

# Intrusive...Useful... Creepy...Cool?

Toronto Transit Riders Are OK to Share Personal Data. In Return, They Want a Better Transportation Experience

Accenture Executive Report 2015, Transit



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GTA citizens have extremely strong opinions about how "their" information should be used.





Transit agencies and operators know a lot about their riders. That's generally a good thing. Customer information—gleaned largely through electronic means—could help improve the passenger experience in myriad ways. Riders understand this. After all, they're the willing source of much (if not most) customer data.

But according to a recent Accenture survey<sup>1</sup> of more than 1,000 people residing in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), the fundamental data-management challenge—acquiring, leveraging and maximizing **only that data which customers find appropriate and useful**—has not been surmounted. Yet understanding what information is within or off limits could be vital. Such insights may be the key to boosting ridership, increasing customer loyalty, generating new revenue, and continuously hiking overall mass-transit value.

This executive summary presents key findings from the aforementioned research, highlighting 1) what customers want and don't want with respect to data acquisition and utilization and 2) how transit providers serving greater Toronto may wish to respond. GTA citizens have extremely strong opinions about how "their" information should be used.

This report, which brings forward the result of our survey, offers a chance for their voices to be heard.

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<sup>1</sup> Accenture Executive Report 2015, Transit

# Findings Focus on the Travel Experience

The Accenture survey was undertaken in eight North American cities—Boston, Calgary, Edmonton, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, Toronto and Washington DC—in July 2015. More than 1,000 respondents hail from the greater Toronto area. Seventy four percent of this group had taken some form of public transportation (bus, train, etc.) in the six months prior to the survey. Across all demographics—age, gender, income, technology acumen—a clear picture of GTA respondents' preferences emerged:



Boston



Calgary



Edmonton



Los Angeles



New York



San Francisco



Toronto



Washington, D.C.

## 1. GTA riders are comfortable sharing data. But they believe that data should be used solely to help increase travel convenience, comfort and economy.

Most any data with the potential to improve riders' transit experience is considered "cool." Revealing basic contact data (name, e-mail, phone number, reading and eating preferences) may also be OK. But respondents state clearly that transit agencies should not share personal or household details with retailers, other public agencies or social media.



*"When I get close to the station or bus stop, my mobile device alerts me when my next subway/bus will arrive."*

**86%**  
**SAID NO**

*"Would you be willing to provide transit agencies, social media or retailers with various forms of personal information to help them create a better customer experience?"*

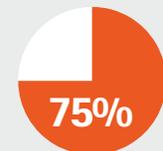
*(Referring to household income, bank balances, car ownership, medical information and fingerprint or facial recognition, an average of 86 percent said "no").*

## 2. GTA Riders Covet Convenience and Control.

People like it when the data they've provided helps them complete a mass-transit journey in less time, with fewer hassles and surprises. Most, therefore, are cool with notifications (alerts) about connection options, route incidents, and time- and money-saving travel opportunities (e.g., suggestions for best routes). Conversely, Toronto riders don't like services that are perceived as too controlling or revealing. And anything "automatic" (bank debits, broadcasting rider status) is invariably creepy. For example, 62 percent don't want information disclosed about where or when they have been traveling. Nor do they want transit providers linking services to bank accounts, such as automatic reloads when their fare-card account gets low. (The idea of alerts is received positively throughout the study indicating that the idea of being notified when their account needs reloading would be well-received.) In short, according to Accenture study the most valued data is that which puts transit riders in the driver's seat—that helps them optimize the travel experience.



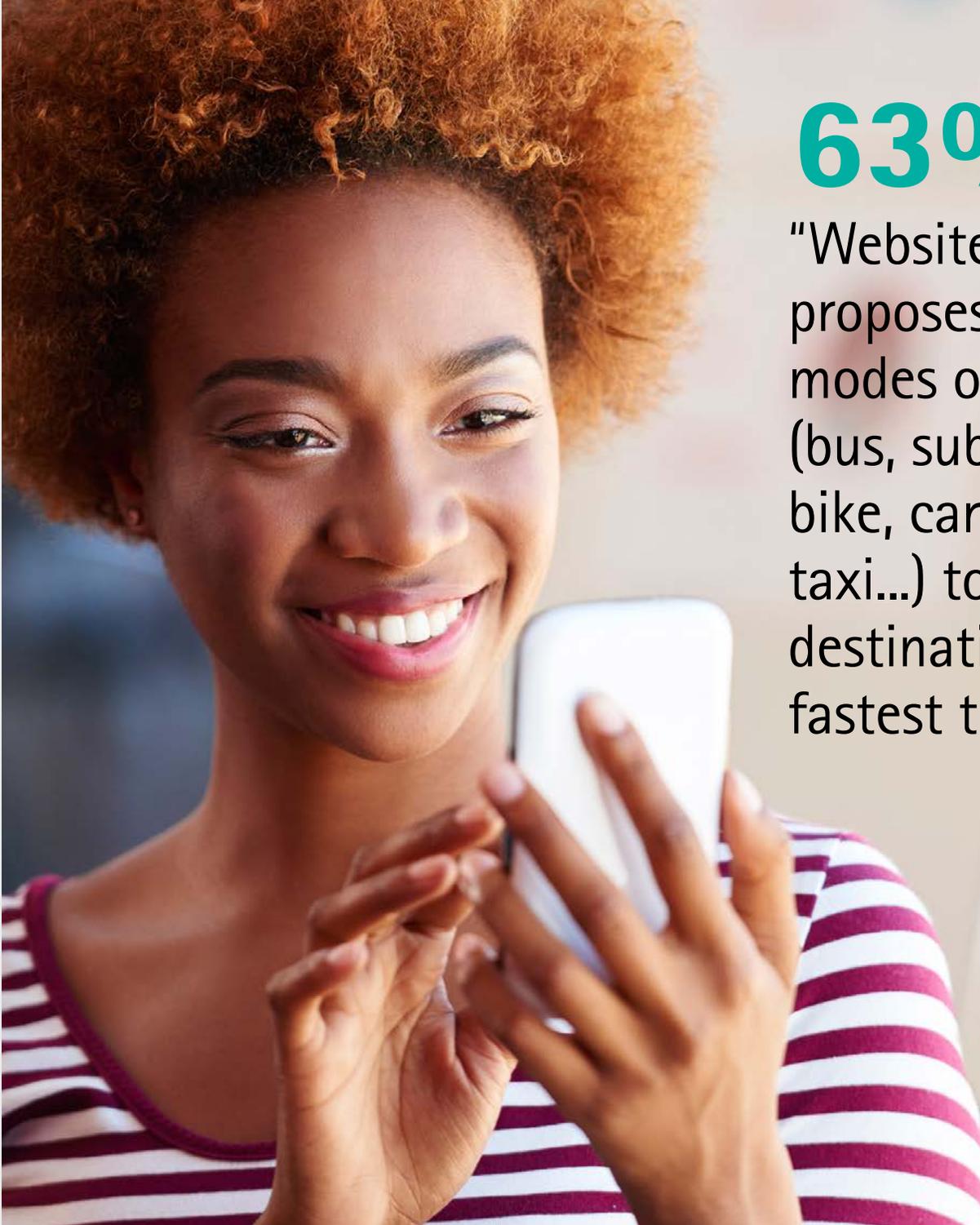
*"When I buy my ticket on the virtual kiosk operator, I receive instant alerts before paying if there are any incidents on my route."*



*"My bank account gets automatically debited for the coming week's travel based on my usual journey patterns."*

● COOL

● CREEPY

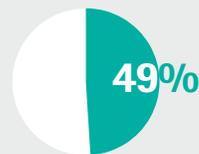


63% 

"Website/app which proposes combined modes of transport (bus, subway, bike, car sharing, taxi...) to reach my destination in the fastest time"

### 3. GTA customers embrace the idea of coupons and other financial incentives.

Identifying transport economies is a good example: Forty seven percent of respondents are cool with a website or app that offers money-saving intermodal ticketing opportunities, such as subway, bike, bus or car sharing. Another 35 percent are neutral and only 18 percent found this creepy. However, other financial incentives—such as providing coupons from third party partners—could be a largely unexplored market: Few transit agencies have worked with the business community to flesh out this idea.



*"If I have time before my next train/bus arrives, I'm offered a coupon to buy a drink or snack at a nearby stand or shop."*



*"Website sends me promotional offers for items that I have researched online (other transport modes, parking slots, taxis)."*

# Avoiding Creepy and Emphasizing Cool

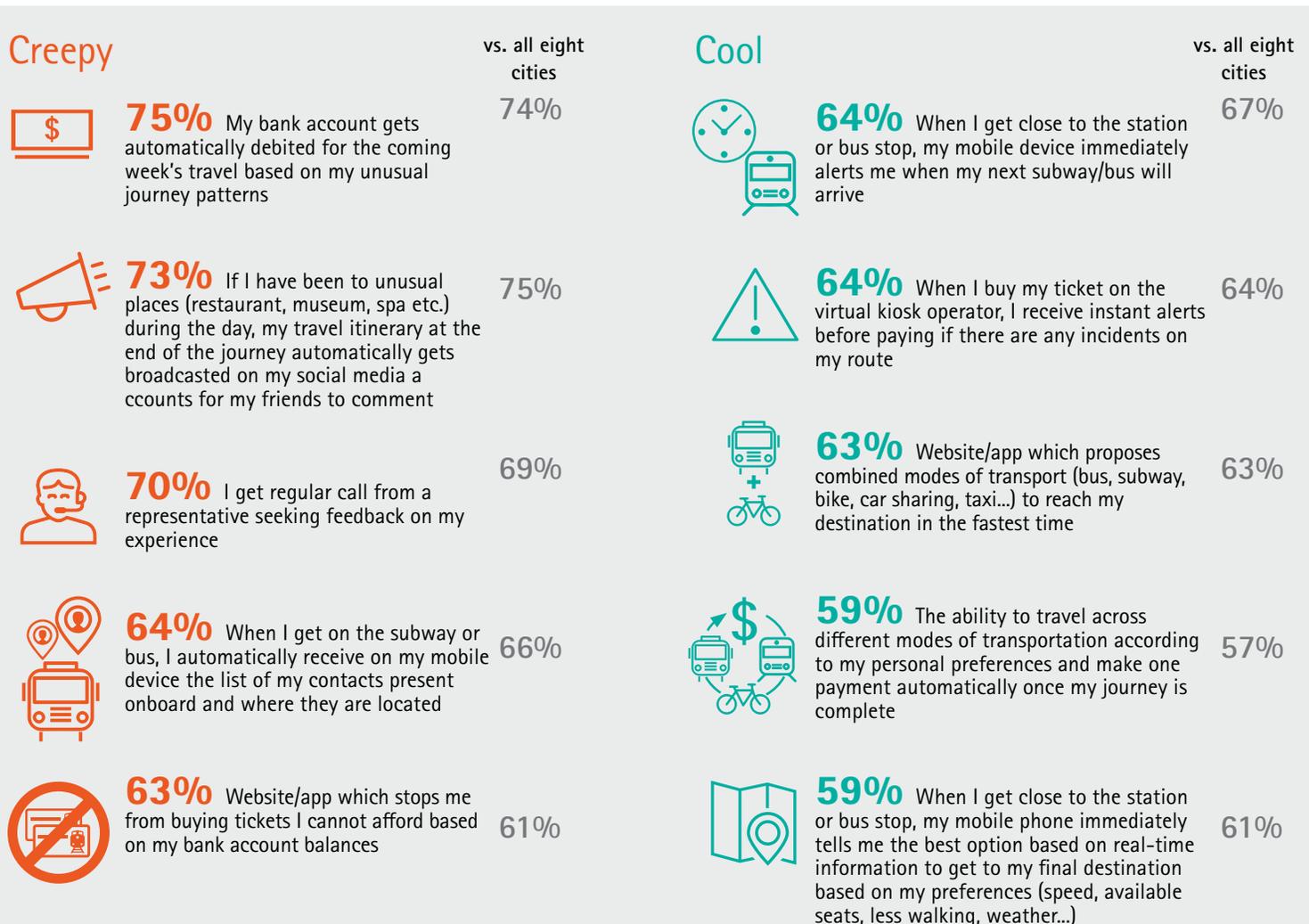
Riders know what they want. Most are enthusiastic about receiving alerts and other information that improve their transit experience (coupons, smart geo-location services, integrating real-time data into the journey). But automatic or intrusive things (like bank debits, social media postings) seem to be mostly creepy. A good example of the latter is “a website or app synced to my health monitoring app that tells me if I should walk to my nearest station or take a bike or bus.” Forty six percent of GTA respondents find this creepy. Another 29 percent are neutral and only 25 percent find it cool. Figure 1 summarizes the data-enabled actions that GTA survey respondents embrace and those they eschew.

This report’s most important takeaway could be that **public transit agencies must “respect the data.”** That means 1) developing and proliferating data-driven services that riders believe are cool (e.g., convenient, economical, enjoyable) and 2) severely limiting the use and distribution of data that riders find creepy (e.g., intrusive, inappropriate, overly personal). Developing a four-part “customer data collection, management and utilization policy” might be helpful for Transit agencies considering the following:

- Strive to collect only that information which customers find agreeable.
- Focus data-application efforts on sharing information that directly abets the rider experience.
- Avoid collecting and communicating personal data unrelated to the rider experience.
- Base data-collection and -management policies on rider feedback and preferences.

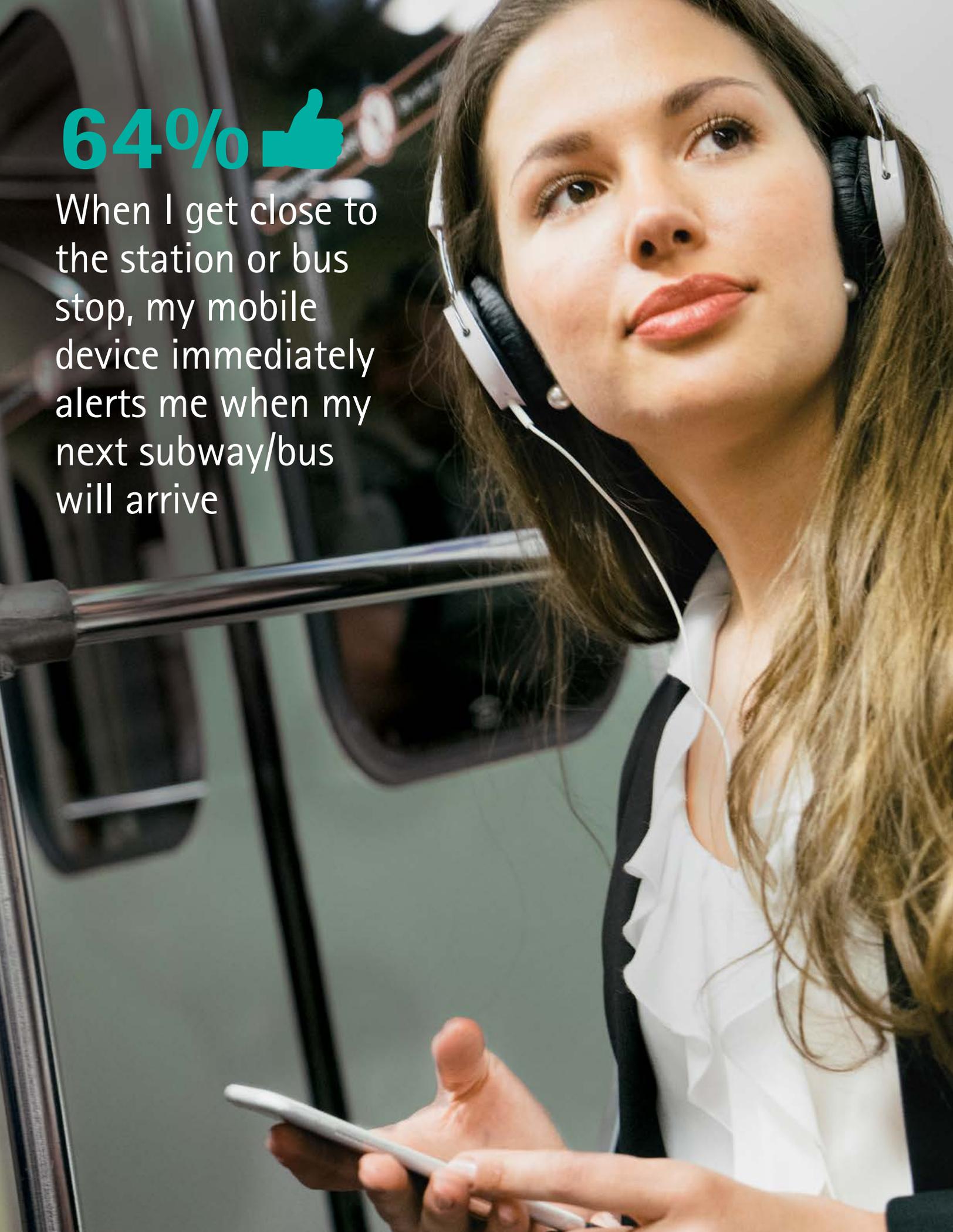
Accenture has conducted creepy/cool studies in several industries, and we have found that customer views in multiple sectors and cities generally mirror those gleaned from the GTA Study. In short, **companies must work harder to use acquired information responsibly—to make discretion and customer benefit top priorities.** Survey respondents across North America have made this abundantly clear.

Figure 1: Data-enabled/derived services and actions that GTA transit-survey respondents find attractive (“cool”) or off-putting (“creepy”).



64% 

When I get close to the station or bus stop, my mobile device immediately alerts me when my next subway/bus will arrive



## About Accenture

Accenture is a global management consulting, technology services and outsourcing company, with more than 358,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries. Combining unparalleled experience, comprehensive capabilities across all industries and business functions, and extensive research on the world's most successful companies, Accenture collaborates with clients to help them become high-performance businesses and governments. The company generated net revenues of US\$31.0 billion for the fiscal year ended Aug. 31, 2015. Its home page is [www.accenture.com](http://www.accenture.com).

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