



Ministry of
Transportation
and Infrastructure



**SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS:
NORTHERN TRANSPORTION SYMPOSIUM
November 24th, 2015
SMITHERS, BC**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On November 24, 2015, the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure and the First Nations Health Authority co-hosted the Northern Transportation Symposium to engage with First Nations leadership, community members and local government representatives to help identify safe transportation options for communities along the Highway 16 corridor.

During the symposium, over 90 participants discussed a number of community-based transportation options, which could service communities located along the Highway 16 corridor. Participants heard about services in communities where First Nations and local governments are working together to provide transportation services. Some examples included the Fort St. James “Seniors Helping Seniors,” the First Nations community-led transportation service in Lake Babine, as well as Northern Health Connections, a medical transportation service provided by the Northern Health Authority.

The First Nations Health Authority distributed a survey to First Nations communities along the Highway 16 corridor in advance of the symposium. Responses were received from 129 individuals that described their transportation needs. Symposium participants proposed that additional work is required to increase the response rate to the survey and ensure meaningful results for future considerations, particularly reaching out to youth.

The symposium also included an afternoon of smaller break-out group discussions, where participants shared their ideas to connect communities along the nearly 800 km stretch of highway between Prince Rupert and Prince George. Built upon lessons learned from previous community engagement, surveys and reports, the discussions focussed on finding practical and sustainable transportation solutions to address both medical and non-medical travel and support healthy communities. Discussions provided a wealth of information, perspectives and insights into a wide range of regional realities.

The symposium was an important step in finding solutions that work for the people in the communities along the corridor. Participants were actively engaged and, as a result, are committed to action. Building on existing approaches and collaborating on shared services will provide for the development of new relationships and service delivery models to meet community transportation needs.

KEY THEMES

Throughout the day, symposium participants emphasized that transportation solutions need to be responsive, efficient, effective, accessible, safe, practical, sustainable and inclusive. Many participants also emphasized that action – not additional research or reports – is required to begin implementing transportation solutions. Bringing together the diverse group of participants at the symposium was identified as a positive development. It was also anticipated that additional organizations will need to be involved with implementing solutions; some suggestions included the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, University of Northern British Columbia, federal government, industry, all elected leaders, provincial ministries, and service organizations.

Participants acknowledged that providing and coordinating transportation services poses significant challenges due to low ridership and long distances between rural and remote communities. There is no “one size fits all” solution to the transportation needs along the Highway 16 corridor. Many positive outcomes were anticipated with improved transportation options, including economic development, enhanced community well-being, and individual health. The importance of these issues necessitates a comprehensive and collaborative approach.

Key themes were identified at the symposium through discussion and breakout sessions and are categorized within four areas of focus: Expansion of Services, Capital and Operating Funds, Collaboration and Communication, and Highway Safety.

1. Expansion of Services

Symposium participants noted the following:

- Communities with some transportation services want increased service levels, whereas remote communities with no transportation services want access to at least some services.
- More transportation options for accessing services are required, including the ability to travel into neighbouring cities and towns for shopping, banking, work, school, medical and social activities.
- Schedules, frequency, cost, and reliability are challenges associated with some of the existing transportation services, including the Northern Health Connections program, B.C. Transit, community-based services, and inter-city bus services such as Greyhound.
- Options for passengers seeking inter-city travel between neighbouring communities need to be increased to allow for greater flexibility.
- Options for passengers seeking to travel the length of the entire corridor need to be increased.
- There is a need to adjust transit schedules to meet the needs of working people.
- The disparity between transportation services in the northern and southern part of the province is perceived as unjust.

2. Capital and Operating Funds

Symposium participants noted the following:

- Where additional services are required, the cost of funding additional services may be more than the capacity of local governments, which contribute toward the cost of the service.
- Community-based initiatives are succeeding in some communities (i.e. “Seniors Helping Seniors” in Fort St. James); however, additional operating funding is needed to expand services into a successful business operation.
- Some communities have vehicles that could be used to support transportation needs; however, there is inadequate funding to coordinate the service.
- Additional support for driver training initiatives, such as the one managed by Carrier Sekani Family Services (CSFS), was encouraged. CSFS is developing and implementing a driver training program designed to increase the number of licensed Class 4 and Class 5 drivers in First Nations communities along the corridor. Barriers to getting a driver’s license cited included lack of confidence, test anxiety, low literacy rates, and lack of money for fees and training.
- First Nations communities reported operating 15 passenger vans and 7 passenger SUVs between communities, but some these vehicles may be underutilized.

3. Collaboration and Communication

Symposium participants noted the following:

- Efficient, practical and affordable transportation solutions must be community-based. Each community is unique, with different transportation challenges. Recognizing the travel needs of residents will help to identify the best possible transportation models.
- A key to success is collaborating to effectively utilize collective resources. Pursuing partnerships with service providers, industry and various levels of government would strengthen each community's ability to establish sustainable services.
- Coordinate transportation services to align an effective hub and spoke model. Consultations with existing service providers when developing schedules for feeder services will ensure the transportation network is as efficient as possible.
- The transportation network must be well communicated to all potential users. A public education and awareness campaign would increase use of services. Participants identified the need for increased cellular service to support any proposed app-based technology.
- Federal and provincial leadership is required.
- Opportunities for industry partnerships need to be explored.

4. Highway Safety

Symposium participants noted the following:

- People continue to hitchhike because they do not have alternatives that meet their needs, creating continued safety issues for some of the most vulnerable people.
- Need to act so that no other families experience the sadness and grief of losing a loved one.
- A shuttlebus between each town and city along Highway 16 continues to be supported as a viable option.
- More education and awareness campaigns are required.
- A safety lens must be applied to all transportation services, including waiting times and waiting areas.
- Safety could be improved by increasing both cell coverage and the number of cameras along the highway corridor.

NOTES FROM SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The following questions were provided to participants in 4 different break-out groups based on the First Nations Health Authority Regions – Coast Tsimshian/Coast Mountain; Gitksan/Wet'suwet'en; Carrier Lakes/Lake Babine; and Carrier South.

1. How do we build on what we have heard about today, or already have in our region/communities, to meet the transportation needs (i.e. drivers, vehicles, political commitment, partnerships, etc.)?
 - a. What's working?
 - b. What could be done better or differently (improvements)?
2. What are the proposed option/s or solution/s that increase availability and access to practical, affordable, sustainable and safe community transportation models?
3. How will we know when we have been successful?

The responses for questions 1(b) and 2 have been combined and categorized into the following focus areas: Expansion of Services; New opportunities and considerations; Communication and Collaboration; Hitchhiker Safety; and Other.

1(a). What's Working?

- Regional Transit.
- Northern Health Connections.
- Greyhound services.
- Shuttle Transit bus passes given to people by First Nations Health & Band(s).
- Gitksan Health Society shuttle bus.
- Gitanmaax shuttle bus.
- Lake Babine Nation's transportation program.
- Saikuz Tinto bus.
- Transit to Kitselas and Kitsumkalum.
- Haisla shuttle from Kitimaat and Terrace.
- Senior bussing in Burns Lake – Lakes District Community Services Society.
- Seniors by seniors bus is working in Fort St James.
- Supportive family members and community members.
- Tele-health.
- Northwest Resource Benefits Alliance – a potential model for coordination which is an example of how to get communities together to dialogue and problem solve. However, this needs to have inclusion of FN communities.
- Mandate from our new Prime Minister Trudeau – First Nations leadership can capitalize on the Liberal mandate.

1 (b). What could be done better or differently (improvements)?

2. What are the proposed option/s or solution/s that increase availability and access to practical, affordable, sustainable and safe community transportation models?

Expansion of Services

- Northern Health Connections – improved service to include the following:
 - Revise policy to allow parents to take young children with them onto the bus when the parents have out-of-town appointments;
 - More coordination with hospitals / doctors regarding discharge times (medical and detox);
 - Expanded hours;
 - Increase the communities that it accesses;
 - Social media app to identify Northern Health schedule between various locations;
 - Expanding bus use to allow for family members to use bus transport to visit critically ill family members that are in larger hub locations ie. Vancouver, Prince George;
 - Expand provision of transportation to allow for social determinants such as allowing individuals to access bus service for shopping, family/friend visits, attending events etc. (provided there are seats available);
 - Implement a non-medical/health related travel billing system for use of health buses.
- Improve Greyhound services as follows:
 - Improve bus scheduling so that there are more options, particularly for weekends and holidays;
 - Provide security at the bus depot at all hours;
 - Ensure that the taxi service is available during bus drop-off schedules;
 - Sync bus schedule with times that appointments are often scheduled.
- Have the Hazelton Regional Transit hours of operation expanded to include the Hwy 37 FN Communities on the Transit Route.

New opportunities and considerations

- Develop a plan first. Determine the current travel expenditures of municipal, NHA, FNHA, First Nations Band staff to develop a plan to use those funds to develop a community travel system that can benefit everyone.
- Consider all aspects of travel:
 - Phase 1 - patient transportation. Ensure First Nations are aware of Northern connections bus, streamline patient transportation at the community level, example use of personal vehicles
 - Phase 2 - social transportation. Address issues of liability, drivers licenses; attend to needs of elders, and those individuals needing groceries
 - Phase 3 - entertainment transportation. Support communities to have their own businesses; support transportation vehicles connecting their communities to other bus routes.
- Identify gaps and identify partners for transportation system.
- As a collective, create SMART goals and priorities.
- Implement a hub and spoke model where each hub uses a number of different transportation options to get to or along Highway 16 with flexible, sustainable schedules.

- Create transportation solutions and expand on existing transportation within community hubs to create linkages between regional districts or areas to ensure transport availability from Prince George to Prince Rupert.
- Do comprehensive surveys before and after the process to measure success.
- Invite UBC, UNBC or any other Universities to have their Marketing Programs, etc. have as their assignment to Explore a Transportation Model for the Northern Region which will capture a 'Return on Investment':
 - The development of a Coordinated Economic & Social Model for Transportation.
- Develop Regional District Transportation plans. Regional Districts work with others to develop action plans to create and implement transportation solutions within their areas.
- Ensure solutions/resources have equitable distribution. Consistency in funding.
- Have First Nations communities supported with funding to have their own shuttle bus / van to assist with meeting some of their membership transportation needs.
- Have regular and on-going service of smaller shuttle buses to the First Nation communities and municipalities; and, to include the town of Houston on the route.
- Ensure the recreational & educational (after school extra-curricular) activities are met with the proposed transportation model/framework
- Ensure investments are broader than just meeting health needs.
- The Highway of Tears Recommendation – shuttle bus along Highway 16.
- Additional funding for existing programs ie. Lake Babine Nation transportation program.
- Saikuz - Tinto bus works but needs improvement (drop off and pick up spots and timing). Could be improved by coordination with Vanderhoof.
- Tl'azt'en had a bus that was working but doesn't have funding in place.
- Transit comes to communities like Kitselas and Kitsumkalum – scheduling is an issue and although the community pays Terrace for that service, community members still have to pay. The annual review of the services by Terrace should also include Kitsumkalum and Kitselas.
- Haisla shuttle from Kitimaat and Terrace – NHA should subcontract this service to link Kitimaat to the NHA bus. Providing a waiting area for folks waiting would be amazing.
- Have signage that is friendly to those who are Illiterate, have dyslexia, learning disabilities, etc.
- Have alternatives to bus system – virtual network system for transportation.
- Start a rideshare program, with an app and an admin person that links with bus schedules.
- Have a Northern Transportation App with security built in to help with confirming expected arrival time to destination – real time updates.
- Use more incentives to promote the use of existing/available transportation (bus passes as door prizes at functions, bus pass gift certificates – annual rider bus pass rate, etc.).
- Better education & awareness with regard to transportation discounts.
- Have agreements in place with taxi's regarding payment of rides – by employers for employees/clients for Christmas holidays, etc.; and, for Health/Band to meet the needs of medical transportation clients.
- Implement a 'park & ride' to encourage greater use of public transportation.
- Implement a tiered fee service to encourage use of public transportation system.
- Implement an affordable and economically viable fee for those that choose to use the public transportation system.

Collaboration and Communication:

- Ensure meaningful engagement and involvement from First Nation communities.
- Get everyone at the table (school district, Northern Health, bands, community, BC transit, companies, road users at table).
- Include the Northwest Municipalities and First Nation communities at the transportation table.
- Partnership agreements between communities within Regional Districts.
- Identify and formalize the practices around transportation that are in use and working in communities ie. family/ friends driving community members into town.
- Collaboration within and between rural/ remote communities and urban centres to provide transportation services to and from community events within community and held in urban centres ie. community dances and other social events.
- Greyhound & Rail Services have to be brought in to 're-visit' whether they are meeting the needs of the Northern Region.
- Invite Ministry of Child and Family Development, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ministry of Education to these events and forums to ensure that they are present because there are services and transportation issues that are present which affect accessibility such as:
 - Ministry of Child and Family Development regulations that impose counselling for parents who have children in care but services are only offered in larger "hub" locations;
 - Students (high school students & post-secondary students) who have to attend school outside of their communities but return home on scheduled vacations;
 - Court mandated appointments ie. probation, court attendance.
- Expand the use of tele-health for providing other services such as:
 - Mental health services;
 - Court ordered visits;
 - Ministry of Child and Family Development mandated visits with councillors etc.
- Research and identify other models & best practices in the World.
- Municipal meetings to determine solutions which are inclusive of political "decision makers".
- Building partnerships with businesses and urban centres with investments into transportation for rural and remote community members to shop in their stores and locations.
- Partner with big industry – they have vehicles that transport employees.
- To have the resource industry inject funding to support the transportation system through a 'long term' commitment of funding to the transportation system.
- More coordination at a regional level – form Sub Regional working groups (conference call or face-to-face meetings; a regional survey).
- Communicate frequently to all First Nations communities and municipalities/regional districts.
- Possible partners:
 - Volunteers
 - Seniors
 - Non profit
 - Industry
 - Log haulers
 - Service providers
 - Integris credit union

- Colleges & universities & school district
- Local government
- Federal government
- Health Authority
- Northern Development Initiative Trust
- First Nations and all communities
- Federal Government

Hitchhiker Safety:

- Safety is an issue.
- Have Security Cameras at high hitch hiking areas:
 - Destination;
 - Frequent stops;
 - 24 Hour services – monitoring.
- Have improved cell phone service in all areas in the Northern Region.
- Community education - create increased awareness of hitch hiking risks – school presentations, RCMP presentations to Youth, and to broader community.
- Promote youth engagement and have them teach their peers on the dangers of hitchhiking (using U-Tube, creation of videos, etc.)
- App for hitchhikers to use – taking pics of plates and a check in/out.
- A block parent/foster parent type of program – folks with cars sign up, get vetted and have a decal that shows people they are safe vehicles.

Other:

- Improved taxi services within communities ie. Burns Lake, Smithers.
- Partner with gas companies – buying gas in bulk could save money.
- Encourage ‘car pools’ and Bike to Work week.
- Establish a ‘Go Fund Our Northern Transportation System’ - to accept monetary gifts from companies, resource sector, philanthropists, etc.
- Gaming revenue sharing between BC and First Nations communities to improve transportation services, education, etc.
- Implement a “social tax” on corporations to provide funds and investments into transportation.
- Increase social assistance dollars that would go into transportation costs.
- Create /implement emergency funding pots using funds from industry working in communities ie. LNG.
- Implement a river transportation model to assist with local economic development for the communities along the river systems - summer option.
- Doctor and medical equipment accessibility in Burns Lake to allow for service provision at home such as:
 - Kidney Dialysis
 - Ultrasound
 - Anesthesiologist
 - Surgeons

- To have a medical transportation advocate worker – employed position, to assist the senior population with their needs.
- Develop /enhance a program to have a community shopper.
- Ensuring that social assistance cheques/payments are available for pick up in their home communities (no office in Burns Lake).
- Ensure BC has a no poverty strategy.

How will we know when we have been successful?

- A Sub-Regional transportation plan that specifically assessed the gaps, and addressed the needs within each sub-region –and connected those systems to meet the needs of the entire Northern Region.
- Provincial & Federal government leadership and support that ‘Made It Happen’.
- Assigned responsibilities that delivered the objectives.
- All organizations participated with the process (Assembly of First Nations, Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine, First Nations communities/Bands and municipalities, etc.).
- Successful working group with solutions driven by community.
- Creation of sustainable partnerships.
- System with less jurisdictional boundaries.
- Regular meeting updates were held on the progress of the work being done to meet the transportation needs of the Northern Region.
- Sustainable Ministry of Transportation budget line for transportation services within the North.
- Built on best practices ie. Facebook transportation groups, safe homes.
- Free or low costs for busses.
- Wide range of services.
- Gitxsan Gyeets communities (Gitsegukla, Gitwangak and Gitanyow) applied a shared approach/model.
- Better transportation systems – fewer complaints.
- Fewer missing and murdered reports along the highway 16 corridor.
- Fewer hitchhikers.
- Health and wellness outcomes along 16 are more positive.
- The socio-economic gap is closed.
- Centralized Tele-Health:
 - Medical specialist services;
 - Northern Health/Wrinch Memorial Hospital/First Nation communities.

NEXT STEPS

Based on the input from the Northern Transportation Symposium, along with previous community engagement, surveys and reports, the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure will present a Highway 16 transportation action plan to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure. The action plan will identify solutions to provide safe, practical and sustainable transportation services for communities along the Highway 16 corridor.

The Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure will establish a six person advisory group that reports to the Minister. The advisory board will ensure that the actions identified in the plan align with what was heard at the symposium; and they will also review implementation of the action plan.