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“The structure of neighborhoods can powerfully affect how much we walk, and play a big role in making us healthier as we age...”

B.C. Premier’s Council on Aging and Senior’s Issues, 2006



Photo Credit: Tcdailyplanet.net

As Manitoba’s populations continue to age, with shifts occurring in proportions of seniors across the country (StatsCan projecting that by 2026 Canadians over 65 years of age will account for 21.4% of the total population), there will be an increasing need to consider issues of mobility (and increasingly accessibility) among those 65 years and older in both urban and rural settings. Issues of transportation are highly prioritized by seniors (STWG, 2006). Limitations to reliable local transport affect so many aspects of a person life; access to goods and services, social and community events, and a sense of independence are what are at stake for aging adults with fluctuating physical and cognitive limitations. Adequate transportation options are essential for senior’s sense of wellbeing (Turcotte, 2012).

Small towns face a number of particular challenges when considering initiatives to promote transportation options: limited tax base, overworked public leaders and municipal staff, lack of a strategic transportation plan, degree of rurality, as well as infrastructure and layout predominantly designed for the automobile. Small communities can make up for these limitations by capitalizing on their strengths and by a strategic prioritization and execution of initiatives. This document outlines three low cost, high efficiency initiatives in local transportation for aging populations - and attempts to show how strategic approaches, careful prioritization of resources, and consideration of location specific opportunities can positively impact outcomes.

Automobile/Private Transportation

Our notions of accessibility, convenience and practicality in city living have been, for the last 60 or more years, set by the automobile. As a result our neighborhoods have been stretched farther and farther apart and whole areas have been zoned and developed for single use, affecting nearly every aspect of urban life. Planning issues aside, many seniors in rural areas realize the automobile provides the only real available mode (HAWW, 2007). In situations where alternative modes are not possible, providing mature drivers courses to familiarize seniors with driving strategies that address issues of aging and driver safety can assist in extending driving years. However, evidence shows that this approach is resisted by many older adults, and should only be implemented in combination with provision of attractive supports for transition to non-driver



Photo: Farehamaction.co.uk

Many communities have implemented successful volunteer driver organizations.

status (TONSmb.org Transportation Options Network for Seniors).

For seniors who can no longer drive, or have never driven, the next best option is soliciting rides from people in their social networks. Asking for a ride is a safe, and reliable form of transportation, but comes with its own set of issues. Many seniors feel guilty about asking for rides, especially when it concerns getting to a ‘non-essential’ social event (STWG, 2006). The burdens on caregivers, that many seniors don’t have reliable family caregivers, and increased feelings of dependence suggest that informal driving schemes may not be fully satisfying the requirements of a community’s seniors.

Volunteer driving organizations provide a good alternative for seniors who wish to maintain the intimacy and familiarity of a personal driver but cannot find anyone in their network to provide it (Fig. 1). The Canadian Cancer Society and Red Cross Volunteer Driver Programs operate as a highly successful model across the country. Widening exclusivity to include all seniors has been successfully implemented for programs in many communities (WSDT, 2013). Program organizers develop connections between volunteer drivers and interested seniors, and inform the public through promotion and coordination between community organizations. This can be as simple as a regularly updated bulletin board posting or a page built into the town website. Coordination between a volunteer driving program and Handi van operations can further provide efficiencies for group events. Organizers will face challenges, but diminishing volunteer bases, safety issues and funding difficulties are all surmountable - the benefits far outweigh the costs. Rebates and tax incentives are available, transportation demand management strategies, and actively tapping new volunteer resources (high schools, regular inter municipal commuters) are inexpensive options for adding value to existing volunteer driving organizations.

Active Transportation

Active transportation includes any form of travel which powered by our bodies. Walking, cycling, and by wheelchair are just a few examples of how people integrate physical activity with their daily needs. The user benefits of active transportation are very real: including improving physical and mental health, having independence in mobility, low costs, and forging strong connections to our environments (Transport Canada, 2009). Communities



Photo Credit: Gaelen Pierce

Fig. 2 Low ‘tech’ and cost effective solutions for organizing volunteer driving solutions can include utilizing existing public notice boards.

“We all benefit from preventing new barriers where we live, learn, work and play and by implementing long-term plans to remove existing ones.”
Jennifer Howard
 - Minister of Family Services and Labour and Minister responsible for Persons with Disabilities and Women



Photo Credit: Unitedwaysca

Fig.1 Organization like the Canadian Red Cross have included volunteer operated services like volunteer driver programs, offering door to door transportation at cost.

“Transportation is so important for older adults, as well as the availability of it, because you can become quite isolated if you can’t get out of the house. It’s really important for us to provide safe, reliable transportation.”

**Debbie Wolfson -
River East Council
for Seniors
(tonsmb.ca)**

Fig. 3: Handi-van taxis offer flexibility for small communities.



Photo Credit: Steinbach.ca



Photo Credit: rrstar.com

Fig. 4: Path networks which include a spectrum of maintenance levels increases variety at lower maintenance cost.

which prioritize active transportation find it helps foster a vibrant and safe street life, promotes thoughtful community layout, and encourages economic success with walkable service centers (City of Winnipeg, 2010).

The City of Camrose, Alberta is a regional agricultural, retirement, and educational centre, which is itself a satellite community of Alberta’s capital city. It maintains an exceptional walking network throughout the city. Its historic commitments to safeguarding its scenic river valley, and continued investment into upkeep of walking paths and green spaces, and recent development of its Green Space Master Plan, all result in a highly functioning extension of the city’s sidewalk network (Fig. 5). Importantly it integrates existing central recreation facilities, a number of seniors housing facilities, protected wildlands, the local college, all while maintaining a vibrant and meaningful connection to the agricultural lands outside the city.

Considering user ability, routing and destination, climate considerations, types of use, and connections to the community will help in formulating your community’s successful active transportation network. Successful initiatives include an integration of many age and ability types, multi season activities, lower maintenance design features (wild greenspaces/paths Fig. 4), and wayfinding features.



Photo Credit: Camrose.ca

Fig.5 Camrose demonstrates excellent integration of geography, institutions, and existing sidewalk network.

Public Transportation

While small communities may like to offer public transit opportunities, often there just isn’t the tax and rider base to support the logistics of such complicated systems. Public transportation for small towns is tied to a fundamental commitment to realistic priorities. Handi van taxi services are widely used in small rural centres the country over and offer the flexibility, affordability, and accessibility that many communities desire. (Fig. 3). Unfortunately they are often too expensive for seniors to use, suffer some of the same problems that large scale public transit systems have (low density of demand), and have a lack of coordination between neighboring municipalities. Problems can be remedied using transport demand management strategies (promotion, incentives, information campaigns), funding programs like MDTP (Mobility Disadvantaged Transportation Program), employing use contracts with community organizations, increased coordination between municipalities and organizations (STWG, 2006 and TDM, 2011).

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