

TRANSIT REPORT – PURPOSE & BACKGROUND

February 2021

PURPOSE OF REPORT

- Phase I - transit options and service potential
- Research approach



This report is intended to provide information to evaluate the options and feasibility of public transit in the RM of Piney to meet the needs of people requiring transportation support as part of a community.

The transit development plan is the initiative of the RM of Piney encouraged by responses in several recent surveys, community public forums and aligns with the strategic plan to support the betterment of individual lives in the community, more specifically the age in place focus. The work is supported through a 2020/21 Building Sustainable Communities grant as well as the Gas Tax rebate from the Manitoba government as funded from the Federal government.



This planning will form Phase I and provide the RM with information on transit option solutions and service potential to improve transportation shortfalls within the municipality that may include medical transport (non-urgent), public transit and product delivery. The intent is to develop a plan with a focus on seniors, mobility challenges and low-income residents but residents of all ages to benefit from improved transportation supports and potentially replace single car use.

Research Approach

A variety of sources and methods are relied upon to gather data about transportation related issues. Sources include online searches, community consultation, surveys, communication with neighboring regions and other rural municipalities, government agencies, academics, insurance providers, seniors organizations, academic sites, transportation providers and community partners East Borderland Community Housing, Service to Seniors, Sunrise Corner and the Piney Chamber of Commerce.



Community consultation, including past survey transportation related responses, is used to identify the type of service most useful to those requiring transportation supports. Public open houses were held in Piney, Sprague and Woodridge in September 2020. A transportation survey was offered in paper, electronic and telephone format in September and October 2020.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Thank you to the Transportation Options Network for Seniors (TONS) for networking opportunities, resources and other project support.

BACKGROUND

- What is the transit need
- Current situation in the RM of Piney

COMMUNITY VOICES

- *need to travel to urban town/city for services
- *no transit option except private vehicle reliance
- *difficult to find drivers
- *informal rides too expensive for some
- *missing discontinued Greyhound Bus

RESEARCH FINDS

- *lack of adequate rural transportation common
- *transportation becoming recognized as priority for seniors
- *safety issues for those compelled to drive
- *quality of life issue w/o transportation
- *MB population of seniors to grow 43% over 20 years

Transit Need

The complexity of providing adequate transportation in rural areas of Manitoba is becoming increasingly recognized as a priority issue to ensure a sustained quality of life for rural seniors.¹

Rural residents are more reliant on personally-owned vehicles than their urban counterparts. Some residents who have physical or mobility limitations may not drive. Safety is an issue for those who are compelled for their independence to drive but should no longer drive or are not comfortable driving to larger urban centers. Vehicles can be expensive to purchase and maintain and some residents may not have a driver's license.

According to the Manitoba Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities; A Guide

"As one caregiver's comment illustrates, however, the costs go beyond that of the price of gas. The real cost of this "underground" transportation system is the discomfort older persons have with their dependence on others to get around the community and beyond—a loss of both their independence and their pride. Several participants also raised a critical question: what do people without family members or helpful neighbours do?"

Transportation is a quality of life issue and the ability to live in a rural, remote community. Transportation options can foster independent living to allow residents to age in their community rather than moving away for services and social engagement. Transportation is integral to daily life for food, healthcare, education and employment, shopping (clothing to hardware to household supplies) as well as recreation and entertainment.

Manitoba expects its population of seniors to increase by 43 per cent over the next 20 years². A 2010 report by Transport Canada warned that lack of transportation is "a top concern" for seniors in rural areas, a demographic that will gradually form a bigger share of the population. Transportation has been identified as a determinant of health by the World Health Organization³. A mobility needs and

¹ TONS transportation toolkit

² <https://www.gov.mb.ca/seniors/afmb/index.html>

³ https://seniorsocialisolation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/working_together.pdf page 18

transportation issues in rural Manitoba study found that while significant mobility resources exist in some parts of the province, the lack of transportation alternatives in many small communities puts resident elders at greater risk of social isolation and a poor quality of life⁴.

Current Situation

In the RM of Piney residents are virtually 100% reliant on personally-owned vehicles (with the exception of school buses for children) since the demise of the Greyhound bus service to the RM in 2009 and discontinued stops by White Owl buses in 2015. The nearest taxi service in Steinbach is an hour away for many residents making it cost prohibitive. Some residents don't drive by choice or necessity. Those without access to a vehicle or unable to drive rely on friends, family or volunteers have no other options.



The Service to Seniors coordinator provides an informal ride matching service with privately owned vehicles, however, this option is said to be too expensive for some residents, at 35 cents per kilometre, and it is sometimes difficult to find available volunteer drivers as needed. About 1 trip per month was arranged in the fall of 2019 and spring 2020, while others arrange their own.

In the fall of 2020 a provincial grant was made available during the COVID-19 pandemic to fund essential transportation for seniors as costs rise with various restrictions during this unprecedented health challenge. Twelve trips were arranged in October 2020. As the number of COVID19 cases grew, volunteers were reluctant to continue to use their own vehicles, often being seniors themselves. Other rural regions with accessible transit that chose to operate for essential trips only had shields installed around drivers and transported only one passenger at a time.

With very few services in the majority of the RM of Piney, travel is required for many necessities. A major issue regarding service access in rural areas has been the centralization of the public and private services due to the increasing strain of maintaining services in sparsely populated and geographically isolated communities⁵. Local grocery store prices are more expensive with increasing transportation costs from urban areas but were able to increase stock during this COVID19 pandemic and the ongoing closure of the Canada/US border.



⁴ https://tonsmb.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/research-Rural-Report_MobilityNeeds_2006.pdf

⁵ Rural Report Mobility Needs 2006