



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

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# Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 041**

Wednesday, November 23, 2022

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Chair: Mr. Peter Schiefke





## Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

Wednesday, November 23, 2022

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting No. 41 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, February 3, 2022, the committee is meeting to study inter-city transport by bus in Canada.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House Order of November 25, 2021. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

[*English*]

Members of the committee, appearing before us today we have, from the Canadian Urban Transit Association, Marco D'Angelo, president and chief executive officer.

From Motor Coach Canada, we have Vince Accardi, president.

From Ontario Northland, we have Tracy MacPhee, vice-president, passenger rail and motorcoach, joining us by video conference.

From Rider Express, we have Firat Uray, president.

From Transport Action Canada, we have Terence Johnson, president, joining us by video conference.

I'd like to take this opportunity before we begin to inform members that all of today's video conference witness participants have completed the necessary audiovisual checks. Once again, I look over to our interpreters for a thumbs-up to make sure that everything is okay. Perfect.

We will now begin our opening remarks with Marco D'Angelo for five minutes.

The floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marco D'Angelo (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Urban Transit Association):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon everyone.

[*English*]

It's great to be here.

On behalf of the Canadian Urban Transit Association and our members, I'd like to thank the chair. I'd like to thank the members of the committee for inviting me to speak about Canadians' travel needs.

Here at CUTA, we represent the transit industry, including transit agencies, private sector operators, manufacturers—the makers of buses and vehicles—on-demand transit service providers and more.

First, I'd like to thank the Government of Canada for working closely with provinces and municipalities to keep transit running during the pandemic. Funding for transit operations was crucial for our frontline workers during the pandemic and for our nation as it goes through its economic recovery every day.

Currently we're seeing how provinces, municipal transit agencies and the private sector are filling the gap to connect Canadian communities. Already we have businesses like Transdev and others entering the intercity market.

BC Transit connects rural areas, for example, along Highway 16, including many indigenous communities that depend on affordable transportation to the province's economic and industrial centres.

Another example is in the Niagara region, where as of January 1 several local systems there—Niagara Falls, Welland, St. Catharines, Fort Erie—will be merging or being moved up to the region of Niagara. That will create vital connections between cities to help boost the economic recovery and, of course, tourism.

I commend the region of Niagara's proactive and innovative approach to regional transit.

Additionally, CUTA supports the government's commitment to high-frequency rail to enhance intercity transit on the Quebec-Windsor corridor. It's one of the most densely populated and economically productive parts of Canada.

• (1635)

[*Translation*]

It's also very important for the Canadian Urban Transit Association, the CUTA, to support the government's high-frequency rail project to enhance inter-city travel along the Windsor-Quebec City corridor.

[English]

Canadians in rural and remote areas who work in or travel to cities need a cost-effective and reliable transit service. We are confident that our members can meet Canadians' intercity travel needs to support growth, but we believe the federal government should support intercity transit innovation.

[Translation]

In recent months, ridership has grown steadily. In September, we were at 73% of pre-pandemic levels. Federal-provincial partnerships aided public transit in its darkest hour. However the job is not yet done.

[English]

Most agencies are expecting to find revenue shortfalls in the coming weeks as we enter the new year. Our members cannot be forced to make service cuts. That will make a full economic recovery simply out of reach. Sustainable transportation and transit are essential as our economy reopens.

We call on the government to renew emergency transit operating support in 2023 to help transit systems maintain service levels. We encourage the government to renew the federal-provincial transit and housing funding arrangement that was announced earlier this year. Together we could keep Canadians connected in our rural areas, small towns and large cities.

[Translation]

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

I'm looking forward to answering your questions.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. D'Angelo, for your opening remarks.

Next we have Mr. Accardi, from Motor Coach Canada.

The floor is yours, and you have five minutes.

**Mr. Vince Accardi (President, Motor Coach Canada):** Thank you, Chair and committee members, for inviting Motor Coach Canada, MCC, to present in front of the committee on the impacts of COVID-19 and the reduction of bus services on Canadians and communities across Canada.

MCC is a national, not-for-profit, member-based association representing motorcoach and tour operators across Canada. We represent the interests of bus operators supplying scheduled services, charters, private transit and tourist services, plus tour operators across our great country.

Motorcoach travel is critical to Canada's recovery. Our operators provide cost-effective, safe and environmentally responsible modes of transportation. This not only includes scheduled-service line runs; it also includes moving amateur sports teams, tour groups, universities, colleges, schools, community groups and seniors groups.

Additionally, Motor Coach Canada members provide Canadians with regular, essential and emergency services. For example, motorcoach operators provide transportation for communities that

need evacuation and for first responders and emergency services in the medical area and for floods and wildfires.

Our members are primarily small and medium-sized family-owned businesses that have been in this industry for generations. These small businesses play an essential role in connecting our cities, towns and rural communities across Canada. The motorcoach carrier passenger industry of Canada, the bus industry, is a significant force in the Canadian economy. In prepandemic business activity, we had approximately 1,032 companies generating more than \$20 billion in operating and non-operating revenues and employing over 118,000 full-time equivalents.

Canada's ground transportation network is currently disconnected, with thousands of routes and hundreds of businesses lost during the pandemic. Service providers were left struggling to restart their businesses. COVID impacts and Greyhound's departure from Canada after nearly a century have left a lasting impact, particularly in rural communities that have relied on buses to connect them to larger towns.

Canadians in both urban and rural communities deserve access to affordable, environmentally friendly transportation. As a result of the COVID pandemic, Canadians have lost their abilities to travel from coast to coast on a single ticket through an affordable and environmentally sustainable mode of transportation. Private motorcoach operators in a post-COVID environment cannot restart all their scheduled service routes as quickly as they would like. Urban routes like Toronto to Montreal are the first to come back. Selling tickets in large populations provides less risk to a private business that depends on the fare box for revenues.

The vast majority of operators are not subsidized. These companies depend on the fares they collect on their ticket sales alone. This means that many rural and remote communities will likely stay disconnected, with limited or no transportation options for years to come. Publicly funded transportation providers cannot reconnect Canada alone. This needs to be done in partnership with private operators.

Canada's travel economy is driven by more than just airlines, rail services and marine transportation. Privately owned motorcoach businesses across Canada are part of Canada's transportation system and must be part of reconnecting our great country.

The Government of Canada's public transit investment funds have been helpful in assisting in building stronger communities, fighting climate change and creating new jobs; however, Canada's private sector transit providers do not receive support through most federal or provincial transportation transfers. They're often not eligible to apply for these programs or grants, nor do they benefit from HST or GST fuel rebates.

This gap in support makes it challenging for private operators to play their vital role in connecting communities and servicing Canadians. They offer hundreds of thousands of kilometres in non-subsidized routes, and they're often the only mode of transportation into and out of rural destinations and communities.

• (1640)

Access to federal transit funding would allow private operators to reconnect rural and urban communities more quickly, and specifically in destinations where public transit is not viable or available.

The federal government has the constitutional responsibility for regulating motorcoach carriers, but through the Motor Vehicle Transport Act it delegates to the provinces the authority to regulate them. This gap has generally left motorcoach carriers without support. Although the government has asked provinces for solutions to help reconnect Canada, the federal government can take even more action and more leadership in redeveloping routes across Canada by a few levers.

First, we recommend—

**The Chair:** Sorry, Mr. Accardi; I'm going to have to cut you off there as you've gone about 40 seconds over the time, but I do ask that you submit your remarks, as they will be taken into consideration.

**Mr. Vince Accardi:** Remarks have been submitted and are available for the committee.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Accardi.

Next, from Ontario Northland, we have Ms. MacPhee.

Ms. MacPhee, the floor is yours. You have five minutes.

**Mrs. Tracy MacPhee (Vice-President, Passenger Rail and Motor Coach, Ontario Northland):** Thank you, Chair and committee members.

It is my pleasure to represent Ontario Northland today, to share our experiences and perspectives regarding bus transportation between rural and urban cities in Ontario.

Ontario Northland is a Crown corporation, reporting to the Ontario Ministry of Transportation. We are a 120-year-old agency providing passenger rail, freight, rail remanufacturing and repair, and motorcoach services. We work hard to maintain our long-standing relationships with people and communities in the north, and our shared history helps inform our deep understanding of the unique needs of northerners as a result.

Unlike urban transportation, which seeks to address congestion problems, at Ontario Northland we seek to address connection problems.

Over the past 10 years we have transformed our motorcoach routes and services to respond to passenger needs. We stop at the doorsteps of hospitals and education centres, and we work closely with municipal partners to ensure travel is accessible, affordable, reliable and, most importantly, safe. We help to take anxiety out of travel to urban centres by connecting to municipal transport, and we are working with other providers—for example, Via Rail—so passengers travelling outside the province can get to where they are going seamlessly.

When Greyhound Canada left Canada in 2020, we expanded our services in northwestern Ontario and into Manitoba to address the urgent transportation needs of Canadians. We continue to engage stakeholders and local businesses to ensure that our services in this part of the country align with the needs of passengers.

As a result, our routes pass through and stop in communities like Fort Frances, Kenora, Ignace, Dryden and more.

Because of this outreach, we know there are still gaps in the transportation needs of our rural communities, which will most certainly increase over time. For example, a large percentage of residents in the north will pass 70 years of age in the coming decade. We need to address the need to provide seniors with safe transportation to urban centres and health care institutions, particularly during winter months. We hear of many Ontarians living in northwestern Ontario who cross the border into Manitoba for health-related appointments.

There are still many rural, remote and northern communities that do not have feeder service to connect to our services. For example, the communities of Manitouwadge and Hornepayne are both located less than 100 kilometres off the Trans-Canada Highway, but they have no public transportation service to connect to our once-a-day service along the Trans-Canada.

At Ontario Northland, our services revolve around access—Ontarians to government services, seniors to medical appointments, students to post-secondary institutions, and so on. The access we provide is a two-way journey, an opportunity to see and be seen, to explore what makes us unique and united.

With all of this in mind, Ontario Northland proposes that the federal government consider the following options to better support transportation services across the country.

One, provide funding for intermodal stations to allow all modes of public transportation to connect in one location, whether it be by intercity bus, rail, light rail or city transit.

Two, allow passengers—and our parcels that need to be connected across the country—to access connecting services to continue the journey across our country and allow a safe location to wait for connecting services.

Three, invest in the development and support of a national motorcoach network to create a system whereby private and public transportation providers can connect with one another, as well as support the technology resources required to operate this national network.

Four, provide funding that would allow privately or publicly funded intercity carriers to access federal infrastructure funding for the acquisition of capital assets, specifically wheelchair-accessible coaches.

In planning for an equitable, sustainable future, the federal government must continue to explore ways to support public, connected transportation needs across the country. Access to services, economic development, education, businesses and people is crucial. Without proper investment in this infrastructure, the country will leave populations behind and untapped potential unmet.

• (1645)

Furthermore, investing in organizations that understand the lived reality of citizens and communities, that recognize the potential for service enhancement and that can plan for innovation and integrated solutions will remain an important ingredient in establishing a path forward.

Thank you again for your time. I welcome any questions you may have.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. MacPhee.

Next, from Rider Express, we have Mr. Firat Uray.

The floor is yours. You have five minutes.

**Mr. Firat Uray (President, Rider Express):** I would like to introduce Omer Kanca, our company's general manager. He is going to introduce Rider Express to you guys.

I appreciate you guys calling us here.

**Mr. Omer Kanca (Witness, Rider Express Transportation Corporation):** Mr. Chair and honourable members, thanks for the invitation to appear before the committee in view of its study on intercity transport by bus in Canada.

Launched in 2017 in Saskatchewan as a fully Canadian-owned business—and it still is—following the departure of the Crown corporation Saskatchewan Transportation Company, or STC for short, Rider Express has been expanding its intercity bus transportation services into new territories.

Currently, Rider Express operates in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario, and has stops in more than 60 cities and towns across Canada. With the widest network in Canada, Rider Express's services are being utilized by around 15,000 passengers every month. Since its launch, despite having limited resources and funds, Rider Express was able to fill the void created by STC and Greyhound rather quickly.

Rider Express did not use or rely on any form of government subsidy in its operations until the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, which could possibly be the longest and strongest impact the industry has endured in modern times.

We lost 80% of our ridership at the peak of the pandemic, and we are yet to see prepandemic levels. In the past few months, including the summer of 2022, the industry has seen some positive impact on ridership, but it is still reeling from the lack of international tourism. Unlike many companies in the industry, Rider Express was able to keep providing this crucially important public service in such hard times.

Rider Express's success lies partly in our ability to keep our overhead costs down, which enables us to focus on the service. This is what matters the most to the passengers. Rider Express's aim is to reach every corner of Canada, connecting people and businesses. We are searching for ways to do this with our own resources and capabilities.

However, Canada's population density does not make it financially viable to reach every city and town. Naturally, intercity bus services require a presence in every city and town to varying extents. Unable to obtain any support from local, provincial and federal governments, it is a prohibitively heavy burden for a private company to provide its services everywhere. Rider Express tries to keep the overhead costs down to keep its services affordable to all. However, many other major expense items still exist.

A wider transportation network that leaves no city or town behind requires government support. This support does not necessarily have to be in financial funds, but could be provided in other ways, from lifting licensing requirements to the provision of local government facilities to be used in intercity bus services.

Public transportation is not crucially important only to the those who need it; it is also the environmentally best alternative, with its lower-carbon emissions. We strongly believe that having a wide, efficient and affordable ground public transportation network is paramount to a better-off social and economic environment.

This is our speech. We welcome your questions.

• (1650)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for your opening remarks.

Finally, from Transport Action Canada, we have Mr. Johnson.

The floor is yours. You have five minutes.

**Mr. Terence Johnson (President, Transport Action Canada):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the committee for taking on this work.

The closure of Greyhound Canada in 2021 was the end of a long saga of service cuts across the country. Transport Action Canada, an organization dedicated to researching sustainable public transportation and representing the passenger perspective, is deeply concerned by the impact of these cuts on Canadians and our communities.

Here in southwestern Ontario, for example, the bus network was decimated in 2013 when Aboutown Northlink shut down. People who'd been taking a bus to appointments at London's hospitals suddenly faced \$100 fares, even for volunteer-run services. The closure of STC, Saskatchewan Transportation Company, in 2017 had similar spillovers into health care, as discussed in some papers I have referenced in my notes to the committee.

Following the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, our federal government has an undeniable moral responsibility to restore an essential network of safe mobility that reaches all communities, large and small.

Mr. Chair, I wish I had a succinct policy solution that would quickly clean up the mess left by FirstGroup PLC's decision to abandon Greyhound Canada and abandon Canadians, but we don't think it will be simple. There have been calls for nationalization, but it would be a blunt instrument, ignoring the struggles and successes of Canada's locally owned and indigenous-owned operators. Companies like Kasper in Ontario, DRL in Newfoundland and Mountain Man Mike's in the Kootenays kept essential services operating through the pandemic as best they could, despite financial losses.

Neither can we ignore the role of public service operators. Ontario Northland and BC Transit have been instrumental in closing service gaps. There are also grant-funded services reaching many smaller communities. The rural transit solutions fund may build on those.

In some cases, public and private operators have forged partnerships. In others, competition has caused service losses. Although the regulation of intercity buses is delegated to the provinces, what happens in any part of the ecosystem often affects the whole, with national consequences. Northlink's closure weakened Greyhound's London hub. The shutdown of STC cut both passenger and package traffic from Greyhound. The end of Greyhound in the west cost Maritime Bus half a million dollars' worth of package traffic.

On the one hand, deregulation of the industry in Ontario and western Canada has allowed new entrants to step up. Reinstating routes into Quebec took longer. On the other hand, deregulation has allowed chaos. Routes have been started and shut down again with little or no notice. A few city pairs now have four or five bus lines competing, but most communities still have nothing.

Canada's bus network has also existed largely in competition with VIA Rail, to the detriment of both modes and passengers. Maritime Bus is an exception, and should be seen as a role model, like Amtrak's Thruway model.

To nurture the complex ecosystem of public and private services that is emerging across Canada back into a thriving network, we believe the federal government must reassume the role of regulatory stewardship and take a systems approach with a nuanced touch.

Passenger information is key. Greyhound used to serve as an agent for connecting carriers. That's gone. The would-be passenger is on their own. Trying to collate information about routes and schedules, even for a researcher knowing where to look, is like swimming through mud. Some of the smaller bus lines don't have the resources to keep websites up to date. Even the larger companies lack accessibility features. Most don't publish general transit feed specification data, so their services don't appear on Google Maps or other common platforms. This information deficit doesn't do the industry any favours either. Discoverability fills seats.

Busbud, a Montreal-based start-up, is trying to solve this problem and provide an online ticket gateway for bus and rail. Expedibus in Quebec is making a similar effort to put the interline package network back together between operators in that province. However, a nationwide non-profit clearing house for passengers and package connections, together with a framework for passenger rights and managing disruptions, would strengthen the industry by making bus travel far more dependable and attractive. Too, this would provide an open data framework so that Transport Canada and other policy-makers can see the whole ecosystem and solve for the gaps.

With regard to terminals, passengers need a safe place to wait. With Greyhound went most of the remaining terminals, such as Calgary, Ottawa and London. In Winnipeg, the Greyhound terminal alongside the airport was demolished earlier this year. It was a \$7-million facility that opened in 2009, replacing the old downtown terminal at Portage and Balmoral. Today the depot is a steel door in a windowless building at 939 Sherbrooke Street, a half-hour walk from Portage and Main. However, this might be one of the better remaining hubs in western Canada, because it brings together Maple Bus, Ontario Northland and Rider Express. Meanwhile, Mahihkan and NCN Thompson appear to still pick up near the airport, and Kasper stops near the Balmoral transit hub.

One way the federal government could lead is by re-establishing union terminals in key cities, with adequate facilities for passengers, drivers, vehicle stabling and potentially zero-emission fuelling.

● (1655)

Ideally, these would also be at or near train stations, like the new Union Station bus terminal in Toronto, the terminal in Moncton or the terminal at Pacific Central Station in Vancouver.

With regard to accessibility, fragmentation of the network, loss of services and risk of missed connections are amplified for passengers with disabilities. There are no standards for reduced fares or companion fares, and it should not require 48-hour advance notice to travel with a wheelchair. Some vehicles that currently provide a wheelchair space do so awkwardly, requiring most other rows of seats on the bus to be vacated and folded so the lift can be used.

The loss of terminals also means a loss of accessible restrooms and of staff to assist in arranging travel. When curbside pickup locations and schedules are not coordinated with local transit, an accessible taxi ride may be needed to get on the bus, if such a taxi is even available.

The challenge for companies seeking to add new services is this: Buses with good accessibility features are very expensive, and there are only a few models of motorcoach on the market that provide low entry, let alone an accessible toilet. This is another reason that we favour rail for trunk routes and long distances, with bus connections.

To mitigate the cost premium of providing an inclusive and accessible service—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. Johnson. I'm going to have to ask you to wrap up, if possible.

**Mr. Terence Johnson:** I have one more sentence.

We support the idea of the government providing financing that both private and public operators can access—possibly through low-interest loans, lease financing and tax relief on vehicles—and getting the HST off fares, for all Canadians.

**The Chair:** You made the most of your sentence, Mr. Johnson. I appreciate that.

Before I turn it over to Mr. Strahl for the first round of questioning, I will ask Mr. Johnson to speak a little more slowly. It would greatly help our interpreters.

● (1700)

**Mr. Terence Johnson:** I apologize. Thank you.

**The Chair:** No need to apologize, sir. I just want to look out for the welfare of our interpreters. Thank you.

We'll begin our six-minute rounds of questioning.

I'll turn the floor over to you, Mr. Strahl.

**Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses for coming in on short notice. I know we had started another study, but you came here very quickly to fill in.

I want to indicate that I'd hoped we would be hearing from Transport Canada officials, first of all, so we could get an idea. We've heard different testimony today about what the role of the federal government should be. I think it would be instructive for us to hear what programs there are now, and what the jurisdiction of the federal government is.

We read the press releases when Greyhound Canada left parts of the country with a staggered approach and then left altogether. In my home province of British Columbia, there were immediate concerns about Highway 16, the Highway of Tears. As noted in testimony here, BC Transit and the Government of British Columbia stepped in to provide additional services there, as did my hometown.

When I was growing up, there were no public services between towns like Chilliwack and Abbotsford. That has now been filled by BC Transit as well, through their route 66 bus, which is well used by our community. There's now a possibility for communities like mine, which are in a rural space, with lots of farms in between communities, to get from Chilliwack to Vancouver International Airport, for instance, though perhaps it's not the fastest way to travel.

Perhaps I can start there. I'll start with Mr. D'Angelo.

You said the federal government should work closely with municipalities and provinces to keep transit moving. What is the mechanism for that, in your view, other than the federal government having access to lots of money? What is the solution that would provide that integrated system you talked about in your testimony?

**Mr. Marco D'Angelo:** Thanks for the question. I appreciate that.

Certainly, I'm very proud of our member, BC Transit, and the great work it's been doing across the province to keep the whole province moving—outside the Lower Mainland, of course, which is run by TransLink.

We've been very pleased with the support received to date, whereby the federal government assisted provinces, which then assisted municipalities during the worst part of the pandemic. It made sure that essential workers could get to their jobs and...to schools, and so on.

We were very happy when, this past February 17, the federal government created an agreement between provinces and the feds to provide \$750 million in continued operational support. It means we can avoid service cuts. Ridership is returning but has not returned fully, and the economy continues to open, so we're asking for the renewal of a program like that, a program that brings provinces to the table as well, to participate as partners in ensuring those operating funds reach towns and cities across the country.

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** Thank you very much.

My next question is to Ms. MacPhee.

I'm interested in a Crown corporation model. What is your funding model? Do you receive an annual amount from the Government of Ontario? What percentage of your revenue comes from government and what percentage comes from riders? How would you calculate the subsidy per passenger? Is it per kilometre?

I'd be interested to know your costs or your funding model.



**Mrs. Tracy MacPhee:** As a Crown corporation, we are funded by the province. Every year we have to do a business plan to identify what we expect our ridership to be for the coming year. The ministry will allocate resources to us for that.

We have different divisions, as I mentioned in my submission earlier. For the motorcoach division, we're at approximately 80% cost recovery. The ministry provides the funding for that shortfall. That's just for the operating funding.

For our capital funding, we do receive yearly capital funding to provide for the purchase of buses we will need. We have a fleet management plan we go through, and the ministry is very involved in that.

In terms of our costing for our customers, we do have a cost per passenger that we monitor. One thing we try to make sure we're doing is ensure that we keep the cost to our customer at a reasonable level. We don't want to scare customers away. We don't want to charge exorbitant amounts for tickets for travelling a distance. We're continually looking at ways to optimize our service and where we can find more efficiencies to try to ensure that our revenue streams still come in. It's been very difficult during the pandemic.

Again, we have support from our provincial government to continue those services. When there are stoppages or when bus services do cancel service, then we have the ability to go in and provide that service on short notice, as we did when Greyhound pulled out of all of Canada.

• (1705)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. MacPhee.

Next we have Ms. Koutrakis.

Ms. Koutrakis, the floor is yours. You have six minutes.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all our witnesses who are here before us this afternoon.

It's very interesting and important testimony. Hopefully, through this study, we'll get to some really great recommendations and things we could use to move forward.

I'd like to begin my questions with Mr. D'Angelo.

Thinking outside the box—and I know you spoke about many different options—are there alternatives to the traditional Greyhound coach service, such as chartered buses, for example, or ride-sharing? Is there any room for new technologies available in that regard, in your opinion?

**Mr. Marco D'Angelo:** Thanks for the question.

Indeed, there is. Many of our members are providing on-demand service. In areas where there's a rural area or a new suburb, our local transit systems have been quite creative at sometimes reaching outside their service area to provide links to jobs. For example, if a large industrial site is built, they work closely with transit systems, contracted providers and on-demand services to ensure that employees are connected to their jobs so they're able to work. That's been one of the pillars of the economy's reopening. That's been

continuing the connections of Canadians to work but also for school and for other purposes.

It's been quite heartening to see the private sector step up and to see technology and solutions help to create efficiencies across the national transit network.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** Thank you.

Continuing with Mr. D'Angelo, some politicians have called for a publicly run national intercity bus network through the creation of a new Crown corporation or an expansion of the mandate of VIA Rail to include public bus transportation.

What are your thoughts on this? Is it realistic? How would it be viewed by provinces? There are sensitivities around the jurisdictional piece, so we need to be very mindful of that. Do you have any idea how much this might cost?

**Mr. Marco D'Angelo:** I will think outside the box with you for a moment on the question. Thank you for it.

We know that with funding, innovation can occur, so it's looking at different pilots to meet the needs of different regions. For example, the distances between towns in Atlantic Canada are a lot shorter. We have examples like Kings County transit, which links maybe 10 or more communities in Nova Scotia. That's been a great service that they're providing. Earlier, I mentioned the Niagara region.

I think it's important to connect folks, especially in the farther areas. I'm thinking about northern Ontario. There was a study that was completed in I think 2014 by the Ontario government in looking at different options to provide bus service to supplement the service that VIA Rail isn't capable of providing, simply because it needs additional fleet and additional support. We think that in looking at that there are a lot of opportunities there. There are different rights-of-way.

There are a lot of creative solutions, but there's no one solution for a country the size of Canada when most of the time we're moving people between cities under 100 kilometres apart.

• (1710)

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** I have one last question, if I have time, Mr. Chair. My last question is for Tracy MacPhee.

It's really nice to see you again. I saw you in person when I was passing through Edmonton this past summer at the Railway Association conference. In your view, will the proposed high-frequency rail project have implications for intercity bus travel? If so, could you elaborate on that piece for us, please?

**Mrs. Tracy MacPhee:** The high-frequency rail is in a corridor that Ontario Northland does not operate in right now. In terms of how that will impact us, I do not see that coming into play.

We are looking at the return of the northeastern passenger rail that will connect the communities from northern Ontario down into Toronto. We will be bringing in our bus service to enhance and connect with that rail service, but as I said, the light rail that is being talked about is not in our territory.

**The Chair:** You still have one minute, Ms. Koutrakis.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** That's great.

Would any of our other witnesses like to chime in on any of the questions I've asked?

**Mr. Vince Accardi:** I think there is a lot of out-of-the-box thinking happening already in our industry. We're working in partnership with both privately and publicly funded organizations. I think the mechanisms that are available to the government are to open up some of the current programs to private operators to ensure that we can help to support this connectivity.

As I said, privately funded organizations cannot do this alone. It has to be a partnership. We have members—folks like Rider and others—who are ready to help. We just need to make sure that from a business perspective they have the support to ensure that they'll at least break even on these routes as they start. Without any other form of support available to them, it just won't happen.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Koutrakis.

Thank you, Mr. Accardi.

[Translation]

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you have the floor now, for six minutes.

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd also like to thank the witnesses for being with us today.

We're very happy to see you here. It's an important subject, particularly in rural areas, where people have been seriously affected.

During the pandemic, I heard that there had been a complete shutdown of services and that some companies, private carriers in particular, were facing serious financial problems.

I had the opportunity to meet a few representatives of these companies during that time. They told me that there was government assistance for labour and rents, but that transportation companies did not receive any particular assistance. That meant that the buses stayed parked. However, they had to continue to pay expenses, even if they were not operating their bus lines. The situation at the time had become very complex.

Mr. Accardi, How did you experience the situation and where do you stand today?

[English]

**Mr. Vince Accardi:** It continues to be challenging for private operators, postpandemic. Our members were very thankful for the support the government did come to the table with in terms of rent subsidies and wage subsidies.

You're absolutely right: Their assets were parked, and they're not meant to be parked. There was not much available to help them restart those assets and get them safe to be back on the road. These are big vehicles. Our members were spending \$30,000 to \$50,000 per unit to get them out of the parking lots, safe and back on the road. That's simply because they were parked.

That was a big challenge that took some capacity out of the system. We're about 80% down from where we were, just in terms of

the number of vehicles. Then we added on supply chain issues for parts and other things that we've heard so much about in the automotive sector. It was the same for buses.

It's a very big challenge, but we are thankful for the support that was available to us. Hopefully, through this committee's work, there might be more opportunity in the future.

• (1715)

[Translation]

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** In your address, you said that it was important for the private sector to play a role in serving communities. You felt that in certain instances, government support is needed to accomplish that, because not all of the routes are profitable. I can understand that, but you then said in another part of your response that there were ways of providing support other than direct funding for overhead costs and routes. That made me curious. Can you tell us more about it? What are means does the government have?

[English]

**Mr. Vince Accardi:** Thank you for giving me an opportunity to finish the “what we recommend” part of my submission.

Certainly tax incentives are helpful, as are fuel rebates. Private operators do not get fuel rebates, or HST or GST. These are levers that are available to the federal government to make happen now.

Then, of course, we recommend programs that would support the development of cross-province routes, just to ensure that there are no shortcomings while the route is being developed. I know that is a form of a subsidy, but it's really what we're calling “gap funding” for subsidy development. This is where our publicly funded partners are just not able to provide those services or where there are no services other than a privately funded organization.

[Translation]

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** Thank you.

My next questions are for Mr. D'Angelo.

During the pandemic, the federal government, unusually enough, with a view to keeping public transit going, provided ad hoc assistance to provincial governments, which then redistributed funds to their local public transit corporations. I had the opportunity to meet the representatives of several of these. They told me that this assistance had been helpful, but they would have liked to have still more. Even today, some have not recovered entirely from the problems they went through at the time.

A number of these representatives wanted regular, ongoing and stable financing from the federal government for public transit. They argued that although the idea of infrastructure funding was interesting, it led to additional operating expenses that they would have to pay. At the same time, these entities are not accountable to the federal government, but to the provinces or municipalities.

How then to go about doing something that would actually work? Do you have any ideas about that?

**Mr. Marco D'Angelo:** Thank you.

It was definitely a major challenge. The public transit companies in Quebec and Canada are delighted to be able to build more infrastructure and to purchase the zero-emission vehicles, but the operating expenses for these vehicles are very high and it's difficult to directly request more and more public funding to pay these expenses. Solutions have to be found.

As you mentioned, billions of dollars are spent on financing major projects, but more funds are required to cover the operating expenses involved in maintaining services to the public. One of the possible solutions would be to renew the agreement announced on February 17 for next year, until the economy recovers and ridership gets back to normal.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. D'Angelo and Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[English]

Next we have Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Bachrach, the floor is yours. You have six minutes.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Thanks so much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses. I think this is a really important study.

I come to this from the perspective of a part of the country that has predominately rural and remote communities. I was thinking about it, and I believe that transportation options, particularly for low-income folks in rural Canada, are worse now than they have been in a hundred years.

We used to have a train that ran on time, a passenger rail system that was given priority on the rail corridor. In the part of the world where I live, the train might be eight hours late. We used to have a bus service, a national bus service on which you could travel from coast to coast on a single ticket, a service that served almost every rural community in the country. Now, as we've heard, we have a patchwork that fills a fraction of what Greyhound used to serve. I think this is a huge gap in our country, and it has truly national implications, so I'm very appreciative that the committee has made time to talk about this issue.

I want to start by talking about the issue of leadership. What we've heard from the witnesses so far is that there is a need for someone to pull together all of these strings and to create something from what exists in this patchwork of public and private bus options across the country.

Perhaps I'll direct this question to Mr. Johnson. I wonder who in Canada right now is best positioned to provide that leadership.

• (1720)

**Mr. Terence Johnson:** Thank you for that question. The leadership has to come from the federal government, though not all the control.

The way I look at this is that there's a great deal of difference between leadership and control. The federal government needs to actually put some effort behind its desire under the Accessible Canada Act, under its response to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and under its commitment to reconciliation. That has to be met with effort to get into the details. There is a gap here. The private sector can't fill it at the moment. Why not? Can the public sector fill it? Does it make sense?

It is, as I said in my remarks, a very complex ecosystem. There are tremendous synergies between being a charter bus operator in a region and being the passenger operator. Those economic synergies make it a lot easier to deliver a national network using the private sector as a major partner, but a lot of our bus companies are small, locally owned Canadian and indigenous-owned. If you start a franchising system with a really complicated procurement process, you're going to squeeze them out. They're just not going to put up with that amount of paperwork. Their expertise is running buses.

Therefore, there are no magic solutions here—

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** I'm going to run out of minutes.

I've spoken to the Transport Minister about this very topic and I've asked for that leadership. I've asked him to pull together all these pieces across the country and deliver bus transportation for all Canadians. He has said it's not his jurisdiction and it's up to the provinces. What do you make of that response?

**Mr. Terence Johnson:** That's inaccurate.

As we've heard, this is not in the constitution of provincial responsibility. That is delegated. The federal government can re-issue the role of regulator, especially across interprovincial bus services, which is the whole national network. What gets cut in one place harms the whole ecosystem.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** If we leave it up to the provinces, what's the probability that we will end up with a cohesive national bus transportation system?

**Mr. Terence Johnson:** It's not great.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** I'll turn to our friends from the bus transport industry.

I'm curious: Today, what percentage of Greyhound's peak network has been restored?

I'll start with Mr. D'Angelo. I don't know if you have the answer to this question at your fingertips, or if Mr. Accardi does. I mean just a ballpark number, like within 10%. Do we have half of it back? Do we have 80%?

**Mr. Marco D'Angelo:** You mean in terms of the intercity bus that was vacated by the previous company operating?

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** If you think of the number of routes and the frequency of bus service that Greyhound at its peak service levels delivered for Canadians, what percentage are we at today when it comes to bus transport?

Mr. Uray, would you hazard a guess?

**Mr. Firat Uray:** I think right now in the five provinces—Alberta, B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario—we can say we are covering 50% of what Greyhound had.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** You'd say 50%.

**Mr. Firat Uray:** I'd say 50%. It's mostly big cities that we are trying to cover. As a private company, we need the funding to operate these routes. We would love to go to the rural areas, but we cannot do that ourselves. We will need help.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** When we had Greyhound, my understanding is that the regulations were a bit of a social contract. Greyhound was able to operate the profitable intercity routes in exchange for also operating the rural routes that lost money because, frankly, you can't make money and turn a profit delivering service in remote regions of Canada. You just can't.

Do you see this kind of social contract as part of the future of bus transport in Canada? Will private companies be given access to profitable routes in exchange for taking on the needs of rural Canada?

• (1725)

**Mr. Firat Uray:** Exactly, if that is possible in Canada so that we can provide more and wider services in rural areas, because right now, if you don't mind, we are competing with other companies for all of those big-city profitable routes. If we are competing, it is going to be hard for us to expand our services to different small towns.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Uray.

Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

Next we have Mr. Muys. The floor is yours. You have five minutes.

**Mr. Dan Muys (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC):** Let me also ask some questions of Rider Express.

You talked about the fact that when you filled the void left by STC for the first few years until the pandemic, you were able to operate without any funding or public support. What has changed since 2020 in terms of the routes you're offering? When do you think you could be back to a point where that might be the case, or is that not going to ever happen at this point?

**Mr. Firat Uray:** It's definitely not going to happen that we can cover as much as Greyhound used to cover. As I said, currently we are providing these services to close to 60 cities. There are still some routes that are not making money that we are providing for from the other routes that are making money. We're using those routes to keep those services up and running.

What we provide is a connection service. Let's say that one route doesn't make money; if you cut that route, the connection is not going to happen. Our business style is to rely on connecting people, connecting cities and connecting each other. That creates enough volume of passengers so that we can operate.

**Mr. Dan Muys:** Thank you.

For Ontario Northland, I think you mentioned you're in an 80% cost recovery level. I think, if I heard correctly, there's an optimal

cost. There's probably a price point after which you're going to have a decline in ridership, so you've probably mapped that out.

Is that sustainable into the future? Has that changed since prepandemic times? What does that look like?

**Mrs. Tracy MacPhee:** Based on my experience and what I witnessed through the previous years prior to COVID, up to now, it's not flexible to change it significantly. If we were to do a 10% increase, that's detrimental to passengers who are trying to take the bus service.

There is very little appetite to be able to increase the fares to a point that we would cover our cost, because at that point we would lose people who are relying on our service and who have no other option to take any other transportation across the country.

**Mr. Dan Muys:** I have another question, and I think it was alluded to. It's about bus parcel express. I remember using this in the nineties to get stuff from Toronto to Ottawa. You could do stuff within a five-hour time frame versus overnight couriers.

How many people are getting Amazon deliveries at their doorstep? There's a big uptick in parcels.

Is that a potential future revenue stream, or are there other potential future revenue streams—whether for Northland or the folks from Rider Express—that can help contribute to the business model?

**Mrs. Tracy MacPhee:** I think the biggest challenge we see in trying to connect parcels is not within our own network, but to other carriers. We don't have appropriate locations to switch off parcels. In Ottawa, for example, we don't physically have a location where we can leave parcels to send them across to Quebec to connect with Maritime Bus. That was a huge loss of business. It's not so much in our region that the parcels we're carrying within our own territory are not enough to sustain the operations; we need to be able to connect with other carriers.

As I mentioned in my submission, if we don't have these locations to do that, we can't be doing it on the side of a highway. It's not safe.

We don't have the capacity to do that.

**Mr. Firat Uray:** Location is the biggest problem for us, and it's an expensive overhead for us. The one thing the federal government or provincial governments can help us with is to create a safe location for passengers and also for parcels.

**Mr. Dan Muys:** Do I have time for one more question?

**The Chair:** You have one more minute, Mr. Muys.

• (1730)

**Mr. Dan Muys:** Okay.

Some years ago, when I lived in Calgary, there was the Red Arrow, and I think it existed in other parts of the country as well. Mr. Chahal may know. At least my view of it is that they offered a higher-end service from downtown Calgary to downtown Edmonton that competed with air traffic. It was often a better option than flying, in terms of both cost and comfort.

Is that a potential opportunity, given the mess at airports these days, whether in northern Ontario, in Saskatchewan, or in other parts of the country where that might exist?

**Mr. Marco D'Angelo:** I think it's really good news that Red Arrow services are coming to Ontario as well, to help supplement bus service there. There are also other examples of businesses in the United States that are providing more comfortable services, such as an overnight service that provides some sort of bedding. A recent piece in The New York Times did a survey of going from Atlanta to Washington, D.C.

There are opportunities out there. It's about creating the value proposition, but that may involve subsidizing those routes and looking at really creative options, because a lot is possible.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. D'Angelo, and thank you, Mr. Muys.

Next we have Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Rogers, the floor is yours. You have five minutes.

**Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses who are with us today. Welcome. I particularly enjoyed your testimony.

We do know, of course, that busing and other forms of transportation faced major challenges due to COVID-19 and other complications that arose from that.

Mr. Accardi, first of all, and maybe Mr. Johnson, I want you to comment on some specific needs in Atlantic Canada, because I know that the only bus line in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador that goes from Port aux Basques to St. John's is DRL. It's a family-owned business. It's private sector. I met with them on two or three occasions during the COVID-19 period, and they were having some significant challenges. However, there were a number of disputes, which may not be the right word, or differences of opinion as to who was responsible to support these folks, and whether it was federal or provincial responsibility.

You mentioned regional transit, Mr. D'Angelo. I'm wondering, from a regional perspective, how you would see Atlantic Canada. Is the situation there fundamentally different from all the regions of the country?

**Mr. Marco D'Angelo:** I can certainly talk to you about work that we've done in New Brunswick in trying to secure operating funding so that systems could grow outside the urban areas. I'm thinking about Miramichi, Saint John, Fredericton. They've been working to expand their service, but they've been finding difficulties in partnering with the Government of New Brunswick, so that's made it a little bit difficult.

In other cities in Atlantic Canada, St. John's is expanding their service. They're back to full ridership, as I'm happy to report as well. Halifax Transit is also looking at connecting. It's fully within

HRM, but also a little bit outside the Halifax Regional Municipality as well. We have a good-news story, I think, in growth, in terms of what's happening in Cape Breton and the transit service there.

**Mr. Churence Rogers:** The question is this: Is there a way of connecting all these different providers in some kind of a regional system?

**Mr. Marco D'Angelo:** I think there are lots of technological opportunities that exist out there that can connect them. It's a matter of creating the economic argument to do that. That would be an opportunity in terms of innovation. The federal government could step in and look at innovative solutions whereby technology providers could help to connect existing carriers in regions.

**Mr. Churence Rogers:** That's interesting.

Mr. Johnson, do you want to comment on that?

**Mr. Terence Johnson:** Yes, I would.

DRL is a kind of unique situation, because the bus line actually replaced the Newfoundland railway. It was previously operated by CN. There is kind of a responsibility to keep that running that is separate from the other responsibilities in the network.

For example, if I wanted to go from Corner Brook in Newfoundland to Hay River today, I could do it, but it would usually be complicated and there would be a lot of different tickets. I can't even get a ticket that takes me on VIA Rail, Marine Atlantic and then Maritime Bus to go to Moncton. This is where the idea of a national clearing house is absolutely essential.

You'll find that companies like BusBud that are trying to do this want a cut as brokers. A lot of the bus companies I've spoken to don't have 10% to give a broker. That's why it has to be a non-profit, national clearing house that is operator-agnostic and that everybody can work with. That's where the federal government can really have a role. It's in creating that by working with Motor Coach Canada and with players across the industry.

What does this need to look like to support the industry rather than to take money from it?

• (1735)

**Mr. Churence Rogers:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Accardi, would you like to comment on that as well?

**Mr. Vince Accardi:** I believe the committee has invited Coach Canada to come, and I think Michael Cassidy is coming next week.

I agree. I think there's an opportunity for the federal government to take a leadership position through innovation and other mechanisms to help fast-forward what will likely happen and to help re-connect those communities that are currently without service.

**Mr. Churence Rogers:** Okay.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Rogers. We're out of time for your round of questioning.

Next we have Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you have two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have another question for Mr. D'Angelo.

In Quebec, it's really an issue of a Quebec-Canada infrastructure agreement. The federal government decided to move the deadline for applications under this program ahead by two years. Among other things, the agreement provides for contributions to public transit projects.

Has your organization been informed of this, whether by its members or otherwise? What do you think of it? On the Quebec side, \$2.7 billion will be at stake soon. It might be possible to lose funding for public transit.

**Mr. Marco D'Angelo:** If I've understood your question properly, I'd say that's a problem outside Quebec as well. The Investing in Canada's Infrastructure Program will end on March 31, 2023. It would therefore be important to get going on the permanent public transit fund, or at least be allowed to submit eligible expenses under this program ahead of time, even if it is not yet in place.

[*English*]

We very much support making sure there is no gap in that funding in that time. We'd like to have eligible expenses advance, even if the program isn't ready immediately. We can't have a stop-start cycle in public transit in Quebec or anywhere else.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** Thank you.

If there were still funds in this envelope for public transit projects, whether in Quebec or in another province, I imagine that you would want them to be invested in public transit rather than returned to the public coffers.

[*English*]

**Mr. Marco D'Angelo:** Having large projects approved in a timely way has been a challenge between transit agencies that need to go through either their provincial government or through the treasury council of Quebec and then nominated and brought forward to Ottawa.

It is important that money isn't left on the table. We fully support any initiatives that make sure that is avoided.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. D'Angelo.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[*English*]

Next we have Mr. Bachrach.

You have two and a half minutes. The floor is yours.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. D'Angelo, earlier you mentioned the imperative that the operating support from the federal government be renewed for transit systems across Canada.

What do communities stand to lose if that doesn't take place?

**Mr. Marco D'Angelo:** They stand to lose quite a bit. It's important that funding does continue, because ridership is returning at different speeds across the country. Sherbrooke is at 102%. Brampton is at 115%. Those systems need to grow. Other systems.... I'm thinking about where workers haven't been recalled to our down-towns. It's affecting our economy, so it's important that transit systems be maintained.

In our larger centres where there are connections between cities, it's important that those be strengthened. The cost of not doing so.... It took 18 years after several budget cuts in the 1990s for ridership to return to where it was pre-pandemic.

• (1740)

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Thank you.

We heard previous witnesses talk about this vision of a coherent national system that has consistent service delivery for Canadians and things like ticketing, pricing, scheduling, service standards, accessibility of buses, condition of stations and all of these things. We also heard that the federal government has a leadership role to play in ensuring consistency across the country.

I want to push back a little bit on this idea that a public model isn't possible in a country like Canada. I am curious why that is. Is it because of the incumbency of the current private sector players in the mix? Why would a public model not work in Canada?

Maybe I'll go with whoever would like to tackle that question. Mr. Accardi, do you want to take a stab at it?

**Mr. Vince Accardi:** I think there are a lot of resources in the system. There are a lot of players, like we have here today, who are willing to help.

I think, given the opportunity with the right supports, the private-public system that's already in play can work. We just need the mechanism to connect those tickets, to connect those routes and to support private operators.

I'm not sure that we need to create a monster out of it. We need to have the mechanisms and the supports for industry to do what they do best and to partner more effectively to get Canadians across Canada on one single ticket.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Accardi.

Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

Next we have Dr. Lewis. Dr. Lewis, the floor is yours. You have five minutes.

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses for this very important testimony.

I come from a rural community. In my community of Haldimand—Norfolk, we don't have any public transportation. I believe we had one bus, and my colleague has told us he has taken it before. That was some years ago—

**Mr. Dan Muys:** That was many years ago.

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis:** —and it's no longer there.

What I am seeing is a new phenomenon. Many people during COVID decided that because things were online, they would move to rural communities that are very close to a city like mine. Hamilton is close to us, and we're close to Niagara West.

Now there is a return to work, so these individuals now have to commute, and there's no way of even getting to stations within the city to maybe take the GO train downtown, and they have to have vehicles.

Mr. D'Angelo, I wonder if you have any idea how we could rectify that problem.

**Mr. Marco D'Angelo:** One thing that I think has been very good that the Ontario government has been doing—and that is in all parts of Ontario—is distribution of the Ontario gas tax and assigning some of that to cities that are quite small.

Also, community transit grants have been very helpful in establishing start-up services in smaller areas. Those have been helping to connect to the GO network and also to other local transit systems.

In other words, there are funding mechanisms that the Ontario government, for one, has been taking a leadership role in.

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis:** You also mentioned in your testimony that there are areas like Brampton that have an uptake in ridership of 115%, but you said that where workers haven't been recalled to downtown, there was a problem. What do you mean by “workers who haven't been recalled”?

**Mr. Marco D'Angelo:** There is a challenge. In Brampton, for example, you have an economy that's based on transporting goods and services and coordinating that across the country, and those jobs have grown and were maintained during the pandemic.

That's different from around Union Station, where you have a lot of bank towers, or office space in other large cities where hybrid models have taken place, so it's more of a Tuesday-to-Thursday week or fully remote. That's been detrimental to building the network.

• (1745)

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis:** Okay, I understand.

Mr. Accardi, what impact does the carbon tax have on private motorcoach operators? Did they have to raise their fares? What kinds of things did they do to compensate for this unforeseen expense?

**Mr. Vince Accardi:** In our industry, fares have gone up because costs have gone up.

As I said in my testimony, in very few cases do our operators have a subsidy model or a program that they can use to offset the costs of ridership, so they do need to pass that on to the riders. Anything that costs them additional funds—which could include policy changes, changes to equipment, gas taxes and others—gets passed on, because our operators are solely dependent on the fare box.

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis:** Do you agree with that, Mr. Uray?

**Mr. Firat Uray:** Yes. We agree. We have to pass it on in the ticket. Otherwise, we simply cannot survive in the business.

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis:** Have you been able to sufficiently compensate for that unforeseen expense?

**Mr. Firat Uray:** No, we haven't. COVID has had another role in that.

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis:** Mr. D'Angelo, would you comment?

**Mr. Marco D'Angelo:** Even for public transit systems as well, we have to renegotiate the price for diesel. We don't have an electric zero-emission fleet yet.

Going back to St. John's, Newfoundland, the amount that was negotiated between the mayor of St. John's and the province was very helpful, but a lot of that money was negated, because they have to rebid for diesel every Monday, for example. That's made it difficult to keep service running from an operating perspective.

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis:** I can't recall, but I believe it was Mr. Kanca who mentioned some issue with respect to supports for licensing requirements. That led me to think that perhaps there was a shortage of drivers and that the licensing requirements had something to do with it.

**Mr. Omer Kanca:** No. Sorry. It was more about the fact that we have to be in a lot of cities and towns, and every city and town that we service requires a licence. All those licensing requirements add up. They start at \$150 or \$250, but when you're serving 100 cities or maybe more, it does add up.

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis:** Would harmonizing it or recognizing some sort of global or universal type of licence, so that you don't have to have licensing in every single city, make sense?

**Mr. Omer Kanca:** That could certainly help a lot.

I just want to name a few of those fees and expenses. They don't appear at first glance, but when you are into it, they start appearing.

There's the IFTA requirement. You need to have special plates on your vehicles to do cross-border services. This is really a lot, considering you need to have this plate on all your vehicles. I don't want to go into too much detail about IFTA, but it was set up thinking that a trucker would be travelling from Ontario all the way to California, passing through many states, but in fact what we're doing is travelling through a few territories and provinces.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Kanca, and thank you, Dr. Lewis.

If there's no objection from committee members, I just want to ask a follow-up question.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Make it very short.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** It will be a very short question. Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

You mentioned, Mr. D'Angelo, electrification of the fleet. I have a three-pronged question. A short response would be appreciated.

First, does the technology exist to actually transition to an electric fleet? In terms of the buses that would be used by Greyhound, for example, for 50 passengers, do electric versions of those vehicles exist?

Second, would it be helpful for funding to be put in place at either the provincial or federal level to help support that transition?

Third, would that help offset some of the costs and make it more affordable for consumers?

**Mr. Marco D'Angelo:** With electrification, distance is always an issue. Battery life is definitely something to think about when going a long distance. However, I'm very happy to talk about the bus manufacturers, including New Flyer, which builds MCI, and Nova Bus, which builds Prevost. There is a lot of leadership on that front in the design aspect.

There's also ZETF, the fund already announced by the federal government, which will assist with the transition. Certainly it's something that is worth considering.

You have to remember as well, as you're doing your study, the manufacturers in Winnipeg that are building the MCI coaches. Imagine how few tour buses or coach buses were being sold during the pandemic and the impact that's had on the industry there, as well as Prevost in Quebec. Canada has leadership in the manufacturing area in North America. It's important to keep that in mind as well as you continue your study.

• (1750)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. D'Angelo.

Thanks, committee members, for your indulgence.

Next we go to Mr. Chahal for five minutes. The floor is yours.

**Mr. George Chahal (Calgary Skyview, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to everybody providing testimony today.

Mr. Johnson, I want to go back to you with regard to leadership and roles. I know that in 2018 there was a federal-provincial inter-city bus task force. Are you aware of the results of the work done on that task force and the collaboration provided between the federal government with the provinces? What was the result of that?

**Mr. Terence Johnson:** Actually, I'm not aware of any deliverable results of that task force. It is slightly before the time I became national president of Transport Action Canada. I was mostly working on advocacy in Ontario at that time. I am not aware of that task force having actually resulted in the federal government taking any concrete action to address the problems that exist.

**Mr. George Chahal:** Mr. D'Angelo or Mr. Accardi, would you have information on that? Was there a response from the provinces in looking to collaborate further to create better coordination and opportunities to work together in western Canada?

Are you aware of any of the provinces looking to do so?

**Mr. Marco D'Angelo:** It's been a challenge. We've worked hard to build relationships with Prairie governments on that. We've had a great deal of success with Alberta. They were meeting the federal government halfway on operating funds and then looking at expanding services. We hope that continues, and we appreciate the private sector work that's being done in Saskatchewan.

I think that there's more to do in connecting communities in Manitoba and safely connecting communities that are north of Winnipeg. That's also been cited by the Amalgamated Transit Union in the study that they did as well.

**Mr. Vince Accardi:** I'm aware that the provinces are actively looking at this and probably working with their neighbouring provinces, but I don't think that's going to get us a solution that will get Canadians across Canada.

**Mr. George Chahal:** I think British Columbia has come forward with some solutions, but there's nothing concrete on the Prairie provinces.

I'm wondering about Saskatchewan, with the STC completely vacating and the lack of government support there. Has that been a challenge in Saskatchewan particularly, trying to connect mostly rural communities?

**Mr. Firat Uray:** Yes. We tried to connect with the Saskatchewan government. We haven't had any success with them. That includes Manitoba and Alberta. They haven't had any connection, even, with us.

British Columbia has had some funding with us and they've worked with us. Other than British Columbia, we haven't had any provincial government approach us.

**Mr. George Chahal:** This is provincial jurisdiction and there's a lack of support from the provincial governments. I guess they've stepped out of providing any public support, other than the Province of British Columbia. That's a concern, because a lot of our Prairie provinces have rural communities and need better connectivity.

I know there was a pilot program in Alberta that would help support operators. Was your company a part of that pilot program, or did you have an opportunity to participate?

**Mr. Firat Uray:** No, we didn't. I think there were some rules saying our company wasn't fit for it.

**Mr. George Chahal:** Okay, thank you.

I want to go to what we've seen in the U.S. and some opportunities in the U.S. in rural communities. Are there any innovative solutions we've seen from the United States that we can learn from to help incorporate here in Canada?

Mr. D'Angelo or Mr. Accardi, would you have anything?



• (1755)

**Mr. Marco D'Angelo:** One of the things that's been tremendously helpful through the Federal Transit Administration is that in the year 2020 the FTA funds were renewed for five years for, I believe, about \$64 billion U.S., or something like that. Don't quote me; it's give or take. It does help to support the creation of transit.

States within the U.S. have regional transit authorities. They usually cover more than one municipality. It's very conducive to intercity transit simply by its nature. It's a bit of a different model.

**Mr. Vince Accardi:** The U.S. handled their pandemic support for the industry very differently as well. Some of that support helped to backstop some of the losses that private carriers would have had from lack of ridership.

**Mr. George Chahal:** That's in the same way that we provided support during the pandemic through funding directly to municipalities, or other funding sources as well.

**Mr. Vince Accardi:** Yes. Our industry was very happy and thankful for the support we received from the government. It's just that the U.S. handled it a little bit differently.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chahal.

Thank you, Mr. Accardi.

Next we have Mr. Strahl. Mr. Strahl, the floor is yours. You have five minutes.

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** Thank you very much.

To continue some of the discussion, Mr. Bachrach mentioned Greyhound's heyday. Not to date myself, but I think that probably would have been 25 years ago. I certainly recall—again, I'm speaking about my region—when the Abbotsford airport became a regional hub and welcomed WestJet 25 years ago. Many Canadians who previously used Greyhound because they didn't have another option are now using some of the discount airlines, such as Flair and Swoop, especially with fares being low right now.

Is there an opportunity for the motorcoach industry or intercity busing to not do what they used to do, which was take people from Vancouver to Calgary, but rather to get people to Prince George so that they can get on a plane and get to their final destination? Is there any vision for connectivity with small regional airports that carry the passengers that buses used to carry? It's now being done with a different mode of transport.

I'm asking whether there is interoperability—whether you're looking to coordinate your schedules with smaller regional airlines in order to get people to regional transit hubs, which are now usually, in this case, the airports.

I don't know if that is to Mr. Accardi or...

Another way to ask the question is this: Are any of you providing service to smaller regional airports?

**Mrs. Tracy MacPhee:** I would like to jump in here and state that we provide connectivity to Pearson Airport. We are trying to connect people throughout rural Ontario. We get them connected to GO Transit so that they can get to Pearson Airport. We are already doing that.

In terms of regional airports, we had conversations with different airports in our area. Many regional airports throughout rural Ontario have lost a lot of service, and that service hasn't come back. There might be only one flight a day, operating at a time when our one bus trip a day doesn't coincide with those flights. The regional airports are trying to set up their flight schedules to connect with larger airports like Toronto and Vancouver, in order to meet up during times that will give them further connections throughout the world.

It's a very difficult thing to try to set up. We have certainly tried with others.

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** I certainly appreciate that.

There was some talk too about the government or public sector having some way to allow for multiple different modes or companies to offer services, so that a passenger could book a ticket seamlessly and travel seamlessly. They have transfers, etc. Perhaps you could call it a one-stop shop for travel planning.

Obviously, there are multi-million-dollar companies that do this for other modes of transport. Is there no margin for them to include this option? Why wouldn't—I'll pick a name—Expedia be a better option for offering this service to travellers than a level of government trying to create the same level of expertise that already exists in the private space?

I don't know who would like to take a run at that. Perhaps Mr. Johnson would.

• (1800)

**Mr. Terence Johnson:** I'd love to take a run at that.

One thing that happened when the railways in the U.K. were privatized, and therefore fragmented, was the resurrection of a 19th-century concept called a "railway clearing house", which was a kind of non-profit co-operative among the carriers. It wasn't a heavy-handed government thing. It was through the industry's organization, but it was the glue that helped the industry stay together.

That's what I mean by creating a non-profit clearing house. If you have Expedia do it, they'll want 15%. You can ask any carrier you like whether it has 15% margins to give away. I can pretty much guess what the answer will be, because this is not a high-margin industry.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Johnson.

Thank you, Mr. Strahl.

Next we have Mr. Iacono.

[Translation]

Mr. Iacono, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here this afternoon, it's been very interesting.

Mr. D'Angelo, what demographic groups and communities will be most vulnerable if there is a decrease in intercity bus transport?

**Mr. Marco D'Angelo:** It's a bit difficult to hear the question in French in the room.

**The Chair:** Could you repeat the question, Mr. Iacono?

I'm going to ask them to increase the volume in the room.

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** I'll repeat the question a bit louder.

What demographic groups and communities will be most vulnerable if there is a decrease in intercity bus transport?

**Mr. Marco D'Angelo:** The elderly might be most affected. I'm very proud of Quebec today. The mayor of Montreal announced that beginning on July 1, 2023, they will be able to travel free of charge on the Société de transport de Montréal, the STM. This will greatly facilitate intercity travel because many people have to go through greater Montreal

There are also agencies like Exo, which provide service in the suburbs of greater Montreal and neighbouring areas.

[English]

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** I would like to add to your response that I've used Greyhound quite a bit. I remember that when I was using it, a lot of students were using it from Montreal to Ottawa to go to school, and a lot of public servants, believe it or not, were working in Ottawa—I was one of them—and living in Montreal and traveling back and forth every morning and every night. I think it affects the whole population. It's not just the old people, but everybody as a whole.

Mr. Johnson, since the withdrawal of Greyhound, have we seen new private sector operators emerge?

**Mr. Terence Johnson:** Absolutely, and you have one right here in the room with Rider Express. You have Onex Bus in southwestern Ontario as an example. You have a company called Book A Ride.

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** Have those new and private sector operators contacted the provinces? What's the feedback? What's the dialogue with the provinces?

You know, this is mainly a provincial jurisdiction, and yet we're hearing a lot that we want the federal government to intervene. Obviously there's always that question that we're damned if we do and we're damned if we don't. How do we find a balance?

Also, you know very well that when the federal government needs to get involved, it needs to receive a notice, a request from the provinces. Obviously with the bus routes, it's going to affect multiple provinces. It's not going to affect just one province in particular. How have these new carriers dealt with their provinces respectively?

• (1805)

**Mr. Terence Johnson:** Actually, Kasper Transportation in northern Ontario is an example of one that existed while regulations were still in place in Ontario. They went through the application process for regulated routes, whereas now Ontario is deregulated and it's a free-for-all, as I was mentioning earlier. I believe the western Prairie provinces are also quite deregulated.

As you heard Mr. Uray say, he gets very little contact from the provincial government. That now appears to be the same case in Ontario. What we see in Ontario is that operators were able to do Toronto and Ottawa, and then they weren't able to go to Montreal because they had to jump through hoops to go into Quebec. We actually went to the Quebec government last year saying, "Look, can you please allow operators from eastern Ontario to come into the Gare d'autocars in Montreal so that you're not effectively regulating Ontario?" As a matter of fact, that was the net effect of what was happening. The regulation ended up crossing the provincial border when it was just being done by the province.

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** If there continues to be a demand for intercity bus transportation, is it not reasonable to assume that the private sector will fill in this need? Why aren't there more actors involved?

**Mr. Terence Johnson:** It's partly because of the timing. A large number of newer operators have entered since the end of the pandemic. Some people were keeping the powder dry. Those who were already in the market, out of a sense of a responsibility to the communities they served, carried on, but there are a lot of routes that are not sustainable on their own.

We were asked earlier about the social contract. If you have five competing operators between Toronto and Ottawa, some of them are going to lose a lot of money, and certainly none of them are going to have money to spare to run a service up near north of Peterborough or wherever else you might want to have a service so that all Canadians are connected. The profit motive is not going to—

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Johnson. Unfortunately, we're going to have to end your remarks there.

[Translation]

Thank you very much, Mr. Iacono.

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you have the floor now for two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll begin with a question for Mr. Accardi.

There's a new policy in Quebec that will make it impossible at some point for public transit corporations to finance the acquisition of buses that are not electric.

To be sure, buses in the private sector are not funded by the government, but we are beginning to see bus electrification in the public sector. I would imagine that this transition will inevitably occur for private-sector buses in the intercity transportation sector.

I was in fact wondering about the extent to which your members or you yourself had begun to take steps in this direction. How much progress has occurred in this area? Do you see the transition occurring in the short, medium or long-term?

[English]

**Mr. Vince Accardi:** As Mr. D'Angelo pointed out, there is a fund that is helping some of our private operators offset the additional costs of electrification. Depending on the use of the vehicle, it has its spots. For example, on the east coast and the west coast, servicing crews are able to come in, pick up guests, take them on their tour, go back and plug the bus in overnight. It works. Right now, the challenge is with getting the power stations across Canada and on our major routes so that buses can charge along long distances.

The industry is moving towards this, but it's not without its challenges, especially coming out of a post-COVID environment when cash and access to liquidity are challenges for private operators. They're on it, and they're ready. Programs like that, for private operators who can access them, are going to be helpful in moving that needle forward.

[Translation]

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** Thank you.

I myself drive an electric vehicle, and I have found that there are some difficulties with that, but I also found that for a drive from the Montreal area to Ottawa, for example, it might be useful to look into a number of bus routes, even if they take several hours. Once at the destination, drivers only need to connect the vehicle for a few hours, and in the meantime take a break or go and eat a meal.

In any event, the person doing the driving will have to stop at some point. If the stops can be arranged to coincide with when you need to recharge the battery or when the driver needs a break, then that might make sense.

That's my own point of view. Of course you're the specialist, and I'm not. That's why I would like to hear what you have to say. Do you think this transition is about to happen?

• (1810)

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, Barsalou-Duval, You don't have enough time for the answer.

[English]

Next we have Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Bachrach, the floor is yours. You have two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Johnson, I'm curious if you've come across other countries in the world that have integrated national passenger bus services. Who should Canada look to as rail leaders in this space?

**Mr. Terence Johnson:** Mr. Bachrach, I will apologize for not having a very good answer for you. My organization did commission a research study over the summer to look at this very question. Maybe, in due course, we will be able to point to models of things that are working.

What I would say is what works very well south of the border is Amtrak's Thruway model. In this model, they have contracted or partnered to extend services to particular areas. They didn't make it

a public-sector operator, but they partnered well with the private sector. I think that could work well here.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** You mentioned earlier this idea of a clearing house to provide passengers with a one-stop shop for the patchwork of services available out there. This is being looked at in northern British Columbia right now to help passengers navigate a patchwork of public services.

Now we have various public services and we don't have that one-stop shop, but it feels to me like that's not the whole answer, because if what we have is a patchwork of disconnected private sector service providers, helping passengers see that on one website doesn't seem to really help them get where they need to go, or it's at least not the full picture. What role should the federal government play in filling out that picture and ensuring consistent pricing, accessibility, service levels and all those other pieces?

**Mr. Terence Johnson:** Thank you for that.

I think part of the problem at the moment is that the average wannabe passenger can't see that there are services where they want to go. A lot of people don't know that there's any bus service to replace Greyhound. Closing that information gap will help to make the whole thing a lot more sustainable. Knowing that you'll be able to connect into the ecosystem will make it more sustainable to create new routes.

The federal government can address, as we've said, the vehicle affordability question and the safe terminal and connection question. These are things the federal government can do that do not create a large subsidy to any one player but do help the industry to function really well.

Then you can see that there's a gap and think about how we can solve this gap. This an appropriate thing to work on with the municipalities and the province to make that a public service like BC Transit and all of those, but at the moment, I don't know that Transport Canada even knows where the gaps are.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Johnson.

Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

Next we have Mr. Muys. Mr. Muys, the floor is yours. You have five minutes.

**Mr. Dan Muys:** My question is for you, Mr. Kanca.

You started to talk about some of the fees, but then of course the time ran out. Here we have a private sector success story in filling a gap in transit, and you're being choked by various fees, and by red tape, no doubt, from the government. Maybe you can continue your answer in terms of some of those challenges that you're facing.

**Mr. Omer Kanca:** Yes, certainly. Thank you for the opportunity.

To start with, there are many of them. There is no time to list all of them here. One of them certainly would be the local municipalities' licensing fees. As you know, you need to have a business licence to do service in their city, but we are only there to pick up and drop off, which is not really a service for a full day.

Then there's the IRP, which I started talking about, which is a huge cost, as well as an IFTA, which is a special plate that you need to do the cross-border intercity bus service. It was set up with truckers in mind. Trucking companies travel across many cities and states across the U.S. and Canada. With us, that's not the case, but we still have the burden to pay that kind of cost.

• (1815)

**Mr. Dan Muys:** Do you have an estimate of what those costs would be on a monthly basis as a percentage of your cost structure, or maybe even how many passengers in an average month would be required, just to pay the fees alone?

**Mr. Firat Uray:** I will answer that question. It depends on how many buses are in your fleet and how many buses pass the different provinces. It changes monthly. It's up to \$50,000 or up to \$100,000 in cost.

**Mr. Omer Kanca:** To give another figure here, we know from experience that there are some private operators that stayed away because of those costs involved to provide services across provinces.

**Mr. Dan Muys:** Government fees are a disincentive to private sector solutions to the gap.

**Mr. Omer Kanca:** Certainly, yes.

**Mr. Dan Muys:** If I have time, I'll ask one more question.

We talked a little bit about this earlier and we had some examples from the United States. Are there examples or are there lessons we can learn from places like Australia? Canada is a big country with a big land mass and a sparse population, and maybe there are other countries that are similar. Obviously, we're not Europe. We're not even parts of the United States that are more densely populated.

Are there examples? No?

All right; no one's been to Australia.

My next question is for Rider Express. You talked about the fact that you filled in 50% of the gap left by Greyhound and STC. What has contributed to that success? Do you have different-sized buses? You're probably not running 50-passenger buses.

Is there on-demand service? Is it scheduling? What are the things that are contributing to making that successful?

**Mr. Firat Uray:** In 2017, we started with 15 passenger vans in Saskatchewan. Once Greyhound left western Canada, we started adding buses on our services.

Our success comes from the connections. We do connect the five provinces together. Partially, we are working with Ontario Northland. Passengers can travel from Vancouver to Toronto. We are connecting them in Winnipeg with the same location. Our success, I think, comes with the connections. In a short time, we expanded our service to many cities, and that brings us success in the area.

**Mr. Dan Muys:** Ms. MacPhee, is that similar with what's happening with Ontario Northland, in that you have been able to expand that over time or hope to continue to do so?

**Mrs. Tracy MacPhee:** We're working really hard to create the relationships at each end of our service, wherever we connect.

Part of the challenge with this is that if you're operating one service a day over the distances that we're travelling, each carrier has their own approach and business model for what they are trying to solve in their region and in their area.

When you're travelling over 2,000 kilometres and you're trying to do that in a one-day period, there are going to be some areas that you connect with that are in the middle of the night. If you're connecting with a carrier in the middle of the night, they may have a different operating schedule that completely disconnects. When you don't have that safe location to wait or you don't have that same terminal to go to, that's when problems are created. On either end of the province of Ontario and for us connecting in Winnipeg or in Ottawa, those are the issues that we're running into.

We're trying to make sure that all of services are at the same time, but that's very difficult to do because of the vast distance that we're covering.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. MacPhee. Thank you very much, Mr. Muys.

Finally for today, we have Ms. Koutrakis. Ms. Koutrakis, you have five minutes. The floor is yours.

• (1820)

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Over this past summer I was holding a series of round tables on supply chains. One of the themes that kept coming up whether it was thematic or regional in nature, was the importance of collecting data. To Mr. Johnson and Ms. MacPhee or any other witness who may have this information, are we doing enough on collecting data?

Before we can recommend, we need to have data and try to find out where the gaps are and how we can do better when we're designing programs. Do we know whether Statistics Canada is collecting data on intercity transportation, including bus service?

**Mrs. Tracy MacPhee:** I am not aware of Statistics Canada. What I do know is that as a provincial agency, we have to have all of our information together in terms of our ridership. We do submit that. I know that the Province of Ontario does ask the other carriers that operate within the province to share that information on ridership and have that data available on where there is bus service and where there is none.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** Do you feel that there's a need for a survey to assess the transportation needs of intercity travellers, especially postpandemic?

**Mrs. Tracy MacPhee:** I think it would certainly help. I think that the more we know, the better we can respond. I think one of the big things we're missing that we need to talk about in this conversation as well is that there are a lot of first nation communities that don't have access to bus service. A lot of first nation communities are located off the main highways. It's really important for us in terms of population and trying to get them into our service to consider what we can do to make sure that we're providing safe transportation for them as well.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** It's as if you read my mind. I was just thinking in solution mode.

My final question is this: Could a solution be to offer transportation subsidies to less fortunate individuals or communities who might effectively be stranded without intercity bus transportation? Do you recommend this? How would you see those forms of subsidy, if that's a solution?

**Mrs. Tracy MacPhee:** I absolutely see something like that. A lot of the first nations communities I have spoken with and communicated with wish they could have some type of funding to allow them to provide transportation out to a main highway or to a location where they can connect with our service.

We started a new service with the City of Elliot Lake. We don't provide the service. It's located off the highway, but they receive that community transportation fund grant from the Province of Ontario that was mentioned previously. They use that funding. They have a school bus that connects with our service. As the carrier, we provide the back-end support to do the ticketing. All the City of Elliot Lake has to do is make sure that they have transportation coming in and out of their community. They're on our ticketing system. They know when passengers are arriving.

That model has worked really well. If the federal government can support models like that, especially with first nations communities, it would be a really good thing.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** Mr. Chair, I don't know if I have any more time.

**The Chair:** You have a minute and a half left.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** It's Christmastime, and you're here with your asks. What would be your number one ask that we should be including in this study as a recommendation to tackle this very important issue and find solutions?

That's open to anyone.

**Mr. Terence Johnson:** If I could go first, it is that clearing house. As I said, a lot of the operators don't even have general transit specification feed data on their websites that people can access to find out what the services are. We've tried. I've spent hours and hours trying to work out who's running what and where. In some cases, it's really hard.

I don't know whether Northern Express's website is up to date for services up to northern Alberta. I can't even tell whether Frontier Bus Lines is still running to Yellowknife. I don't know. I've tried to figure it out.

It's getting the data, as you were asking earlier. Does anybody collect the data? It's been very hard.

**The Chair:** That is it, Ms. Koutrakis. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Johnson.

On behalf of the entire committee, I want to express our gratitude to all of our witnesses for appearing today and for sharing their testimony with us.

For those appearing and joining us online, I would ask you to kindly log off now.

I turn to colleagues for some housekeeping that shouldn't take more than two minutes.

As you know, we have to approve the budget for this study on intercity bus transportation, as well as the proposed draft budgets for the possibility of us visiting the ports, which we were not able to do in the fall. Obviously whatever is approved here still needs to be approved by the liaison committee and the House, but this is at least getting the first step under way.

Do I have any objections to approving these two budgets?

• (1825)

**Mr. Dan Muys:** Which? There were two versions.

**The Chair:** There are two versions of the budget. There's one with a visit to Seattle and one without. Both of those are being approved today, which we would submit—

**Mr. Dan Muys:** Okay. We'll submit those two.... I see what you mean. I get it.

**The Chair:** Do you want to pick which one?

Okay. We need to pick which one.

Why don't we go forward? My proposal is we do not include Seattle, as much as everybody would like to go, but it's up to the will of the committee.

Go ahead, Mr. Strahl.

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** I saw two nights in Seattle. I would rather keep this within a sitting week if we're going that way, and I think the only way we can do that is if we bump Seattle.

I would agree with you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Strahl.

I would also like to note that it adds substantial cost to the trip. I'm seeing some nodding heads, so we will move forward, if there's no objection, with the approval of the budget that excludes Seattle from the tour.

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** Then we'll go to Singapore.

**The Chair:** Fantastic. Mr. Strahl would like to go to Singapore. That's duly noted.

All jokes aside, colleagues, is there any objection to approving the budget as stated for the intercity bus study as well as the budget for the port visits?

Seeing no objections, the budgets carry.

Have a great evening, everyone, and a good weekend. The meeting is adjourned.

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