

TRANSIT REPORT SUMMARY - SERIES #3

OPPORTUNITIES

- Social Factors
 - Age in place & maintain residents in rural communities
 - Community spirit and inclusive communities
 - Alleviate social isolation
 - Well-being, quality of life, safety
- Employer Resource
- Tourism
- Environmental



COMMUNITY VOICES

- *access to services needed
- *longer distance to urban for shopping and medical
- *desire for social outing opportunities
- *reduce social isolation

RESEARCH FINDS

- *promote community inclusiveness
- *promote safety for those compelled to drive w/o travel options
- *transportation important to reduce social isolation
- *benefits for employers, tourism, environmental



Social factors

With the lack of services in the RM of Piney, the need to travel longer distances to urban centers for shopping, services and medical is supported by results of the 2020 transportation study. Being able to access services not available locally rather than being compelled to move elsewhere, allows residents of all ages to live in a rural area and to age in place within their communities, to visit with family and friends, and to take part in community events. Providing a public transit option will alleviate the need to drive and promote safety when you are no longer able to drive or have the confidence to safely drive but have no other options. This is intended to be promoted as community inclusiveness, by bringing awareness of ride share opportunities. Many social trips for all ages were suggested and are listed in the summary of public transit destinations section of Appendix 1 (included with summary series #2 report).

Social inclusion can impact both the physical *and* mental health of community members¹ according to the Social Plan H BC Healthy Communities. Transportation's link to inclusive communities is also echoed by the Minister of Rural Economic Development.

¹<https://planh.ca/take-action/healthy-society/page/inclusive-communities>

“Making sure everyone can get where they need to go safely, quickly and comfortably is essential to creating inclusive communities. Supporting vital projects like the purchase of these handi-vans in Selkirk, Morden and Morris, will ensure that all members of the community have transportation options that meet their unique needs.”
The Honourable Bernadette Jordan, Minister of Rural Economic Development Gov’t of Canada News Release February 13, 2019

Social connectedness matters to well-being and quality of life making transportation important for services and for social outings. Social isolation can occur where people may be alone and do not ask for help with their steadfast self-reliance and have no or little social contact. With the COVID-19 pandemic stay home orders in the Spring and Fall of 2020, most people better understand social isolation and feelings of despair by being alone and not able to go places or see friends and family.



A University of Winnipeg (Urban Studies) 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 life².

Employers could potentially tap into labour markets by improving the mobility of potential employees such as lower-income residents, youth, the working elderly and residents of communities that currently do not have transportation options. Efficient and affordable transportation is an important driver in economic growth in rural areas.³

Public transportation can attract **tourists** who might not otherwise visit the community or know where to go. Outings could be planned for residents and non-residents whether it be historical tours, day at the lake or community festivals as group travel may be more inviting and entertaining. Group charter services are provided by other accessible transit operators to support additional revenue opportunities for operational sustainability.

The potential to reduce local air pollution, and contribute to local climate change strategies by using a ride share rather than multiple vehicles travelling as individuals is also a potential. No specific **environmental** studies in this regard have been undertaken at this time and are included as a general comment.

²https://tonsmb.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/research-Rural-Report_MobilityNeeds_2006.pdf

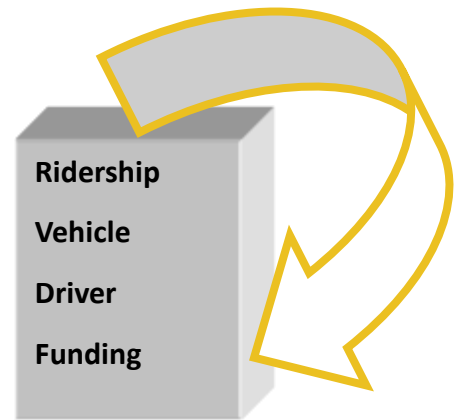
³ Rural Health Information Hub (US)

CHALLENGES

- Ridership, vehicle, driver, funding
- Buy local
- Local investment and return
- Continued financial support
- Climate
- Distance to passengers and services
- Geography
- Cost of service
- Communications

COMMUNITY VOICES

- *affordability concerns for long distance to urban
- *limited local services
- *medical difficult to coordinate rideshare
- *accommodate wheelchairs, walkers
- *cost of services to come to RM
- *sparse population for fundraising



RESEARCH FINDS

- *consistent multiple ridership numbers for sustainability
- *large physical area with sparse and spread out population
- *providing access to urban area may keep rural residents
- *economic and social considerations
- *lack of cell and internet capability for communications
- *competing local fundraising projects

The very basic elements and challenges to a transit plan are ridership, a vehicle, a driver and funding.

Ridership will be determined by the cost of fares, schedule, availability and safety according to the 2020 transportation survey results. Appropriate scheduling is a priority to get passengers where they want to go, when they want to go. Ridership will be influenced favourably if a transit service is promoted as a community transport rather than the potential stigma and the outdated concept of a “handi van” where some may infer those who need help rather than community inclusiveness and available to all.

Ridership will be enhanced with an appropriate **vehicle**. Having a suitable vehicle will dictate how it can be used. Medical appointments were expressed as potentially difficult to schedule for ride shares which refers to multiple passengers travelling to the same/similar destinations using the same vehicle at the same time. “Difficult to ride share” infers that these may be one-off schedules and likely require a smaller and less expense vehicle for single rides. Shopping trips and social outings are conducive to a larger vehicle to bring together those who are not able to get to community events or choose not to drive. Vehicle accessibility is an important factor whether for mobility aid such as wheelchairs or ease of entering and egress. A survey respondent noted that a local senior’s day at the community center did not accommodate the travel need for someone in a wheelchair.

Volunteer **drivers** will favourably impact cash flow, but if there is volunteer fatigue, a paid driver may attract greater willingness to drive. Those willing and available to drive may not hold a class 4 license if a larger vehicle is required for 11 or more passengers. The coordination of drivers' and vehicle location within a large physical land area is another logistical challenge. Driver training is likely to enhance driver's ability to provide consistency in service and improve safety for all.



It is expected that with the start of a transit service, only one vehicle will be made available unless significant **funding** opportunities are forthcoming. Financial support of a transit service is comprised of affordable fares, fundraising and grants. If fares are too high, those that could benefit may choose not to travel. If fares are too low and no other grants are available, the transit service will not be sustainable. Funds need to consider operational items such as scheduling, oversight and reporting requirements along with ongoing driver and vehicle service needs. There may be greater revenue opportunities with the capacity to transport more passengers to contribute favourable to the financial bottom line. With a lower than Manitoba average income, a third of residents over age 60 and low population density per square kilometre, sustainable transportation requires financial support. Charters and parcel pick/up delivery are also expected to aid financial support.

Negative feedback may be rendered by **local business** for requests to go shopping outside the RM. However, a "local {Ontario} sustainability report produced in 2011... indicates that access to large urban centers needs to be occasionally provided in order to retain residents in rural areas in the long term".⁴ This is similar to private car owners who travel to larger urban areas to purchase items and services not available in the RM.

It will be difficult to show that an X amount of **investment is a Y return** within the community. Transit options need to consider the financial aspect, but also the social opportunities as described in Section VIII with community rewards now and in the future. A service solution is expected to take time for community members to increase ridership knowledge and usage and operations to adjust to preferences.

Continued financial support is generally more difficult once an operation is established. Fundraising efforts often support starting a new service but not necessarily ongoing costs. In the past government grants provide for initial funding for a new vehicle but limited in the way for ongoing or replacement vehicles.

Long **harsh winters** are common in the area increasing potential of isolation. The 2006 Rural Report Mobility Needs was not completed because "The greatest difficulty encountered in this

⁴ Ontario's Accelerating Rural Transportation Options

study was attempting to visit rural seniors in their communities because of the dangerous winter driving conditions that are commonplace throughout Manitoba.”

With no central community in the region, **seniors are spread out in the physically large land** area thus requiring longer travel distances within the RM itself to gather for ride shares as well as travelling to the intended destination.

The next largest Canadian urban center is Steinbach where a number of residents regularly travel for groceries, supplies and services. Depending on the residence within the RM this could be more than **1 hour away**. Costly to have service such as repairman come to RM. Prior to the current COVID19 pandemic and the closing of the US/Canada border, a number of residents in the southern portion of the RM travelled to Roseau or Warroad, Minnesota, USA at about half the distance.

Being situated in the southeast corner of the province has its **limitations for government supports** which need a ‘rural lens’ as programs that work in urban areas do not in rural. (<https://data.fcm.ca/documents/resources/building-better-lives-together.pdf>) Rural areas have unique needs especially as services have been centralized to large population areas. Regional transportation and government support is needed for rural areas to survive.

Being a lower income area, **fares need to be low enough** for those that most need the transportation support. It has been noted on several occasions that some may not fully appreciate the current costs of operating a vehicle. As per section X-A.1 ownership costs and depending on the vehicle, a personal vehicle could cost 50 cents a kilometre and a larger community vehicle could be twice as costly or more. Nevertheless, with fewer services offered in a rural area, the reasons to travel multiply.

The region experiences poor or **lack of cellular and internet coverage** in many areas. This is a hindrance to both safety and general communications required in public transportation whether for dispatch, emergencies or operational information.