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• (1630)

[Translation]

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

Welcome to meeting No. 43 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]

Appearing before us by video conference today as witnesses, we have Dr. Jacob Alhassan, assistant professor, department of community health and epidemiology, college of medicine, University of Saskatchewan, and Dr. Cindy Hanson, professor, department of sociology and social studies, University of Regina. They are appearing as individuals.

Joining us by video conference, we also have, from Coach Atlantic Maritime Bus, Michael Cassidy, owner; from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, we have Matt Gemmel, director, policy and research; and from Kasper Transportation, we have Kasper Wabinski, president.

I'd like to take this opportunity to inform members that all of today's video conference witness participants have completed the necessary audiovisual checks.

Once again, I'll look over to our esteemed translators to get the thumbs-up and make sure everything is good on their end.

We will now begin the opening remarks with Dr. Jacob Alhassan for five minutes.

Sir, the floor is yours.

Dr. Jacob Alhassan (Assistant Professor, Department of Community Health and Epidemiology, College of Medicine, University of Saskatchewan, As an Individual): Thank you.

Let me start by acknowledging that I'm joining you today from Saskatoon, on Treaty 6 territory, the traditional homeland of the Métis. I pay my respects to the first nations and Métis ancestors of this land.

Over the past years, I've had the opportunity to conduct research on how the absence of intercity public transportation affects marginalized communities. Based on my findings, I believe that Canada needs a national public transportation system.

First, public transportation promotes access to opportunities and services, and this ultimately improves population health. Access to safe, reliable and inclusive intercity public transportation is connected to road traffic accidents, health care and other outcomes. Countries with well-funded bus systems have lower accident rates because buses are less prone to accidents than private vehicles. For example, comparisons with other OECD countries reveal that Canada has higher traffic fatality rates than the OECD average, and this is likely because there are few public transport options. For this reason, people rely on private vehicles, which have a much higher likelihood of being involved in collisions than buses.

Additionally, access to safe and reliable bus travel reduces transport poverty and facilitates access to economic and other opportunities. Whether or not people can access health care, groceries and other services depends on the availability of consistent, reliable and safe public transportation.

Public transportation is also much better for the environment, because while a bus may carry, say, 50 people from one city to another, the absence of a bus means 50 cars on the road, or perhaps 25 if people are driving in pairs.

Although the absence of public transportation negatively affects all people, these impacts are never felt equally, but disproportionately affect seniors, indigenous communities, women, people with disabilities, youth and other vulnerable and marginalized populations. In Canada, these realities have been compounded and acutely felt by many following the loss of the Greyhound bus company.

I want to share a story about how the loss of a public intercity bus system in Saskatchewan caused untold suffering among the most marginalized.

In 2017, the Saskatchewan Transportation Company, or STC, a 70-year-old bus service, was shut down by our provincial government as part of an austerity budget. At the time of the closure, the STC had a fleet of 41 buses connecting about 253 communities and travelling 2.8 million miles per year. The closure of STC without any research evidence, ostensibly to save \$85 million, provides an important case study to understand what happens when we lose intercity public transportation.

The STC had relied on a balance scorecard system, providing its services not for profit but to facilitate access to key services for some of the most vulnerable people in the province. For example, patients travelling for physician-prescribed treatments could obtain a medical pass for \$54, and this enabled unlimited travel on a specified travel corridor for 30 days. To put things in context, the STC's annual operation grant of \$14.2 million meant that the buses then cost only about \$14 per person to run.

Saskatchewan's health system relied on the buses to transport vaccines and equipment, and STC's closure left it stranded. Many health workers had to unhappily inform patients that their medications were unavailable because there was no bus to transport these medications.

Additionally, the loss of the bus led to isolation and a disproportionate driving burden, often borne by middle-aged women, who assumed the role of caregivers for ailing relatives.

I developed the concept of the web of dispossession to highlight this complexity. Lack of public transportation affects all of us, even if we do not realize it.

There are so many stories I could share about how the absence of a public bus system affects people, and I want to share the story of someone I interviewed three years ago.

Louise was a 60-year-old indigenous woman from Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan. She's a grandmother who has worked in indigenous social work. Louise suffers from paralysis, and at the beginning of our interview she asked me if I knew what it was like to be paralyzed. Although it was a simple question, it had never crossed my mind.

Because Louise needed to attend regular treatments for cancer and faced several challenges doing this, she used a wheelchair, which came at a significant cost.

Given the unpredictability of the weather, she described many situations in which she would have preferred a public bus. She recounted one example of being stuck in a blizzard, and this is a quote from her:

I had a catheter. Then by standing on the side of the road because of the blizzard, the motor filled up with snow and wouldn't stay running because it had so much snow in it. This was not a predicted blizzard, that's the thing that you deal with. It could be nice on this side of the valley, but the other side of the valley, when you're driving, it could be horrible. That's exactly what happened. I had to wait and get rescued. Now, who needs that when they're sick? It was so cold in that car that there were ice crystals forming in my urine bag.

Stories like this highlight the importance of creating a national public transportation system to ensure that people can access needed services without such profound loss of human dignity.

• (1635)

In many ways, our current status quo is exclusionary and problematic. In a country like Canada, where it is widely believed that the health system is robust and health care is free at the point of use, there are many among us who cannot exercise their right to health. No matter how well we improve health services, people need to be able to get to these services for them to make a difference.

Canada needs a national public transportation system guided by human rights principles, equity and inclusion, rather than profit or typical cost-benefit analyses. We need a national public transportation system to ensure access to health care and other services, and to reduce the vulnerability of key subpopulations.

Saskatchewan's experience provides a morbid cautionary tale—

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Alhassan. Unfortunately, I'm going to have to cut your opening remarks off there.

Next we have Dr. Hanson. The floor is yours. You have five minutes for your introductory remarks.

Dr. Cindy Hanson (Professor, Department of Sociology and Social Studies, University of Regina, As an Individual): Thank you for inviting me to present.

I want to start by acknowledging the indigenous territory, Treaty 6 and homeland of the Métis, where I am situated today.

I've been a public transportation user and researcher, and I'm currently residing in Saskatchewan in a community with no access to public transportation since the shuttering of STC. I was asked by this committee to speak about intercity transportation.

I'd like to start by saying it's important that we consider intercity transportation as beyond cities—that is, inter-regional or intercommunity—because if we don't do this, there will be a loss in citizen's voices from people living in rural and remote locations, which is some 20% to 30% of the population, depending on where you live. Transportation systems need to be inclusive and citizen-led.

What do I mean by this?

When public systems are replaced by private ones, citizens are replaced by “consumers”. I'm concerned that a policy focus on urban centres and private transportation speaks to a loss of citizen voices and participation. The absence of a framing policy around all citizens creates a risk that some—i.e. citizens in rural areas, the elderly, indigenous, those with mobility issues, etc.—become second-class citizens.

This is not how Canada was built. Our communities are interconnected. The rural supports the urban and the urban supports the rural. That's how Canada was structured. Therefore, the starting point needs to be more than intercity.

Secondly, in developing transportation policy, Canada needs to consider not only rural and remote and how transportation to and from these areas is structured and sustained, but also how populations are not homogenous.

There are two examples of this. One is the The Highway of Tears in northern British Columbia. It is a location that until recently was not serviced by public transportation and is an area of a high number of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. Another example is citizens with mobility issues.

The Highway of Tears was notorious, particularly for indigenous women hitchhiking, because no bus service existed until recently. As someone now living north of Prince Albert, I'm grossly aware of how northern Saskatchewan is quietly on its way to becoming another highway of tears. Call for justice 4.8 in the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls report as well as calls for safe resource allocation in the TRC report both speak to the need to address these.

The second class of citizens without access to transportation is people with mobility issues, like my friend Terri Sleeva. Terri is in a wheelchair and has not had bus access since the end of STC. Without access, she is part of a "mobility underclass", and her transportation disadvantage limits her ability to work, to access basic services and to contribute to society. It took Terri two years of fighting a legal case with Transport Canada until she was finally awarded access on a private carrier in Saskatchewan.

Lack of transportation in these examples and more means a lack of safety and a lack of participation in society. Transportation needs to be about more than those who can pay. It has to ensure that we have democratic decision-making, equitable outcomes, opportunities and community benefits. This includes access to health care before, after and during a pandemic.

Mobility shapes how we live our lives. If, for example, citizens in the city have access to subsidies on public transit of up to 60%, why can't the same rights exist for people in rural and remote locations of Canada?

The removal of Greyhound demonstrates that transportation needs to be public and not designed on economics only. Greyhound stopped operating because it was no longer profitable for it to do so. Social, health, environmental and other factors need to be considered in the policy. They can be designed, monitored and evaluated with a public lens to equality, safety and accessibility.

An example of this would be to look at the STC scorecard. When STC was shuttered, the public was told that private industry would take over. That hasn't happened. Only one still operates in Saskatchewan, and only on the routes that are profitable. Although a special interest group might step forward to meet the needs of people in the community, that only creates gaps for people who aren't part of that special needs group.

Mobility rights are human rights. Canada signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, but with current barriers to movement, these freedoms cannot be realized.

• (1640)

Finally, I conclude with key recommendations from our study, "Here Today, Gone Tomorrow". These include further research, community planning on public transportation, mobility with attention to diversity of users and vulnerable groups and looking at factors beyond economic indicators.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Hanson.

Next we have Mr. Cassidy.

Mr. Cassidy the floor is yours. You have five minutes.

Mr. Michael Cassidy (Owner, Coach Atlantic Maritime Bus):
Thank you.

Intercity busing is a very low-margin, highly capital-intensive industry with many well-documented financial challenges.

In 2012, Orléans Express tells the maritime region that it has to surrender its motor carrier rights due to losing two million dollars a year. In 2014, Orléans tells the Quebec government that it's losing \$3.5 million a year risking low-revenue routes in the province of Quebec. In 2018, Greyhound pulls out of what they call the unprofitable west. In 2020-2021, COVID did its best to halt this industry. In 2021, Greyhound ceases operations in Canada and sells their U.S.A. operations. Yes, this industry needs a model.

We have been petitioning for a model for the past four years. We have presented this model to standing committees, round tables, rural caucus, Atlantic caucus, government officials and policy advisers, and we met with our Minister of Transport when he was in Halifax in March of this year. It is a model that is based on the following.

It has to be collaborative with nothing to do with jurisdiction.

Rural-urban connectivity has to be a priority. We have to acknowledge that public transit on provincial highways is no different from public transit on municipal streets.

Ticket pricing must be affordable and service must be accessible. We have to acknowledge that for-profit carriers have been the backbone of this industry.

The ask in this business model going forward is very straightforward: For the next generation of infrastructure funding, we are suggesting that intercity busing should be identified as an eligible project, and for-profit carriers should be identified as eligible recipients in future capital infrastructure funding.

Collaboration versus jurisdiction is very important. When you try to present this model, you have to make sure that the provinces are onside. This year in April, we wrote the three maritime provinces. We thanked them for their support for Maritime Bus during COVID but, more importantly, we said that a capital infrastructure program helps lower the acquisition costs of buses. It would help cash flow, creating a sustainable operating model and alleviating many potential requests for annual operating subsidies.

We gave them an example: If 25 buses for a line run between cities were purchased for the maritime provinces with a cost-sharing of \$8 million from a federal program, \$6 million, or 30%, from the provinces of the Maritimes and 30% from Maritime Bus, or \$6 million, at \$8-million, \$6-million and \$6-million contributions, there would be new buses fully accessible within our maritime region.

I am very pleased to make mention here this evening that the three maritime provinces, with Newfoundland and Labrador joining them in July of this year, wrote to the Minister of Transport and the Minister of Infrastructure to suggest that they can confirm that we are interested in reviewing any merit-based applications for the support of intercity buses. The four provinces said it was an important service that provides considerable value to Atlantic Canadians. Our hope is that our region's intercity busing will continue to operate.

In closing, we have intercity buses identified as a very valuable and a very important service. We have a solution. We have collaboration. Now we need policy changes.

People ask us at Maritime Bus, "Why do you do it?"

We answer, "It's the right thing to do."

• (1645)

I hope, going forward, that this committee agrees it is the right thing to do.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Cassidy.

Next we have Mr. Gemmel.

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

• (1650)

Mr. Matt Gemmel (Director, Policy and Research, Federation of Canadian Municipalities): Great. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good evening to all of the members of the standing committee.

I'm calling in today from FCM's offices in the city of Ottawa. As FCM moves forward with our commitment to reconciliation, we acknowledge that our head offices are located on the unceded surrendered territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin nation, whose presence here reaches back to time immemorial.

I'm very pleased to be here on behalf of FCM's more than 2,000-member municipal governments from coast to coast to coast. Intercity passenger bus service is a critical issue for municipali-

ties in all regions of the country, and so I want to start by thanking the committee for choosing to study this important topic.

There is no doubt that providing reliable, affordable and effective passenger bus service in a nation as vast as ours is a challenge, and we've heard that already tonight. The loss of Greyhound routes was a terrible blow for Canadians in rural regions, particularly those in areas where transportation options were already limited. It follows similar announcements over the past decade impacting Acadian Bus Lines and, as we already heard tonight, the STC—Saskatchewan Transportation Company—on the Prairies.

This marks a concerning trend. We're not going in the right direction. These challenges aren't new, and yet we still lack a coordinated approach to passenger bus service in this country. FCM's sincere hope is that this study is a catalyst for concrete action by the federal government in partnership with provinces, territories, municipalities and indigenous governments.

As the committee has already heard in the course of its study, passenger bus service is a critical element of an equitable and sustainable national transportation system. It's not only vital for economic development—especially in a rural context—but it's also a key contributor to public safety and community well-being. There's a direct link between the lack of affordable and safe transportation options in certain regions and violence against indigenous women, girls and the two-spirit and LGBTQ+ communities. As we've already heard tonight, the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls recommended improved rural and remote transportation options for exactly this reason.

[*Translation*]

Intercity bus services are also essential to achieving a zero-emission transport system.

Across the country, emissions from the transportation sector are on the rise. Municipalities and the federal government have chosen to invest in urban public transport as a priority. This partnership enables cities and communities to develop transportation networks that will enable these communities to become carbon neutral by 2050.

[*English*]

As we look at greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector, we must not forget intercommunity travel. Canadians need affordable public transit options, be those bus or train, between communities to reduce the number of single-passenger vehicles on our highways even as we shift to electric vehicles and low-carbon fuels.

For municipal leaders, the question of how to move Canadians safely and reliably between communities has only grown in urgency. At our 2021 annual conference, shortly after the announcement that Greyhound would be reducing service in the Canadian market, municipal delegates voted to adopt a resolution calling for urgent federal support for intercommunity passenger bus service.

The resolution calls on the federal government to take leadership on this issue by identifying a lead federal department—most likely Transport Canada—and working with the provinces and territories to develop and implement a long-term funding model for passenger bus services for all regions of the country.

The federal government's mandate set out in the Canada Transportation Act is to contribute to the development of a competitive, economical and efficient national transportation system, and it's in that spirit that FCM's members adopted the resolution last year. The federal government has a critical role to play in terms of coordinating and funding this essential public service.

One of the key messages that I want to leave with you today—and that I'm hoping we can discuss more in the Q and A—is that we aren't starting here from scratch. We have some of the elements of a comprehensive national system already in place, and we've heard about some of that already tonight. There are regions of the country that are covered by passenger rail, and the federal government is rightly looking to expand and improve rail service in the Toronto-Quebec City corridor. Over time, passenger rail service could be added elsewhere in the country as well, starting with existing underutilized short-line infrastructure.

We have a long history in this country of publicly run or publicly subsidized passenger bus companies at the provincial and regional level. We've heard some examples of those tonight. As the committee heard last week, we're seeing more private and non-profit carriers entering the market since Greyhound's departure—on certain routes and in certain regions of the country—and these can be supported to expand further.

• (1655)

Lastly, the federal government already has funding programs for public transit in place, notably the rural transit solutions fund that was announced in 2021. There's a very strong existing federal-municipal partnership on public transit, and we can build on that. I would be happy to speak more about that during the Q and A.

FCM is calling on the federal government to build on these existing elements and work with provincial, territorial, municipal and indigenous governments to create a national approach that includes a sustainable funding model in partnership with provinces and territories. Such a plan should be developed in consultation with municipalities to ensure it reflects local realities as much as possible. The federal government should work to ensure that any strategy to address gaps in service avoids a one-size-fits-all approach.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Gemmel. Unfortunately, there's no time remaining.

Next and finally for introductory remarks, we have Mr. Wabinski.

The floor is yours. You have five minutes.

Mr. Kasper Wabinski (President, Kasper Transportation): Hello, everyone.

We are based in Thunder Bay, Ontario. We operate scheduled routes from Winnipeg to the west, Sioux Lookout and Longlac to the north, and as far east as White River.

We operate 16 buses on four daily routes, delivering parcels and providing critical essential charter services and scheduled service.

To give a perspective of—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Wabinski. We're going to do a sound check here. You're coming in quite light. We want to make sure that all members, including our translators, can hear you.

If you can get your mike closer to your mouth, please, that might be helpful. We will give that a try.

Mr. Kasper Wabinski: How about this? Is that better?

The Chair: All right, Mr. Wabinski. We will troubleshoot here.

We're going to suspend the meeting for two minutes, Mr. Wabinski, so the sound technicians here can call you and work out the issue. We just want to make sure that all of the translators can hear you and that the members can hear your testimony.

The meeting will be suspended for two minutes. I ask for the patience of all witnesses joining us by video conference. Thank you.

• (1655)

(Pause)

• (1700)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

Mr. Wabinski, would you please restart your remarks? Thank you very much for your patience.

The floor is yours.

Mr. Kasper Wabinski: Thank you for that.

Hello, everyone.

We are based in Thunder Bay, Ontario. We operate scheduled routes from Winnipeg to the west, Sioux Lookout and Longlac to the north, and as far east as White River. We operate 16 buses on four daily routes, delivering parcels, providing critical essential charters and, most importantly, scheduled services. To give a perspective of the area we serve, we travel 4,000 to 5,000 kilometres per day.

I will make a strong opening statement. Today's intercity bus network is a national embarrassment. The biggest problem with intercity busing in our country is that we have a handful of operators that service limited regions of the country in an inconsistent, localized approach. Half of the provinces have proven over and over again that they have little interest in this file. There's no leadership, and furthermore, Ontario has a major conflict of interest, with potential concerns for violations of the federal Competition Act.

Today, operators are acting of their own accord, doing what is best for their companies. That is the result of eliminating provincial highway transportation boards, and it stands as proof of provincial priorities. Without a vision, a plan and guidance, we will never see a coherent trans-Canada bus route. We cannot ever allow again one company to hold our country hostage by monopolizing Canada, as a few entrants are working towards doing. It needs to be a coalition of like-minded operators working to achieve a federal vision. Far too often intercity busing is used by our provinces as a political bargaining chip. Besides the maritime provinces, there is little to no private-provincial co-operation in achieving a form of sustainable busing.

Today, many of us plan or compete for market share in busy corridors like Toronto to Ottawa. Open markets focus financial resources on the big busy centres where there is volume and more money to be made. That approach does not work in the intercity bus sector.

I ask the committee members to review the Coast to Coast Bus Coalition proposal. We signed a pledge to interline together nationally and work together with the federal government in creating a sustainable national bus network. We outline an industry-driven private-public solution.

I believe we need a national highway intercity transportation board and a national essential bus transportation act to lead us into the future. I believe that the federal government is responsible for connecting Canada by bus, and in my view, that should be one of the key mandates of Infrastructure Canada. The federal government can and should include private coach operators in transit and rural transit funding. There's no reason that private operators like us should be excluded from the fund while municipalities can apply. The rural transit stream is not meant to solve the intercity rural transportation issues in its current form. This is because in area like northern Ontario, small townships and municipalities either don't have the capacity or don't make it a priority to improve transportation between them, and if the province doesn't take leadership, the entire region is left with inadequate services and disconnected from the rest of Canada.

The federal government can introduce subsidies for private motorcoach operators to help support the cross-provincial development of routes. For example, the U.S. government's essential air service program gave \$350 million largely to the smallest airlines in 2021 in the lower 48 states serving remote cities. Why not have a similar essential bus service program working on a similar concept, but geared towards intercity busing? The federal government can use direct funding to fund private motorcoach operators like tax incentives, tax rebates on fuel or more direct project grants to correct various connectivity shortcomings.

We are the most basic backbone of our intercity infrastructure. Where there is political will, solutions will be implemented. Intercity busing crosses provincial boundaries, and that should make it a federal matter, just like trains, airplanes and ships.

Only federal oversight and a federal plan will reconnect Canada. I ask our government to take responsibility for the transportation file and make it a federal mandate again.

Thank you.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Wabinski.

To begin our line of questioning today, we have Mr. Lewis.

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

Mr. Chris Lewis (Essex, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses this evening. I certainly appreciate your testimony.

I have quite a few questions, but I would start by saying, in fairness to the witnesses, that my riding of Essex is down by Windsor, next to the busiest international border crossing in North America.

I suppose, to start off, Mr. Chair, this study could have simply been called "intercity transport by bus in Canada and the United States", because for an area like Windsor, there's a lot of cross-border travel. Doctors and nurses go across on our transport system. I realize that's not what the study is studying, but I had to bring that up, because even for something as silly as a football game.... The Detroit Lions, by the way, just lost their last one, but won three in a row.

There's something called the Tunnel Bus, or the "special bus", that many of our patrons jumped on to go to a Detroit Lions game, a Red Wings game or a Detroit Tigers game. After two and a half years of COVID, it just opened up in the middle of November. It truly affects people's lives.

First and foremost, Mr. Cassidy, from Coach Atlantic Maritime Bus, I really respect you, sir, especially for the fact that you said that although the industry is really tough, it's the right thing to do. Those are some pretty powerful words in the face of an industry that's, quite frankly, been relatively walked past.

Mr. Cassidy, this is to you first, sir, and then I'll be following up with the same question to Mr. Wabinski. Would it be fair to say that a lot of the struggles are due to the labour shortages? It's not only our drivers, but our mechanics.

Mr. Cassidy, this it to you first, please, sir.

Mr. Michael Cassidy: Thank you, Mr. Lewis.

Definitely not. There has never been a shortage during the history we've been involved with in the line run or intercity busing. Tomorrow we celebrate our 10th anniversary here in the Maritimes after OrLéans surrendered their motor carrier rights in 2012, and our challenges have never been mechanics and/or drivers.

• (1710)

Mr. Chris Lewis: Thank you, sir.

Go ahead, Mr. Wabinski, sir.

Mr. Kasper Wabinski: I would echo what Michael Cassidy has said. I agree with that statement for us as well.

Mr. Chris Lewis: Okay. Thank you.

That's mind-boggling, because you're probably the only folks I've met with in the last year and a half who are not screaming for labour. In my capacity as shadow minister for labour, that's good news. We always need a good-news story.

Through you, Mr. Chair, to Ms. Hanson, you spoke about private versus public transportation. The message is received. However, our public transit system, going back to the example of Windsor-Detroit, in that it was shut down....

Could you expand a bit on that? If I understood you correctly, what you said was that if we don't keep it public, we're in trouble on the private side.

Could you please expand somewhat on that?

Dr. Cindy Hanson: Sure.

I think there are lots of directions where that can go, but let me start by saying that the motive of private carriers is profit. If the route is not profitable, why would they continue having services on that route?

A case in point to this is in Saskatchewan, where the government said private carriers would take over when STC was shuttered. Out of, I believe, 10 private companies that came forward, there's one that still exists, and it operates in three cities in the province, because that's where it's profitable.

We have to start looking at public transportation as beyond the economic indicators of profitability on routes. We need to look at it.... There are so many other ways it could be profitable. I think Kasper alluded to charter services and those kinds of things.

There's also what's called a social audit. This is where I think the federal government needs to do more study. We need to know the actual costs of operating or having areas of provinces that are not being serviced by buses. What is the actual cost in missed medical appointments and in people being unable to access, for example, vaccines—if that's their choice—for COVID?

It limits what people can do. In the case of mobility and with my example of Terri being unable to be a citizen in Canada because she had no mobility, it took Transport Canada two years to resolve her issue, when in fact the CEO of the Canadian Transportation Agency said in a study—

Mr. Chris Lewis: Finish up very quickly, please, Ms. Hanson.

Dr. Cindy Hanson: It said, "Accessibility is a fundamental human right and we are committed to ensuring that this right is realized in practice." A successful transportation—

Mr. Chris Lewis: Thank you.

I'm sorry, Ma'am. I have only 30 seconds left.

Very quickly through you, Mr. Chair, to Mr. Gemmel with the FCM, I am a little bit concerned about tourism. We're just starting to get going here again and we have to talk about tourism.

I have only about 10 seconds. Can you tell me what FCM's thoughts and feelings are and what can we do to enhance our tourism sector?

Mr. Matt Gemmel: In 10 seconds, one thing that FCM is focused on is the future of federal infrastructure programming. We've heard from members that infrastructure is part of rebuilding, especially downtown in larger urban centres post pandemic, to support attractions and to help bring tourists back.

I will say, in the context of this study—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Gemmel. I'm going to have to end it there and turn it over to our next line of questions, which will be led by Mr. Chahal.

The floor is yours. You have six minutes.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for your testimony today.

I'm going to start with Dr. Alhassan and then go with Dr. Hanson afterwards.

The federal government offered to work with provinces to restore some routes after Greyhound withdrew from western Canada. To your knowledge, how did the Government of Saskatchewan respond to this offer?

Dr. Alhassan, could you go first?

• (1715)

Dr. Jacob Alhassan: Thank you very much.

That's a very good question. In the case of Saskatchewan, they actually rejected the federal government's offer of financial support in the context of the loss of the Saskatchewan Transportation Company.

In many ways, it was probably because the closure of the STC was likely connected to ideological reasons. It's not entirely clear why a government would refuse to take money to ensure that a company could run when the company was shut down for not making money.

We've written some of this stuff up and published it in academic journals. Ideological considerations are probably the most logical explanation to make sense of such a decision by our government in response to the federal government.

Mr. George Chahal: Thank you for that. It's sad to hear that this is why they're making decisions.

Dr. Hanson, would you like to comment as well?

Dr. Cindy Hanson: I think that just speaks to the need for a nationally led transportation system and one that engages a broad base of citizens across the country.

Canada doesn't have a lot of transportation studies. A lot of studies have been done internationally. Transport Canada and Infrastructure Canada did fund some SSHRC work that we were privileged to participate in. However, I think there is room for a lot more work in terms of what the cost is of not having a national transportation system.

Mr. George Chahal: Very good. Thank you.

I'm going to go back to Dr. Alhassan.

The withdrawal of Greyhound occurred shortly after the Government of Saskatchewan closed the Saskatchewan Transportation Company. Is that correct?

Dr. Jacob Alhassan: That's right. It was not very long after. STC was shut down in May of 2017 and by 2018, Greyhound withdrew from most of western Canada.

Mr. George Chahal: Okay. I think that's a very important point there.

I want to stay with you, and then I'll go to Dr. Hanson afterwards.

Which communities were most affected in Saskatchewan by the closure and by Greyhound leaving?

Dr. Jacob Alhassan: It's hard for me to respond for Greyhound, but I would respond more for the STC, which was serving Saskatchewan residents before Greyhound withdrew.

At the time the STC was operating, it was serving 253 communities. That's a big number, compared to what Dr. Hanson was saying about three communities now being serviced by the private carriers. It was a well-connected system.

I think in many cases the two are related—the STC closure and the Greyhound closure—partly because they fed each other. If a person knows that they can travel out of Saskatchewan and join another bus that is connected to Greyhound and go to Manitoba or some other place, then the two are connected. If STC is lost because of whatever reason and Greyhound can no longer receive the passengers they would have received through the STC, then it affects Greyhound's ability to operate as well. These things are interconnected in some ways.

We've moved from 253 communities to three communities, so that gives you a sense of the level of change we are talking about.

Mr. George Chahal: Dr. Hanson, can you comment on which communities were most affected in the province of Saskatchewan?

Dr. Cindy Hanson: Ditto to what Dr. Alhassan is saying, but what this also illustrates is that intercommunity, intercity and inter-regional aspects—all of these aspects of a transportation system—are interconnected, and we can't address one without addressing the other ones.

When you asked me what's been affected, I think about my last ride to my home community, which is north of Prince Albert, and I see the person trying to ride the bicycle with a sign on the back that says, please give me a ride.

Mr. George Chahal: Thank you.

Dr. Alhassan, you commented in your opening on what the savings would be for the cut of \$85 million in the austerity budget. If you had to restore that service again today, what would that cost look like? Do you have an estimate?

Dr. Jacob Alhassan: No, unfortunately I don't have an estimate, but I know it would be far more than what it was assumed it would save. The STC's budget per year was not above \$20 million. This \$85 million was supposed to be the savings for a five-year period.

In terms of the actual cost of restarting, the buses have been sold off. We're talking about 41 buses that have been sold off. The people no longer work for the STC. It's much harder to maintain something like that than to restart it, so it will be a little bit more costly, but of course, as a couple of people have mentioned, we also have to think about the cost of the status quo. The current situation we have is far more costly even than the \$85 million or the cost of restarting. The cost of people not going to hospitals and the cost of people—

• (1720)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Alhassan, and thank you, Mr. Chahal.

[*Translation*]

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

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

I would like to begin by thanking the witnesses who are before us today to talk about the reality of intermunicipal bus transportation.

I must admit that I have learned a lot from listening to your testimony. Coming from Quebec, I must say that I don't really know the reality of western Canada. In any case, I can see how traumatic the loss of Greyhound must have been, since everyone, witness after witness, has spoken about it.

In Quebec, I would say we are less familiar with this. There are intercity transportation services that were hard hit during the pandemic, but I couldn't say that there was as big a crisis as what we saw in the west, where there were serial closures, although there were significant financial difficulties experienced by Quebec carriers.

Mr. Cassidy, in your intervention, you said that the private sector could be made eligible for certain forms of funding to provide intercity transportation services, given that it is hardly profitable. I've had the opportunity to meet with several bus operators in Quebec. They said that what they found difficult during the pandemic was not having help paying for their buses. Even though there were measures to help with labour and rent, the buses did not pay for themselves, even if they were immobilized and there was no one on board.

In this context, it would make sense to implement a program that would revive the bus industry and compensate for the difficulties experienced in the past by operators such as yourself. However, I know that we also have a shared commitment to transition to clean energy, to achieve carbon neutrality and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

If a program aimed at the electrification of buses, for example, were to be put in place, would you see some value in it?

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cassidy: Thank you very much.

Electrification will be coming to the bus industry in the future, but when we think of electrification on a motorcoach, we have to think of range and we have to think of battery storage. The battery storage is underneath our bus, where you usually see suitcases or parcels when it comes to the line-run business.

An electric motorcoach would not be practical when you cannot travel the kilometres that we do on a daily basis for range and we literally have no storage underneath our bus. Again, passengers and parcels have to use that storage.

The other thing is that today we could say that a brand new diesel bus is approximately \$725,000. You might be looking at \$1.2 million for an electric motorcoach. Pricing alone is another contributing factor that would suggest that electric motorcoaches for line runs are not practical today. However, I could turn that around in terms of our public transit operation in greater Charlottetown. I could tell you that electrification for public transit on municipal streets is practical. There is government funding to help on the pricing, and you certainly have your range, but it's the public transit infrastructure fund that is driving electrification at the municipal level.

As I said in my opening remarks, public transit on provincial highways should be treated no differently from public transit on municipal streets.

• (1725)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: You seem to be saying that in your opinion the technology is not advanced enough to allow this type of program to contribute to a revival of the sector in general. Would there be other ways to revive the bus sector?

Obviously, the subject under consideration is very interesting, but the fact remains that bus transport is managed by municipalities and provinces. So, from the perspective of respecting the responsibilities of each level of government, I was wondering how the federal government could help you with your operations.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cassidy: In my opening remarks we had the letter from the four Atlantic provinces, in which, to their minds, jurisdiction is not a problem. They are willing to assist. They are willing to collaborate with the federal government. I think that is very important.

This is not an issue of jurisdiction. This is an issue of getting something done because it's the right thing to do. When you have four Atlantic provinces writing to the Minister of Transport, and the Minister of Infrastructure is willing to contribute to the acquisition of buses in a line-run situation, I think that is very favourable, to the point that I have tried to position the Atlantic provinces to be a pilot study so we can understand exactly what is happening in this business and we can take the program across the country.

At Maritime Bus—as you heard last week in your meetings here—we have seven terminals. We cross-ship parcels. We live on a feeder system. We support 40 communities in our region. We have low-revenue-producing routes. We want to stay supportive, but at the same time an infrastructure program that could help us with the capital cost of our buses would lower the amount in payments that we make. That extra cash flow can help us make it sustainable to operate.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Cassidy.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much, 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): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses. This has been an excellent bit of testimony, which I think will be very useful for our study.

I'd like to start with Dr. Alhassan.

At the outset, you called for a national public transportation system. A lot of our conversation over the course of this study has been about the pros and cons of a public model versus a private model or some sort of hybrid in-between.

Could you lay out what you see as the main advantages of a public model?

Dr. Jacob Alhassan: I think that there are many advantages to be gained from relying on a public model. The first is that we eliminate the prioritization of profit and we focus on other considerations that are quite important, like thinking of mobility as a human rights issue.

When you think of public transportation as a tool to the achievement of a number of goals beyond profit, it opens up opportunity for Canada to take on a certain kind of leadership in how we think about public transportation. For example, think about climate change. I just gave the example of 50 people in a bus; with that, you are saving 50 cars from being on the road. If you make these things private, if you think of transportation with a private approach rather than a public approach, the thing is that there are often communities that end up being left out because they don't make enough money on those routes. I think the STC example is a very good one of moving from serving 253 communities to picking the communities that you think are the most profitable.

Again, if we use a public model, we start to think more carefully about the possibilities of making sure that people can have access to goods and services in a way that private providers may not necessarily consider. In some cases they might; I'm sure that there are private companies that may have the interest in running a route even though the route doesn't bring the profit that is needed, but for the most part, that cannot be expected of most private companies.

The reason I keep pushing for a national public transportation system is that we get out of that problem of people refusing to run certain routes because they believe that the route is not profitable. We can start to prioritize equity. We can start to make sure that particular groups or people with disabilities, indigenous communities and racialized communities that are often excluded are able to be prioritized. Those groups can then have the ability to access goods and services in a way that is fair and guided by human rights principles.

• (1730)

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Dr. Alhassan.

I'll turn now to Dr. Hanson.

Dr. Hanson, is passenger transportation unique or is it part of a larger trend affecting rural Canada?

Dr. Cindy Hanson: I could basically speak on that, I think, from the example of STC. In that case it was passenger transportation, but it was also charters that were profitable. It was also the system of bringing goods from one location to another, which is also profitable, so there are profit arms of a public transportation system. I'm not sure that it totally answers your question.

I also want to point out that both scholars and politicians in Mexico and the U.S. have advocated a mobility bill of rights. If Canada could get behind this—and I think we have a Minister of Transport who is supportive of it—I think it moves us in a direction of seeing mobility rights as human rights.

I also want to talk about the environment, and this is also a way for Canada to achieve our environmental goals.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Dr. Hanson.

I'll turn now to Mr. Gemmel.

I'm wondering, Mr. Gemmel, if you can characterize the current status of the conversation around this idea of an interconnected national passenger bus transportation network. What's the status of the intergovernmental conversation on that topic?

Mr. Matt Gemmel: Thanks, Mr. Bachrach. It's great to get a question from a former mayor.

I would say that from FCM's perspective, that conversation is not advancing very quickly.

We're very encouraged that this committee is studying the issue, but aside from this committee's study, we're not seeing signs of progress on this file. We're not seeing the same kind of interest from the federal government in intercommunity passenger bus service that we are on urban public transit.

To sort of echo remarks earlier from Mr. Cassidy, and just to underline remarks I made in my opening presentation, we have an excellent partner in the federal government on urban public transport. We've had significant support for capital for purchasing buses and other investments in infrastructure for public transit from successive governments, from the previous Conservative government and, since 2015, with the current government.

Importantly, just in the last couple of years, we've seen the creation of a new fund, the rural transit solutions fund, that's expanding that partnership beyond cities to smaller communities, but, as has been noted, that fund is designed and scoped to support transit within a small town or on a regional basis to connect a rural region to that town. That is critically important and something that FCM absolutely supports, but it's not—

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Gemmel, and thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martel, you now have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for attending.

Mr. Alhassan, you said that some regions are underserved. What are those areas, specifically?

[*English*]

Dr. Jacob Alhassan: For the most part, we can think of it in a geographical sense and we can also think of it in terms of communities of people. Geographically, we're talking about rural areas that have smaller populations; these are areas that often end up being neglected. I think the other groups of people that we can think about who often get excluded and are under-served would be people with disabilities, indigenous communities and other people living in vulnerability. They often lose out because there are not enough people to board the buses on those routes, if they are private, and so the private bus provider may decide to simply pull out of such areas.

• (1735)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel: As a matter of curiosity, are the roads adequate or would new infrastructure be required?

Mr. Alhassan, you said that rural areas, people with disabilities, and indigenous people are underserved.

What I am looking for is whether the roads are adequate for a private transportation system, if there was one.

[English]

Dr. Jacob Alhassan: That's a good question.

I think it's difficult to respond comprehensively, although I would say, in the case of a place like Saskatchewan, there was a well-established system for travelling through the bus system, so if, for example, there was a desire to create a public bus system that would come to, say, Saskatchewan, there would be an existing infrastructure, by and large. However, there might be areas in other parts of the country where they have lost public transportation options for a much longer period. For such areas, much more infrastructure investment would be needed to kick-start and restart things in some of those areas that have been underserved for much longer.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel: Thank you, Mr. Alhassan.

I will now address Mr. Wabinski.

In 2018, Greyhound Canada announced the significant reduction of several routes, particularly in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia. The company still maintained its routes in Ontario and Quebec. However, the famous COVID-19 pandemic hit, and we could no longer travel. This put a damper on the national economy and dealt a big blow to Greyhound Canada, which decided to stop offering its services in Quebec and Ontario, the two remaining provinces. One of the reasons cited by the carrier was a 41% drop in passengers nationwide since 2010.

As the president of a motor coach company similar to Greyhound Canada, have you seen a significant decline in passengers since 2010?

[English]

Mr. Kasper Wabinski: Actually, I would like to say that our ridership has gone up since we entered the market. We entered the market in 2015. I think it's critical for a bus company to provide the kind of service that people want and I think there's a misconception that buses are only for low-income people. There's 90% of the country that could be a bus customer, and they're not. It's a matter of subsidies for people who can't afford it, and they are an easy solution to that problem.

Ridership can actually go up and up from where it is if we give people what they want and they want a safe, comfortable trip and they want the experience. They want a kind of new Uber experience; they don't want to be cramped in on buses with uncomfortable seats. Our company has been working towards meeting those objectives, and we've been noticing that our ridership went significantly up since 2015 to 2020. When COVID-19 came, obviously, we were down 90%, but we're back to 90% pre-COVID-19 revenue right now. Ridership is still down because the cost of travel has gone up, and not everybody has gone back to the old way of doing things. A lot of people still travel less than before, but we see that upward trend continuing over the next five years.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Martel.

[English]

Next we have Ms. Koutrakis.

The floor is yours. You have five minutes.

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

Thank you to all of our witnesses for your very valuable testimony this afternoon. This is a very important study, and I'm very pleased that my colleagues and I agreed to have this on the record.

I'd like to start with Dr. Hanson.

You mentioned "social audit" in your testimony. I'd like to know a little bit more about that. What kind of data is missing for evaluating the socio-economic impacts of declining intercity bus travel? What don't we know and what should we know?

Dr. Cindy Hanson: When STC was shuttered in the province of Saskatchewan, one thing that we continually asked the auditor to do was to provide a social audit, because the government said it was done on cost. We wanted to know what the actual cost was.

The social audit would include things like people missing medical appointments. The transportation of blood products in Saskatchewan was done by the provincial bus company, STC. Blood was transported safely from one location to another. That is now being done by taxi. You can imagine the increased cost on the private sector when these public goods are taken away. The library books were all shipped by the public bus system. Those interlibrary loans are now done by private courier.

When you put these public items into the private sector, the costs actually increase. All of that would be shown in a social audit.

You had a first question.

• (1740)

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: What are the socio-economic impacts of declining intercity bus travel?

Dr. Cindy Hanson: Those are some of them.

Of course, another one is something like people not having access to get out of a situation. For example, some of the drivers told us about picking up people who are fleeing situations of abuse in their home communities. They can no longer exit those communities because they don't have a safe way out.

Public buses provide a way out of various situations that make people vulnerable. The Highway of Tears is an example of that.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: That's a great segue, because my next question to you was if you could elaborate for us on the gendered effects of declining intercity bus travel.

Dr. Cindy Hanson: What STC actually found—I'm using them as an example because they had really good statistics, which we need more of in Canada in terms of the bus systems—was that of the people who rode buses, 60% were women and 71% were vulnerable populations.

First of all, when we look at that stat, we see that the majority of bus users in the province were women. You also have to look at aging populations. Women tend to live longer. Seniors are generally more dangerous drivers. I don't mean that in a bad way. As an aging woman, I can say that. Public buses are, as Jacob alluded to in the beginning of his talk about OECD, in general, safer modes of transportation. They're also less polluting. There's a whole bunch of reasons there.

Those are some of the gendered effects. However, the Canadian government really needs to do a GBA+ analysis of the impacts of having public and private transportation in Canada and what the best system would be for an intercommunity approach.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: Besides Greyhound now leaving this vacancy and other private operators hopefully stepping in, I'm also interested to learn what some of the other primary factors are that we have been seeing in the declining intercity bus travel. Are there other factors besides just private operators shutting down?

Dr. Cindy Hanson: Some of the other factors would be people having access to loved ones. Another factor in the province of Saskatchewan is where you have a mother and father living in different communities. Through social services, children are now being put in taxis with social workers. You look at the time social workers spend with people, plus the use of private carriers.

Those would be some of the impacts. People can't get from one province to the other because there aren't always bus systems that exist interprovincially. There are access to specialists and health costs, etc.

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

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I listened carefully to, among other things, what Ms. Hanson and Mr. Alhassan had to say, and they seem to be making a strong case for a Canadian bus system run by a Crown corporation-like company, if I understand their vision correctly.

For my part, I still have some questions. At this time, there are other concerns with regard to transport. Having said that, you should know that I am strongly in favour of public transport. It makes a big difference for students, for example, as well as for retired people or anyone who wants to get from one place to another without using a car.

We should talk about the federal government's jurisdiction. For example, we did studies on the issue of inter-regional air travel and we found that it was very difficult to make it profitable and that very little service was in place. There was a problem there that would need to be addressed.

We should also talk about transport by train. For example, there is the famous Via Rail Canada high frequency train project that would serve several cities. It may not be a Via Rail project anymore; today, we don't know. I think we've been talking about it for more than three elections and it hasn't come to fruition yet.

I would like to hear your views in the context of the federal government already having significant responsibilities for transportation. The government has made announcements of projects for intercity and inter-regional transportation within its jurisdiction, but these have not materialized and are not moving forward very quickly.

Why would we create another project when it is hard to see what it would look like and who would do it? Wouldn't this duplicate services that already exist and create bickering over jurisdiction?

Does the Federation of Canadian Municipalities representative have a comment on this?

• (1745)

Mr. Matt Gemmel: Thank you.

[*English*]

I can try to answer that question. Our view is that there is a role for the federal government. I think this is an area of shared jurisdiction. That is the way we would describe it.

I would draw the parallel again to public transit in an urban context. There, you have a clear jurisdiction for municipal governments, but public transit systems are funded by provincial governments and by the federal government. They're increasingly funded by the federal government. As I noted, we have a very strong partner in the federal government when it comes to urban public transit. I don't see any reason—and other witnesses have suggested there's no reason—that the federal government couldn't play a bigger role going forward.

To the points around the diversity of the regional needs in this country, there's a role for the federal government around coordination. There are many different models that could be adopted to implement a national transportation system, and the federal government is best placed to play that coordination role.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Gemmel.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[*English*]

Next we have Mr. Bachrach. The floor is yours. You have two and a half minutes.

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

On the topic of jurisdiction, I had this conversation with our current transport minister. He said very clearly that in his view, buses are provincial jurisdiction. The federal government is willing to help, but the provinces need to show the leadership.

Dr. Hanson, I'm wondering what your reaction is to that kind of statement.

Dr. Cindy Hanson: The situation in Canada is that we have some provinces that think they have the lead on a lot of issues. However, I think in the case of a national transportation system, if we look at it not just from the perspective of buses but as a centralized network and a transportation system, it can help build something that is national. From that, there can be networks and other systems that take place interprovincially.

Part of that is thinking outside of the box. It's also about looking at what happens when we don't have those systems and the vulnerabilities of places and people within communities that don't have access to public transportation.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I'm going to try rapid-fire questions for my remaining seconds, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Wabinski, where should we be looking for leadership in order to achieve the vision that everyone's talking about nationally? Who needs to lead?

Mr. Kasper Wabinski: We should create a national highway transportation department, a board that would be dedicated towards managing buses. I don't believe provinces will ever come to terms, so it has to be the feds, and the only way to do this in a timely manner across the nation is to centralize this right in the federal government, maybe in the infrastructure ministry or Transport Canada. That's my belief and understanding over the last three years.

• (1750)

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. Cassidy, where should the leadership lie?

Mr. Michael Cassidy: It should be a working collaboration, done no differently from what we've done here in the maritime provinces. We have the four provinces speaking to the federal government on what kind of model can we have for the Atlantic provinces. It's a "working together" model.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Okay.

Dr. Alhassan, who should lead this conversation?

Dr. Jacob Alhassan: I would say the federal government needs take a little bit of leadership and work in collaboration with the provincial governments to identify communities that are clearly missing out and make sure we have a national system so that wherever you live within Canada, you are not completely excluded from accessing very basic services, as we have seen through the research we've been doing.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bachrach.

Thank you, Dr. Alhassan.

I believe I referred to your earlier as "Mr." and I want to apologize for that. My wife would never let me forget about that, given that she's also a doctor.

With that, I'll turn it over to Dr. Lewis.

The next line of questioning is yours. You have five minutes.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Thank you so much.

I want to thank all the witnesses for the testimony today. It's been very informative.

My first question is for Mr. Gemmel.

You spoke about a zero-emissions transport system. You stated that it is something you wish to reach by 2050. You also spoke about a national transportation system and a rural transit fund.

I believe Mr. Cassidy stated that an electrified system would not be financially viable for passenger coach transportation, so how is it that you propose you will reach a zero-emissions transport, a carbon-neutral system, by 2050? Can you give us some insight into that?

Mr. Matt Gemmel: Sure. I think that question is for me.

I have a few points on that.

Under the Paris climate agreement, 2050 is recognized as the target for reaching zero emissions for the globe to be able to limit the global temperature increase to no greater than 1.5° Celsius. That's why there's that the target.

In terms of the technology and the economics of reaching that, I'll draw another parallel to urban transit.

In recent years it was not economic for urban public transit systems to adopt zero-emission bus technologies. The cost of batteries has come down immensely. The cost of the bus and the total cost of ownership, because of the lower operating costs of electric buses, has come down significantly, and as a result of increased leadership from the federal government through the zero emission transit fund that was announced two years ago, we're seeing a lot progress in urban transit shifting to 100% zero emissions.

It's important to note—and I think Mr. Wabinski mentioned this earlier—that transit inherently produces lower emissions than a single-passenger vehicle regardless. The near-term objective is get more people on buses in an urban context or in an inter-community context, but as we look ahead in the decades to come, I think it can be expected—and Mr. Cassidy alluded to this—that the cost of battery technology will come down and will enable longer ranges for electric buses in a intercity coach context. Then other technologies—hydrogen most promisingly, which has a big upside for the Canadian economy as Canada positions itself to be a world-leading hydrogen producer—also come into play and have particular promise in a longer-range, heavier-duty transportation context.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: My next question would be for Mr. Wabinski.

You stated that you operate at a loss in rural communities and gave some explanation for why. I myself am in a rural community. There is absolutely no public transportation in Haldimand—Norfolk, my community.

How do we overcome that loss and how do we move away from the economic factors that are constraining that development?

• (1755)

Mr. Kasper Wabinski: I've proposed a model of subsidy specific to the route, as they do in America with the feeder lines and the essential air service program, but converted to a bus system. If there are routes that have to be built up, routes take time to build up. When you start a route, you may be losing money for eight or 10 months. You're not just failing to break even; you're not making enough money to pay the cost. There may be very few people on that bus initially, especially going to small communities. You need to be able to run that service long enough and reliably enough with the right-sized vehicle with the right frequency long enough for people to trust it. Once they start trusting it, people will start getting on board.

I think I'm the master of running low-volume routes. I have the lowest-volume routes in Canada, and I can make them work. It's a very simple formula. The cost of running has to be recovered in the ticket cost. If it can't be recovered through ticket cost, then it has to be subsidized on a pay-per-route basis. I think that's the quickest, easiest solution to solve this problem of some routes not generating enough revenue.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Lewis.

Thank you Mr. Wabinski.

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

Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Welcome to all of our witnesses today. It was good to hear different stories in different parts of the country.

Being from Newfoundland and Labrador, I'm going to focus on Mr. Cassidy and Atlantic Canada.

I had numerous conversations with the owners of DRL during the COVID period. They went through some very challenging economic times, and it was a very challenging environment for their bus line. I'm sure you probably experienced the same.

You've been in business for 10 years. You're obviously in a very spread-out area, with low ridership at times. Were you able to take advantage of any of the COVID supports that were offered during that period just to survive?

Mr. Michael Cassidy: We've had 18 years in the bus business. Our line run anniversary tomorrow is ten years. If it wasn't for the federal government's wage subsidies and rent subsidies and their government guaranteed loan and working capital programs that were put in place—and Mr. Rogers, if it wasn't for the Province of Nova Scotia, the Province of New Brunswick and the Province of Prince Edward Island subsidizing and assisting Maritime Bus in 2020-21—our operating losses would be much greater than what they were in that two-year period.

We're thankful to the federal government, but in the Maritimes, our three provinces are committed to line run operation. They showed it in COVID, and now Newfoundland and Labrador has joined them in suggesting that they would be interested in dis-

cussing a capital infrastructure program here in the Atlantic provinces.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Cassidy.

You've answered my second question, but I'll go on to this question. I know you offered some solutions there in your testimony. I'd like for you to take the opportunity to do that again in terms of moving forward.

We went through a very difficult time. What would you need to ensure long-term viability for your business? What are the things you specifically need done?

Mr. Michael Cassidy: We had these challenges, Mr. Rogers, well before COVID. Well before, if you consider labour shortages. These items have been discussed for years. Jason Roberts of DRL and I have spent time together. We can talk about Canada and we can talk about national systems, but we are regional in our country.

In the Atlantic provinces, we are running expensive buses. We are providing an essential service, and as operators, Jason Roberts and I are asking that rather than having annual operating subsidies, perhaps we could change the language in a new generation of funding for capital infrastructure programs. We are asking for intercity busing to be an eligible project within the funds, no different from municipalities being eligible for projects.

We're also suggesting that carriers like ours, which are committed to Newfoundland and Labrador and the Maritimes, could, as for-profit carriers, be eligible recipients of infrastructure funding. It's a an eligible project, Mr. Rogers, and its eligible recipients could receive assistance on a capital basis.

Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, P.E.I and New Brunswick, for what Mr. Roberts and I are asking for, may cost an investment in capital of \$8 million shared by four provinces. The federal government might be at an \$8-million to \$10-million contribution, and Mr. Roberts and I could be at close to \$8 million.

That is a regional solution to intercity busing, because you can't have a national system, Mr. Rogers, unless there are sustainable bus carriers in each region. That's what we are trying to suggest through DRL and Maritime Bus.

• (1800)

Mr. Churence Rogers: Thank you for that, Mr. Cassidy. You certainly made very clear what your position is and what you need going forward.

In terms of your relationship with DRL, have you ever considered or talked about how you could support each other and whether it would be some kind of linkage in the business sector or some kind of merger? Has any of that stuff ever been discussed?

Mr. Michael Cassidy: No. I think when we do discuss it.... We are just two committed individuals in this business. Our sole intent is public transit on provincial highways. From DRL in your province of Newfoundland and Labrador, we do get passengers getting on the ferry. We can meet in North Sydney and we can transfer back and forth.

Sometimes, Mr. Rogers, it's moral support talking to another carrier that believes strongly in what we do each and every day before COVID, during COVID and post COVID.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Rogers.

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

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

My first question is for Mr. Gemmel.

To achieve the program or the service levels that the FCM is looking for.... I can't recall in your presentation if you talked about a national public transportation system or a national bus transportation system. Whichever one it is, what are the ballpark initial costs for the federal government and what would be the annual cost?

I assume that if we're asking for this type of investment from the federal government, that ballpark number at least is available.

Mr. Matt Gemmel: Thanks for the question, Mr. Strahl.

FCM hasn't done an estimate of the cost. I think a large part of what would go into that number is whether you are talking about capital funding from the federal government, as Mr. Cassidy was suggesting, or broader support in terms of capital and operating costs. The model is another factor as well, as we've been talking about. There are a number of different models.

I would like to say that with the commitment to the rural transit solution success—\$250 million over five years—we're seeing strong interest from municipalities and from non-profit and for-profit transit providers in that immediate regional context for that funding. We are calling for that type of program to be continued going forward.

The federal government has committed \$3 billion a year for the permanent public transit fund. Currently it's scheduled to start in 2026. We would like to see a rural transit element of that.

What is clear is that the amount—

Mr. Mark Strahl: I'm sorry. I only have five minutes. I'm going to have to go back.

Mr. Wabinski, perhaps I'll go to you now. You mentioned tax incentives and tax rebates on fuel.

Can you give us an indication of perhaps the amount of carbon tax that you pay on fuel every year? Can get us that figure and include the amount you receive in a rebate from the federal government?

You mentioned tax incentives. I'm interested to hear if you have fleshed that out at all. Do you have any specific tax incentives in mind to help incentivize that private investment?

• (1805)

Mr. Kasper Wabinski: I don't have that exact figure. Fuel taxes are a big part of the fuel costs. Fuel is a major cost of operations right now, until there is electrification technology that we can use.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Do you receive any rebate for the carbon tax that you are charged?

Mr. Kasper Wabinski: No, I don't ever receive any incentives right now in taxes or fuel rebates. It would be nice if we did.

Mr. Mark Strahl: You mentioned that there should be a subsidy on the routes. I think you referenced a United States program to subsidize small regional carriers.

In the Canadian context, do you believe that the federal government, for all modes of transportation, should be subsidizing all routes that carry passengers to ensure that they are profitable?

Mr. Kasper Wabinski: I believe that program would work because it would allow us to transform non-profitable routes into sustainable routes, or non-sustainable routes into sustainable. Not all routes need subsidy. I like the idea of this program because it would allow us to build up routes that could become sustainable over time.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Do you have any idea of what the cost for that initiative would be? What would any level of government need to invest or spend in order to ensure that all routes that need to be made profitable are made profitable?

Mr. Kasper Wabinski: Thank you for that question. It depends on how far we go and how fast we can move. There's limited equipment available, and it takes time to put infrastructure in place. You don't want to go too hard, too fast, right off the bat. It could cost as little as \$30 million a year, from my estimates. It could go up to \$85 million, depending on how many remote communities or smaller communities we want to connect.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Is that for your company or for the province?

Mr. Kasper Wabinski: It's for the entire country.

Mr. Mark Strahl: We heard, though, that it was \$85 million for STC to operate on its own. How could the entire country's routes be subsidized for \$30 million to \$85 million?

Mr. Kasper Wabinski: Based on Dr. Alhassan's comment, it wasn't \$85 million to operate the company. It was only a \$14.9 million subsidy from the province. The total cost was \$85 million. They recovered that through ticket sales.

Mr. Mark Strahl: So for double the amount of their operating budget, we could subsidize every route in the country?

Mr. Kasper Wabinski: Yes. I believe that would be possible. The Greyhound network connected something like 200 communities. Now, it depends how far you want to go—

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Wabinski, and thank you very much, Mr. Strahl.

Next we have Mr. Badawey.

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

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll preface my comments by saying this. This is all about leveraging and ensuring that the federal government takes into consideration our contributions. For example, the most recent contribution we put forward in the 2021 budget, which was the rural transit solutions fund, was \$250 million over five years for planning and design grants, capital procurement and construction for a wide range of transit modes that meet rural community needs. The provincial government in my home province of Ontario puts together mechanisms or levers to allow municipalities to then, again, leverage federal funding. Some provinces are generous. Saskatchewan, for example, is not. They don't put anything forward. Ontario puts a bit. More importantly, there's the leveraging that comes from municipalities to their transit systems.

This is directed to the FCM.

Currently the Conservatives in Ontario are now planning a claw-back for the ability for municipalities to collect development charges from developers who create growth-related capital or operational costs within those individual municipalities throughout the province of Ontario. Those growth-related costs, both operational and capital, include intermunicipal transit. With that inability now, municipalities are handcuffed. By default, they will be relying on property taxpayers to then foot the bill for those growth-related costs versus the developers who are creating those growth-related costs, such as inter-municipal transit.

With that said, the bottom line is that the Conservatives in Ontario are raising property taxes as well as other operational and capital growth-related costs, such as water bills, etc., etc., etc.

Alongside AMO, who I wish was here today too, what advocating are you currently doing with the Province of Ontario, for example, to ensure that these costs don't fall onto property taxpayers and that they in fact are leveraged between the partners that they once were—for example, the federal, provincial and municipal levels of government as well as the private sector, which does create some of those growth-related costs?

• (1810)

Mr. Matt Gemmel: Thank you for the question, Mr. Badawey.

I'll start by saying that FCM's mandate is federal; we don't advocate to individual provincial governments. My colleagues at the Association of Municipalities Ontario, as you mentioned, are active on Bill 23 on that question. As you probably know, they've estimated that the impact of Bill 23, in terms of limiting the ability of municipalities to collect development charges, could cost as much as a billion dollars a year in municipal revenue for the 19 largest municipalities in Ontario. It's significant, and it's something our colleagues in Ontario are very concerned about and are looking closely at.

I think it speaks to a bigger issue around how we fund municipal governments in this country. Last week, Statistics Canada data came out that showed that municipalities collect less than nine cents on every tax dollar collected in the country, yet the responsibilities for municipalities are only increasing, and we own and manage more than 60% of public infrastructure in the country. It's part of a bigger discussion.

As it relates to transit, whether it's in an urban context or an intercommunity context, I think we need to look at partnership between orders of governments, including indigenous governments, as I mentioned in my opening, in how we fund a system that, in FCM's view, would be a mixture of public, private and non-profit carriers. We have that model in an urban context, and there are ways to expand it. Municipalities are expanding it. In an intercommunity context, there is a role for municipalities, but given just the nature of the routes, there's less direct municipal responsibility or involvement, though there are models in which municipalities are contributing on an operating-subsidy basis for services that pass through or serve their community.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Mr. Gemmel. I have only got 30 seconds left and I have one more question for you.

With respect to the \$250 million that the federal government gave you over five years from the 2021 budget, do you have any examples of how your members are using this funding to develop new and local solutions?

Mr. Matt Gemmel: As I mentioned, there's a lot of interest from municipalities in either expanding existing fixed-route transit services that they have in their communities or, in many communities and small towns that didn't previously have a fixed-route schedule system, looking to develop that for the first time as a result of this funding.

As well, there is increased interest in on-demand services, meaning more of a shuttle bus service or more of an Uber type of model, but delivered publicly by the municipality to provide on-demand services within a rural region. There are a number of examples in all regions of the country of rural municipalities using that funding.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Gemmel.

Thank you, Mr. Badawey.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My question is for the director of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

As Mr. Bachrach said earlier, the Minister of Transport mentioned that bus transportation was a provincial jurisdiction. However, when it comes to public transit and infrastructure funding, there are agreements between the federal government and the provinces, particularly Quebec. Moreover, the investing in Canada plan, a bilateral infrastructure agreement between Canada and Quebec, was signed in 2018 by the federal government. This agreement provides for money to be made available to the Government of Quebec, particularly for public transit projects. So we're not just talking about infrastructure, but also infrastructure for public transit. This includes several phases.

During the testimony of Minister LeBlanc, the committee learned that the first phase of the agreement provided \$350 million, but that it had not been invested. According to the agreement, this money could be used for subsequent phases. Unfortunately, Mr. LeBlanc told us that he would simply not respect the agreement and that the \$350 million would go back into the consolidated fund. The reason I mention this is because \$290 million of the \$350 million was for public transit.

The Union des municipalités du Québec campaigned to demand that these funds be given to Quebec, as agreed to in the agreement that was signed.

Currently, there is an additional \$2.7 billion in infrastructure, including infrastructure for public transit, that is at risk.

Does the Federation of Canadian Municipalities support the Union des municipalités du Québec in its fight to ensure Quebec gets the money it was promised?

• (1815)

Mr. Matt Gemmel: Thank you for your question, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

I will answer it in English.

[English]

Certainly it's an issue that we're following closely and in consultation with the Quebec municipal association, UMQ, which you mentioned, as well as the FQM.

There's a shared objective here among the federal government, the Province of Quebec and municipalities to invest in public infrastructure, including in public transit, and that remains FCM's priority.

There is a timeline in place to identify transit projects for that remaining money you mentioned, and it's certainly our hope that the Province of Quebec will identify projects within that timeline and ensure that funding is invested in Quebec and benefits Quebecers.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Gemmel.

[Translation]

Thank you very much, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[English]

Next we have Mr. Bachrach.

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

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My question is for Mr. Cassidy.

I understand that your company has tried to integrate its schedules with passenger rail, and I'm wondering to what extent we should be talking about integrating bus and rail transportation as part of this overall conversation about passenger transportation in the country.

Mr. Michael Cassidy: It is very important when we talk about intermodal transport. When we started 10 years ago, we made sure that we were in the same terminal as Via Rail in Moncton, New Brunswick, and in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

On the surface it sounds great—ground transportation, bus, rail—but unfortunately we used to have interlining from Ontario through to the Maritime provinces train with our bus system. I think you made mention of this last week. The train schedule doesn't live up to the times, and our buses depart after the trains arrive late, normally over 60%, 70%, 80% of the time. If we do have intermodal service, whether it's air, train or bus, there has to be a working relationship with schedules, with reliability and consistency, because it's the passenger we have to think about here. It has to be seamless ticket travel to allow them to get from point A to point B, and right now we do not have that.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: This is my last question.

It's been four years since Greyhound left western Canada. It's been a year and a half since Greyhound left Canada altogether. Based on this study so far, it doesn't feel like we're particularly close to even replacing what Greyhound offered, which people loved to complain about. They did offer a one-ticket ride from coast to coast connecting hundreds and hundreds of communities across Canada.

I think almost any of the witnesses could take a stab at this, but perhaps I'll ask Mr. Gemmel.

What's the single ingredient that we're missing at this juncture? Why is progress so slow, and why are we lacking progress toward that goal of a truly interconnected single national system for bus transportation?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds for a response, please.

Mr. Matt Gemmel: Thank you.

It's understandable that the context of this committee study is Greyhound pulling out of Canada, but as you quite readily noted, it's not as if we had a great passenger bus service system for all regions of the country before Greyhound. This was a concern that had been raised through FCM, through our rural forum, for many years before Greyhound left Canada.

I really think it does require being made a political priority at the provincial level and at the federal level, and that there be a concerted effort to coordinate regional services, as Mr. Cassidy mentioned, and to commit long term to funding—

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Gemmel, and thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

Next we have Mr. Strahl once again.

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

• (1820)

Mr. Mark Strahl: Thank you very much.

I heard Mr. Bachrach characterize a conversation he had with the Minister of Transport. I wasn't there, so I don't know if that was in QP or just in a private conversation that he talked about provincial leadership in this matter.

I want to talk about my home province of British Columbia, where, for instance, you can now get—and it's not across the country—from Hope in my riding, which has about 7,000 people in the region, all the way into downtown Vancouver or the Vancouver International Airport on B.C. Transit and TransLink buses. It's about a 150-kilometre journey. There are long stretches in between where there are no passengers, but the buses stop along the way in a number of first nations communities, etc. That build-out has happened in British Columbia.

Particularly, it was mentioned earlier in testimony about the Highway of Tears, or Highway 16, in northern British Columbia, where there has been significant action taken to provide service, not only through expanding B.C. Transit but by collaborating with private services like taxis, ride-hailing, not-for-profit, seniors' shuttles, friendship centre buses, B.C. Bus North, Northern Health Connections, etc. The B.C. Transit service provides that service. That gap was left and was very concerning for those communities in northern British Columbia.

I'm hearing a lot about needing what I would describe as a “made-in-Ottawa” solution for the entire country. Why are we not looking at models that are working and encouraging other provinces to adopt them, rather than saying we need a centralized national busing system? It seems a lot of the commentary is directed at one province, but we're not looking at the successes of other provinces like British Columbia.

Can we talk about provincial leadership and how we build on that, as opposed to simply looking for a national solution that perhaps ignores the reality in certain parts of the country?

I'll throw that open. Mr. Cassidy and Mr. Wabinski, perhaps you want to take the first run.

Mr. Michael Cassidy: Well, you're certainly right.

We have to talk nationally, but before we talk nationally, let's get the regional house in order. You need sustainable bus carriers regionally before we can go nationally, and there are many good operations in this country.

We heard today about where we have gaps, and I agree with the gaps that have been identified, but before we start talking full public, public-private or full private, let's understand what we have and take inventory of it.

The B.C. government certainly stepped up to the plate during COVID-19 to help our provincial carriers, as Quebec did, and Nova

Scotia, New Brunswick and P.E.I. They stood up, and they wanted to make sure we have interlining for the future. Start there with those provinces that have the leadership and put their money on the table in 2020-21. They want leadership, and they just want to work with the federal government to put a program in place. It's very straightforward.

Mr. Kasper Wabinski: I would add to that. Exactly, we have to know what we have, and we have to work and build on what we have.

That's why I think a team—a national highway transportation board, a committee or a department dedicated to this file—could take care of that inventory and work on filling those gaps through capital subsidies or per route subsidies, and each route could be its own separate case. That's going to take time. It may be a team of 50 people—accountants, transportation experts, lawyers, social science—and you build out a national strategy. This is not going to happen with five people. You're going to need a small team of people who know what they're doing to connect what we have and help us fill those gaps.

Mr. Mark Strahl: How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have 18 seconds, Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl: In the previous meeting we heard about the need for a clearing house so that schedules could be shared among carriers right across the country. Would you support that recommendation to create a clearing house as a first step?

• (1825)

Mr. Michael Cassidy: Many carriers have reservation systems now through which we can share our information and have seamless travel for parcels and passengers, but we need a communication platform. Yes, for sure, if you're going to do any form of interlining, you need a communication system for all carriers.

We used to be with Greyhound in Orleans at midnight, trying to find out if we had enough seats for passengers travelling from Ontario into Quebec and the Maritimes. We had a manual system, but we did it for seamless travel.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Cassidy.

Thank you very much, Mr. Strahl.

Finally this evening we have Mr. Iacono.

[*Translation*]

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

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

I thank the witnesses for being so patient and persevering to this hour to guide us on this type of transport.

Ms. Hanson, are you aware of any indigenous-led initiatives to restore intercity bus transportation?

[English]

Dr. Cindy Hanson: I think because of the way that most first nations governments are structured, there are local initiatives taking place in different communities. I know, for example, that in Saskatchewan there are some that operate small vans that go from their community into an urban centre where they can get access to, mainly, health care, but I also know they are inconsistent in the way services are provided.

There is also an example, though, where the federal government just started a free service from La Ronge to Prince Albert to meet one of the gaps in the province, but again it's short-term and an individual case.

We need something that's built from the ground up. I think lots of people have talked about who needs to be involved. I think it's really important that we don't forget that citizens need to be involved. If 70% of users on buses are marginalized populations, how are we involving the users we presently have?

The other point I want to make that hasn't been made is about automobility. We need to change the mindset of Canadians around the idea that we need to have a car to go everywhere. We have the roads; let's use them for public services like buses.

[Translation]

Mr. Angelo Iacono: You mentioned that there is a great willingness. Are these local initiatives that you were talking about having a certain success rate?

[English]

Dr. Cindy Hanson: I can't give an informed opinion about that, or an informed response.

[Translation]

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

Doctor Alhassan, what are the people who relied on bus transportation doing to get around now?

[English]

Dr. Jacob Alhassan: Thank you very much for the question.

I think for the most part people are hitchhiking. In my research, I can give you very specific examples of people who walked two to three days to access health care. I spoke to such people. I have met them. Many people are using very unsafe methods because they have no other option to be able to travel across cities, depending on where they are.

I have encountered people who literally walk for multiple days on a highway to access health services and other services.

[Translation]

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you, Doctor.

You said you had done some research. Do you have any data to present to us or can you share any findings? Also, is the need strictly related to transport—

[English]

Dr. Jacob Alhassan: Absolutely. I'm happy to share that with you.

I think I missed some of that.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Mr. Chair, would you want me to repeat the question?

The Chair: Yes, if you would like to, Mr. Iacono.

[Translation]

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

You mentioned that you have been doing some research. Could you share some details or data on this? Are the needs strictly limited to travel for medical services? Is it more of a daily need?

• (1830)

[English]

Dr. Jacob Alhassan: Thank you very much.

First of all, yes, I'm willing to share that information. Some of it is published. I have a 300-page Ph.D. thesis specifically on this topic. I interviewed 100 people. We've spoken to a big group of people about this.

In summary, people have had to walk for health care services, as I'm describing, but some of the travel is also just to visit their family members and some of it is to access other services within the city beyond health care services.

As we know, in health there are what we call social determinants of health. If a person cannot have access to nutritious food because it's more expensive within their community, and because of transportation they cannot access that health care, then it has a connection to health as well.

There's quite a bit that can be shared, and I'm more than willing to tender a few published journal articles as needed.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Iacono.

[English]

Thank you very much, Dr. Alhassan.

I've been asked by the clerk to kindly ask that you submit an executive summary of your several-hundred-page report. He will actually send you guidelines for that. We very much appreciate that. It will be very helpful.

With that, on behalf of all members, I want to thank our witnesses for their time and their testimony this afternoon and evening.

This meeting is now adjourned.

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