

Rural Considerations Influencing Rural Transit Options

Submission to the BC Special Committee to Review Passenger Directed Vehicles

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This submission was prepared by Dr. Sarah-Patricia Breen (Selkirk Innovates).

The content of this submission draws on the results of two research projects: *Navigating Rural: Place Based Transit Solutions for Rural Canada* and *Moving Forward: determining the influence of place on public transit in rural Canada*. Contributions to this research came from: Courtney Sutherland (University of Guelph), Mark Trueman (Selkirk College), Dr. Ryan Gibson (University of Guelph), Dr. Sean Markey (Simon Fraser University), Dr. Wayne Kelly (Brandon University), and Dr. Karen Foster (Dalhousie University).

Selkirk College acknowledges the traditional territories of the Sinixt (Lakes), the Syilx (Okanagan), the Ktunaxa, and the Secwépemc (Shuswap) peoples.

Introduction

The following submission will speak directly to item ‘e’ of the Committee’s terms of reference, “whether the Act promotes passenger directed vehicle services, including transportation network services, in small, rural or remote communities. My aim is to provide some rural considerations to inform the work of the Committee. This submission will summarize the importance transit options for rural communities, the current state of rural transit options, and end with three key messages for the Committee.

Importance of Rural Transit Options

Transportation between rural communities in British Columbia (BC) is a challenge and an opportunity. Discussions of rural transit are often challenge focused, such as the loss of Greyhound or whether or not ride hailing services like Uber will provide a benefit. However, it is important to note that prominent examples like Greyhound or Uber are not necessarily reflective of the complexity or range of inter-community rural transit services that exist across BC.¹ Transportation within and between communities includes long and short trips, as well as occasional and regular trips.

Individual mobility is critically important in order to access basic services – like health care and education, as well as the ability of individuals to participate in their communities and in the economy – for work, entertainment, and shopping. From a business and community perspective, available transit options have a range of direct, indirect, and induced impacts, including job creation, resident attraction, workforce attraction, market accessibility and more.²

It is a mistake to assume all people living in rural areas have access to personal vehicles. It is equally a mistake to assume that regular, shorter trips occur within a single community. It is increasingly more common that an individual’s regularly used services, places of employment, and home are in different communities. This challenge is particularly acute in communities where there is a shortage of affordable housing, but where there is also a workforce shortage. The people needed to fill these workforce shortages can live in outlying areas or neighboring communities – making transit a necessity.

In rural places, the lack of inter-community transit can impact the ability of people to go to school, to see a doctor, or hold a job. This disproportionately impacts certain parts of our society, including youth, seniors, people with physical or cognitive impairments, low income individuals, Indigenous peoples, and newcomers. This has a direct impact not only on these individuals, but on businesses and communities.

A range of sustainable inter-community transit options offers an opportunity for improved social, economic, and environmental outcomes in rural communities.

Current State of Rural Transit Options


Provincial information current to September 24, 2023 indicates that ride hailing companies have been approved to operate in all 5 of the operating regions in BC.³ However, a scan of the actual functional locations of the Approved Ride-Hail Companies listed demonstrates that rural BC is largely unserved by ride hailing (see Table 1), indicating that to date the *Passenger Transportation Act* has had limited success in small, rural, and remote communities.

Table 1: Scan of Approved Ride-Hail Companies for Rural Service³

Approved Ride-Hail Companies	Approved Regions	Operating Locations <i>*indicates rural location based on the Province's defacto rural definition of <25,000 (used for the REDIP Program)</i>
Apt Rides	1	NA – urban region
Black Top Cabs	1	NA – urban region
Bonny's Taxi	1	NA – urban region
Coastal Rides	3, 5	Sunshine Coast*; Comox Valley*; Texada Island*; Campbell River
Kabu	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	Uncertain, potentially: Metro Vancouver; Victoria; Ucluelet*
Lyft	1	NA – urban region
MDD	1	NA – urban region
MetroRides	1	NA – urban region
North Shore Taxi	1	NA – urban region
Ripe Rides	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	No information available
Safe Ride Sharing	4	Kelowna
Tappcar	1, 2, 3, 4	Uncertain, potentially: Kelowna; Metro Vancouver; Victoria
Transroad Airport Shuttle	1	NA – urban region
Uber	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	Campbell River; Courtenay*; Cranbrook*; Fort St. John*; Metro Vancouver; Victoria
Uride	2, 3, 4, 5	Courtenay & Comox*; Kamloops; Kelowna; Nanaimo; Penticton; Prince George; Vernon*
Vancouver Taxi	1	NA – urban region
Vancouver Taxi Handicapped Cabs	1	NA – urban region
Whistle!	1, 3	Squamish*; Tofino*; Whistler*
Yellow Cab	1	NA – urban region

Based on an analysis of rural transit literature, transit support programs, and over 100 rural case study examples I offer the following summary of relevant considerations^{2,4}:

- Within programs, policy, and legislation, “Rural” is often absent, poorly defined, or treated as if it is a single homogenous group, with rural need or solutions discussed generally. When absent, as it appears to be from the *Passenger Transportation Act*, this can result in unintended consequences or poor outcomes for rural communities. When rural is generalized, this can result



in the failure to consider how different rural communities are and the influence of place specific factors, also potentially resulting in unintended consequences and/or poor outcomes.

- There are several categories of barriers to sustainable rural transit options, demonstrating both general rural challenges (e.g., costs of operation) and place specific challenges (e.g., travel patterns and economic structure).
- Two substantive barriers to rural transit options are the lack of rural specific funding and the lack of funding for operational costs.
- The current state of knowledge is geographically uneven, dominated by experiences and observations from larger, urban-adjacent rural communities in southern Ontario, southern Quebec, and British Columbia.
- There are a growing number of available transit options. The majority of the existing examples we identified are inter-community services. This includes fixed route bus services, as well as innovative approaches, such as on-demand services, flexible routes, car shares, ride hailing, and more.

Key Messages

I would like to offer the following three considerations to the committee.

Consideration #1: Re-visit the *Passenger Transportation Act* with a rural lens, in order to have the Act explicitly reflect rural needs and solutions.

- There is a particular need to include rural considerations in development of government legislation, policy, and programs, so as to avoid unintentionally leaving out or otherwise negatively impacting rural places.

Consideration #2: Differences in place mean that there is no single solution and rural places require particular consideration in the design and implementation of solutions.

- Needs, challenges, and opportunities vary by place, highlighting a need for solutions to be flexible to place-specific considerations. While solutions may look different across BC, there is also a clear need for collaboration and connection across jurisdictions.

Consideration #3: In the development of solutions, acknowledge and account for the difference between where the benefits of transit accrue versus where the costs are borne.

- Transit options are recognized for a range of social, environmental, and economic benefits. However, a fundamental challenge is that the benefits of transit are dispersed among individuals, businesses, communities, and society, while the costs are borne by the service provider. Profit generation from rural transit options are recognized as a significant challenge, particularly as standard measures of return on investment fail to account for the dispersal of benefits.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate and for your consideration of this input.

References

1. Sutherland, C. & Breen, S.-P. Not In Service: A Typology of Barriers Facing Rural Transit Systems. *Can. Plan. Policy* 2022, 172–190 (2023).
2. Breen, S.-P., Sutherland, C., Trueman, M., Gibson, R. & Markey, S. *Navigating Rural - Place Based Solutions for Rural Canada*. <https://sc.arcabc.ca/islandora/object/sc%3A5510> (2021).
3. Passenger Transportation Board. *Special Committee Report*. (2023).
4. Trueman, M. & Breen, S.-P. Innovative Examples of Rural Transit. <https://selkirk.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=17c858b73a014fbfa55d712141847a73> (2021).

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Selkirk Innovates at Selkirk College is a leader in applied research and innovation. The goal of Selkirk Innovates is to support and enable communities to adapt and thrive in the face of change while also enhancing the student learning experience and fostering a sustainable and inclusive organizational climate. The Rural Resilience research team is focused on human capacity, technology and innovation, and infrastructure and services, helping rural places stay vibrant and deal with increased rapid change while holding on to local values (<https://selkirk.ca/rural-resilience>).