



Transit Alternatives

Photo Credit: Healthy Families BC

Gisele
Sobhan-Sarbandi

“Manitoba’s population of seniors is expected to increase by 43 per cent over the next 20 years”

The senior population of Canada is growing as the baby boomers start moving into their retirement years. According to the Age-Friendly Manitoba (n.d.), “Manitoba’s population of seniors is expected to increase by 43 per cent over the next 20 years” (Government of Manitoba, n.d., pa.1). This makes it more important than ever to support the health and well-being of older residents in rural communities in Manitoba. Making communities “age-friendly” is believed to be one of the best ways to do this. The goal of the Age-Friendly Communities (AFC) is to help seniors “age actively” which means setting up the community in a way to help seniors live safely, enjoy good health, and stay involved (World Health Organization, 2007).

Mobility is an essential component of seniors’ well-being. Reliable, safe, and easily accessible transportation options enable seniors to carry out daily activities and ensure that all members, including seniors, remain healthy, active, and independent (World Health Organization, 2019). Rural municipalities in Manitoba face a number of challenges with regard to transportation including limited public transit (areas serviced and frequency of services) and long travel distances.

This precedent research provides an opportunity to explore the potential for developing other options to meet the transportation needs of senior residents in the municipalities of Russell-Binscarth, Yellowhead, Rossburn, Hamiota, and Harrison Park.

Benefits of investing in rural transportation

- Economy - Supports local business
- Opportunity - Offers independence and mobility to non-drivers and relocation avoidance (NCTR, 2014)
- Environment - Supports climate change strategies
- Health and safety - Decrease car accidents (BC Transit, 2010)

What type of transit can be considered “age-friendly”?

According to Canadian Urban Institute (2014), decision-makers should pay attention to 5As when developing senior-friendly transportation:

Availability: seniors need transit mainly in the non-peak periods and their destinations are not usually workplaces, so transit that puts commuters first will not meet their needs.

Accessibility: the transit available must be close enough to be convenient to use, and when a vehicle arrives, seniors should be able to get on it easily.

Acceptability: the transit journey from beginning to end must be perceived as safe, comfortable, and pleasant—these experiences apply to transit stops and their surroundings as much as to vehicles; the attitude of transit staff is also a consideration.

Affordability: seniors should consider the cost worth the journey; for example, short trips in non-peak periods should cost less than long trips at rush hour, which entails smart cards/smart pricing.

Adaptability: seniors who use walkers, wheelchairs, mobility scooters, or guide animals can use transit.

Models for Rural Seniors' transportation

Rural transportation solutions require incorporating the context of rural communities and the input of seniors (Lutz, 2014). Generally, rural transit with a mix of fixed routes and specialized services make personal travels much easier for seniors (Majkut, 2011). The following precedents highlight the initiatives that appear to be successful and potentially sustainable in Canada.

West Kootenay Transit – BC Transit (launched in 2013)

The West Kootenay Transit is a partnership between three local governments and nine transit systems. It serves 10 communities within the regional district of Central Kootenay with a total population of approximately 106,955 (BC Transit, 2015). The West Kootenay Transit offers several types of services in the region, including Fixed-route service, Regional Connectors, Health Connections, Paratransit Services, and handyDART (BC Transit, 2018).

Benefits

- This is a well-recognized example of a successful partnership between neighbouring communities
- The local governments have control over the service in terms of fares, routes, and service levels
- Operated by local companies which create job opportunities for local people
- Offers affordable transportation options

Challenges

- Bus service is not available seven days a week



Figure 1: A bus of BC Transit

- Passengers must carry exact change
- Booking the service could be confusing
- Many rural seniors are unaware of how to use different types of services offered by the West Kootenay Transit

The Rural Overland Utility Transit (TROUT) (launched in 2010)



Photo Credit: BCT
Community Transit

Figure 2: TROUT Transportation

The TROUT was created after expanding an existing ‘handi-bus’ service that was only for seniors. The Trout transit provides transportation services to 8 municipalities with a total population of 15,303 (Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition, n.d).

The TROUT’s types of service include scheduled regional routes, door-to-door service, individualized service, and special destinations (Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition, n.d).

Challenges

- There are funding shortfalls and the service must be subsidized to be sustainable
- The dominant way of thinking is oriented towards private automobile and does not support public transit in the area
- The TROUT’s history of running the handi-bus may confuse people within the region as there is still a perception by some people that the TROUT is just for seniors

Benefits

- Has well-designed routes and schedules
- Plays a prominent role in the sustainability of the region and reduces GHG emissions
- Supports the local economy by connecting riders with goods and services
- Supports the cultural aspects of communities by enabling residents to access cultural events

Recommendations for rural municipalities in Manitoba

- Establish a task force to explore innovative public transportation systems that can serve rural and remote populations including seniors
- Explore ways to improve transportation to health services
- Provide funding and policy support for innovative approaches to increase the mobility of seniors in rural communities.
- Maximize opportunities for residents by partnering with neighbouring communities to create or improve options for travel both within and among themselves
- When developing alternatives for seniors’ transportation, consider that focusing only on the financial line is limiting
- Increase public awareness about seniors’ transportation and the risks of social isolation.

Sources:

- BC Transit (2018). *West Kootenay Transit: Rider's Guide*. Available at: <https://www.bctransit.com/documents/1507215481111>
- BC Transit (2015). *Marketing Plan: West Kootenay Transit*. Available at: <https://rdck.ca/assets/News~and~Press~Releases/News~Archive/WKT%20marketing%20plan%202016.pdf>
- BC Transit (2010). *Rural Transit in BC*. Available at: <https://www.ubcm.ca/assets/Convention/Archived/Convention2010/Session~Presentations/September~28/BC%20TRANSIT.Rural%20Transit.pdf>
- Canadian Urban Institute (2014). *Supporting the Big Shift with Age-Friendly Development*. Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/546bbd2ae4b077803c592197/t/5554a515e4b07a51644b4ebd/1431610645890/Supporting+the+Big+Shift+with+Age+Friendly+Development+December+2014+.pdf>
- Government of Manitoba (n.d.). *Age-Friendly Initiative*. Available at: <https://www.gov.mb.ca/seniors/afmb/index.html>
- Lutz, H. (2014). *Transportation Solutions for Rural Seniors: A Literature Review*. Available at: <http://kootenayseniors.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Transportation-Solutions-for-Rural-Seniors-Lutz-2014.pdf>
- Majkut, K. (2011). *Rural Transportation Issues and Strategies*. Available at: <http://www.octn.ca/uploads/userfiles/files/Rural%20Transportation%20Issues%20and%20Strategies%20Paper.pdf>
- NCTR (2014). *Cost-Benefit Analysis of Rural and Small Urban Transit*. Available at: <https://www.nctr.usf.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/77060-NCTR-NDSU03-508.pdf>
- Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition (n.d.). *Accelerating Rural Transportation Solutions: Ten Community Case Studies in Ontario*. Available at: https://www.ruralontarioinstitute.ca/uploads/userfiles/files/ARTS_-_Case_Studies_for_WEB.pdf
- World Health Organization (2007). *Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide*. Available at: https://www.who.int/ageing/publications/Global_age_friendly_cities_Guide_English.pdf
- World Health Organization (2019). *Age-Friendly Strategy—Transportation*. Available at: <https://extranet.who.int/agefriendlyworld/age-friendly-strategy-transportation/>