

CAPE BRETON REGIONAL
 **CHAMBER**
OF COMMERCE

2025 CBRM Business-Friendly Report Card
Prepared by: Cape Breton Regional Chamber of Commerce

Winter 2025

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Executive Summary

The 2025 CBRM Business-Friendly Report Card provides an overview of how local businesses perceive the business climate within the Cape Breton Regional Municipality. Based on responses from 31 Chamber members, the report highlights both strengths and areas for improvement across four key categories: reducing barriers and costs, transportation and infrastructure, crime and safety, and communication and engagement.

Survey results show moderate satisfaction across all categories, with a combined average score of 2.72 out of 5 (54.4%). At the end of the survey, respondents were also asked to provide an overall rating of how business-friendly CBRM is. This separate perception question received a similar score of 2.7 out of 5 (54%), which reinforces the consistency of the feedback.

Respondents identified several recurring challenges, including high commercial tax rates, permitting delays, road conditions, safety concerns, and communication gaps. These issues contribute to uncertainty and can discourage reinvestment or expansion. At the same time, the survey results reflect strong engagement and a willingness among businesses to participate in solution-focused discussions, with 80% indicating interest in attending policy and advocacy roundtables hosted by the Chamber.

The findings emphasize the importance of improving transparency in municipal processes, strengthening communication, investing in infrastructure, enhancing safety in commercial areas, and fostering a more collaborative approach to economic development. The Chamber will use this report to support ongoing advocacy efforts and to help shape constructive dialogue with municipal leadership, with the goal of creating a more supportive and competitive environment for businesses across CBRM.

About the 2025 CBRM Business-Friendly Report Card

The Cape Breton Regional Chamber of Commerce launched the CBRM Business-Friendly Report Card survey on June 3, 2025, and closed it on July 31, 2025. The purpose of this report is to provide a snapshot of how CBRM is performing across key areas that matter most to our local business community. All insights and grades are based on anonymous feedback from Chamber members.

In total, 31 businesses across CBRM participated in the survey. While this represents a modest portion of our 300 plus members, the results offer valuable insight into the experiences and perspectives of local employers. The responses are not meant to be fully representative of the entire membership; however, they provide meaningful direction and help illuminate the current business climate in CBRM.

The survey evaluated how business-friendly CBRM is across four key categories:

- Reducing Barriers and Costs
- Transportation and Infrastructure
- Crime and Safety
- Communication and Engagement

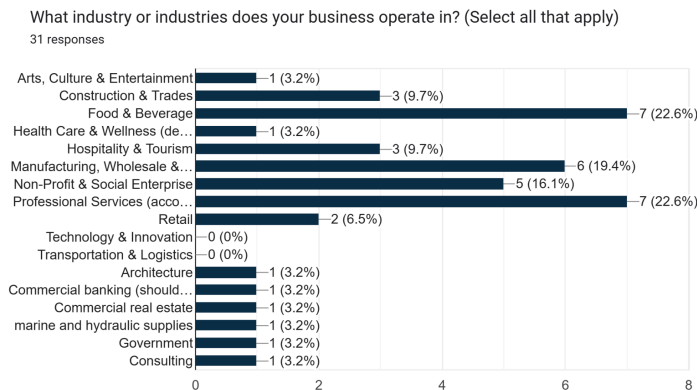
Profile of Respondents

To inform the CBRM Business-Friendly Report Card, the Chamber included a profile section at the beginning of the survey to better understand respondents' perspectives. While 31 members participated, representing a portion of our 300 plus member base, the insights they shared offer a valuable glimpse into the experiences of local business leaders and operators. These responses highlight key challenges and opportunities in the current business climate and help establish early indicators for priority areas moving forward.

Participants represented a diverse range of industries, business sizes, and locations, offering a broad perspective on the factors that influence business friendliness in CBRM. By capturing this range of voices, the report provides meaningful insights and helps lay a foundation for identifying priority areas for improvement and growth.

Industry Representation

Respondents reflected a broad cross-section of industries, showcasing the diverse nature of our local economy. The largest share of responses came from the Food & Beverage and Professional Services sectors (22.6% each), closely followed by Manufacturing, Wholesale & Distribution (19.4%) and Non-Profit & Social Enterprise (16.1%). Other sectors represented included Construction & Trades, Hospitality & Tourism, Retail, Arts & Culture, Health & Wellness, and Government. Some businesses operate in multiple sectors, demonstrating the adaptability and entrepreneurial spirit that characterizes the CBRM business community.



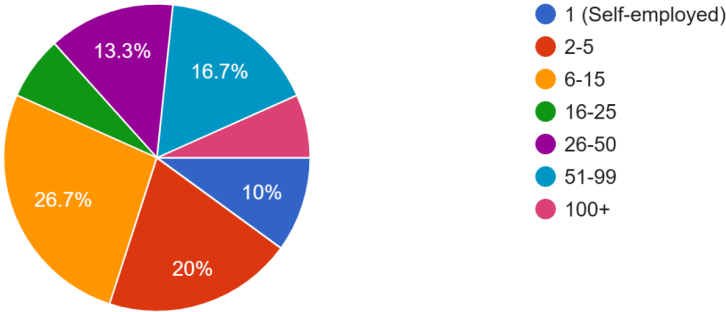
Geographic Distribution

The majority of respondents (83.9%) are based in Sydney, with others operating in North Sydney, Glace Bay, New Waterford, Sydney River, Whitney Pier, Albert Bridge, and Coxheath. While the urban core remains the most concentrated business area, the survey also captured perspectives from smaller communities, underscoring the need for inclusive, region-wide economic development strategies.

Business Size & Employment

Respondents represent a broad range of business sizes. Self-employed individuals and small businesses with 1 to 5 employees accounted for 30% of responses. A further 33% employed between 6 and 25 people, while more than 36% reported staff counts ranging from 26 to over 100 employees. This wide employment range highlights the importance of supporting small, mid-sized, and large enterprises, all of which play critical roles in driving CBRM’s economic growth.

How many employees does your business have?
30 responses

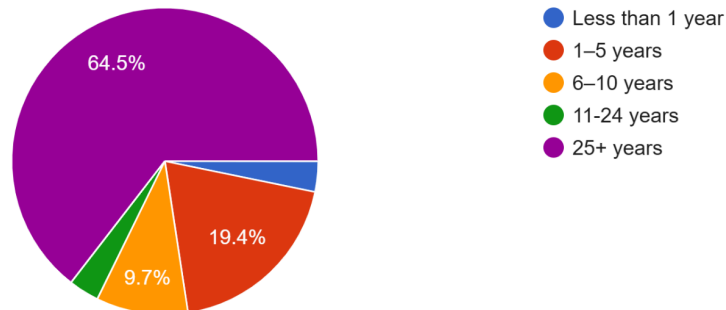


Years in Operation

More than 64% of participating businesses have operated for 25 years or more, demonstrating deep roots and long-term commitment to the region. At the same time, over 30% have been in operation for 10 years or less, reflecting a steady influx of new entrepreneurs and continued interest in building and expanding businesses in CBRM.

How long has your business been in operation?

31 responses



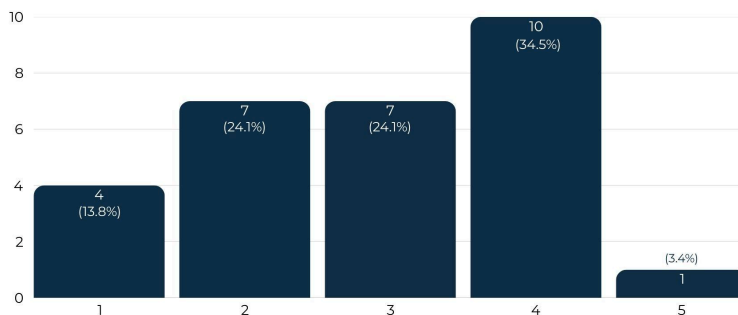
Reducing Barriers and Costs for Doing Business in CBRM

Permits, Approvals, and Process Transparency

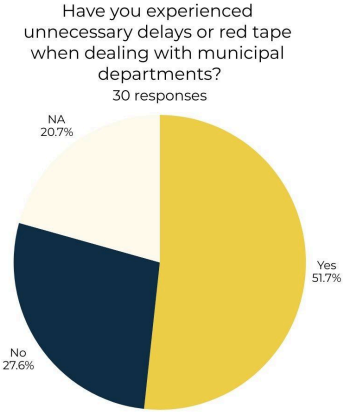
When asked to rate the overall process of obtaining business permits and licenses in CBRM, respondents gave a weighted average score of 2.89 out of 5. While this suggests moderate satisfaction, the data also shows that more than 37% of respondents rated the process a 1 or 2, indicating difficulty or dissatisfaction. The efficiency of municipal approvals for new developments received a similar rating of 2.72 out of 5, with 63.2% rating it below average. These results point to a clear need for streamlined and more predictable approval processes.

How would you rate the overall process of obtaining business permits and licenses in CBRM?

29 responses



Red tape and uncertainty remain significant barriers. More than 51% of respondents reported experiencing unnecessary delays or confusion when working with municipal departments. Several businesses shared concerns about limited communication once a permit application is submitted, noting challenges in understanding timelines, next steps, and points of contact.



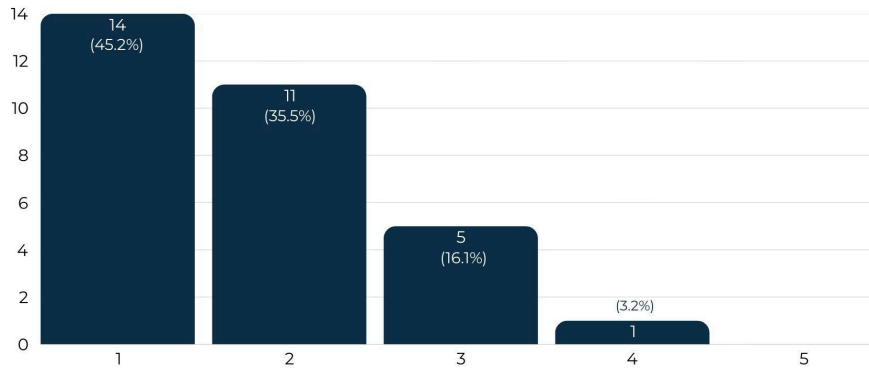
These findings reflect a strong call for improved communication, clearer requirements, and more consistent municipal processes. Businesses want to collaborate with the municipality, but they need reliable and transparent systems to make informed decisions and move forward with confidence.

Taxation and Fees Impact on Growth

Commercial property taxes in CBRM were identified as one of the most pressing concerns. Respondents gave the commercial tax rate an average score of only 1.58 out of 5, with 45.2% rating it a 1 on the scale. Many comments referenced other Atlantic Canadian municipalities such as Moncton, Fredericton, and Charlottetown as examples of more competitive and business-friendly tax environments.

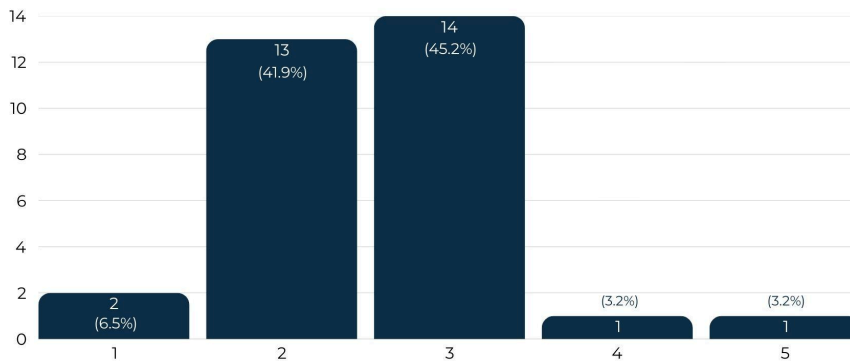
How fair is CBRM's commercial property tax rate compared to similar municipalities?

31 responses



Are municipal fees (e.g., permits, property taxes, utilities) reasonable for businesses?

31 responses

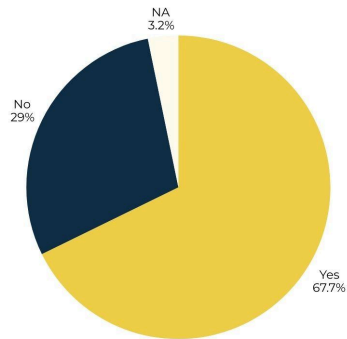


Municipal fees, including permits, taxes, and utilities, received a slightly stronger rating, with 63.2% of respondents indicating that fees are generally reasonable. Transparency around taxation and fees received a score of 64%, which suggests that while the overall structure is understood, many businesses still find it difficult to navigate or anticipate costs.

Critically, more than 67% of respondents said that high tax rates have influenced a decision to delay or cancel an expansion or investment. At the same time, 80% stated that a gradual reduction in commercial tax rates would support business growth or reinvestment. This is a strong indication that tax reform would be a meaningful tool for economic development.

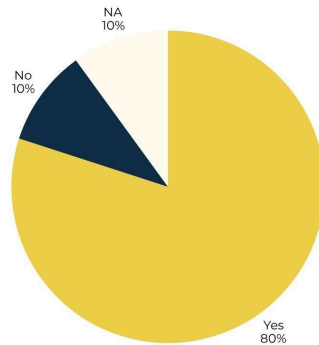
Have high tax rates ever influenced a decision to delay or cancel a business expansion or investment?

31 responses



Would a gradual reduction in commercial tax rates help your business grow or reinvest locally?

30 responses



Comments

Several themes appeared consistently in open-ended responses:

- “Fees are reasonable, taxes are too high.”
- “Communication and transparency is poor... it's hard to understand the process behind the scenes.”
- “Our commercial taxing in CBRM is outrageous.”
- “A reduction in commercial tax rates would help existing businesses to expand and new businesses to grow.”

These comments reflect a desire for a more collaborative relationship with the municipality, one that reduces friction, enables growth, and supports long term success.

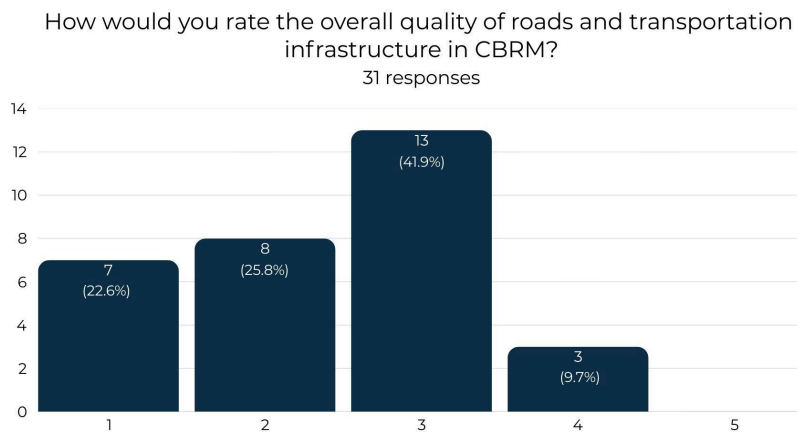
Category Grade

CBRM receives a grade of **2.54 out of 5 (50.78%)** for the Reducing Barriers and Costs category, based on the average of all quantitative survey questions.

Transportation and Infrastructure

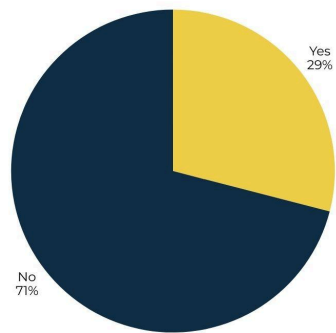
Road Quality and Transportation Infrastructure

Respondents rated the overall quality of roads and transportation infrastructure at an average of 2.39 out of 5. Nearly half of participants, 48%, rated this area a 1 or 2, which indicates that road conditions remain a significant concern. Comments referenced potholes, inconsistent maintenance, and general wear on key routes. These results suggest that while some progress may be underway, current conditions are not meeting the expectations or needs of local businesses.



Although road conditions are viewed as a concern, only 29% of respondents said that roads or access issues directly affect their ability to operate efficiently. The majority indicated that they are able to work around these challenges for now. Without continued investment in road upgrades and infrastructure, however, these inefficiencies may grow into more substantial barriers for future business development.

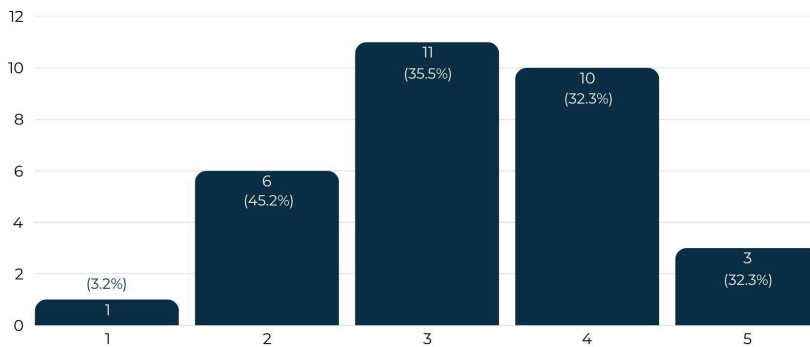
Do current road conditions or transportation access impact your ability to operate efficiently?
31 responses



Public Transit Coverage

Public transportation coverage received one of the higher ratings in the survey, with an average score of 3.26 out of 5 (65.2%). Many businesses indicated that transit is improving and is reaching more employees, customers, and business locations. At the same time, several comments highlighted key service gaps, including the lack of Sunday service, which creates challenges for staffing schedules and accessibility.

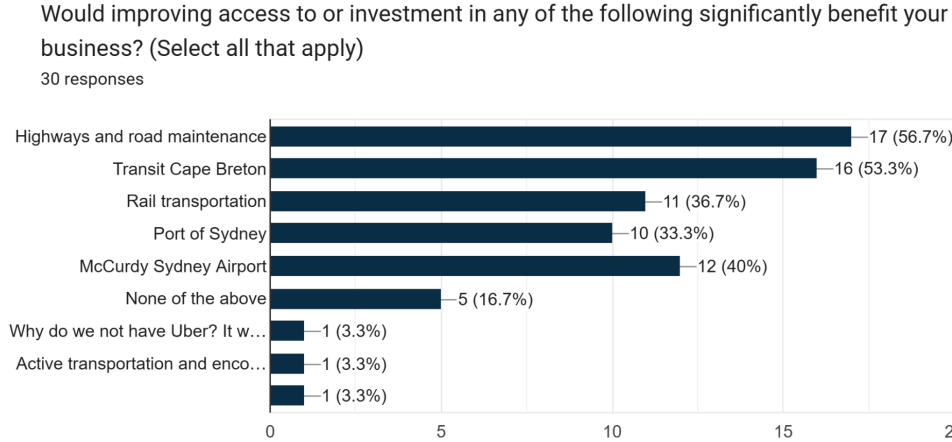
How would you rate the coverage of public transportation in reaching your employees, customers, or business location?
31 responses



When asked where improved access or investment would have the greatest impact, respondents identified highways and road maintenance as the top priority. Other priorities included support for Transit Cape Breton, improved active transportation routes, and enhancements to the Port of Sydney and

the Sydney Airport. There was also interest in rail transportation and the introduction of ride-sharing options. One respondent asked why a service such as Uber is not yet available in the area.

Participants also expressed interest in improved walkability, enhanced multi-use trails, and safer pedestrian and cycling routes in high-traffic areas such as downtown Sydney and Sydney River.

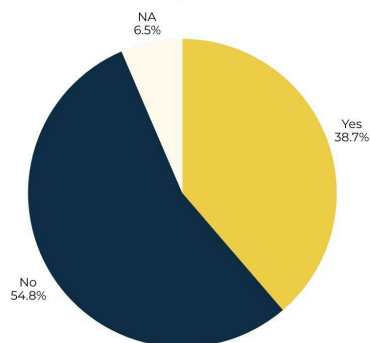


Supply Chain and Logistics

When asked about supply-chain impacts, 39% of respondents reported experiencing challenges related to transportation or customer reach, while 55% reported no significant issues. One participant noted that the presence of freight companies such as Armour Transport is a benefit to the local economy. At the same time, businesses emphasized that any gaps in shipping, delivery, or freight infrastructure can quickly affect operations due to the realities of operating in an island community.

Do transportation or logistics gaps (e.g., freight, shipping, delivery delays) affect your supply chain or customer reach?

31 responses



Comments

From paving and parking to planning and policy, the following themes emerged:

- “The current available transit is a significant limiting factor on Sundays in all of CBRM.”
- “Parking remains an issue downtown.”
- “Repairs on all roads need to continue.”
- “A walking and biking trail from downtown Sydney to Sydney River would add great value.”
- “Fredericton is an excellent example to follow for walkability and accessibility.”

Category Grade

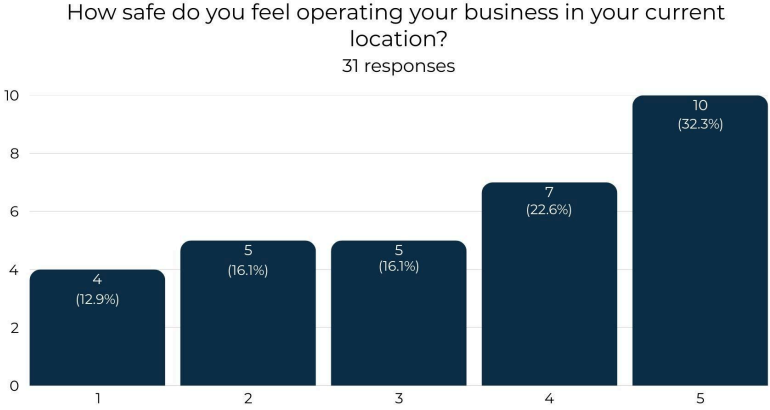
Based on the average of all quantitative survey responses, CBRM receives a score of **2.82 out of 5 (56.5%)**, for the Transportation and Infrastructure category.

Crime and Safety

Perceptions of Safety

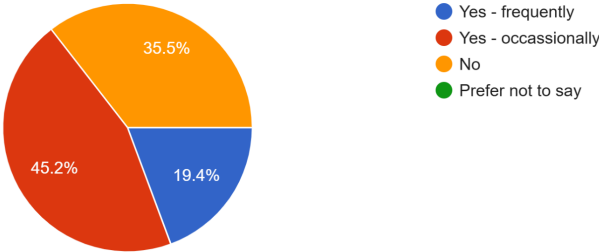
When asked how safe they feel operating their business in their current location, respondents provided an average score of 3.45 out of 5. This indicates that the majority of business owners feel relatively safe within their operating

environments although there is still room for improvement. Notably, more than 55% of respondents rated their feeling of safety as either a 4 or 5.

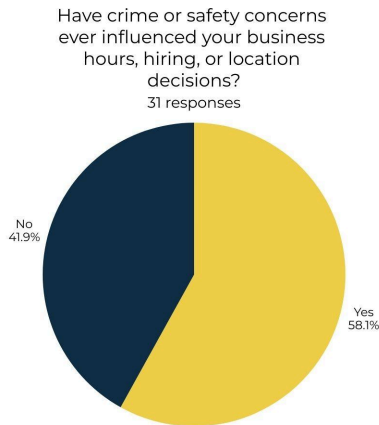


Despite this general feeling of safety, many businesses are experiencing real impacts. Nearly two thirds of respondents, 64.6%, reported experiencing crime either occasionally or frequently over the past year. Occasional incidents were reported by 45.2% of participants, and 19.4% reported frequent issues.

Have you or nearby businesses experienced crime (e.g., vandalism, theft, break-ins) in the past 12 months?
31 responses



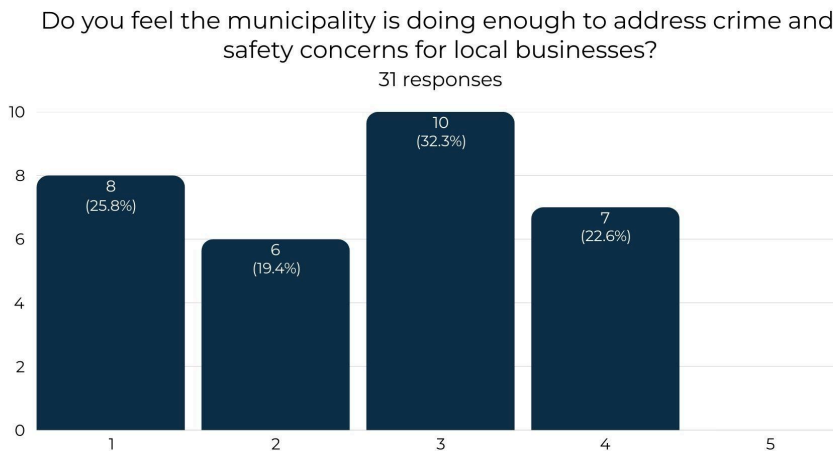
More than half of respondents, 51.6%, said that crime or safety concerns have influenced business decisions such as hours of operation, staffing, or location. These findings reveal a tension between feeling personally safe within a business space and adapting operations because of safety concerns in the surrounding environment.



Many businesses reported taking proactive measures, such as installing security cameras, adjusting staff exit procedures, and improving internal safety protocols.

Perception of Municipal Support

When asked whether the municipality is doing enough to address crime and safety, respondents gave an average score of 2.52 out of 5. Ten respondents selected a score of 3, and the remaining responses were split between higher and lower ratings. This suggests that while some efforts are recognized, many businesses believe more could be done to improve safety and address property upkeep and community concerns.



Comments

Thirteen respondents shared detailed feedback identifying specific community-level safety concerns. Common themes included:

- The placement of shelters and community support centres, particularly in downtown Sydney were seen as detrimental to nearby businesses and residents.
- Abandoned and derelict buildings were frequently cited as hazards, both physically and socially.
- Many called for better regulation and enforcement around public intoxication, vandalism, panhandling, and property upkeep.

The comments reflect not just safety concerns but also broader issues of urban planning, social services integration, and community revitalization. Importantly, some respondents offered constructive suggestions, including the development of outdoor spaces and support facilities away from dense commercial zones and increased municipal consultation with the business community.

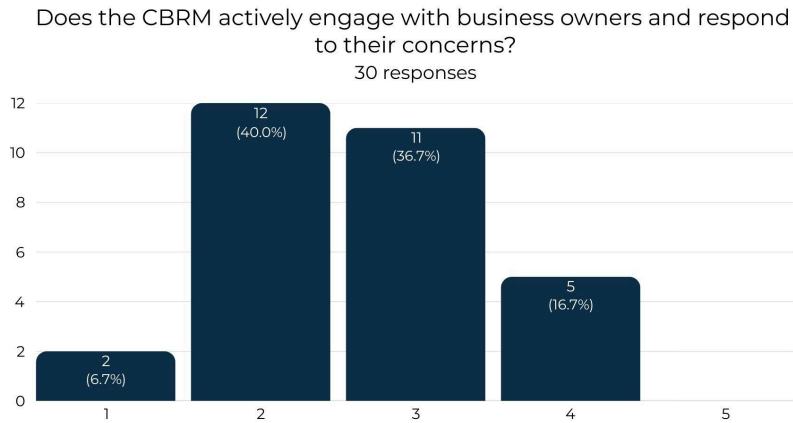
Category Grade

CBRM receives a grade of **2.98 out of 5 (59.7%)** for the Crime and Safety category, based on the average of all quantitative survey responses.

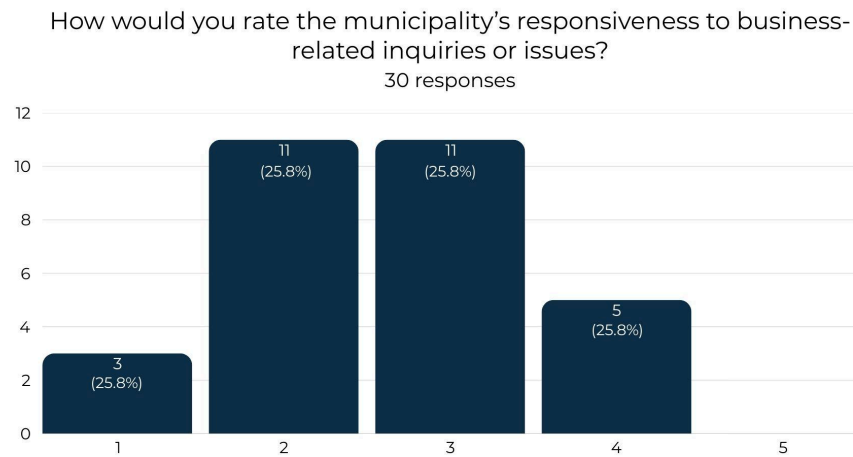
Communication and Engagement

Engagement and Responsiveness

When asked whether CBRM actively engages with business owners and responds to their concerns, the average score was 2.63 out of 5 (52.6%). This suggests that although some positive interactions are taking place, there is significant room to strengthen consistency and follow through in engagement efforts.

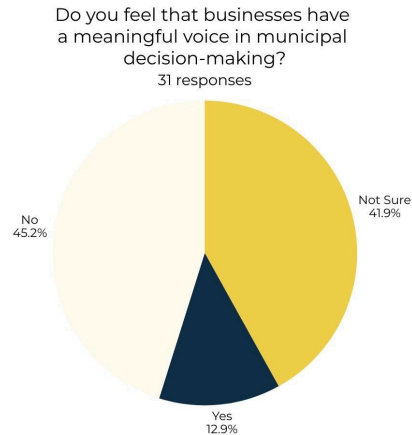


Municipal responsiveness to business related inquiries received a similar score of 2.6 out of 5 (52%). While some businesses reported receiving helpful responses, many indicated that clarity and timeliness remain challenges.

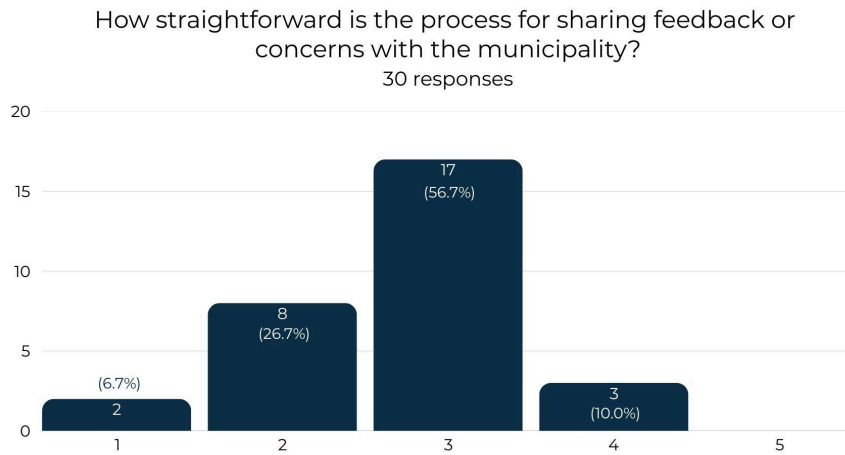


Decision Making and Input

The question of whether businesses feel they have a meaningful voice in municipal decision making revealed an even greater gap. Only 12.9% of respondents said yes, 45.2% said no, and 41.9% were unsure. These results show that beyond engagement itself, there is a need for clearer evidence that business perspectives are being considered in municipal policies and actions.



On a practical level, the process for sharing feedback or concerns with the municipality received an average rating of 2.7 out of 5 (54%). This indicates that while the pathway to provide input is somewhat clear, there are opportunities to make it more accessible, more direct, and easier to navigate.



Category Grade

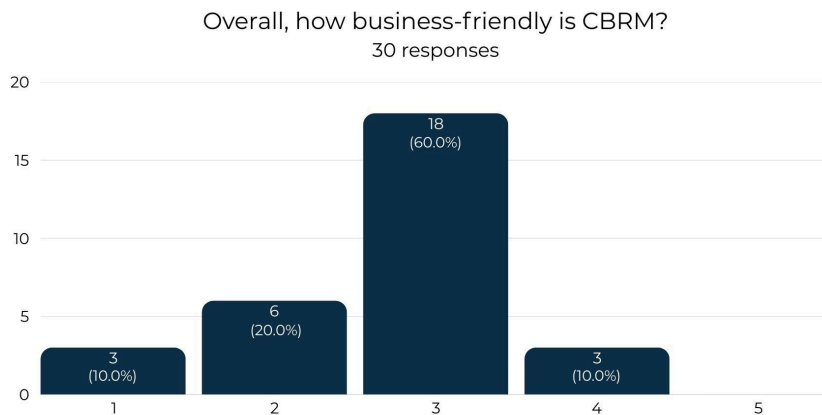
Based on the average of all quantitative responses, CBRM receives a score of **2.64 out of 5 (52.9%)** for the Communication and Engagement category.

Conclusion and Final Grades

The 2025 CBRM Business-Friendly Report Card provides a valuable snapshot of the perspectives and experiences of local business leaders and operators. While the survey includes responses from 31 members, representing a portion of our 300 plus member base, the insights collected offer meaningful direction and help illuminate the current business climate across the region. Respondents identified both strengths and areas that require improvement, particularly in the areas of permitting and municipal processes, taxation and fees, infrastructure, safety, and municipal communication.

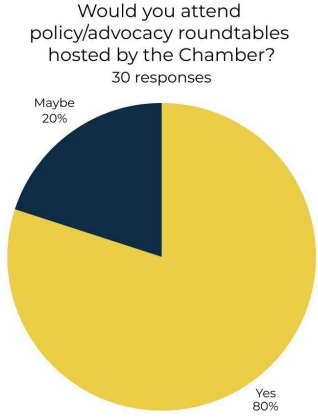
Across all categories, the results indicate moderate satisfaction. The combined average score across the four performance categories is 2.72 out of 5, which represents 54.4%. This calculated overall score reflects how respondents rated CBRM's performance in the key areas that influence business friendliness.

At the end of the survey, respondents were also asked a separate perception question: "Overall, how business-friendly is CBRM?" This question received an average score of 2.7 out of 5 (54%). The close alignment between the calculated category average and the perception score reinforces the consistency of the feedback provided.



Survey responses highlight several clear challenges, including high commercial property taxes, construction and labour costs, delays in permitting, safety concerns, and aging infrastructure. These issues contribute to uncertainty and can limit reinvestment and growth. At the same time, the

results show strong engagement and a willingness among businesses to participate in solution-focused discussions. 80% of respondents said they would attend policy and advocacy roundtables hosted by the Chamber, which signals an opportunity to build momentum for collaborative advocacy and informed decision making.



Several themes appeared consistently throughout the survey. Respondents are seeking improved transparency and predictability in municipal processes, more competitive taxation to support business development, stronger infrastructure planning, safer commercial environments, and more consistent communication and engagement from municipal leadership. These themes highlight both the resiliency of the CBRM business community and the shared desire for a partnership model that supports long-term success.

This report provides a foundation for continued dialogue, targeted initiatives, and focused advocacy aimed at improving business friendliness in CBRM. By continuing to listen to local businesses and bringing their voices forward, the Chamber remains committed to helping build a supportive, competitive, and vibrant economic environment for all.

Final Grades Summary

The table below presents the average scores for each of the four performance categories measured in the survey. These category scores form the basis of the calculated overall business-friendly score for CBRM in 2025.

Category	Average out of 5	Grade %
Reducing Barriers and Costs	2.44	48.7%
Transportation and Infrastructure	2.82	56.5%
Crime and Safety	2.98	59.7%
Communication and Engagement	2.64	52.9%
Overall Category Average	<u>2.72</u>	<u>54.4%</u>

In addition to the category scores, respondents were asked to provide an overall rating of how business-friendly CBRM is. This perception question received an average score of 2.7 out of 5 (54%), which closely aligns with the calculated category average.

Key Opportunities and Recommendations

The findings of the 2025 CBRM Business-Friendly Report Card highlight several opportunities to improve the local business environment. The recommendations below are grounded in the feedback provided by survey respondents and reflect areas where focused action can support business confidence, reduce barriers, and encourage long-term economic growth.

1. Streamline Permits, Approvals, and Processes

The survey shows that many businesses experience delays, confusion, and limited communication when navigating municipal approvals. To reduce barriers and create more predictable outcomes, the municipality should:

- Establish clear and consistent timelines for permit approvals and development applications.
- Improve transparency by offering accessible online tools that allow applicants to track progress and understand required steps.
- Introduce a dedicated business liaison within the municipality to help applicants navigate processes and receive timely responses.

Strengthening communication and predictability in these processes would support reinvestment and reduce unnecessary delays.

2. Review Commercial Taxation and Fees

High commercial property tax rates were identified as a significant barrier to growth. Many businesses reported delaying or cancelling expansions due to the current tax structure. To address this, the municipality should:

- Conduct a benchmarking review to compare CBRM commercial tax rates with those of other Atlantic municipalities.
- Explore phased reductions or targeted incentive programs for businesses investing in expansion, innovation, or job creation.
- Improve clarity around municipal fees and taxation to support more predictable financial planning for businesses.

Greater transparency and competitiveness in taxation can encourage reinvestment and help attract new business activity.

3. Invest in Transportation and Infrastructure

Road quality, transit availability, and logistics infrastructure continue to affect business operations and customer access. To address these challenges, the municipality should:

- Prioritize road maintenance and repairs, especially along high-traffic commercial routes.
- Expand public transit coverage, including weekend service, and explore partnerships for ride-sharing or shuttle solutions.
- Support the development of active transportation networks, including multi-use trails and improved walkability in commercial districts.
- Continue strengthening port, airport, and freight infrastructure to maintain reliable supply-chain connections.

Focused investment in infrastructure would improve accessibility for employees, customers, and suppliers.

4. Enhance Business Safety and Security

Although many businesses feel personally safe within their operations, crime and safety issues continue to influence business decisions. To address these concerns, the municipality should:

- Increase collaboration between the municipality and the business community through consultations on safety and urban planning.
- Improve enforcement related to property upkeep, vandalism, public intoxication, and general safety concerns near commercial areas.
- Strategically plan the placement of social support services to reduce unintended impacts on business districts.
- Encourage transparent partnerships that support safety programs, including security technology and staff training.

A coordinated approach to safety can help restore confidence and reduce operational disruptions.

5. Strengthen Communication and Engagement

Survey results indicate that many businesses do not feel meaningfully engaged in municipal decision making, and many are unsure if their input is considered. To improve communication and strengthen relationships, the municipality should:

- Establish regular, structured opportunities for business feedback, such as engagement sessions or advisory forums.
- Create clear pathways for business inquiries, with defined points of contact and expectations for response times.
- Increase transparency by sharing updates on municipal initiatives, decisions, and outcomes that affect the business community.
- Provide focused communication that highlights progress and supports stronger municipal business partnerships.

Improving communication practices would help build trust and strengthen long-term collaboration.

6. Foster a Culture of Partnership and Collaboration

Across all areas of the survey, respondents expressed a desire for a more collaborative relationship with municipal leadership. To support this, the municipality should:

- Implement pilot programs designed to reduce friction in areas such as permitting, transit, and safety.
- Highlight municipal successes and progress publicly, in order to build momentum and demonstrate shared commitment to improvement.
- Integrate business input into strategic planning to ensure that municipal priorities align with economic-development needs.

A proactive partnership model would help strengthen the overall business climate and support sustainable growth across CBRM.

Appendix: References

1. Cape Breton Regional Chamber of Commerce: Member Survey, Spring 2025