



Promising Models of Community-Based Seniors' Transportation in British Columbia

CASE STUDIES

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Report prepared for the Provincial Working Group on Seniors' Transportation



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Executive summary

This report provides the findings from case studies led by Kate Hosford in partnership with Dr. Beverley Pitman from United Way British Columbia and Dr. Meghan Winters who leads the Cities, Health, and Active Transportation Research Lab at Simon Fraser University. The case studies, conducted from March to May 2022, are intended to support the Provincial Working Group on Seniors' Transportation in advocating for wider adoption and implementation of promising models of seniors' transportation in British Columbia.

Specifically, we aimed to profile promising models of seniors' transportation and to learn what facilitates or impedes the success of these services. We used extensive selection criteria to select six services that covered a diverse set of models and geographic contexts. The case studies are:

- » **Step Up 'N' Ride Society, Dawson Creek:** a wheelchair accessible transportation service in a small town in northeastern British Columbia.
- » **Collingwood Neighbourhood House Seniors Shuttle, Vancouver:** a door-to-door transportation service in an urban neighbourhood.
- » **Zunga Bus, Powell River:** a municipally led on-demand transit pilot in a small coastal city.
- » **Delta Seniors Bus, Delta:** a municipally funded and operated curbside pick-up and drop-off transportation service for seniors in a suburban municipality.
- » **Richmond Cares, Richmond Gives Volunteer Driver Program, Richmond:** a volunteer driver program in a medium-sized coastal city.
- » **Seniors GO Bus, North Shore:** a semi-fixed route neighbourhood-based community shuttle serving three neighbouring municipalities.



For each service, we reviewed publicly available documents to learn about the service and the context in which it operates. We also conducted interviews with key informants (n=6) who were familiar with the service. Across cases, four key learnings are:

1. The community-based senior serving sector plays an important role in the creation and operation of seniors' transportation services.
2. Funding for community-based seniors' transportation is intermittent and inefficient.
3. Services that operate two days per week or less have a hard time sustaining ridership.
4. Drivers are important to the success of seniors' transportation services but are hard to find.

We conclude the report by suggesting a few possible next steps for the Provincial Working Group on Seniors' Transportation, which could include to:

- » Learn about seniors' transportation initiatives in the public transportation system.
- » Advocate for provincial funding to support wider adoption and implementation of the models profiled in this report.
- » Create best practice guidelines for seniors' transportation based on the facilitators and barriers to success identified in this report.
- » Advocate for a provincial strategy to attract, train, and retain drivers for seniors' transportation services.
- » Raise awareness to local, provincial, and/or federal levels of government on the inefficiencies of grant-based funding for seniors' transportation.
- » Convene a forum with stakeholders from government, health, transport, and senior-serving sectors to create a provincial strategy for seniors' transportation.

Project background

Like many countries around the world, Canada's population is aging. Within the next two decades, almost a quarter of the Canadian population is projected to be over the age of 65.¹ This demographic shift presents both opportunities and challenges to meet the transportation needs of older people in our communities.

Older adults overwhelmingly want to age in their own homes and communities; however, many do not expect this will be their reality. Transportation is one of the most commonly cited barriers to aging in place. In a recent survey of adults aged 55+ in BC, over a fifth (22%) indicated that the existing transportation options in their community meant they will likely have to leave their community one day² – potentially uprooting their sense of community, social connections, and routines they have developed over decades.

After regional consultations indicated a clear need to address seniors' transportation challenges across the province, the Community-Based Seniors Services Leadership Council convened the Provincial Working Group on Seniors' Transportation. The purpose of the Working Group is to identify, research, and propose solutions for seniors' most pressing transportation challenges in British Columbia (BC). **This project profiles promising models of seniors' transportation, with the goal of supporting the Working Group's efforts in advocating for wider adoption of seniors' transportation services across BC.**

The current context

Driving, either as a driver or passenger, is the main way that older British Columbians get around.³ For those who can no longer drive or have never driven, other options can include asking family or friends for rides, walking or cycling, or taking transportation services available in the public, private, and non-profit sectors.

The public transportation system in BC is coordinated through TransLink (Metro Vancouver) and BC Transit (rest of BC). Both transportation authorities have HandyDART, an accessible, door-to-door shared transportation service for seniors and people with disabilities who cannot use the conventional public transit system. However, riders must book trips on HandyDART at least one day in advance, limiting their ability to make spontaneous trips. The service is also not available in many smaller communities.

Other transportation services come from the community-based sector. This includes volunteer driver programs, small shuttle bus and van-services operated by non-profits, and those of home care and nursing services, health authorities, private companies, and municipalities.

Many of the transportation services from the non-profit sector are funded through Better at Home. Better at Home is a province-wide program funded by the BC Ministry of Health

and managed by United Way British Columbia to help seniors live in their own homes and remain connected to their communities. The program provides funding to over 80 non-profit organizations across BC to help seniors with non-medical, day-to-day tasks, such as light housekeeping, grocery shopping, and transportation. The agencies providing Better at Home services often cite transportation as the top support seniors are requesting, but note that limited funding prevents the delivery of a reliable transportation service for seniors. The transportation services are often volunteer-driven and under resourced. Throughout the pandemic, many agencies reported driver shortages, as volunteers, most of whom are also seniors, stepped away from their role and followed provincial orders to reduce social interactions.

Therefore, despite the availability of transportation alternatives, many older British Columbians, especially those who do not drive, do not feel their transportation needs are being met. This calls for wider adoption and implementation of successful models of seniors' transportation services across the province, so that older British Columbians can continue to live independently and thrive in their communities, even after they "hang up the keys".

The current project

In 2021, the Provincial Working Group on Seniors' Transportation created an inventory of all the community-based transportation services for older adults in BC. Community-based transportation includes the services provided by non-profits, and those of nursing services, health authorities, private companies, and municipalities. Over 200 community-based transportation services across the province were identified in the inventory.

The current project extends this work by conducting in-depth case studies on six services from the inventory that were deemed to be promising or successful models of seniors' transportation. The aim of this research was two-fold:

1. To profile promising models of seniors' transportation, and
2. To learn what facilitates and impedes the success of these services.

This report provides an overview of our approach for selecting case studies, profiles each of the cases, highlights key learnings from the project, and concludes with suggestions for next steps.

Our approach

We conducted case studies with six community-based transportation services deemed to be promising or successful models of seniors' transportation. We compiled a shortlist of ten services and used the criteria listed in Table 1 to guide the selection of the final set of cases.

The criteria were based on an adapted version of the Five A's of Senior Friendly Transportation from the Beverly Foundation (Availability, Acceptability, Accessibility, Adaptability, and Affordability).⁴ In addition to the Five A's, we considered the services' responsiveness to community needs, sustainability, and environmental impacts. The criteria were developed in consultation with the Provincial Working Group on Seniors' Transportation.

In making our final selection, we aimed to include services that covered a diverse set of transportation models and geographic contexts. We selected:

- » **Step Up 'N' Ride Society, Dawson Creek:** a wheelchair accessible transportation service in a small town in northeastern BC.
- » **Zunga Bus, Powell River:** a municipally led on-demand transit pilot in a small coastal city.
- » **Richmond Cares, Richmond Gives (RCRG) Volunteer Driver Program, Richmond:** a volunteer driver service in a medium-sized coastal city.
- » **Seniors GO Bus, North Shore:** a semi-fixed route neighbourhood-based community shuttle serving three neighbouring municipalities.

- » **Collingwood Neighbourhood House Seniors Shuttle, Vancouver:** a door-to-door transportation service in an urban neighbourhood.
- » **Delta Seniors Bus, Delta:** a municipally funded and operated curb side pick-up and drop-off transportation service for seniors in a suburban municipality.

Between March and May 2022, we reviewed publicly available documents and conducted semi-structured online interviews (one hour, guide in Appendix A) with key informants knowledgeable about the service. We acquired consent for interviews to be recorded. Interviews were conducted with the following individuals:

- » **Program Manager, Step Up 'N' Ride Society**
- » **Sustainability Planner, City of Powell River**
- » **Manager of Seniors Community Support Services, Richmond Cares, Richmond Gives**
- » **Executive Director, Silver Harbour Seniors' Activity Centre**
- » **Director of Community Services and the Better at Home Project Coordinator, Collingwood Neighbourhood House**

Staff from the City of Delta provided written responses on the Delta Seniors Bus.

Table 1. Case study selection criteria for promising models of seniors' transportation

Criteria	Description	Considerations
Availability	Service is available to reach desired destinations at desired times	Day time and evening service
		Weekday and weekend service
		Accommodates all types of trips
Acceptability	Service is comfortable, safe, and user-friendly	Drivers are trained to work with seniors
		Easy to schedule and arrange trips
		Service can be booked on-demand
		Minimal wait times
Accessibility	Service is accessible	Passenger assistance provided for boarding
		Escorted service at destinations can be arranged
		Wheelchair accessible
Adaptability	Service can be adapted to meet the diverse needs of older adults	Offers door-to-door service
		Flexibility to adapt to riders' needs
Affordability	Service is affordable for seniors	Free, discounted service, or sliding scale option
Responsive to community needs	Service is tailored to meet the needs of that community	Community-led or -advised
		Seniors-led or -advised
		Feedback is solicited from the community and/or people who use the service
Sustainability of the service	Service is reliable in terms of its ability to provide a consistent service over time	Consistent source of funding
		Service is reliable and consistent
		Staff-driven (versus volunteer-driven)
Environmental impact	Environmental impacts are considered in service design or delivery	Environmental concerns motivated the service
		Environmental impact considered in operations of the service (e.g., prioritizes shared rides, uses electric vehicles)



Case studies

On the following pages, we provide the context, service details, and key successes and challenges for each service, which we gathered from key informant interviews as well as publicly available documents, reports, and web searches. Population data provided in the Context section are from the 2021 and 2016 censuses.



STEP UP 'N' RIDE SOCIETY

Dawson Creek, British Columbia

Step Up 'N' Ride Society is a local non-profit charitable organization that provides customized door-to-door wheelchair accessible transportation for seniors and people with disabilities in Dawson Creek.

Context

Dawson Creek is located on the territories of several Nations that are signatories of Treaty 8. The City has a population of 12,323 and land area of 27 km², and is in the Peace River Regional District (population 61,532), the largest regional district in BC by land area.

The population in Dawson Creek is younger compared to the rest of BC, with a median age of 34 years compared to 42 years. Only 14% of the population is 65 years or older compared to 20% province wide. The median household income is lower compared to the BC median (\$81,000 compared to \$85,000). About 2% of seniors in Dawson Creek live below the low-income threshold.

Driving is the main way that most people get around. There is a public transportation service however, bus stops are sparse, and service is infrequent. In 2020, due to low ridership, the City Council voted to make major cuts to the public transportation service by eliminating evening and weekend service. For those who cannot drive or use public transportation, the available alternatives are the volunteer driver program offered through Better at Home (although wheelchairs cannot be accommodated), taxi, walking or wheeling, cycling, and Step Up 'N' Ride.

Step Up 'N' Ride started in 1981 by providing transportation for children with disabilities. In 1989, the service expanded to provide transportation to seniors. Today, the service fills an important gap in the community by providing a reliable transportation service for children, people with disabilities, seniors, and others who face barriers using the conventional public transportation service.

Service details

Step Up 'N' Ride has two wheelchair accessible buses for transporting seniors and adults with disabilities. Both regular and occasional trips can be arranged. Riders are encouraged to schedule their trips in advance. If there is availability, same day requests can be accommodated. Medical trips are prioritized; however, trips can be reserved for any purpose – visiting, shopping, recreation, and other reasons.

The total annual operating budget of Step Up 'N' Ride is around \$300,000, which is funded by user fees, grants, and donations. The estimated cost per trip is \$25, however, riders pay a subsidized fee of only \$6 per trip. The Municipality and the Regional District each provide around \$25,000 per year. Other sources of funding include Northern Health Authority and BC Charitable Gaming.

Step Up 'N' Ride details

Service	Door-to-door transportation for all trip purposes; medical trips prioritized
Target population	Seniors, people with disabilities, and people who cannot access the fixed-route public transit service who live in Dawson Creek
Service area	City of Dawson Creek (~90% of trips); Surrounding areas of the Peace River Regional District (~10% of trips)
Hours of operation	Monday to Friday, 9am-2pm; will occasionally provide service outside these hours
Cost	\$6 per trip
Ridership	Provided 1,873 rides to adults with disabilities and seniors in 2021; an average of 7 rides/day they operated

Successes

Step Up 'N' ride has successfully provided accessible door-to-door transportation for Dawson Creek residents for over three decades. The service is well-known in the community, which means they do not need to spend time and money advertising their services. They often operate with a full schedule. The service also has a high-level of community support. As one example, when Step Up 'N' Ride was short funding in summer 2021, several residents rallied to organize an auction that raised \$35,000.

Facilitating factors

There are several program factors that help facilitate the success of Step Up 'N' Ride:

» **A dedicated program manager:** The same program manager has been in place since 1990, handling day-to-day operations, and often working unpaid hours to accommodate requests.

- » **Flexibility of the service to adapt to riders' needs:** The service can adjust hours of operation, costs, routes, and the service area as needed.
- » **The simple intake process and ease of scheduling trips:** Riders only need to provide their information once, and trips are easily scheduled over the phone.
- » **A punctual service:** The service almost always runs on schedule; 10 minutes past pick-up time would be considered "incredibly late".
- » **Kind and empathetic drivers:** The two drivers are quick to adapt to riders' needs and able to work with a diverse range of people.

Challenges

The main challenge for Step Up 'N' Ride is securing core funding. The City of Dawson Creek and the Regional District collectively contribute annual funding that covers about a sixth of Step Up 'N' Ride's annual operating costs. The rest is fundraised through grants and donations. Core funding for Step Up 'N' Ride would alleviate the burden of fundraising and help sustain the service when the manager moves on from the role. A second challenge for Step Up 'N' Ride is finding suitable drivers for the job. Drivers must be able to work with a range of personalities and abilities. Step Up 'N' Ride has had excellent drivers, but when one leaves, it can be a challenge to find a replacement.



Dawson Creek residents organized an auction to raise funds so that Step Up 'N' Ride could continue to operate in August 2021



Step Up 'N' Ride buses



ZUNGA BUS

Powell River, British Columbia

The Zunga Bus is a locally branded on-demand transit pilot in the City of Powell River that complements the City's conventional public transportation system.

Context

Powell River is located along the Northern Sunshine Coast on the traditional territory of the Tla'amin Nation. The City has a population of 13,942 and a land area of 29 km².

Seniors make up a large share of Powell River's population. Almost a third (31%) of the population is over the age of 65. The median household income is 20% lower than the BC median (\$67,000 compared to \$85,000). However, only 1.3% of seniors live below the low-income cut-off.

Powell River's transit system is delivered through a shared governance model between the municipality and BC Transit. The system includes three fixed route transit routes and HandyDART. The frequency of service on the fixed routes ranges from 20 minutes (peak) to 60 minutes (off-peak). For both the fixed-route service and HandyDART, a 2015 review of Powell River's transit system found that riders were generally satisfied with the reliability of the service but were less satisfied with the frequency of service and convenience of routes.⁵ Moreover, HandyDART requires day-ahead booking and provides a 30-minute pick-up window, limiting spontaneous trips.

In early 2020, the City of Powell River adopted the "Powell River Transit Systems Vision and Goals" document, which set a vision for an efficient, convenient, reliable, accessible, and affordable public transit system. To test the benefits and limitations of on-demand transit, the City leveraged \$200,000 in federal funding from the 2020 Built in Canada Innovation Program to work with Spare Labs to launch the Zunga Bus. The initial funding covered the costs of leasing one bus and operation for the first year. The City provided funding for the driver. Longer-term, the City hopes that the Zunga Bus will receive provincial funding through BC Transit.

"Zunga" refers to a makeshift rope swing – a term that originated in Powell River. This name was chosen for the pilot because of its connection to the community and the planning team envisioned the bus as a "fun way to swing from A to B".

Service details

The Zunga Bus provides an on-demand door-to-door public transportation service within a designated service area. With plans for expansion, the service area currently includes the Westview neighbourhood. Rides can be scheduled over an app or the phone.

The cost to use Zunga is \$2.25 per trip, which is the same cost as for the fixed-route public transit system. The target audiences are youth, seniors, and others who face barriers accessing the fixed-route transit service, however, the service can be used by anyone.

As trips are booked, the on-demand software generates a real-time route that is optimized to balance convenience (i.e., wait times) with efficiency (i.e., pooling trips) according to priorities set by the operator. Setting a shorter wait time prioritizes trips on a first come first serve basis and a longer wait time prioritizes pooling trips. Over half (55%) of trips made between April and September 2021 were pooled trips.

Zunga bus details

Service	Door-to-door transportation for all trip purposes
Target audience(s)	Anyone can book a ride, but the target audiences are youth, seniors, and others who cannot access the fixed-route public transit service
Service area	Westview neighbourhood; plans to expand the service area
Availability	7 days/week, 11am – 6:30pm
Cost	\$2.25/trip
Ridership	~2.5 rides/service hour (weekends) to ~4 rides/service hour (weekdays)



The Zunga Bus

Successes

The Zunga Bus pilot has been successful on multiple fronts – through increasing access to transportation for seniors and other segments of the population and achieving an average ridership of 3-6 passengers per service hour. In March 2022, City staff successfully advocated to city council for more funding to continue the pilot to the end of the year. These successes are even more remarkable considering the pilot launched in February 2021, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pilot was initially launched with a motivation to shift travel to sustainable transportation options, but over the course of the pilot, it became clear that social benefits were the most important outcome. This included the increased ability of residents to access community services, social interactions that occurred between passengers on the bus itself, as well as the social interactions that occurred because it was easier for people to make spontaneous trips and meet up with friends.

“I use it all the time when I’m able. Don’t know how I’d get around without it. So handy and so convenient. I don’t drive and have trouble walking. I use it to meet friends [for coffee], regular things. I’d for sure like the Zunga Bus to stay. I’d be stuck at home otherwise.”

Powell River Local, 72 years old

Rider feedback solicited through app reviews and phone interviews has been overwhelmingly positive. The phone interviews conducted with Zunga Bus riders surfaced many examples of the different ways the service benefitted people from all backgrounds – including seniors, caregivers, people with disabilities, single parents, and youth. All interviewees were supportive of the pilot program.⁵ The main recommendations were to expand the service hours and the service area.

“... I lost the ability to drive. I have to rely on public transit... With Zunga, I don’t just get out once a week or once a month. I can now do things every day now. I time all my activities to Zunga Bus. Everything I do is in Westview, Marine or shopping on Joyce. If you extended area, it [would be] even better, it would open up more avenues for me.”

Powell River Local, 48 years old

Facilitating factors

The interview with the Sustainability Planner in Powell River and review of documents highlighted several factors that help facilitate the success of the Zunga Bus:

- » **Dedicated champions within the City:** The Sustainability Planner initiated the pilot; and works closely with the Social Planner to advocate for the Zunga Bus.
- » **Local branding:** The local branding helped build community 'buy-in'. One of the recommendations identified in the external evaluation of the pilot was to lobby to retain the local branding of the Zunga Bus if BC Transit takes over.
- » **Flexibility of the service:** Users appreciated the door-to-door service, instant booking, and the ability to make on-demand trips that were affordable.
- » **A service with seniors in mind but open to all:** People of all ages and abilities who face transportation barriers benefitted from the service.
- » **Aligning the pilot with strategic plans:** In presenting to city council, the planning team linked the Zunga Bus pilot with the Vision and Goals for Powell River's transit system (adopted by city council in Feb 2020), as well as goals identified in the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Challenges

The main challenge for the Zunga Bus is securing long term funding to sustain the service, ideally through a shared partnership agreement between BC Transit and the municipality. BC Transit has started exploring a provincial framework for providing on-demand transit throughout the province but has made no commitment on timelines. This means the longer-term funding and sustainability of the Zunga Bus is uncertain.

Future Direction

Using the outcomes of the Zunga Bus pilot, the City has completed a Transit System Analysis with assistance from WSP and Leading Mobility.⁵ The Transit System Analysis reviewed the existing transit system and made recommendations for future improvements that integrate on-demand technology. The review recommended replacing the currently underperforming fixed Route 3 with on-demand service and streamlining Routes 1 and 2 into a much more intuitive and frequent linear route. The report also recommended using the on-demand technology to improve the quality of the HandyDART service and possibly comingle HandyDART and Zunga Bus services to improve efficiency and user experience.



RICHMOND CARES, RICHMOND GIVES VOLUNTEER DRIVER PROGRAM

Richmond, British Columbia

Richmond Cares, Richmond Gives' Volunteer Driver Program provides transportation for seniors living in Richmond.

Context

The City of Richmond is a municipality in Metro Vancouver located on the traditional territories of the Kwantlen, Musqueam, and Tsawwassen Nations. The City has a total population of 209,937 and land area of 128 km².

A fifth of the population in Richmond is 65 years or older. The median household income of \$79,000 is below the provincial median of \$85,000, and 8.7% of seniors in Richmond live under the low-income cut-off. Richmond has a diverse population. Over half (54%) of residents speak a language other than English or French at home, with the most common languages being Cantonese (18%), Mandarin (17%), Tagalog (2%), and Punjabi (1.5%).

Driving is more common in Richmond than in the Metro Region (64% drive as their main mode compared to 55% in Metro Vancouver). Only 12% of Richmond residents report walking or cycling for errands, compared to 20% in Metro Vancouver.⁶

Richmond Cares, Richmond Gives (RCRG) is a registered charity that serves as a hub for volunteering and giving. In addition to its role as a capacity builder, the organization is a frontline service provider, offering a variety of inclusive, responsive programming for children, youth, families, and seniors. With funding from Better at Home, RCRG has operated a volunteer driver program since 2013. The driver program aims to support seniors to live independently in their homes and remain connected to their community.

Program details

The volunteer driver program provides door-to-door transportation for people aged 55+ living with a chronic condition in Richmond. Priority is given to medical trips. The roundtrip cost for trips within Richmond ranges from \$0-7 and is based on the riders' income. Rides are scheduled over the phone with the Better

at Home coordinator. Riders must be able to independently transfer into and out of the vehicle. All volunteers are provided with a 'handy bar', a car standing aid that riders can use for extra support when entering or exiting the vehicle.

RCRG Volunteer driver program details

Service	Door-to-door transportation for all trip purposes; medical trips prioritized
Target audience(s)	People aged 55+ living with a chronic condition in Richmond
Service area	Most trips are within Richmond but will occasionally provide transportation to medical appointments in neighbouring municipalities
Availability	Monday-Friday with some flexibility for weekend trips
Cost	Sliding scale pricing from \$0-7/trip; \$35/trip for trips outside of Richmond
Ridership	Served 559 unique riders in 2021

Successes

Over 12,000 rides have been provided since the service started in 2013. Prior to the pandemic, the volunteer driver program could fulfill about 90% of requests. The program is currently meeting about 70% of requests because there are fewer volunteers than before the pandemic. If they are unable to meet the trip request, RCRG staff will work with the senior to find an alternative transportation solution.

From the perspective of the Manager of RCRG's senior community support services, the opportunity for social connection between the driver and senior is another point of success. Most seniors provide positive feedback about their experience with the driver, often commenting that "the driver made their day". Drivers also feel rewarded from the experience.

“And I must say that it’s the volunteers’ opinion of the program that is so profound as well. They wanted to volunteer to make a difference, but they didn’t expect to get so much in return.”

Manager of Senior Community Support Services, Richmond Cares, Richmond Gives

Facilitating factors

The following factors help facilitate the success of the volunteer driver program:

- » **Services are known within the healthcare system:** The senior services offered by RCRG are known by staff that work in the local Emergency Department, Acute Care Services, and Home Health. Patients are provided with a pamphlet describing RCRG services when they are discharged.
- » **Relationships with organizations:** RCRG has relationships with many organizations in Richmond, including the Richmond Centre for Disability, Richmond Multicultural Community Services, and other faith-based communities. These organizations help promote their services.
- » **Experience with volunteer management:** As a volunteer-based organization, RCRG is experienced in recruiting and managing volunteers and has been able to maintain a pool of volunteers since the program started. They hold regular training sessions and volunteer appreciation events.
- » **Streamlined intake process and system for scheduling trips:** RCRG has a well-organized system for managing riders and scheduling trips.

Challenges

The pandemic has had a substantial impact on the service. Prior to the pandemic, the driver program had around 30 volunteers. Currently there are only about 10 volunteers. There are also fewer requests from seniors for rides. During the first wave of the pandemic, RCRG temporarily paused their services. Since resuming their services in September 2020, one of the challenges has been recruiting volunteers and getting the word out to seniors that they are offering their services again.





NORTH SHORE SENIORS GO BUS

North Shore, British Columbia

The Seniors GO bus was a semi-fixed route shuttle that was managed and operated by Silver Harbour Seniors' Activity Centre from 2006 to 2020.

Context

The North Shore is located on the traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. The North Shore covers three distinct municipalities: the District of West Vancouver (population: 44,122), the City of North Vancouver (population: 58,120), and the District of North Vancouver (population: 88,168).

A fifth (20.8%) of the population is 65 years and over. Some of Canada's richest neighbourhoods are in West Vancouver and the District of North Vancouver, which have median household incomes well above (\$104,000 and \$123,000, respectively) the BC median of \$85,000. The median household income in the City of North Vancouver is \$86,000. Approximately 5% of seniors in the North Shore are living below the low-income cut-off.

The North Shore has a higher driving mode share (62%) for work trips compared to the Metro Region (55%). 16% of residents in the North Shore walk or cycle for errands, compared to 20% in Metro Vancouver.⁷

The Seniors GO bus was launched in response to a funding opportunity from the Union of British Columbia Municipalities in 2005. Recognizing that many seniors were falling through the cracks with the conventional public transit system, twelve senior-serving

organizations came together at the City of North Vancouver's municipal hall to discuss how to respond to the grant opportunity. The group decided to apply for funding to operate a shuttle bus for seniors, with Silver Harbour Centre designated as the operator of the bus. The grant application was successful. In May 2006, Silver Harbour convened a diverse mix of partners, including staff from Vancouver Coastal Health, senior-serving organizations, and HandyDART, to gather input on potential routes and stops.

The GO bus began as a 6-month pilot program in 2006 and continued operating until 2020. Funding came from a variety of sources including the municipalities, the health authority, donations, and grants. With the onset of the pandemic and pre-existing challenges in obtaining a sustainable funding source, Silver Harbour decided to discontinue the service in 2020 and re-evaluate their transportation programming.

Service details

The Seniors GO Bus was a community shuttle for seniors that stopped at seniors and community centers, senior housing, drugstores, grocery stores, medical centers, and other requested locations. The service was founded on the premise that access to transportation is a social determinant of health, and that seniors need to be connected to services that promote physical and mental health and social connections.

The service model evolved over time in response to rider feedback. It was briefly operated as a fixed-route service but quickly became more demand-responsive, with the flexibility for door-to-door pick-up and drop-off. The service used a 20-passenger bus with space for three wheelchairs. Seniors could phone the driver to request a ride the day prior, although ongoing bookings for regular trips could be arranged.

Seniors Go Bus program details

Service	Semi-fixed route shuttle bus service
Target audience(s)	Seniors aged 65+, especially those who have limited transportation options
Service area	North shore neighbourhoods: Norgate/Eastern part of West Vancouver, Lonsdale, Lynn Valley
Availability	3 days/week*; 1 day/week spent in each neighbourhood
Cost	No charge although donations are accepted
Ridership	~50 rides/day at the peak of the service

*Decreased to 2 days/week in 2016

Successes

The GO bus was a neighbourhood-based transportation service that was scheduled and routed around where seniors wanted to go. As one of the only community shuttles for seniors in Metro Vancouver, many agencies were interested in learning from the GO Bus model, including TransLink, the regional transportation authority. At its peak, the GO bus provided around 50 rides per day. Survey feedback from GO bus users was overwhelmingly positive, and demonstrated that the service successfully provided opportunities for socialization, allowed older adults to access more services more often and continue living in their current location.



John McCann, driver of the Seniors GO bus

Facilitating factors

The following factors helped facilitate the success of the GO bus:

- » **Intersectoral network of partners:** The GO bus was founded by a large network of partners in the senior-serving, transport, health, and municipal sectors that helped in the development, promotion, and operation of the service.
- » **Driver skills, professionalism, and caring demeanour of the driver:** The GO bus was fortunate to have an exceptional driver who was well liked by riders and managed the day-to-day operation of the service for the 14 years that the service operated.
- » **Responsive to community needs:** The service adapted over time to meet the needs of seniors and picked routes and stops based on where seniors wanted to go.

Challenges

The main challenge for the Seniors GO bus was obtaining funding, which depended on the success of ongoing grant applications. The hope was that TransLink might eventually fund the service. They came close to a deal, but in the end, TransLink was not legally able to fund a service that was provided by another operator. In 2016, as costs had increased and funding opportunities decreased, the GO Bus reduced service from 3 days to 2 days/week. Ridership dropped off significantly as a result.

A second challenge of the Seniors GO bus was the inability to adjust the vehicle size to ridership levels. As ridership declined over time, they would have liked to use a smaller vehicle. However, as a non-profit organization with limited funding for different-sized vehicles, they were limited to using the bus they had.

“Funding it really hampered how we were able to operate it. So, when it was new and fun and exciting and prices were lower, we were able to run it at least three days a week which gave people enough flexibility to be able to do some planning around it. When we had to go down to two days a week it just made it so much less useful to people.”

Executive Director, Silver Harbour Seniors' Activity Centre



COLLINGWOOD NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSE SENIORS SHUTTLE

Vancouver, British Columbia

The Collingwood Neighbourhood House Seniors Shuttle is a door-to-door transportation service for seniors in the Renfrew-Collingwood neighbourhood.

Context

Collingwood Neighbourhood House (CNH) is located in east Vancouver on the traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. CNH provides services and programs aimed at improving the quality of life of residents in the Renfrew-Collingwood neighbourhood. The services are primarily targeted to low- and middle-income residents.

The Renfrew-Collingwood neighbourhood has a population of 51,530, about 8% of Vancouver's population. The population distribution in the neighbourhood has shifted over time to have fewer children and more seniors, consistent with many areas of the city. As of 2016, 15% the neighbourhood's population was 65 years or over. Renfrew-Collingwood's population is also diverse; 45% of the population is Chinese, compared to 28% of the City's population. The four most commonly reported ethnic origins in the neighbourhood are Chinese, Filipino, English, and Canadian.⁸

In 2010, as part of the Community Action for Seniors' Independence Pilot, CNH received funding from United Way and the provincial government to offer non-medical home support services for seniors in the community. Through consultation with seniors, staff identified a need for a more accessible door-to-door

transportation service. The Seniors Coordinator at the time had already experienced the challenges of running a volunteer driver program – namely recruiting and retaining volunteers and managing the schedule.

CNH used the funding to employ a driver so they could offer a service with reliable hours and so that the Seniors' Coordinator could manage other aspects of seniors' programming (rather than manage volunteers). Today, CNH still employs a driver and is dedicated to keeping this model. The Community Action for Seniors' Independence pilot evolved into Better at Home.

The day-to-day operations of the seniors shuttle is funded through Better at Home. Additional funds are needed to cover the costs of purchasing and maintaining a vehicle. In the ten years that the shuttle service has been offered, CNH has used an old HandyDART (which was expensive to maintain), rented a bus from a seniors' organization, and in 2019, received funding from the Ministry of Health to purchase a new 14-passenger bus.

Service details

The CNH Seniors Shuttle is part of the basket of services offered through their Better at Home program. The distinguishing features of CNH's Better at Home transportation service are the neighbourhood bound service area, the option to request accompaniment, and a paid driver.

CNH Seniors Shuttle provides a door-to-door transportation service for seniors aged 55+ who live in Renfrew-Collingwood Neighbourhood. Seniors must be able to board the bus independently. The shuttle generally travels to destinations within 10-15 minutes of the neighbourhood boundary, with exceptions made on a case-by-case basis.

CNH employs one part-time driver and has two back-up drivers for the Seniors Shuttle. The current driver speaks Cantonese and Mandarin, which has been a great asset, as there is a large Cantonese and Mandarin speaking population in Renfrew-Collingwood. Rides can

be scheduled by e-mail or over the phone with the Driver or the Better at Home Program Coordinator. The roundtrip cost ranges from \$0-10 and is based on the seniors' income.

The shuttle is currently available twice a week on Thursdays and Fridays from 9:15am to 1:30pm. Medical trips are prioritized but seniors are free to book the shuttle for any trip purpose. Seniors can also request a volunteer to accompany them on the trip, however, since the pandemic, these requests have been more challenging to accommodate. The last Friday of every month is a group shuttle trip to a pre-set destination (replaces the door-to-door service).

Collingwood Neighbourhood House Seniors Shuttle program details

Service	Door-to-door transportation for all trip purposes
Target audience(s)	Seniors aged 55+ living in Renfrew-Collingwood
Service area	Renfrew-Collingwood neighbourhood (and surrounding neighbourhoods)
Availability	Thursdays & Fridays, 9:15am-1:30pm
Cost	Sliding scale pricing from \$0-10
Ridership	143 rides in 2020/21; ~4 rides/week



A senior boarding Collingwood Neighbourhood House Seniors Shuttle

Successes

The CNH Seniors Shuttle has been operating for over a decade. Although ridership has declined in recent years (Figure 1), the service continues to provide service to people who might not otherwise be able to access medical appointments, groceries, and other services. Staff from RISE, the Community Health Centre part of CNH, connect patients with the Seniors Shuttle service to coordinate their transportation to medical appointments. The Seniors Shuttle has also been a good way to connect seniors with other services offered at CNH.

Facilitating factors

Three facilitating factors for success of the CNH Seniors Shuttle are:

- » **A paid driver who speaks multiple languages:** the current driver speaks English, Cantonese, and Mandarin, which enables them to easily coordinate trips with seniors who only speak Cantonese or Mandarin.
- » **Consistent funding:** CNH receives core funding to cover the day-to-day operations of the seniors shuttle through Better at Home.
- » **Neighbourhood-based model:** the neighbourhood-based catchment area allows for more trips in a day to be made.

Challenges

Although CNH receives core funding for the Seniors Shuttle, in 2021, they had to reduce the service from 3 to 2 days/week due to increasing transportation costs (salary, gas, vehicle maintenance, etc.). This reduced the number of trips by about a third. The pandemic has also taken a toll on ridership (Figure 1). Ideally, the shuttle would be offered all weekdays from 9 to 5. Staff are trialing different strategies to boost ridership, including offering group outings to a shopping mall every second Friday. Like the other services, CNH also finds it challenging to find drivers who have the skill set for working with seniors and who are willing to work the part-time hours.

Other day-to-day challenges of the CNH Seniors Shuttle are making decisions around requests for trips outside of the neighbourhood service area and eligibility for seniors to use the service. The ability to board the shuttle independently is one of the eligibility requirements. It can be difficult to have a conversation about discontinuing service for a senior who can no longer board the bus independently. The driver and the program coordinator work closely with riders to so they can continue to use the service for as long as possible.

Collingwood Neighbourhood House Seniors Shuttle
of rides and clients by fiscal year, 2016-2021

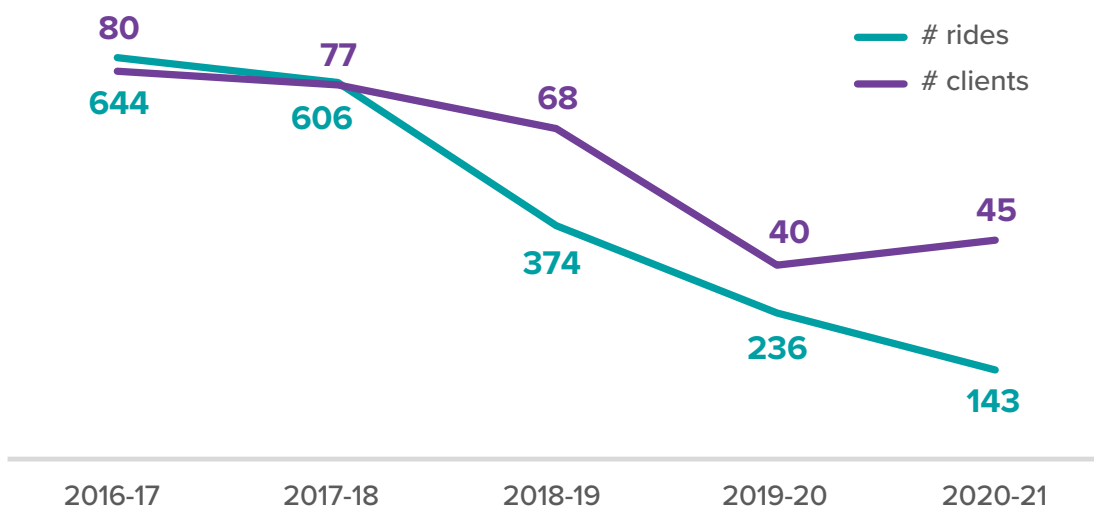


Figure 1. Ridership for the Collingwood Neighbourhood House Seniors Shuttle, 2016-2021. Funding for the shuttle has not kept up with increasing transportation costs. As a result, CNH reduced service from 3 to 2 days/week in 2021, which significantly impacted ridership. The pandemic has also taken a toll on ridership.



DELTA SENIORS BUS

Delta, British Columbia

The Delta Seniors Bus is a free curb side pick-up and-drop off transportation service for seniors aged 65+ that is operated and funded by the City of Delta.

Context

The City of Delta is a suburban municipality in Metro Vancouver located on the traditional territories of the Tsawwassen and Musqueam First Nations. The City has a total population of 111,281 and land area of 180 km² distributed across three distinct communities: North Delta, Ladner, and Tsawwassen.

Delta has a larger share of older adults compared to Metro Vancouver; 20.5% of Delta's population is aged 65 years and older compared to 17.4% in Metro Vancouver. The median household income is almost 30% higher than the BC median (\$108,000 compared to \$85,000). 2.4% of seniors live below the low-income cut-off.

Driving is the main way that most people get around. The suburban context makes getting around by alternative modes of transportation more challenging. Only a quarter (24%) of the population uses public transit, walks, or cycles as their main mode of transportation compared to two-fifths (42%) in Metro Vancouver. And just 11% walk or cycle for errands compared to 20% in Metro Vancouver.⁹

The North Delta Area Plan process revealed that accessible and affordable transportation was a huge concern for seniors. In 2012, a staff report that identified the need for better transportation options for seniors was referred to the Delta Seniors Advisory Committee. The Seniors Advisory Committee unanimously supported the staff recommendation to increase transportation options for seniors, and requested that staff apply for funding to support a seniors bus program in Delta. The service was first implemented in North Delta and eventually expanded to South Delta, which includes Ladner and Tsawwassen.

Initial funding for the seniors bus came from a New Horizons grant. Since then, some City staff have been redeployed and new staff have been hired to support the program. An annual operating budget has been set aside for maintenance, gas, etc.

The Delta Seniors Bus aims to keep seniors connected, independent, active, social, and healthy. Throughout the pandemic, the bus helped support transportation for residents of all ages to vaccination clinics.

Service details

The Delta Seniors Bus provides free curb side pick-up and drop-off transportation service for seniors' aged 65+ living in Delta. The service runs five days a week (Monday to Friday, 9am-4pm), and is also available outside of normal operating hours for rentals. There are a total

of four buses, two that serve North Delta and two that serve South Delta. Trips can be booked over the phone up to seven days in advance and all trip purposes within Delta are accommodated. Seniors must be able to embark and disembark the bus independently.

Delta Seniors Bus details

Service	Curb side pick-up and drop-off transportation for all trip purposes within Delta
Target audience(s)	Seniors aged 65+ living in Delta
Service area	North and South Delta; some exceptions made for medical appointments
Availability	5 days/week, 9am-4pm; plus rentals outside of normal operating hours
Cost	Free
Ridership	Ranges from 5-12 rides/day; demand is growing

Successes

The Delta Seniors Bus is the only municipally funded and operated seniors' transportation service in Metro Vancouver. From the perspective of City staff, the service is successful in enabling older adults in the community to remain independent, active, and socially connected; and in relieving some of the pressure on families and friends to provide transportation. Riders are generally happy with the booking process and appreciate booking with a live dispatcher rather than an automated service.



Seniors boarding the Delta Seniors Bus



The Delta Seniors Bus program is a free transportation service for seniors 65+ living in Delta

Facilitating factors

City staff identified the following program components as key to the success of the seniors bus:

- » **Dedicated city staff and budget:** Ongoing staff and funding for the seniors bus allows for a reliable service that can be offered 5 days/week at no cost to seniors.
- » **Consistent dispatchers and drivers:** The consistency of the staff involved allows them to build relationships with seniors who use the service. Drivers are generally older adults themselves who have retired and have excellent customer service skills.
- » **Ease of booking and flexibility:** The process to book trips is straightforward and there is some flexibility in the service hours and pick-up and drop-off locations. If the bookings for a certain date are full, staff will reach out to drivers to arrange an additional shift.

Challenges

Early on, getting the word out to seniors who did not have access to the internet was a challenge. To reach these seniors, the City advertised in the local newspapers. This campaign was very successful but costly. During the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the service was suspended and repurposed for providing transportation to vaccination sites. Service resumed in early 2022 and ridership has continued to grow.



Key learnings across cases

SUCSESSES

When asked about the most successful aspects of their transportation service, key informants described a wide range of successes – from aspects of their service that helped them meet the transportation needs of seniors to improving the health and well-being of seniors.

Multiple key informants commented on how they were successful in designing a transportation service around seniors' needs, in terms of the door-to-door service, selection of routes, and their flexibility to make accommodations as needed. A few interviewees commented on the importance of having a paid driver for the sustainability of the service and consistency of staff.

All key informants recognized transportation as a key determinant of health and emphasized the importance of transportation in enabling older adults' to remain connected to their

community. Staff with the Delta Seniors Bus commented that their service not only helped promote the independence and well-being of older adults, but importantly, also relieved pressure on families and caregivers to provide transportation. Collingwood Neighbourhood House staff remarked how the shuttle service was a good conduit for connecting seniors with other social and recreational programs they offered.

The following sections describe the facilitators and barriers to success that arose across services, discuss four key learnings from this project, and conclude with some possible next steps for the Provincial Working Group on Seniors' Transportation.

COMMON FACILITATORS AND BARRIERS

At the service-level, common facilitators to success were having a frequent and regular service that had some flexibility, a streamlined intake process and system for scheduling trips, consistent drivers and staff with good customer service skills, and being responsive to seniors' needs. Other important facilitators were partnering with other organizations to help with the development, promotion, and operation of the service; and having some consistency in funding, either through Better at Home or municipal funding.

The most commonly mentioned barrier across services was obtaining long-term funding for the service, as well as funding for bigger purchases like new vehicles. After funding, the next most commonly mentioned barrier was finding drivers who had the right skillset for the job. A few programs also noted that demand for transportation is lower than it was pre-pandemic.

Table 2. Facilitators and barriers to success

Facilitators	Barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Having a frequent and regular service » Having a streamlined intake process and system for scheduling trips » Employing drivers with good customer service skills » Partnering with organizations » Being responsive to community needs » Obtaining core program funding » Building community support and buy-in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Sourcing funding, especially for services that are grant-funded » Covering costs to maintain and purchase vehicles » Finding suitable drivers » Building and maintaining ridership, especially if the service is only offered 2 days/per week

FOUR KEY LEARNINGS

The following section discusses four key learnings that arose from talking with key informants and reviewing documents.

1. The community-based senior sector plays an important role in the creation and operation of seniors’ transportation services

Agencies from the community-based senior serving sector are highly knowledgeable about the transportation challenges that seniors face and work closely with seniors to design a transportation service around their needs. Transportation services operated by this sector often fill essential gaps in the transportation system. For example, there is no publicly funded paratransit service in Dawson Creek. Step Up ‘N’ Ride fills this gap in the community by providing a subsidized transportation service

for seniors and people with disabilities. In other smaller communities in BC, Better at Home funded volunteer driver programs are one of the only transportation options available to seniors who can no longer drive. Despite filling essential gaps in the transportation system, agencies in the community-based senior serving sector often receive little or no core funding from the public sector and rely on grants, donations, and user fees to cover costs.

2. Funding for community-based seniors' transportation is intermittent and inefficient

Obtaining enough funding to cover the costs of delivering the service was the number one challenge raised across the services. With the single exception of the municipally funded Delta Seniors Bus, the transportation services included in this report received most of their funding through grants from government sources and grant programs. Some examples of grant opportunities include the Community Gaming Grant Program, the New Horizons for Seniors Program, the Built in Canada Innovation Fund, and other grant opportunities that came up through the Union of BC Municipalities, Ministry of Transportation, Ministry of Health, and Health Authorities. Obtaining initial funding to launch the service was much easier than obtaining ongoing funding. One interviewee commented that, “fundors often target new and exciting things, rather than programs that are working well”.

Richmond Cares, Richmond Give's volunteer driver program and Collingwood Neighbourhood House Seniors Shuttle both receive regular core funding through Better at Home. While the consistent source of funding is helpful, in the case of the Seniors Shuttle, the funding has not kept up with rising fuel costs and wages, which has meant they've had to cut service. This reoccurring issue with funding for many grant-funded seniors' transportation services is captured in Figure 2.

Grants for seniors' transportation initiatives come from the health, transport, and senior-serving sectors at local, provincial, and federal levels. Evidently, multiple sectors and levels of government recognize there is a gap in seniors transportation. While these grants often result in a service that successfully fills a gap for several years, few community-based seniors' transportation services provide long-term solutions. Step Up 'N' Ride is one of the few examples of a non-profit organization that has successfully provided a seniors transportation service for over three decades. Even for Step Up 'N' Ride, obtaining funding is a top concern for the program manager. The patchwork and intermittent grant-funded nature of seniors' transportation is not working for most seniors or senior-serving organizations.

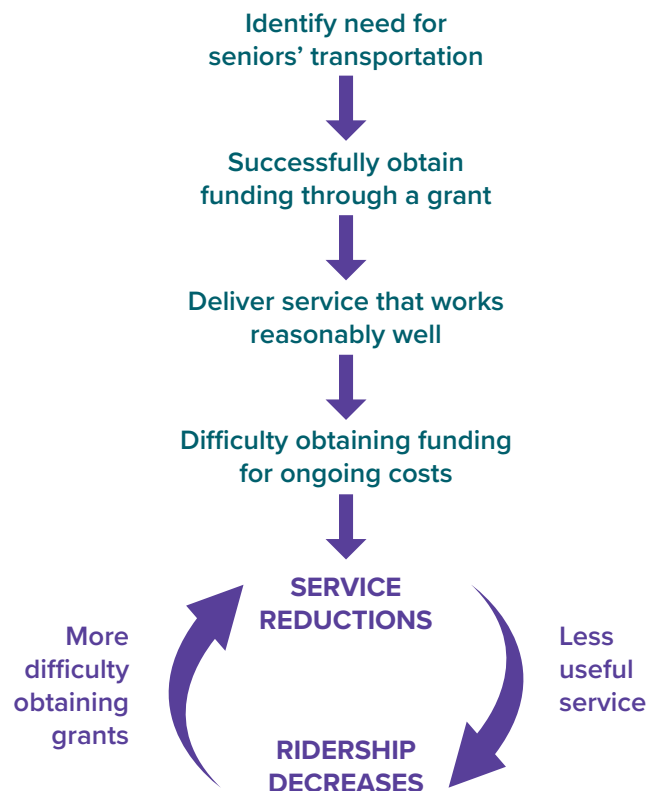


Figure 2. Typical trajectory for many grant-funded seniors' transportation services

3. Services that operate two days per week or less have a hard time sustaining ridership

Key informants noted the importance of offering a service that runs multiple days of the week. Seniors have appointments and commitments throughout the week and at different times of the day. A service that is offered on a regular and frequent basis is much more useful than a service that only operates once or twice a week.

Interviewees from the North Shore Seniors GO bus and the Collingwood Neighbourhood House Seniors Shuttle both noted that ridership dropped off significantly when they reduced their service from three to two days per week. Both had to cut service because of a lack of funding. The interviewee from the GO bus suggested that services should ideally run 5-days per week on weekdays from 8am to 4pm because this aligns with the times when most seniors need transportation.

4. Drivers are important to the success of seniors' transportation services but are hard to find

All key informants commented on the importance of drivers to the success of their transportation service. The role demands someone who is not only skilled at driving, but also has a caring and empathetic demeanour. A few services, especially those operated by non-profit organizations, need a driver for part-time hours only, and the pay is often lower than the rate for drivers in the public transportation system. Therefore, it is often challenging for community agencies to recruit and retain drivers. The GO bus was fortunate to have the same driver for the 14 years their service operated, which was a key factor in the longevity and success of the service.

Finding drivers was less of a concern for municipally run initiatives. The Zunga Bus pilot was able to use drivers from their pool of drivers for their public transit system and the Delta Seniors Bus has had success in recruiting drivers that are typically retired from their mainstream careers.

Next steps

This report synthesized findings from our investigation into promising models of seniors' transportation in BC. We conducted case studies with six community-based seniors' transportation services to learn about different models of seniors' transportation and the facilitators and barriers to their success. We reported on facilitators and barriers unique to the particular service and context, and also synthesized common themes that arose across programs. We hope that this work will support the Provincial Working Group on Seniors' Transportation in advocating for solutions to seniors' transportation challenges.

A few possible next steps for the Provincial Working Group could be to:

- » Learn about seniors' transportation initiatives in the public transportation system.
- » Advocate for provincial funding to support wider adoption and implementation of the models profiled in this report.
- » Create best practice guidelines for seniors' transportation based on the facilitators and barriers to program success identified in this report.
- » Advocate for a provincial strategy to attract, train, and retain drivers for seniors' transportation services.
- » Raise awareness to local, provincial, and/or federal levels of government on the inefficiencies of grant-based funding for seniors' transportation.
- » Convene a forum with stakeholders from government, and health, transport, and senior-serving sectors to create a provincial strategy for seniors' transportation.

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Appendix A

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE

Examining community-based transportation services for older adults in British Columbia

Motivations for starting the program and program objectives:

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your organization and your role within it?
2. What were some of the motivating factors to offer a transportation service for older adults?
3. What are the objectives of your program?

Program details:

4. Who is involved in the day-to-day operations of your program?
5. In terms of availability, what are your operating hours? Are riders generally satisfied with these hours?
6. Can you tell me a little bit more about how people schedule trips?
7. What types of trips do people typically make using your program?
8. Is there a cost to use the service, if so, how much?
9. What geographic area does your program serve?
10. Is this service area growing, shrinking, or changing in any way?
11. Is ridership for your program growing, shrinking, or changing in any way?
12. What is the demographic makeup of people who use your program, in terms of age, gender, race, ability, and/or socio-economic status?

Strategies to address seniors' transportation needs:

13. What are the main transportation challenges that face seniors in your community?
14. What strategies have been implemented as part of transportation service to address seniors' transportation challenges in your community?
 - Have any strategies proven to be particularly easy or difficult to implement?
 - Have any strategies worked particularly well in your community? If so, which ones and in what ways?
15. What do you regard as the most successful aspects of your services aimed at older adults, and by success, I mean success in terms of your ability to provide transportation that meets the needs of older adults in your community?
16. What are the main challenges that the driver program faces in providing a transportation service that meets the needs of older adults in your community?

Sustainability and scalability of service:

The Provincial Working Group on Seniors' Transportation is interested in the sustainability of transportation programs, in terms of the program's ability to obtain funding and consistency of the service overtime.

17. What sources of funding are used to cover the costs of your program?
18. To what extent do you consider your program to provide a reliable transportation service for seniors?
19. Do you think your program, or aspects of it, offers a model of transportation that could be adopted in other contexts?

Closing questions:

20. Is there any additional comment you wanted to share about your program or seniors' transportation in your community?
21. Are there other innovative models of seniors' transportation that you are aware of, and think are promising?