Memorandum

To: Mike Bechard and Tracey Hill, Peel Region, TransHelp

From: Christina Sugiura and Janany Ragunathan, Left Turn Right Turn Ltd.

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Subject: TransHelp Specialized Transit Master Plan Round 1 Engagement Summary

1. Project Background

TransHelp is Peel Region's door-to-door specialized transit service for eligible residents of Brampton, Caledon, and Mississauga who face barriers to using conventional transit because of a physical, cognitive, visual, sensory or mental health disability. It operates as a shared-ride service, and Peel Region delivers trips through a mix of TransHelp-operated buses and contracted vendors driving taxis, vans, and other accessible vehicles. TransHelp also delivers specialized service to Caledon residents through Caledon Community Services (CCS).

Peel Region is updating TransHelp's Specialized Transit Master Plan (STMP). Since 2014, this plan has guided accessible, specialized transit in Peel Region. The STMP will provide strategic, operational and policy direction to ensure that TransHelp continues to meet customer needs and is prepared for future growth in service demand. Development of the Plan began in April 2026 and is expected to be complete in January 2027.

The project is structured around a series of coordinated technical and engagement activities (**Figure 1**). The STMP will be informed by key interest holders and the public, which include current customers, caregivers, families and support persons, transit agencies, community service partners and other interest holder groups.



Figure 1 STMP project timeline and key tasks

A detailed engagement strategy, developed alongside TransHelp staff was prepared at the beginning of the project. This strategy outlines and confirms the proposed approach for engagement and communication. The document was used as a blueprint for more specific tactic design and implementation.

Round 1 was completed between May-August 2026 and ran alongside Task 1: Discovery. Together these inputs, along with the Operation Review, Service Delivery Review and AODA Review (Tasks 2 to 4), will inform the development of the STMP's recommendations.

Engagement involved working with the community to identify and understand current challenges and future priorities. This will ensure that the STMP responds to the unique needs of their community while being informed by research, analysis, and best practices. More details regarding the Round 1 engagement purpose and outcomes are included in the following section.

2. Round 1 Engagement: TransHelp Together — Your Needs, Our Future

This memo summarizes what we heard from TransHelp customers, family, caregivers, support persons and companions of existing passengers, community groups, and partners across the first round of engagement, and how that feedback will be used to support decision making in the next steps of developing the STMP.

2.1 Purpose

Round 1 engagement focused on:

- establishing a better understanding of customer experiences,
- identifying barriers and opportunities for improvement, and
- gathering input to support development of the TransHelp STMP update.

Feedback was gathered from customers, family members and care partners, community organizations, service providers, and other interest holders through targeted meetings, public consultation, surveys, and in-person community outreach.

Round 1 of public and interest holder engagement was undertaken between May and August 2026. Peel Region's TransHelp and the consulting team engaged the community to understand issues, opportunities, needs, and priorities as it relates to TransHelp services. **Figure 2** summarizes Round 1 engagement.

Purpose and Objectives	Timeline	Audiences	Information Shared	Questions Asked
• Inform and educate about the STMP • Build relationships with interest holders and the public and encourage participation • Identify issues, opportunities, needs and priorities	• Discovery and Service Shadowing: Late May-Early June 2026 • Focused conversations: June-July 2026 • Virtual Public Meeting, Pop-Ups and Online Survey: July-August 2026	• TransHelp Staff and Steering Committee • Transit Agencies and Community/ Service Partners • TAC, and Interest Holder Groups • Riders (existing and potential), family, caregivers, support persons and companions of existing partners	• Project purpose and STMP process • Current state and findings • How to participate and provide feedback	• What is working well? • What challenges or barriers exist? • What priorities should shape the Plan? • What does success look like?

Figure 2 Round 1 engagement overview

2.2 Engagement activities

During Round 1, the project team engaged over 400 riders, caregivers, support persons and family members of riders, interest holder groups and community partners through a mix of in-person and virtual events, a survey, meetings, and online tools.

Round 1 provided several ways for customers and interest holders to participate:

- **Virtual Interest Holder Meetings**: Structured conversations with the TransHelp Advisory Committee and community organizations including Caledon Community Services, Peel Senior Services, adult day programs, and local conventional transit agency staff. These sessions confirmed goals, priorities, challenges, and expectations for the STMP.

- **Virtual Public Session**: An online meeting open to customers, families, caregivers, and the broader public, featuring a presentation on the scope of the STMP followed by discussion questions and a question-and-answer period.
- **Online Public Survey**: A survey asking riders, families, caregivers, and support persons about their experience of TransHelp today, booking, ride quality, reliability, and communication, along with what is working well, where service falls short, and their priorities for improvement.
- **In-Person Pop-Ups**: Staffed information table at community locations across Brampton, Mississauga, and Caledon. The pop-ups included display boards with interactive questions and prompted conversations about TransHelp to gather input for the STMP.

2.3 Who responded to the survey

The survey received 377 responses. These responses reflect a mix of direct customer experience and perspectives from people who support TransHelp customers.

Engagement opportunities were promoted through:

- The project webpage[1] and online feedback form[2],
- Direct outreach to interest holders and community partners via email,
- Promotional materials and project notices shared through social media, and the TransHelp site, and
- Word-of-mouth promotion by staff, drivers, and community organizations.

2.4 What We Heard

The following section summarizes what participants shared across all Round 1 engagement activities. Feedback is organized by theme rather than by activity, as similar issues and priorities were raised consistently across the survey, interest holder meetings, the virtual public session, and in-person pop-ups. Each theme describes what participants told us, followed by a summary of what this means for the development of the STMP.

[1] Project webpage: https://peelregion.ca/transhelp/about-transhelp/transhelps-specialized-transit-master-plan-update
[2] Feedback form

Quotes throughout are drawn directly from participant feedback.

2.4.1 Key themes

Although experiences and priorities varied, several themes were identified throughout engagement. Engagement consistently highlighted the importance of:

- TransHelp as an essential service in supporting independence and access to daily life.
- A more modern, transparent, and user-friendly service experience.
- More consistent understanding and delivery of accessibility and support needs.
- Safe, reliable, flexible, and customer-focused service that customers can depend on.
- Clear accountability and meaningful opportunities for customers to help shape future improvements.
- A clear understanding of and access to service information, booking options, and customer service supports regardless of geography or booking method.
- Stronger coordination for regional and cross-boundary trips, including transfer points.

Feedback also consistently reflected changing expectations for specialized transit. Customers want a service that is accessible and dependable, but also easier to understand, manage, and adapt when circumstances change.

2.4.1.1 TransHelp enables independence and is highly valued

Participants described TransHelp as an important service that supports access to appointments, employment, community activities, social participation, and day-to-day life. Riders view TransHelp drivers positively and appreciate the quality of customer service provided by phone and email.

"Amazing service. Customer service and drivers at outstanding. Life changing for seniors at home. Thank you."

"My father's mental health is improving because he is participating in [older adult] meetings. It was not possible without TransHelp."

2.4.1.2 What is working well

Across engagement activities, participants identified several strengths of the current service:

- Professional and accommodating drivers.
- Helpful customer service staff.
- Support for independence and community participation.
- Affordable transportation options.
- Improvements to some customer-facing processes.
- Improved reliability compared with previous years.

More than half of those who responded to what is working well (54%), said booking trips and tools worked well, while many also identified reliability, safety and customer service as current strengths of the service.

While respondents generally value TransHelp, many also identified opportunities to make the service more consistent, flexible, and easier to use. The most frequently cited barriers related to booking and scheduling, service reliability, accessibility accommodations, driver consistency, communication, and cross-boundary travel.

These findings do not contradict the positive feedback described above, as several areas were identified as both strengths and priorities for improvement, which demonstrates the importance of these service areas to riders. When these areas work well, they are highly valued, when they are inconsistent or challenges, they can affect the riders ability to complete trips.

2.4.1.3 Building confidence through reliable, safe, and consistent service

When asked which parts of TransHelp were most important, 65% of respondents selected reliability and on-time performance. This was followed by booking trips and tools (47% of respondents), safety and security (45% of respondents), and communication and customer service (30% of respondents).

Reliability was the strongest and most consistent issue raised during Round 1 across engagement activities. Reliability and on-time performance was also the top improvement priority, with 25% of respondents identifying it as the most important area for future investment and service improvement.

The feedback shows that riders define reliability broadly. It includes:

- whether a vehicle arrives within the scheduled window,
- predictable travel times,
- timely information,
- consistent accessibility supports, and
- confidence they will reach their destinations safely and on time.

Reliability-related concerns appeared in almost 100 open-ended survey responses. Comments referred to:

- late pickups,
- long or indirect trips,
- broad pickup windows, and
- uncertainty about when a vehicle would arrive.

For many riders and care partners, reliability is about the full journey. It can also affect safety, participation in daily activities, and confidence in using TransHelp.

Service consistency emerged as a recurring theme in the open-ended feedback. 85 respondents referenced varying experiences across providers and drivers. Survey responses highlighted that riders want increased confidence that accessibility requirements, customer service standards and operational procedures will be applied consistently across all trips, regardless of driver, vehicle type, or service provider.

What this means:

- Riders place the greatest value on a service that is dependable, easy to access, and safe. Accessibility extends beyond the vehicle itself to the booking experience, timely communication, and confidence that trips will operate as expected.

- Riders are looking for increased consistency in service experience where the quality of assistance, accessibility accommodations, communication, and trip delivery is high-quality each time they take a TransHelp trip.
- The service is performing reasonably well overall, but riders would like to see improvements, particularly greater predictability in trips.

"It is really inconvenient to be picked up on time for work or an appointment but then arrive late due to poor route planning."

"I indicated safety above because the drivers should be walking alongside their clients until they are safely in the vehicle."

"Drivers should get training for a proper door-to-door service."

"I would like to see more reliable pickup times."

2.4.1.4 Accessibility throughout the customer journey

Accessibility concerns were raised at every stage of the customer experience, including booking, communication, trip planning, pickup, travel, and drop-off.

Survey responses included:

- 60 comments related to driver assistance and customer support during trips.
- 48 comments related to vehicle accessibility, vehicle fit, or barriers in using assigned vehicles.
- 164 respondents identified safety and security as an important service attribute, and 139 as a service strength.

Comments also addressed disability awareness, communication support, rider assistance, accommodations, and the ability of service practices to respond to individual needs. Improvement areas include:

- More awareness of cognitive disabilities and dementia.
- Better support for diverse communication needs.

- Consistent door-to-door assistance support.
- Improved support for riders with vision disabilities.
- Better matching of customer needs with vehicles and service arrangements.
- Safe and reliable handoff processes.
- Recognition that a customer's support needs may change over time.

What this means:

- Together, the survey and engagement activities suggest that riders view accessibility as more than physical access to vehicles. Participants frequently connected accessibility to communication, customer assistance, cognitive disability awareness, reliable accommodations, and consistent service delivery.
- Engagement highlighted the need for strengthen operator training to focus on awareness and handling of cognitive disabilities. In addition, customer facing tools should accommodate riders with cognitive disabilities.

2.4.1.5 Regional travel and transfer points

Some survey respondents raised concerns about cross-boundary travel and transfer points. Feedback suggested that service boundaries make it difficult to reach appointments outside Peel Region. Respondents described difficulty arranging connected trips between TransHelp and other services (e.g., TTC Wheel-Trans) including changed trip times, late connections, separate booking processes and little allowances for delays. Feedback suggested that riders have concerns about waiting outdoors or in exposed locations, especially during winter, and about transfer facilities not always being open when trips arrive early.

Participants also expressed interest in stronger feedback loops and ongoing involvement in service improvements.

What this means:

Improving regional travel will require stronger coordinated booking and scheduling practices with neighbouring specialized transit providers.

"Consider some flexibility on cross-boundary medical trips."

2.4.1.6 Communication, transparency, and technology

Participants highlighted the importance of equitable access to services, information, and customer supports. Survey comments identified barriers related to booking restrictions, access to information, eligibility processes, and differences in access to online tools.

Areas of concern included:

- Accessibility and usability of booking tools.
- Long waits for telephone customer support.
- Equitable access regardless of where they live or how trips are booked.
- Clearer information about eligibility, renewals, and service policies.

These concerns can have a greater impact on riders who rely on telephone or other non-digital booking methods, have limited access to technology, or need additional support navigating service processes.

Booking and digital access were one of the most widespread sources of frustration. Survey respondents identified barriers across both phone and online booking. Phone users reported long wait times, while online users encountered limited address lists, technical problems, and difficulty modifying trips. Some respondents asked for an app or more accessible web portal, while also emphasizing the continued need for telephone support. Caledon Community Services riders reported that they could not always use the same online booking and trip functions available to TransHelp riders.

Communication and technology were closely connected in the feedback. Across engagement activities, participants often discussed barriers to getting timely, clear information, particularly when a trip was delayed or plans changed. At the same time, many saw technology as an opportunity to make the service easier to use. Other opportunities for improvement included:

- Plain-language communication.
- Clear explanations of policies and procedures including demerit points.
- Better access to eligibility and renewal information.
- Timely information about delays and service disruptions.

- Greater visibility into trip status.
- Improved notifications.
- Easier-to-use booking and trip-management tools.
- More self-service and mobile options.

Survey comments frequently referred to long telephone wait times, limitations with online booking, difficulty entering destinations, and challenges modifying trips.

"Everyone else has an app, why not TransHelp?"

"There should be more ways to communicate with staff and drivers, especially on holidays and weekends."

"We need a phone # to call if we are stuck with no pickup!!"

"Caledon residents do not receive the same access to TransHelp online tools to book or view rides."

Booking and Trip Management Remain Key Areas for Improvement

Booking was identified as both a current strength and an area where riders want further improvement:

- 196 respondents said booking trips and tools are working well.
- 170 respondents identified booking as important aspect of service.
- 64 respondents identified booking as the most important area for improvement.
- 79 survey comments referred to booking or telephone-related barriers.

This suggests that while many riders are satisfied with aspects of the current booking process, there is still substantial interest in greater flexibility, easier trip management, and improved digital options.

"Online booking needs to work, and you should never ask people to wait for hours on hold to speak to someone."

Alongside specific service issues, participants also expressed interest in stronger feedback loops and ongoing involvement in service improvements. Many described an interest in seeing what changed as a result of their input and remaining involved as the STMP develops.

"I want to help make TransHelp better. I have many ideas."

What this means:

- Riders need stronger access to clear, plain language information about policies, eligibility, renewals, demerit points, and service processes.
- Riders are interested in expanded self-service and digital options, including booking, trip changes, notifications, and trip status information.
- Engagement shared the need to maintain strong telephone support for riders who do not use digital tools or need agent support.
- CCS riders would like to have access to comparable booking methods to TransHelp.
- Riders would like to share continuous input into service planning beyond the STMP.

3. Next steps

Round 1 of engagement established what riders value about TransHelp today, where the service falls short of their expectations, and future opportunities for improvement to address current and evolving needs. The next phase of the STMP will assess the feedback received alongside technical analysis and professional expertise to inform development of recommendations that will support the sustainability of TransHelp for years to come.

The project team will use the Round 1 findings to:

- Validate the key findings and priorities.
- Explore opportunities to improve accessibility and the customer experience.
- Develop and refine draft recommendations.
- Continue engagement with riders, community partners, and interest holders.
- Advance the next phase of the STMP.