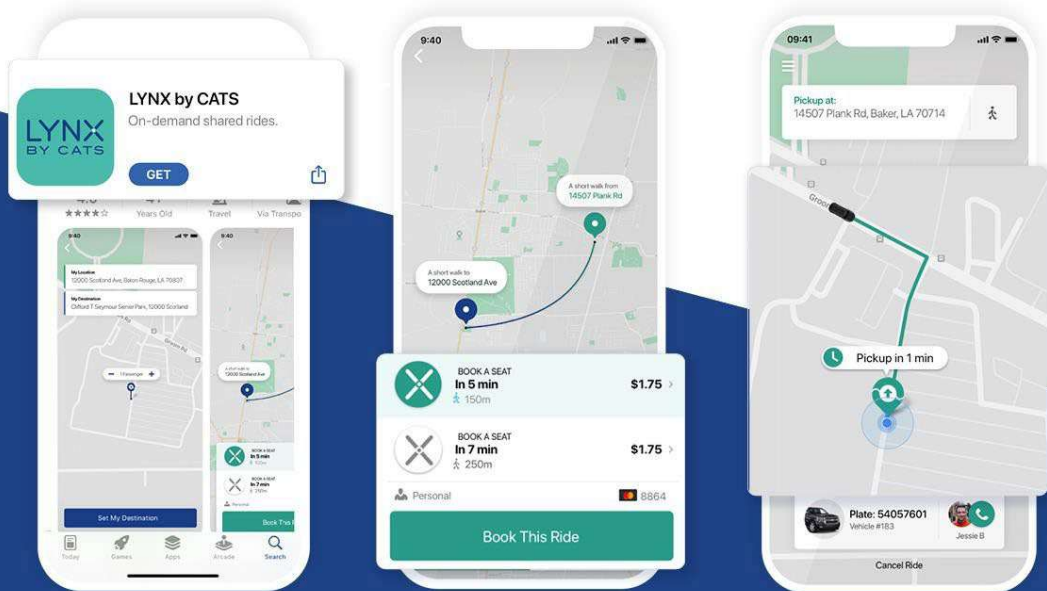


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How to ride with LYNX by CATS.

Follow these easy steps and you'll be on board in no time.



- 1 Create an account.**
Download the LYNX by CATS app from the App Store or Google Play Store and follow the simple signup steps.



- 2 Book a ride.**
Enter your pickup and dropoff addresses. Choose the ride that works for you by tapping Book This Ride. Be sure to tap the Wheelchair icon if you need a Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle!

- 3 Meet your driver.**
Check the app to find out exactly where to meet the vehicle, which may be a short walk from the address you gave us.



Download the LYNX by CATS app
or call 225-267-9080 to get started.

brcats.com/lynxbycats

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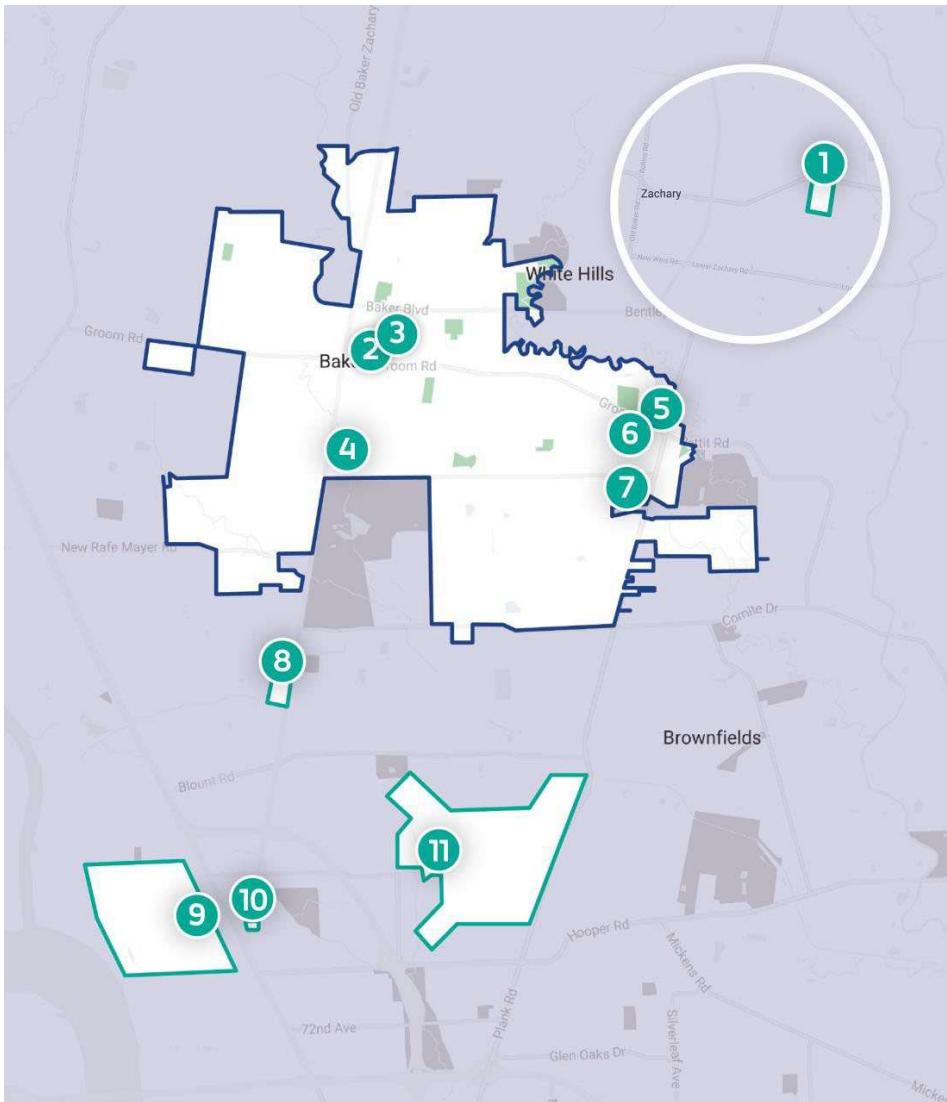


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- ③ Baker Council on Aging
- ④ Shopper's Value Foods
- ⑤ Plank Crossing
- ⑥ Walmart Supercenter
- ⑦ Bethany Church
- ⑧ ExxonMobil Baton Rouge Plastics Plant
- ⑨ Southern University - F.G. Clark Activity Center
- ⑩ Scotlandville Transfer Point
- ⑪ Baton Rouge Metropolitan Airport (BTR)
- ★ Baker Area Schools



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