



Inter-Community Public Transit in Manitoba
Discussion Paper
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Introduction

Most people use some form of transportation every single day, whether it is walking, wheeling, driving, or taking the bus. Perhaps because we use it so frequently, the transportation system (the range of different transportation options available to us) can blend into the background, becoming invisible—obscuring questions of who has an easier or harder time getting around, or the impact of different methods of transportation on the climate. Sometimes, transportation becomes visible only in its loss or absence, especially for those most impacted by that loss. The loss of inter-community public transit for many rural communities in Manitoba in 2018 with the withdrawal of Greyhound Canada is one example.

Access to transportation is critical for taking care of basic needs, visiting friends and family, accessing the healthcare system and social services, going to work or going to school. Public transit is a more affordable and accessible means of transportation than owning a car, and is an important part of any transportation system. Transit ridership may be lower and it may look different in low-density rural communities, but transit still has an important role to play in the rural transportation system, especially as we seek to reduce emissions across the province.

This paper is about exploring public inter-community transit as an equity-based climate solution in Manitoba, one that could benefit rural and remote communities especially. The term “inter-community” refers to travel between municipalities, rural areas, and other settlements. Rural and remote Manitoba is defined as outside the municipality of Winnipeg. This paper covers the recent history of inter-community transit in just over the last decade, including its gradual deregulation, the loss of Greyhound, the companies that have tried to replace it, and the impact the lack of stable service has had on rural communities. To help imagine what models of public inter-community transit could be implemented in Manitoba, the paper presents case studies on the Saskatchewan Transportation Company, Ontario Northland Transportation Commission, and the Ontario Community Transportation Grant program.

With the urgent need to reduce emissions to meet climate targets, and the gap left by Greyhound, the timing is perfect for the province to step in and create public solutions to inter-community transit that can work for the long-term. Which specific approaches work best may vary depending on the different contexts and characteristics of rural and remote Manitoban communities. We are seeking to gather input on rural Manitobans’ needs and visions to inform the final recommendations this paper will put forward.

1. Why is inter-community public transit important?

Inter-community public transit has multiple interconnected benefits that range from social, to health, to environmental, to economic. Expanding inter-community transit ensures that equity-seeking groups and rural communities are not left out of climate transportation policy and are provided with a low-emissions transportation option that fits their needs. At the same

time, inter-community transit ensures that everyone has equitable access to mobility, which translates into more equitable access to healthcare, essential services, work, and leisure. It can ensure that Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit plus people have safe ways of travel. And by connecting rural communities with economic centres and with each other, public inter-community transit can strengthen and build up rural regional economies.

Climate change

Reducing transportation emissions, while ensuring that we can still get where we need to go, is critical to doing our part in Manitoba to fight climate change, and contributing towards federal and global emissions targets of net-zero emissions by 2050. Currently, the most common and convenient option for traveling between communities is by private vehicle, most of which are powered by fossil fuels. The Manitoba Climate and Green Plan notes that “rural and northern households have greater obstacles to reducing transportation emissions than urban households due to longer travel distances that are part of daily life.....”¹ In total, transportation produces 31% of Manitoba’s greenhouse gas emissions.²

Widespread electrification will play a part in reducing transportation emissions, but it will take more than simply replacing every gas-powered vehicle with an electric one to achieve the reductions necessary within the time we have left to meet our targets. EVs still have a climate impact. While Manitoba’s hydroelectricity means that we can at least charge EVs cleanly, the lifecycle GHG impacts of EVs are another story. Many EVs are manufactured in jurisdictions that have not yet switched to clean electricity, meaning every EV represents a high GHG impact before it has even been driven off the lot. The mining of critical minerals for EV batteries comes with a heavy environmental and social justice impact for countries in the Global South, which will only increase as EV production continues to ramp up.³

The voluntary replacement of gas vehicles with EVs will also take time—perhaps longer than we have. EV uptake is hampered by price and infrastructure barriers that have not been fully addressed by the provincial government. While EV prices continue to drop, they remain more expensive than gas vehicles, and Manitoba is one of the few provinces that currently does not provide any form of EV rebate. The province is also lagging behind in building out the public charging network, particularly in rural areas. Chargehub, a database of public charging stations, shows large gaps in the southeast, southwest, and northern regions of the province.⁴ We can expect the provincial government to continue ramping up EV infrastructure investment, especially as we approach 2035 after which no more new passenger gas-burning vehicles can be sold. But research on EV uptake shows that, taking

¹ Government of Manitoba, “A Made-in-Manitoba Climate and Green Plan,” 2017.

https://www.gov.mb.ca/asset_library/en/climatechange/climategreenplandiscussionpaper.pdf

² Government of Canada, “National Inventory Report 1990-2021: Greenhouse Gas Sources and Sinks in Canada.” 2023.

https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2023/eccc/En81-4-2021-3-eng.pdf

³ Milovanoff, Alexandre, et al. “Electrification of light-duty vehicle fleet alone will not meet mitigation targets.” *Nature Climate Change*, vol. 10, no. 12, 2020, pp. 1102–1107,

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-020-00921-7>.

⁴ ChargeHub, October 2023, <https://chargehub.com/en/charging-stations-map.html>

into account the 10-12 year life span of a vehicle, many vehicles on the road will still be burning gasoline by 2045—only a few years before we must be at net-zero.⁵

A study by U of T researchers on EV uptake in the US found that relying on EVs as a “silver bullet” for transportation emissions would result in the country failing to meet its climate targets on time.⁶ Their recommendation is to prioritize policies that focus on reducing vehicle use and ownership overall, including by expanding public transit. Whether electric or not, buses are far more efficient than personal vehicles at moving people,⁷ and energy efficiency is equally important for reducing emissions as electrification. Reducing emissions at the scale and time required, while also minimizing environmental and social impacts, requires more than simply electrifying every vehicle. We must also transform our transportation systems to reduce individual vehicle-use and increase use of collective public transit.

Equity

Expanding public transit is an opportunity to ensure equitable access to green transportation, as well as transportation broadly. Many Manitobans who are unable to afford or access a vehicle, or unable to drive due to disability or age. The right to mobility is recognized under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and viable public transit is critical to ensuring this right can be realized by all.

Data collected by the Saskatchewan Transportation Company showed that the majority of its riders were also members of a marginalized population (women, low income, young and elderly, Indigenous).⁸ This correlates with studies in the US, Australia, and beyond, which find that youth, seniors, low-income households, women, people with disabilities, racialized minorities, and Indigenous peoples are more likely to struggle to access convenient, safe, affordable transportation options.⁹ The effects of the lack of inter-community services on marginalized populations has been documented and discussed by researchers, journalists, political leaders, and advocates in the wake of the cancellation of the Saskatchewan Transportation Bus Company in 2017, and Greyhound’s withdrawal from Western Canada and then all of Canada.¹⁰ For example, Jacob Alhassan’s research in Saskatchewan found that since the loss of public bus service, one disabled participant had not been able to access essential

⁵ MacLean, Heather L., et al. “We Need More than Just Electric Vehicles.” *IEEE Spectrum*, IEEE Spectrum, 23 June 2023, spectrum.ieee.org/electric-cars-2657880896.

⁶ Milovanoff, Alexandre, et al. “Electrification of light-duty vehicle fleet alone will not meet mitigation targets.” 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-020-00921-7>.

⁷ Fraser, Joan. “Intercity Bus Service in Canada.” Standing Senate Committee on Transportation and Communications, Senate of Canada. December 2002. <https://sencanada.ca/en/content/sen/committee/372/tran/rep/rep03dec02-e#TABLE%20OF%20CONTENTS>

⁸ Saskatchewan Transportation Company. “2016-17 Annual Report,” Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan. 2017. <https://www.cicorp.sk.ca/pub/Reports/STC%20Reports/2016-17-stc-annual-report.pdf>

⁹ Hanson, C et al. “Public Transportation and Intersectionality,” Factsheet #1, Here Today, Gone Tomorrow: Public Transportation and Vulnerabilities in Rural and Remote Canada. 2022. <https://www.criaw-icref.ca/publications/public-transportation-and-intersectionality/>

¹⁰ Perry, Adele et al. “Missing the Bus: Indigenous Women and Two-Spirit Plus People and Public Transit in Western Canada.” December 2021. <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2018/07/10/greyhound-exit>

medical treatment in two years because they could not find transportation.¹¹ Others described the financial strain of being forced to purchase or travel by vehicle. As marginalized populations are less able to travel to access economic and educational opportunities, or healthcare and other essential services, existing social and economic inequities are only reinforced.

MMIWG2S+

Inter-community public transit service can help protect Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit plus people, while its lack puts them more at risk. When Greyhound announced its withdrawal from Western Canada, political leaders and commentators such as Bernadette Smith, Pam Palmater, and the Native Women’s Association of Canada expressed concerns that it could lead to another “Highway of Tears” in Manitoba, as more Indigenous women and girls would be forced to hitchhike.^{12,13} A recent study by Adele Perry, Jocelyn Thorpe, and Karine Duhamel at the University of Manitoba confirms the connection between diminishing public transit options in Western Canada and the exposure of Indigenous women and Two-Spirit plus people to violence.¹⁴ The authors take care to emphasize that violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2S+ peoples is not somehow “inevitable,” but is tied to specific structures which can be changed—including the transportation system. The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls called for “safe and affordable transit and transportation services and infrastructure for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people living in remote or rural communities.”¹⁵

Rural communities

Public inter-community transit is also important for ensuring transportation equity for rural and remote communities as compared to urban centres.

While most urban residents benefit from publicly-owned and subsidized transit, rural and remote residents often lack comparable options. While public transit design and ridership might look different in a less densely populated context, Cindy Hanson argues that the transportation disadvantage rural residents face “is more a result of political decisions than technical constraints.”¹⁶ Rural and remote communities across Canada have suffered the withdrawal not just of transportation infrastructure, but also essential public services like

¹¹ Alhassan, Jacob et al. “It feels like somebody cut my legs off”: Austerity, transportation and the ‘web of dispossession’ in Saskatchewan, Canada.” *Social Science & Medicine*, Volume 282, 2021, 114147, ISSN 0277-9536,

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114147>.

¹² Palmater, Pam. “Greyhound Canada’s cuts are a public safety crisis for Indigenous people,” *MacLean’s* magazine, July 11 2021.

<https://macleans.ca/opinion/greyhound-canadas-cuts-are-a-public-safety-crisis-for-indigenous-people/>

¹³ Macintosh, Maggie, and Larry Kusch. “Fallout from Greyhound Departure.” *Winnipeg Free Press*, July 10 2018. <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2018/07/10/greyhound-exit>

¹⁴ Perry, Adele et al. “Missing the Bus.” December 2021.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2018/07/10/greyhound-exit>

¹⁵ “Calls for Justice, 4.8” *Reclaiming Power and Place: Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*. (2019).

https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Calls_for_Justice.pdf

¹⁶ Hanson et al. “Here Today, Gone Tomorrow: Public Transportation and Vulnerabilities in Rural and Remote Canada.” *University of Regina*. 2021.

<https://ourspace.uregina.ca/server/api/core/bitstreams/4f9df7a5-48ab-4d70-acc7-0c5a11439f38/content>

healthcare and education, as governments move to centralize services in urban areas.¹⁷ This centralization only heightens the need for adequate public transit infrastructure connecting rural communities to urban centres.¹⁸

Rural economies require adequate transit linkages (both to urban centres and between rural communities themselves), to ensure a flow of goods and services, and access to employment and income. Greyhound once provided freight service for rural businesses in Manitoba, offering same-day shipping to most communities.¹⁹ In a past provincial consultation, rural residents identified these freight services as one of the most important roles played by Greyhound, especially the transport of reasonably-priced goods to northern communities.²⁰ Stakeholders also described how bus services brought visitors into rural communities to spend money at local businesses. Disparity in transportation infrastructure translates into economic disadvantage for rural communities.²¹

The economic and social disadvantages stemming from lack of inter-community transit are also experienced at the individual level within rural communities, especially for members of marginalized populations living rurally. Like other parts of rural Canada,²² rural Manitoba communities tend to have relatively higher populations of certain marginalized groups compared to urban areas—specifically, low income, elderly and youth, and Indigenous people—all groups that are more likely to experience barriers in accessing transportation, as discussed above.²³ It is therefore important to take an intersectional lens to understanding inter-community transit needs. Inter-community public transit is essential for alleviating inequity not only for marginalized groups, but also between urban versus rural and remote communities.

Road safety

Intercommunity public transit can also increase road safety for rural and remote communities. Driving in rural and remote areas can be more dangerous due to weather, poor road conditions, and the risk of hitting an animal. Gaps in amenities and cell phone coverage

¹⁷ Jaffee et al. “Transportation as Infrastructure in Rural and Remote Canada,” Factsheet #2, Here Today, Gone Tomorrow: Public Transportation and Vulnerabilities in Rural and Remote Canada. 2021. <https://www.criaw-icref.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Transportation-as-Infrastructure-in-Rural-Remote-Canada-FS-2-EN.pdf>

¹⁸ Council of Deputy Ministers Response for Transportation and Highway Safety. “Intercity Bus Services Task Force Final Report.” September 2010.

¹⁹ Leedham, Emily. “Still Waiting for the Bus: The Unnatural Death of Prairie Intercity Transit.” ATU Canada. 2019. <https://www.atucanada.ca/still-waiting-bus-unnatural-death-prairie-intercity-transit-0>

²⁰ Council of Deputy Ministers, “Intercity Bus Services Task Force Final Report.” 2010.

²¹ Hanson et al. Here Today, Gone Tomorrow,” 2021.

<https://ourspace.uregina.ca/server/api/core/bitstreams/4f9df7a5-48ab-4d70-acc7-0c5a11439f38/content>

²² Hanson et al. “Here Today, Gone Tomorrow.” 2021.

<https://ourspace.uregina.ca/server/api/core/bitstreams/4f9df7a5-48ab-4d70-acc7-0c5a11439f38/content>

²³ Government of Manitoba. “Rural Manitoba Economic Profile.” 2021. https://www.gov.mb.ca/jec/lmi/pdfs/ecprofiles/rural_mb_ep_2021.pdf

can also leave drivers stranded should they be involved in a collision.²⁴ The risk of collision increases in cases where seniors or medical patients who are not in good condition to drive are forced to do so because of a lack of other options. Bus travel may therefore be safer in many cases than travelling rurally by private car. Rates of accidents for busses are lower than for private vehicles, and bus passengers involved in collisions are less likely to suffer fatalities.²⁵ Busses can also play an additional safety role by providing emergency evacuation services—for example, from wildfires exacerbated by climate change.²⁶

Inter-community public transit produces multiple inter-linked benefits, relating to climate action, equity, rural development, MMIWG2S+, and road safety. Even if inter-community transit services are only used by some Manitobans, the benefits can ripple across the province in the form of reduced emissions, and more vital, healthier, and safe rural and remote communities. Importantly, the realization of these benefits requires comprehensive transit coverage—not a piecemeal system covering only the most popular routes. This is partly why it is important that the inter-community transit system be publicly-owned—as will be shown below through an examination of the history and current landscape of inter-community transit in Manitoba.

2. The history of inter-community transportation in Manitoba

As a largely rural province with only a single major urban centre, Manitoba depends on inter-community transportation to link the province together. The inter-community passenger transportation system includes air, rail, handi-vans, and bus services, as well as private vehicles and informal carpooling or ride-shares. Greyhound Canada was a major provider of inter-community bus service in the province until the company cancelled all provincial service in 2018. Smaller companies have stepped in, but it remains uncertain whether they will be able to succeed for the long-term where Greyhound failed. Provincial and municipal governments fill in some of the gaps through programs targeted at specific populations (handi-vans for those in need of mobility assistance, and the Northern Medical Patient Transfer Program). But overall, current inter-community transportation options are precarious, inadequate, and leave many needs unfulfilled.

The province of Manitoba is 552,371 square kilometres, spanning the southern arctic to the boreal shield to the prairies.²⁷ A total population of 1.3 million means there is an average of only 2.3 people per square kilometre. Just under half of all Manitobans live outside the main metropolitan region of Winnipeg—in smaller population centres like Brandon or Thompson,

²⁴ Jaffee et al. “Transportation as Infrastructure in Rural and Remote Canada,” 2021.

<https://www.criaw-icref.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Transportation-as-Infrastructure-in-Rural-Remote-Canada-FS-2-EN.pdf>

²⁵ Schiefke, Peter. “Improving Bus Connectivity in Canada: Report of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure, and Communities.” Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure, and Communities. May 2023.

https://www.ourcommons.ca/content/Committee/441/TRAN/Reports/RP12444313/441_TRAN_Rpt13_PDF/441_TRAN_Rpt13-e.pdf

²⁶ Schiefke, Peter. “Improving Bus Connectivity in Canada,” May 2023.

https://www.ourcommons.ca/content/Committee/441/TRAN/Reports/RP12444313/441_TRAN_Rpt13_PDF/441_TRAN_Rpt13-e.pdf

²⁷ Statistics Canada, “Province of Manitoba,” Focus on Geography Series, 2016 Census. 2017.

<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/fogs-spg/Facts-pr-eng.cfm?Lang=eng&GK=PR&GC=46&TOPIC=1>

or in what are classified as rural areas (less than 1000 people).²⁸ Manitoba's rural population has grown faster than the overall population over the past thirty years, though this growth is concentrated in areas adjacent to urban centres and northern Manitoba.²⁹

The current inter-community transportation system

According to the Rural Development Institute, ruralness can be measured along two scales: density, and distance to density.³⁰ Rural communities tend to be both low in density and far from a metropolitan centre, though some rural communities may sit higher on one scale than the other (for example, a “bedroom” community located just outside a metropolitan centre but still quite low in density). These two characteristics of density and distance also neatly sum up the challenge of rural inter-community transit: lack of density makes inter-community transit services challenging to run (especially for profit), but long distances means they are crucially important nevertheless.

The rural Manitoba transportation system consists of automobile, rail, and air, along with handi-vans, and limited bus service.³¹ Via Rail offers passenger rail service between Winnipeg, the Pas, Thompson, and Churchill, as well as between Winnipeg and neighbouring provinces. 58 northern communities have an airfield, with passenger services provided by private companies Calm Air and Perimeter Aviation. Air transport is also used for cargo shipping, as well as medical, policing, fire fighting, and search and rescue emergency services.

Many municipalities have handi-van services that provide local medical, shopping, and recreational transportation for seniors and mobility-challenged residents to nearby communities. These services are funded by municipalities or a regional health authority with support from the provincial government, which provides one-time capital funding (maximum \$10,000) and annual operating funding (maximum \$20,000 to \$30,000) through the Mobility Disadvantaged Transportation Program (MDTP).³² Municipalities may choose whether to contract a provider or to operate the service themselves. Depending on funding levels, drivers might be volunteers or might be professionally hired. Handi-van services typically offer pick-up and drop off from specific locations, and require booking ahead of time. According to Manitoba Municipal Relations, this program cost \$1.7 million in 2022 and supported handi-van services in 69 communities.³³

The provincial government also provides the Northern Manitoba Patient Transportation

²⁸ Ashton, Bill et al. “Manitoba,” State of Rural Canada Report. 2015. <https://sorc.crrf.ca/manitoba/>

²⁹ Ashton, Bill et al. “Manitoba,” <https://sorc.crrf.ca/manitoba/>

³⁰ Bollman, Ray D. “Manitoba Rural Demography in the Canadian Context: an Update.” Rural Development Institute, Brandon University. 2012. https://www.brandonu.ca/rdi/files/2015/09/Manitoba_Rural_Demography_in_the_Canadian_Context_An_Update.pdf

³¹ Government of Manitoba. “Look North: Transportation.” <https://www.gov.mb.ca/looknorth/invest/transportation.html>

³² Municipal Relations, “Mobility Disadvantaged Transportation Program Guidelines.” Government of Manitoba. https://www.gov.mb.ca/mr/mfpp/pubs/mdtp_program_guidelines.pdf

³³ Municipal Relations, “Annual Report 2021-2022.” Government of Manitoba. 2022. https://www.manitoba.ca/mr/reports/annualreports/pubs/mr_annual_report_2021-22.pdf

(NMPT) program.³⁴ Administered through the Northern Health Region, the NMPT program subsidizes medical transportation costs for Manitoba residents living north of the 53rd parallel who are required to travel outside their community to access medical care. Patients pay up front and are reimbursed for part of their expenses. The program covers all modes of transportation: private vehicle, air, bus, or train, with the mode of transportation recommended by the health care provider. The program also covers partial costs for patient escorts, so long as the escort is required for medical reasons. In 2022, the Northern Health Region spent \$22 million on this program.³⁵

These two programs (MDTP and NMPT) demonstrate a recognition on the part of the province of the need for publicly-funded or subsidized rural transportation options, particularly for groups with more acute needs. A provincially-funded Manitoba-wide inter-community transit service aimed at the general public (while still accessible and affordable) would both augment and fill in the gaps left by these programs. In the case of the NMPT program, a convenient and affordable transit service would reduce the cost to government associated with subsidizing more expensive northern travel via plane or car.

Greyhound Canada

Bus service has played an important role in the inter-community transportation landscape in Manitoba for over a century. Grey Goose Bus Lines, for example, was founded in 1934, and provided service for almost six decades until it was absorbed by Greyhound Canada in 1992.³⁶ For the last 30 years Greyhound Canada was the most significant player in the industry. Along with passenger service, Greyhound provided parcel and freight services to individuals, businesses, and government departments. In 2018—the year the company announced it was withdrawing from Western Canada—Greyhound’s Manitoba network connected 114 communities and served 92,000 passengers a year.³⁷ This included Thompson, Gillam, Cross Lake, Flin Flon, and Winnipeg, as well as interprovincial connections to Calgary, Regina, and Thunder Bay.

The company canceled services because it claimed it was no longer able to make a profit from its Western routes, citing declining ridership as well as competition from publicly owned, subsidized services such as Via Rail.³⁸ According to the company’s own estimates, the service cancellations impacted around 2 million riders across BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and northern Ontario.³⁹ Though the federal government offered to provide \$10

³⁴ Northern Health Region, “Northern Manitoba Patient Transportation Program.”

<https://northernhealthregion.com/programs-and-services/northern-patient-transportation-program-nptp/>

³⁵ Northern Health Region, “Annual Report 2021-2022.” 2022.

<https://northernhealthregion.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/NHR-Annual-Report-2021-22.pdf>

³⁶ Manitoba Transit Heritage Association, from Regeic, Alex et al. “Dusty Trails to Divided Highways: A History of Intercity Bus Lines in Manitoba.” 2006. <https://www.mtha.ca/intercity-coach-history.html>

³⁷ CBC News. “Pending end to Greyhound service a shock to Manitoba customers,” July 9, 2018. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/greyhound-amc-bus-cancellation-1.4739787>

³⁸ Schiefke, Peter. “Improving Bus Connectivity in Canada,”

https://www.ourcommons.ca/content/Committee/441/TRAN/Reports/RP12444313/441_TRAN_Rpt13_PDF/441_TRAN_Rpt13-e.pdf

³⁹ The Canadian Press, “Greyhound Canada to end bus service in Western Provinces,” CBC News, July 9, 2018.

million among the provinces to subsidize affected routes for a transitional period,⁴⁰ only BC accepted. In 2021, Greyhound canceled its remaining Canadian routes.

Greyhound's withdrawal from Manitoba had been preceded by a spiral of decreasing regulation and declining service. Prior to 2012, the province had allowed Greyhound to operate with essentially a "regulated monopoly" on certain routes.⁴¹ Under this regulatory regime, the Motor Transport Board assigned routes to specific carriers. New carriers, or carriers seeking to start up new routes, would have to apply to the Motor Transport Board and prove that the services were necessary before a public hearing. Carriers also had to seek approval from the Board in order to make changes to fares or scheduling, or to cancel routes. This model meant that Greyhound was able to subsidize the more remote routes it was assigned using the higher profits it earned from more densely-populated routes, without having to worry about competition.

In 2009, the Council of Deputy Ministers Responsible for Transportation and Highway Safety created a national Intercity Bus Services Task Force (led by Manitoba), in response to complaints from the bus industry about declining profits.⁴² One of the final recommendations of the Taskforce was for provinces to review their regulatory frameworks with the aim of making it easier for private carriers to adjust routes, schedules, and fares. Around the same time, the Manitoba Department of Transportation and Infrastructure (MTI) negotiated a \$3.12 million interim service maintenance agreement with Greyhound, which also included a commitment to move towards a less regulated system.

In the summer and fall of 2010, MTI conducted a series of public consultations on inter-community bus services to inform its regulatory re-design.⁴³ Stakeholders included local municipal governments, seniors' organizations, mobility rights groups, First Nations, and more. Public consultations were held in Minnedosa, Thompson, The Pas, Swan River, Powerview-Pine Falls, and Morden over the summer and fall of 2010. The department's report shows that participants' response to deregulation proposals were mixed. Some suggested that a less regulated system would allow providers such as handivans or First Nations medical transport vehicles to expand their services more easily. However, participants also agreed that subsidies play a necessary role in supporting inter-community transit, just as they do for urban transit. They supported a greater role for communities working with local or regionally-based services providers to provide regional services, which

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/greyhound-cancellations-alberta-manitoba-saskatchewan-british-columbia-1.4739459>

⁴⁰ Transport Canada, "The Government of Canada addresses Greyhound Canada's discontinuation of bus routes." Government of Canada. October 31, 2018.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/transport-canada/news/2018/10/the-government-of-canada-addresses-greyhound-canadas-discontinuation-of-bus-routes.html>

⁴¹ Pauls, Karen. "Small-town Canada mourns the loss of Greyhound bus service in the West," CBC News. October 30, 2018.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/small-town-canada-mourns-the-loss-of-greyhound-bus-service-in-the-west-1.4883900>

⁴²Council of Deputy Ministers Response for Transportation and Highway Safety. "Intercity Bus Services Task Force Final Report." September 2010.

<https://comt.ca/Reports/Intercity%20Bus%20Services%20Task%20Force%20Report%202010.pdf>

⁴³ Council of Deputy Ministers Response for Transportation and Highway Safety. "Intercity Bus Services Task Force Final Report." September 2010.

<https://comt.ca/Reports/Intercity%20Bus%20Services%20Task%20Force%20Report%202010.pdf>

could feed into a provincial network. Participants also discussed the success of the Crown Corporation BC Transit, and whether such a model would be possible in Manitoba.

Despite the hesitancy around deregulation heard in these public consultations, the province went ahead and lifted regulations on the inter-community bus industry with the passage of Bill 5 in 2012. The new regulatory framework, which came into effect on July 1, 2012, “provided carriers with freedom to establish routes, schedules, and fares at their discretion, subject to safety and insurance requirements.”⁴⁴ It also ended subsidies to private carriers. Soon after, Greyhound gave the newly required 90 days notice that it was ending service for twelve less profitable routes, affecting Pine Falls, Gimli, Russell, Carman, and Steinbach, as well as reducing service to Brandon.⁴⁵

The provincial government implemented a second round of deregulation in June 2018, with the passage of the *Traffic and Transportation Modernization Act*, which eliminated the Motor Transport Board and public hearings altogether.⁴⁶ By the time this round of regulatory changes came into effect in March of 2019, Greyhound had already withdrawn completely, leaving inter-community bus services to a handful of smaller carriers.

No formal research studies have been conducted in Manitoba on the loss of Greyhound. News coverage, however, included testimonies from rural residents and political leaders on the impacts the loss of inter-community transit service would have on themselves and their communities, especially in the north. News stories covered feelings of isolation, and the disconnection between family and friends in different communities; the importance of the bus for medical travel; the economic impacts on riders who were now forced to purchase more expensive plane tickets if they wanted or needed to leave their community; and the renewed risk to Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit plus people left without a safe transportation

⁴⁴ “MB Announces Deregulation of Scheduled Intercity Bus Services,” BC Trucking Association, March 22, 2010.

<https://www.bctrucking.com/bulletin/2012/03/22/mb-announces-deregulation-scheduled-intercity-bus-services>

⁴⁵ Lambert, Steve, “Greyhound Canada announces service cuts across Manitoba this summer,” The Canadian Press, Global News, April 5, 2012.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/231045/greyhound-canada-announces-service-cuts-across-manitoba-this-summer-3/>

⁴⁶ “Traffic and Transportation Modernization Act,” Bill 14, 3rd Session, 41st Legislature, Legislative Assembly of Manitoba. 2017-2018. <https://web2.gov.mb.ca/bills/41-3/b014e.php>

option.^{47,48,49,50,51} Dennis Fenske, the Mayor of Thompson at the time, decried “transportation in the north being driven by the bottom line.”⁵²

Current inter-community transit service

In the years following Greyhound’s exit, existing companies such as Kasper Transportation expanded their services and some new, smaller companies emerged to fill the gaps. Manitoba’s inter-community bus services currently consist of a patchwork of these companies. Five years later, the scheduled inter-community bus network consists of:

Provincial

Mahihkan Bus Lines (formerly Kelsey Bus Lines): operates scheduled motorcoach service multiple days a week between Winnipeg and Flin Flon, and Winnipeg and Thompson.

NCN Thompson Bus Lines: operates daily scheduled motorcoach service between Thompson and Winnipeg, and multiple days a week routes between Thompson and Cross Lake, and Thompson and Split Lake.

Maple Bus Lines: operates scheduled motorcoach service six days a week between Winnipeg and Thompson.

Brandon Air Shuttle: operates daily scheduled service with 10-passenger vans between Dauphin and Brandon, and Brandon and Winnipeg airport.

Inter-provincial

Rider Express: operates weekly scheduled motorcoach service between Winnipeg and Regina, providing connections to cities in the rest of Western Canada.

⁴⁷ Palmater, Pam, “Greyhound Canada’s cuts are a public safety crisis for Indigenous people,” July 11 2021.

<https://macleans.ca/opinion/greyhound-canadas-cuts-are-a-public-safety-crisis-for-indigenous-people/>

⁴⁸ Lambert, Steve & Bill Graveland, “Loss of Greyhound bus service makes some rural areas feel ‘cut off’” The Canadian Press, Global News, July 10, 2018.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/4323209/greyhound-bus-service-cuts-western-canada-rural-areas/>

⁴⁹ Coubrough, Jill, “End of Greyhound service will have ‘huge impact’ on Manitoba’s north, leaders say,” CBC News, July 10, 2018.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/greyhound-northern-manitoba-1.4741300>

⁵⁰ Martens, Kathleen, “Feds should be doing something about loss of Greyhound bus service: MMIWG advocates,” APTN News, May 20, 2021.

<https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/feds-should-be-doing-something-about-loss-of-greyhound-bus-service-mmiwg-advocates/>

⁵¹ CBC News, “Pending end to Greyhound service a shock to customers,” July 9, 2018.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/greyhound-amc-bus-cancellation-1.4739787>

⁵² Dacey, Elisha, “‘Shock but not surprised’: Manitobans react to Greyhound Bus shutdown,” Global News, July 9, 2018.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/4321313/shock-but-not-surprised-manitobans-react-to-greyhound-bus-shutdown/>

Kasper Transportation: operates daily scheduled motorcoach service between Winnipeg and Thunder Bay.

Ontario Northland: operates scheduled motorcoach service six days a week between Winnipeg and Thunder Bay, with connections to Ottawa and Toronto.

All providers above offer both passenger and freight service.

Gaps remain, especially in southern Manitoba, where various companies have tried and failed to establish a route between Selkirk and Winnipeg, Steinbach and Winnipeg, and Brandon and Winnipeg (beyond the existing airport shuttle).⁵³ In the north, the lack of routes between Gillam and Thompson represent a significant gap. In an interview in the Winnipeg Free Press, the owner of Brandon Air Shuttle Reg Hickmott claims that a company must be prepared to suffer five years of losses on a new route in order to build up a consistent customer base.⁵⁴ So many tries and failures shows the challenges of running these routes as a small private company operating under the need to make a profit, with no public subsidies, and facing competition from other companies. Even where smaller companies have stepped in to replace Greyhound, services are still potentially temporary, leading to uncertainty and precarity for rural community members.

Since the dissolution of the Motor Transport Board in 2018, the responsibility for regulatory oversight falls to the Manitoba Motor Carrier Enforcement agency (housed under the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation).⁵⁵ The agency's role deals only with safety, not with service, including the issuance of safety certificates, and ensuring compliance with insurance and drivers' license requirements. There is little requirement for private inter-community carriers to be accessible,⁵⁶ nor is there any regulatory management to prevent competition or ensure a balance of service between more and less densely-populated routes.

The provincial government also ceased providing subsidies to commercial bus companies in 2018, though representatives of companies Rider Express and Kasper Transportation have both spoken publicly about the need for provincial and federal subsidies to maintain services. Without public subsidies, there will always be a level of uncertainty about how long current services will be maintained.

⁵³ Vanderhart, Tessa, "Routes of Isolation," Winnipeg Free Press, August 30, 2019. <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/featured/2019/08/30/routes-of-isolationforecast-bleak-with-a-cha-nc-e-of-bus-service>

⁵⁴ Vanderhart, Tessa, "Routes of Isolation," 2019. <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/featured/2019/08/30/routes-of-isolationforecast-bleak-with-a-cha-nc-e-of-bus-service>

⁵⁵ "Traffic and Transportation Modernization Act," Bill 14, 3rd Session, 41st Legislature, Legislative Assembly of Manitoba. 2017-2018. <https://web2.gov.mb.ca/bills/41-3/b014e.php>

⁵⁶ In Saskatchewan, a Rider Express passenger and wheelchair user issued a complaint to the Canadian Transit Association that resulted in the company being compelled to make all its busses more accessible. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/rider-express-wheelchair-accessible-buses-1.6007731>

Without the Motor Transport Board managing routes and intervening to prevent duplication of services, current carriers are also competing with each other for the most populated and profitable routes (for example, into Thompson). The competitive environment encourages carriers to find ways to keep costs down, which can lead to cutting corners and inadequate service.

Several stories in the Winnipeg Free Press between 2019 and 2023 have reported on safety issues pertaining to northern bus carriers.^{57,58,59,60} A recent story in spring 2023 covered the launch of a provincial investigation into claims made by passengers and former drivers that NCN Thompson Bus Lines's motorcoaches were subject to frequent breakdowns, and sometimes ran without heat.⁶¹ The Free Press found that the company had formerly operated under the name "Thompson Bus and Freight," but had re-incorporated with a different name to avoid addressing safety concerns. The province responded by passing legislation in May 2023 where so-called "chameleon carriers" would be assigned a conditional safety rating, and could be denied a safety fitness certificate.^{62,63}

Stories about breakdowns and lack of heat raise additional questions about the adequacy of existing safety regulations and oversight. Current regulations require buses to be inspected only every six months, and a broken heater is considered a 'minor defect'---a much lower standard compared to other Prairie provinces.⁶⁴ A former bus driver for NCN interviewed in the Free Press described how Motor Carrier Enforcement officers conduct random roadside inspections, but these happen rarely and are limited to paperwork inspection.⁶⁵

⁵⁷ Piche, Gabrielle, "Province turns eye to Thompson in hunt for 'chameleon carriers.'" Winnipeg Free Press, March 17, 2023.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/business/2023/03/17/province-turns-eye-to-thompson-in-hunt-for-chameleon-carriers>

⁵⁸ Piche, Gabrielle, "Passenger safety allegations chase northern bus lines," Winnipeg Free Press, March 3, 2023.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/business/2023/03/03/passenger-safety-allegations-chase-northern-bus-lines>

⁵⁹ Paul, Alexandra, "Bus ride to Thompson became 'nightmare in an icebox,' passenger says," Winnipeg Free Press, January 28, 2019.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2019/01/28/bus-ride-to-thompson-became-nightmare-in-an-icebox-passengers-say>

⁶⁰ Robertson, Dylan. "Passengers complain about lack of regulation for intercity bus routes." Winnipeg Free Press, February 28, 2019.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2019/02/28/passengers-complain-about-lack-of-regulation-for-intercity-bus-routes>

⁶¹ Paul, Alexandra, "Bus ride to Thompson became 'nightmare in an icebox,' passenger says," January 28, 2019.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2019/01/28/bus-ride-to-thompson-became-nightmare-in-an-icebox-passengers-say>

⁶² "Manitoba government moves to enhance road safety, target unsafe commercial motor carriers," Province of Manitoba, March 8, 2023. <https://news.gov.mb.ca/news/?archive=&item=58417>

⁶³ "The Highway Traffic Amendment Act," Bill 21, 5th Session, 42nd Legislature, Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, May 8, 2023. https://www.manitoba.ca/legislature/hansard/42nd_5th/hansardpdf/la5.pdf

⁶⁴ Robertson, Dylan. "Passengers complain about lack of regulation for intercity bus routes."

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2019/02/28/passengers-complain-about-lack-of-regulation-for-intercity-bus-routes>

⁶⁵ Piche, Gabrielle, "Passenger safety allegations chase northern bus lines," Winnipeg Free Press, March 3, 2023

The history of inter-community public transit in MB is one of decreasing regulation and declining service. While the Manitoba government funds some public programs that either provide or subsidize inter-community transportation for those most in need, provincial inter-community bus services have been left up to the private sector. This is not what Manitobans support: a national survey conducted soon after the loss of Greyhound from Western Canada found that the majority of Canadians, including a majority of Manitobans, believed that the government (either provincial or federal) should step in to provide services, rather than relying on the private market. An even higher majority (64%) of Manitobans surveyed supported “a rural bus service funded by the provincial government.”⁶⁶

Instead of taking responsibility for providing publicly owned or subsidized transit, the strategy of the provincial government post-Greyhound was to deregulate and cut subsidies. This created an environment where carriers must struggle to establish themselves without any financial support (except for what they can make off of rural passengers), while also needing to keep prices lower than their competitors. This has led to a very precarious transportation environment for rural travelers. Not only is there uncertainty over how long current services and companies will last, but traveling with current companies may involve safety risks, as documented in the Free Press over the last several years. The history of transit in Manitoba, particularly over the last 15 years, demonstrates the dangers of relying on the private market—whether a single large carrier or many smaller ones.

3. Public inter-community transit case studies

Other provinces have long provided public inter-community transit services, with some expanding these services in recent years. These case studies focus on Saskatchewan and northern Ontario as they are both largely rural and remote, like Manitoba. The examples explored here are all public models but vary across other characteristics including the timing of the service (scheduled versus on demand) and the vehicles themselves (full-size buses or mini-busses or vans). The former Saskatchewan Transportation Company and Ontario Northland are provincially-owned and operated services, while the Ontario Community Transportation Grant is a provincial funding program for municipal-owned or contracted services.

Each has advantages and drawbacks, and different models might fit better with different contexts. As well, these service models are not mutually exclusive. For example, a provincially owned and operated bus service can provide scheduled service along a main trunk line, while community-owned on-demand vans run feeder routes connecting the most remote communities to the provincial network. Together, these case studies demonstrate the viability of public inter-community transit and provide tangible details around ridership, funding, and beneficial outcomes.

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/business/2023/03/03/passenger-safety-allegations-chase-northern-bus-lines>

⁶⁶ “Most residents of Western Canada have used a Greyhound Bus at least once in their lives,” Angus Reid Institute, July 27, 2018. <https://angusreid.org/greyhound-bus/>

Additional data:

<http://angusreid.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/2018.07.24-Greyhound-ReleaseTables.pdf>

The Saskatchewan Transportation Company

Like Manitoba, Saskatchewan is a province of few urban centres and many small towns, scattered across the prairies. The Saskatchewan Transportation Company (STC), a provincial crown corporation, provided provincial-wide bus service in this context from 1946 to 2017. The STC provided safe, affordable, accessible, and lower-carbon transportation, connecting 253 communities across the province.

The STC was created by the provincial government in 1946.⁶⁷ At the time, Greyhound and several other private bus companies were already operating in Saskatchewan, but the government identified the need for an entity that would provide transportation as a public service, “for the public good” without a concern for profit. It had approached Greyhound to propose taking over their bus lines, but the company had refused. So, the province issued an Order in Council establishing the new crown corporation. Its mandate was to “provide service between major urban centres and to as much of the rural population as possible.”

The STC allowed rural residents to access educational, economic, health and social services, and the justice system in larger cities while maintaining lives and connections in small communities. It ensured friends and families in neighbouring communities could visit each other. Residents used the STC to travel to medical appointments, including dialysis or chemotherapy, supported by an affordable annual medical pass program.⁶⁸

The STC’s roles extended beyond passenger service to include freight, medical equipment transport, and library book delivery. Medical materials included vaccines, medical equipment, and blood samples, with its frequent scheduling ensuring timely delivery. It also operated a profitable freight service for rural businesses and farms.

In the last decade of operation, STC yearly ridership fluctuated between 250,000 and 300,000. According to STC annual reports, and as mentioned above, the service’s ridership was largely made up of marginalized populations (elderly, disabled, youth, Indigenous), and 70% of riders were low income.⁶⁹ Over 40% of the STC’s fleet were wheelchair capable, and it “documented and sought to improve accessibility.”⁷⁰ The STC’s fleet of 41 buses covered

⁶⁷ Alhassan, Jacob. “It Feels Like Somebody Cut My Legs Off: Public Transportation and the Politics of Health in Saskatchewan.” Dissertation submitted to the Department of Community Health and Epidemiology, University of Saskatchewan. 2021.

⁶⁸ Hanson et al. “Here Today, Gone Tomorrow.” 2021.
<https://ourspace.uregina.ca/server/api/core/bitstreams/4f9df7a5-48ab-4d70-acc7-0c5a11439f38/content>

⁶⁹ Saskatchewan Transportation Company, “2016-17 Annual Report,”
<https://www.cicorp.sk.ca/reports/saskatchewan-transportation-company-stc-annual-reports>

⁷⁰ Hanson et al. “Here Today, Gone Tomorrow.” 2021.
<https://ourspace.uregina.ca/server/api/core/bitstreams/4f9df7a5-48ab-4d70-acc7-0c5a11439f38/content>

about 2.8 million miles per year.⁷¹ Complementary provincial programs supported remote communities to create privately-operated feeder lines connecting to the STC's network.⁷²

The STC provided over 200 people with a source of stable employment, with the majority of STC jobs unionized under the Amalgamated Transit Union.⁷³ As a federally regulated employer, it was mandated to meet employment equity targets.⁷⁴

In its final operating year, the STC received \$13.2 million total in funding from the Saskatchewan government, while raising \$7.7 million in revenue from fares, freight, and other services.⁷⁵ To measure its performance and ensure accountability to the public, the STC also used a Balanced Scorecard that included social, environmental, and economic goals together. The balanced scorecard measured economic performance through efficiency targets that captured how effectively the STC was using its public funding. The Balanced Scorecard was an important evaluation tool for capturing the wide range of public benefits provided by the STC not captured by a revenue and expenses statement.

In March 2017, the Saskatchewan government announced their intention to wind down the STC by the end of May.⁷⁶ While the Crown Investments Minister cited decreasing ridership numbers and the increasing cost of subsidies, the cancellation was met with an outcry from both rural and urban community members and riders, STC workers and labour unions, rural and provincial leaders, and academics. Criticism focused not only on the impacts of the closure, but the lack of public consultation on the decision and the short notice, and the

⁷¹ Saskatchewan Transportation Company, "2016-17 Annual Report," 2017.

<https://www.cicorp.sk.ca/reports/saskatchewan-transportation-company-stc-annual-reports>

⁷² Hanson et al. "Here Today, Gone Tomorrow." 2021.

<https://ourspace.uregina.ca/server/api/core/bitstreams/4f9df7a5-48ab-4d70-acc7-0c5a11439f38/content>

⁷³ Saskatchewan Transportation Company, "2016-17 Annual Report," 2017.

<https://www.cicorp.sk.ca/reports/saskatchewan-transportation-company-stc-annual-reports>

⁷⁴ Hanson et al. "Here Today, Gone Tomorrow," 2021.

<https://ourspace.uregina.ca/server/api/core/bitstreams/4f9df7a5-48ab-4d70-acc7-0c5a11439f38/content>

⁷⁵ Saskatchewan Transportation Company, "2016-17 Annual Report," 2017.

<https://www.cicorp.sk.ca/reports/saskatchewan-transportation-company-stc-annual-reports>

⁷⁶ "Government ends Saskatchewan Transportation Company (STC) subsidy - Bus Company to be Wound Down." Government of Saskatchewan, March 22, 2017.

<https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2017/march/22/budget-stc-wind-down>

framing of the STC “as a business as opposed to a public service.”^{77,78,79,80,81,82,83} The Saskatchewan Government Employees Union (SGEU) called for an audit to account for the full costs of losing the STC, but this was never undertaken.⁸⁴

The loss of the STC (which was followed by the loss of Greyhound a year later) left Saskatchewan residents with few public inter-community transit options. The consequences to individuals’ physical and mental health, personal safety, and finances, as well as larger community costs in the form of isolation, increased travel costs for rural organizations and agencies, and impacts on the healthcare system have been documented by University of Saskatchewan researchers,^{85,86} as well as by Emily Leedham in her documentary, *Still Waiting for the Bus: The Unnatural Death of Prairie Intercity Transit* with the Amalgamated Transit Union.⁸⁷

The STC was the longest-running province-wide inter-community public transit service in Canada. Established by the same government that created medicare, the STC operated on a similar principle of providing transportation service for the public good and as a basic right. Its cancellation was justified using the limited logic of cost, as if the Saskatchewan government were a business like Greyhound. This logic ultimately failed to account for the wide and diverse range of benefits the STC provided, and the important role it played in the economic, medical, and social fabric of the province.

⁷⁷ Leedham, Emily. “Still Waiting for the Bus.” 2019.

<https://www.atucanada.ca/still-waiting-bus-unnatural-death-prairie-intercity-transit-0>

⁷⁸ Alhassan, Jacob et al. “Politics, transportation, and the people’s health: a socio-political autopsy of the demise of a 70-year-old bus company,” *Critical Public Health*, 32:4, 556-567, 2022. DOI: 10.1080/09581596.2021.1905152

⁷⁹ CBC News, “Groups say ‘people will die’ with loss of Crown bus company,” May 12, 2017.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/saskatchewan-transportation-cuts-safety-1.4112501>

⁸⁰ Giles, David, “Protestors refuse to get off final STC bus to Saskatoon,” *Global News*, June 1, 2017.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/3494740/stc-saskatchewan-transportation-company-saskatoon-protest/>

⁸¹ Warick, Jason. “‘It’s going to be quite a nightmare’: Passengers outraged by STC closure.” *CBC News*, Mar 22, 2017.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/saskatchewan-bus-company-stc-end-service-shut-down-1.4036612>

⁸² CBC News, “STC closure to affect many Sask. residents.” March 24, 2017.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/stc-closure-video-saskatchewan-1.4040499>

⁸³ CBC News, “Sask. made ‘fundamental mistake’ treating STC as business, not service: researcher,” May 31, 2019. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/stc-private-research-1.5158002>

⁸⁴ The Canadian Press, “SGEU wants audit of defunct Saskatchewan Transportation Company,” *Global News*, June 1, 2018,

<https://globalnews.ca/news/4247176/sgeu-audit-saskatchewan-transportation-company/>

⁸⁵ Alhassan, Jacob et al, “Politics, transportation, and the people’s health: a socio-political autopsy of the demise of a 70-year-old bus company.” 2022. DOI: 10.1080/09581596.2021.1905152

⁸⁶ Alhassan, Jacob et al. “It feels like somebody cut my legs off,” 2021.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114147>.

⁸⁷ Leedham, Emily. “Still Waiting for the Bus,” 2019.

<https://www.atucanada.ca/still-waiting-bus-unnatural-death-prairie-intercity-transit-0>

Ontario Northland

The region of Northern Ontario is 806,708 km², and includes 144 municipalities, 106 First Nations and Metis communities, and more than 150 unincorporated communities, home to a total population of around 800,000.⁸⁸ In this context, a crown corporation, Ontario Northland, is an important provider of transit services alongside the private companies that also operate in the region (Kasper Transportation, with routes into Winnipeg, being the largest). In the last five years, as some companies (Greyhound and Caribou Coach) have pulled out of the region, Ontario Northland has expanded its network.

Founded in 1902 under the ONTC Act, the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission operates inter-community bus service (Ontario Northland), along with passenger rail, and formerly telecommunications.⁸⁹ In 2012, the Ontario provincial government threatened to divest from the ONTC, claiming (as the Saskatchewan government did), it could no longer afford to subsidize these services. However, a review by the Ontario auditor general concluded that the costs of selling Ontario Northland (\$830 million over three years) would have surpassed the potential savings (\$265.9 million over three years).⁹⁰ The province subsequently decided only to sell the telecommunications service.

The ONTC's 2023 mandate letter from the ON Transportation Minister includes the following priorities: "Delivering or supporting the delivery of efficient, safe and reliable transportation services to enable the movement of goods and people across Northern Ontario while providing a secure connection to essential services."⁹¹

Inter-community bus services in Ontario are regulated through the Ontario Highway Transport Board. The ONTC is exempt from licensing requirements under the Public Vehicles Act. The board oversees licensing so as to prevent competition between Ontario Northland and private companies.

The ONTC operates both rail and bus freight and passenger services for Northern Ontario, connecting over 150 communities, including Toronto and Ottawa in the south, Hearst in the north, and Winnipeg in the west. While passenger rail (except for the Polar Bear Express) was suspended in 2012, there are now plans to reinstate passenger rail service by the mid-2020s.⁹² The Polar Bear Express passenger train is "the only all-season land link" between Cochrane and Moosonee on James Bay—a vital service that provides vital freight and passenger service to Moosonee and other northern communities on James Bay.

⁸⁸ "Growth plan for Northern Ontario," Government of Ontario, 2011.

<https://www.ontario.ca/document/growth-plan-northern-ontario/communities>

⁸⁹ Ontario Northland, "Annual Report 2021-2022." 2022.

https://www.ontarionorthland.ca/sites/default/files/corporate-document-files/Annual_Report21-22EN.pdf

⁹⁰ Lysyk, Bonnie. "Divestment of Ontario Northland Transportation Commission," Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, December 2013.

https://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/specialreports/specialreports/ONTC_en.pdf

⁹¹ Mulroney, Caroline. "Ontario Northland Transportation Commission 2023-24 Mandate Letter." Ministry of Transportation. November 3, 2022.

https://www.ontarionorthland.ca/sites/default/files/2023-08/Letter-from-MTO_2023-24-Mandate-Letter_2022-11-03.pdf

⁹² "Northlander Passenger Rail Updates," Ontario Northland.

<https://www.ontarionorthland.ca/en/northlander-passenger-rail-updates>

In the 2021-2022 fiscal year, Ontario Northland provided 167,676 passenger trips. These ridership numbers still reflect the impact of COVID 19—in 2018-19, trips were at 311,080. The bus company provides jobs for 746 people, and has higher representation of women in its workforce (23.1%) compared to similar industries.⁹³

ONTC's mandate letter also includes accounting for the safety of Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people, and the needs of all marginalized groups, including women, 2SLGBTQQIA people, racialized people, Indigenous communities and people with disabilities. The mandate letter instructs ONTC to engage with those groups to ensure their needs are being met.⁹⁴ Ontario Northland recently created an Accessibility Advisory Committee composed of passengers "with a range of abilities and experiences" to inform the company's approach to improving accessibility.⁹⁵

In 2022, Ontario Northland generated \$71,673,000 in revenue from rail freight, passenger rail, bus services, and remanufacturing and repair services. It received \$103 million in funding from the Ontario and Canadian governments. In a 2013 report, the Ontario auditor-general noted the ONTC's challenging mandate of balancing service provision with economic goals of financial efficiency. They cited a 2006 Operational Review that described how the ONTC "provides services where there is limited viability for a commercial business case, but there is a compelling social need."⁹⁶

Like the STC, Ontario Northland is an example of how provincially-owned and operated bus services can play an important role in a rural and remote context. Unlike the STC, Ontario Northland was saved from closure when a full accounting of the economic and non-economic benefits alike were accounted for. Its status as a publicly owned crown corporation means it has a broader mandate than a private company, including serving diverse populations, being accessible, and addressing MMIWG2S. Rather than declining, the long-running service has been expanding in the last several years, and was well positioned to fill the gaps in transit service when Greyhound pulled out of northern Ontario (along with Manitoba) in 2018. Though private companies and some communities (as will be explored below) also provide bus services in the region, Ontario Northland plays an important role by providing an established backbone to the inter-community network.

The Community Transportation Grant Program

In 2017, the Ontario Ministry of Transportation organized a series of public consultations requesting feedback and suggestions on a proposal to remove regulatory mechanisms for entry into the motorcoach industry. Somewhat similar to the 2010 consultations in Manitoba

⁹³Ontario Northland, "Annual Report 2021-2022." 2022
https://www.ontarionorthland.ca/sites/default/files/corporate-document-files/Annual_Report21-22EN.pdf

⁹⁴Mulroney, Caroline. "Mandate Letter." November 3, 2022.
https://www.ontarionorthland.ca/sites/default/files/2023-08/Letter-from-MTO_2023-24-Mandate-Letter_2022-11-03.pdf

⁹⁵Ontario Northland, "Annual Report 2021-2022." 2022.
https://www.ontarionorthland.ca/sites/default/files/corporate-document-files/Annual_Report21-22EN.pdf

⁹⁶Ontario Northland, "Annual Report 2021-2022." 2022.
https://www.ontarionorthland.ca/sites/default/files/corporate-document-files/Annual_Report21-22EN.pdf

led by the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, participants largely argued against removing regulatory mechanisms, saying that it could actually result in lower levels of service for rural communities. Instead, participants pointed to increased provincial support as the solution, on both a community and regional level. In response, the Department issued two decisions: (1) to increase ONTC service; and (2) to establish a new Community Transportation Grant program, funded through the provincial gas tax, for municipalities to run their own small-scale inter-community bus services.

The Community Transportation (CT) Grant Program was launched in 2018, with the purpose of supporting both local and inter-community transit services in underserved communities. It followed a successful two-year pilot that ran from 2014 to 2016, which had found the model was effective for enabling municipalities to provide “customized transportation service” that met their needs.⁹⁷

Under the CT program, 38 municipalities (9 in northern Ontario) are receiving a total of \$44 million over seven years for 43 transportation projects, which include bus service, on-demand shared rides, and door-to-door transportation services.⁹⁸ Many of the services are targeted towards specific groups including seniors and mobility-challenged. Originally launched as a five-year program, the program has been extended until 2025.

The CT program provided a maximum grant of \$1.5 million total for “long-distance scheduled inter-community bus service” for the initial five-year period. While only municipalities were eligible to apply for the funding, they were encouraged to partner with community organizations. Municipalities could operate the transportation service themselves, or contract a private company.

Program funders prioritized southwestern and southeastern Ontario, areas that have been identified as lacking adequate inter-community service. The program will not fund services that duplicate Ontario Northland or other carriers’ routes.

The township of Terrace Bay is one community that has been funded by the CT program. In partnership with the Superior Seniors Club, it provides an on-demand door to door transportation service connecting several neighbouring communities in the region to the centres of Thunder Bay and Marathon for medical trips.⁹⁹ Services are open to anyone, but are not wheelchair equipped. Services must be booked in advance, with costs ranging from \$40 to Marathon or \$85 to Thunder Bay. These costs can also be reimbursed under

⁹⁷ Ontario Ministry of Transportation. “Community Transportation Pilot Grant Program: Survey and Final Reporting Evaluation.” 2018.

[https://www.ruralontarioinstitute.ca/uploads/userfiles/files/CT%20Pilot%20Grant%20Program%20Evaluation%20Results%20MTO%20March%202018\(1\).pdf](https://www.ruralontarioinstitute.ca/uploads/userfiles/files/CT%20Pilot%20Grant%20Program%20Evaluation%20Results%20MTO%20March%202018(1).pdf)

⁹⁸ “Backgrounder: Community Transportation Grant Program Recipients and Services.” Government of Ontario. June 28, 2021.

<https://news.ontario.ca/en/backgrounder/1000417/community-transit-grant-program-recipients-and-services>

⁹⁹ Community Health Travel Program, Terrace Bay.

<http://www.terracebay.ca/residents/resident-information/transit/>

Ontario's Northern Health Travel Grant. Terrace Bay received \$345, 043.75 in total funding from the CT program.¹⁰⁰

Ontario's CT program shows another role for the province to take in supporting inter-community transportation—supporting municipalities to deliver small-scale, regional transportation services. While the province of Manitoba provides funding for urban transit, there is no specific fund for municipal-run or contracted inter-community services. As Ontario's case shows, these services, which tend to offer smaller vans and on-demand booking, can be designed to complement a provincially-run fixed route service—all contributing to create a healthy, extensive, inter-community public transit network.

These three case studies from Saskatchewan and northern Ontario demonstrate what is possible when it comes to providing inter-community transit services in rural and remote areas. STC and Ontario Northland both provided service for more than seventy years (and in the case of Ontario Northland, continue to do so), showing that a public service is important for providing consistent service for the long-term, while private businesses may come and go. A publicly-owned provincial or regional transit service can complement regional commercial services, as well as smaller community-owned or funded services to form a strong, inter-connected network (such as Ontario Northland, Kasper Transportation, and services funded through the CT program).

These public models often have a broad public mandate that can include building a diverse workforce, addressing MMIWG2S+, and ensuring accessibility. Governments need the right evaluative tools, designed to measure outcomes beyond the fiscal (such as STC's balanced scorecard), to properly weigh the cost of subsidies against these wide-ranging and important outcomes.

Conclusion

The lack of inter-community transit in rural Manitoba is a political choice, not a technical barrier. Inter-community transit should be seen as a public good, as healthcare or urban public transit is. Like other public goods, inter-community transit has multiple, interlinked beneficial outcomes—outcomes that require public investment to be realized. This includes lowering transportation emissions, addressing MMIWG2S+, and fostering equity, rural development, and road safety. The history of bus services in Manitoba, which focuses on Greyhound as well as the private carriers that have since replaced it, demonstrates the problems with relying on the private sector to deliver reliable, long-term, extensive, and safe inter-community transit.

Saskatchewan and northern Ontario are similarly rural with low-density populations, but have successfully implemented public transit programs on the provincial, regional, and community scale. But which models work best in Manitoba is still to be determined.

The Climate Action Team would like to solicit feedback on public inter-community transit solutions in Manitoba, including what objectives and considerations rural Manitobans would like to see taken into account during inter-community transit planning, and which

¹⁰⁰ "Backgrounder: Community Transportation Grant Program Recipients and Services." 2021. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/backgrounder/1000417/community-transportation-grant-program-recipients-and-services>

publicly-owned or funded approaches would work best.

There are three ways to submit feedback:

1. Participate in an online discussion: <https://climateactionmb.ca/rural-transportation/>
2. Complete our survey: <https://climateactionmb.ca/rural-transportation/community-survey/>
3. Submit written answers to the discussion questions, or any other feedback, to policy@climateactionmb.ca

APPENDIX 1

Discussion questions:

1. Are the current inter-community transit options services adequate to meet the needs that exist (considering: convenience of scheduling; frequency, connections, and return schedules; prices; flexibility of bookable services; accessibility issues)? If not, how would you describe that gap: what needs are not being fulfilled (medical travel, accessible travel, essential shopping, etc.)? Who is most impacted?

2. In Manitoba, inter-community transit services have historically been provided by a mixture of private (Greyhound, smaller operators), non-profit, and public (handi-vans) entities. Transportation services could be owned by a crown corporation (owned by the province), community agency or non-profit, or a private company. What ownership model(s), or mixture of models, do you think work best for inter-community transit?

Sub-question: What role, if any, do you think public subsidies have in supporting inter-community transit services? What about monopolies for private companies (as was the case for Greyhound)?

3. We're particularly interested in exploring public ownership models for inter-community transit. There are several different examples: provincially-owned and operated scheduled bus service, or community-based scheduled or on-demand service [*facilitator will briefly describe each*]. Which of these models, if any, do you think would work best for addressing the inter-community transit needs of your community? What are some of the advantages or disadvantages of each? Are there any different or additional solutions you would propose?

Sub-question: Who should services be aimed at? Should ridership be limited to certain groups (e.g. mobility challenged, seniors), or should it be available to and designed for the broader public?

APPENDIX 2

Principles for inter-community transit in Manitoba (draft):

1. Extensive and stable, long-term service: service must extend beyond the largest population centres to include smaller and more remote communities. Riders should also have certainty that services will be available for the long-term.
2. Frequent: service needs to be frequent enough that it allows users to travel when they need to, as much as is possible. There should be regularly-scheduled return trips from common destinations.
3. Convenient: pick-up and drop-off locations should be designed to be as close as possible to passengers' trip origins and destinations within communities, minimizing the distance passengers need to travel to and from the bus stop. Scheduling times should also be convenient and be designed to match users' travel patterns.
3. Accessible: vehicles and services must be accessible for all users, which may include assistance with boarding and disembarking, mobility aid spaces, and more.
4. Safe: regulations must ensure that vehicles are safe and in good working order every time they are driven. Pick-up and drop-off should be at sheltered and well-lit facilities.
5. Affordable: services should not rely on passenger fares to cover the majority of expenses. There may be a need for discount passes for groups in higher financial need or who travel most frequently (seniors, low-income, medical, etc.).
6. Public ownership and funding: many of the above principles depend on public ownership and funding, which bestows a broader mandate than profit alone. Publicly-owned and funded service(s) should be the foundation of the inter-community transit system.

APPENDIX 3

Manitoba Regulatory Structure & Funding Programs relevant to Inter-community Transportation

Regulatory

Department of Transportation and Infrastructure: provincial department responsible for regulating motor carrier transit.

Highway Traffic Act: governing piece of legislation for all highway travel, including inter-community public transit services.

Motor Carrier Enforcement: agency that oversees safety regulations for all commercial motor carriers since 2019.

Motor Transport Board: former regulatory body that oversaw motor carrier transit, including regulating schedules and granting operating licences. Dissolved in 2019.

Funding Programs

Northern Manitoba Patient Transportation Program: provincial funding program administered by the Northern Health Region, subsidizes medical-related travel for northern patients.

Mobility Disadvantaged Transportation Program: provincial funding program administered through the Department of Municipal Relations, which supports municipalities to establish transportation for mobility-disadvantaged residents.

Rural Transit Solutions Fund: 5-year federal funding program launched in 2021 available to municipal and provincial governments for small-scale transportation projects within rural and remote communities.

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