DISTRICT OF
100 Mile House

2023 Shopping Preferences & Business Opportunity Survey
Findings

The Shopping Preferences and Business Opportunity Survey has given residents a chance to share what influences their shopping and spending habits and what types of products and services they would like to see available locally.

The major goals of the survey were to find out how shopping habits have changed over the past few years, inform businesses to help them remain competitive, and identify which product and service gaps represent promising investment or expansion opportunities. All of these goals are ultimately intended to help slow shopping dollars leaking out of the local economy.

The survey was open from March 6 - 24, 2023. Response to the survey was excellent, with 597 responses returned.

21% of respondents live in 100 Mile House, with the remaining 79% from throughout the South Cariboo. The 108 Mile Ranch had a particularly high level of engagement outside of the District of 100 Mile House, also representing 21% of all respondents. The participation of the outlying communities reconfirms that 100 Mile House is the service centre and residents throughout the South Cariboo are interested in engaging in the local economy.

29% of respondents said they have lived here for less than 5 years, indicating the survey had good engagement with new residents. 32% of survey respondents have lived here for more than 20 years. It is likely there are differences in the shopping patterns of new residents and longer-term residents, but the survey questions don't allow strong conclusions to be made with respect to these possible differences.

The survey asked whether residents had gone out-of-town for various reasons in the past two years, with the intent of determining coincidental reasons for out-of-town shopping. The two most cited responses were that people had gone out of town for medical/dental appointments and to visit family and friends. Medical services for our population size may be similar to other towns. However, as a rural location we are losing spending dollars due to medical needs being met in larger centres. On the other hand, the dollars leaving the community during out-of-town visits with family and friends may be reciprocated when those family and friends pay a return visit.

Residents were also asked whether they made impulsive purchases and/or prioritized shopping while out-of-town for other reasons. Of those who answered the question, 60% indicated they made impulsive purchases and 86% said they prioritized shopping when out-of-town. Clearly, this indicates that to a high degree, residents make both planned and unplanned purchases while out-of-town for appointments, visiting, and other reasons.

When asked where people shopped out-of-town, the top answers were Kamloops, Williams Lake and online. The prevalence of online shopping responses, third highest for this question, follows current trends that a considerable amount of local spending is leaking out into the digital economy. A lesser number of respondents indicated they shopped in the Lower Mainland, but this was significant enough to note. It may be that residents who have relocated to the South Cariboo from the Lower Mainland, continue to travel back for shopping. A relatively low number of responses indicated that people shopped in Prince George.

The survey included a question about where residents purchase bigger ticket items, like electronics and appliances. The highest response given was for Kamloops, followed by 100 Mile House. This may be an indication that selection and pricing on big ticket items is locally competitive. It may also indicate practical logistics of transporting larger items home from the point of purchase.

When asked for the main reasons people shop out-of-town, the top 3 responses were: a product or service was not available in town, a greater selection was available out-of-town, and sales or other promotions. These responses represent strong recurring themes throughout the survey, namely that residents are looking for product availability, selection, and they are price conscious. Following closely was a fourth theme, that of combining shopping with other activities out-of-town.

The same question was asked, for reasons people shopped ONLINE. Likewise, the top 3 answers given were similar, and included: product not available locally, cost savings, and selection. Convenience was also a popular response, mentioned about the same number of times as selection. While the cost of fuel was listed as a reason for shopping ONLINE, it was less of a motivating factor than the other 4 choices listed above.

Next, the survey asked how often out-of-town shopping trips were scheduled. The highest response given was monthly, followed by every 3 months. Monthly shopping trips could coincide with grocery shopping, while every 3 months may indicate bulk purchases or other regular household shopping needs.

When asked to indicate what percentage of their monthly spending took place locally, residents reported that just over 50% of their monthly spending took place in town.

Questions were also asked in the survey around how much money residents spent locally, out-of-town, and ONLINE. 426 people reported their estimated monthly spending out-of-town.
The amounts reported varied widely, ranging between $10 and $4,000, but the average monthly spending of those who reported was $560. This represents nearly $240,000 / month.

Likewise for ONLINE spending, 402 respondents indicated spending an average of $300/month, representing a total of $120,000 / month. Detailed financial analysis of these spending estimates is beyond the scope of this project. Still, accounting for only those who responded to these questions in the survey, as much as $360,000 / month is leaving the local economy. The true spending leakage is likely much larger.

Next, the survey focused some questions on what types of products households regularly purchase out-of-town. The top 3 answers were: clothing and footwear, groceries and specialty foods, and furniture and home décor. The same question was asked about regular purchases ONLINE, where respondents said they regularly purchased clothing and footwear, toys and hobbies, and health and beauty products.

Residents were asked to identify how they typically find out about products and services. The top choices were that shoppers rely on flyers, word of mouth, or shopping apps, with Facebook and email subscriptions also frequently mentioned.

As previously noted, one of the major goals of the survey was to identify gaps in the product and service mix available locally. After all, product availability was cited frequently as the reason that residents shop out-of-town or ONLINE. To that end, the survey asked which 5 new businesses they would like to attract to the municipality. The responses were varied, some listing business types and others listing franchise business names. A separate information sheet is being prepared for this question alone as there were a total of nearly 2,100 businesses reported.

The most frequently mentioned types of businesses that respondents said they wanted were restaurants (including sit-down, fast food and coffee shop options), shoe and clothing stores, and a sporting goods store. The top franchise businesses requested included Walmart, Canadian Tire, Costco, Winners, Superstore, and Home Depot. The franchise restaurants most frequently named were McDonald's, Wendy's, Starbucks, and KFC.

At the heart of the survey was a question about how residents' shopping habits have changed over the past 2-3 years. Perhaps not surprisingly, the single highest response was that residents do more ONLINE shopping than they did previously. The second most noted responses were that residents did more out-of-town shopping than they did a few years ago and that their shopping habits have not changed. These two responses were cited an equal number of times. To a lesser extent, people noted they buy less, shop less, and do without, followed by responses around stocking up and bulk buying.

Finally, the survey asked whether residents had any additional comments to help better understand their shopping habits. The responses followed some themes. Mid-priced clothing and shoes for adults and children were in high demand. Pricing, whether actual or perceived, was one of the biggest reasons given for shopping out-of-town. High grocery and gas prices were the most frequently noted. Another strong motivation to shop out-of-town or ONLINE was the desire for greater selection than what is available locally. Respondents mentioned that hours of local business operation were challenging for them, especially noting limited weekend hours and a preference for businesses to be open later on weeknights. Another common theme was that residents would prefer to shop locally, but only if pricing is competitive. Finally, quality products, more options, and fair pricing were frequently mentioned, indicating the importance of value for money spent.