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IMPROVING BUS CONNECTIVITY IN CANADA

**Report of the Standing Committee on Transport,
Infrastructure and Communities**

Peter Schiefke, Chair

**MAY 2023
44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION**

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**Peter Schiefke
Chair**

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NOTICE TO READER

Reports from committee presented to the House of Commons

Presenting a report to the House is the way a committee makes public its findings and recommendations on a particular topic. Substantive reports on a subject-matter study usually contain a synopsis of the testimony heard, the recommendations made by the committee, as well as the reasons for those recommendations.

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THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES

has the honour to present its

THIRTEENTH REPORT

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2), the committee has studied the inter-city transport by bus in Canada and has agreed to report the following:

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SUMMARY

Canadian intercity bus transit has suffered severely over the past several years from the loss of carriers such as Greyhound Canada and the Saskatchewan Transportation Company, as well as from the Covid-19 pandemic and related travel restrictions.

Over the course of its study on intercity transport by bus in Canada, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities (the Committee) heard about the many benefits that safe, affordable, accessible, and reliable intercity passenger connections can have on individuals and communities. It also heard about the serious impacts a lack of these connections can have, particularly on marginalized communities. These can include loss of access to jobs, education, and health services, not to mention a reduced ability to escape domestic violence, and an exposure to unsafe alternative modes of transportation.

Witnesses also proposed many solutions to enhance intercity passenger connectivity across Canada and discussed the merits of public versus private service models, as well as jurisdictional issues surrounding interprovincial bus routes. The Committee heard about the importance of tailoring solutions to local needs, and the related value in gaining further information on the habits of intercity transit users. It also heard about the need to ensure connectivity between regional transit networks to allow simplified pan-Canadian bus travel.

Also addressed in the study were the state of electrification technology for intercity bus travel, as well as options for federal financial support to both public and private bus carriers.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of their deliberations committees may make recommendations which they include in their reports for the consideration of the House of Commons or the Government. Recommendations related to this study are listed below.

Recommendation 1 – Intermodal Connections

That the Government of Canada collaborate with all stakeholders, including provincial and territorial governments, Indigenous communities, municipalities, as well as public and private operators, to encourage the coordination of intercity bus routes with passenger rail and air travel.

Recommendation 2 – Creating a National Clearing House/Communications Platform

That the Government of Canada work the provinces and territories and with private and public bus operators to facilitate the creation of a non-profit, national clearing house/communications platform to allow for seamless travel between provinces for passengers.

Recommendation 3 – Better Intermodal Connections Between VIA Rail and Other Modes of Transport

That VIA Rail establish a system to provide real-time reporting of arrivals and departures to other modes of transportation (ex. taxis, ride-sharing operators, etc.) to facilitate timely and convenient intermodal connections.

Recommendation 4 – Assessing and Addressing Knowledge Gaps (Habits of Intercity Transit Users)

That the Government of Canada collaborate with all stakeholders, including provincial and territorial governments, Indigenous communities, municipalities, as well as public and private operators, to assess and address the current knowledge gaps with regards to the habits and needs of intercity transit users in Canada.

Recommendation 5 – Expanding the RTSF to Cover Private Bus Carriers and Intercity Routes

That the Government of Canada expand the Rural Transit Solutions Fund to incentivize the development of intercommunity rural routes, and allow private bus carriers providing services on such routes to access the Fund.

Recommendation 6 – Harmonization of Licensing Requirements

That the Government of Canada recognize that the private sector plays an important role in providing intercity bus service and take steps to harmonize licensing requirements between provinces, while respecting provincial and territorial jurisdiction.

Recommendation 7 – Government’s Responsibility for Reconciliation

That the Government of Canada recognise its role in delivering safe, reliable and affordable inter-regional transit to Indigenous communities, as part of its responsibility towards Indigenous reconciliation.



IMPROVING BUS CONNECTIVITY IN CANADA

INTRODUCTION

In Canada, bus companies operating across provincial boundaries are regulated by provincial governments through their respective road or motor carrier commissions or agencies. This responsibility was delegated by the federal government to the provinces under the *Motor Vehicle Transport Act*. As a result, the regulatory framework for extra-provincial bus operations can vary considerably from province to province.

Interprovincial bus service was primarily offered or facilitated by the private carrier Greyhound Canada until May of 2021, when it withdrew all services from Canada, with the exception of some cross-border routes to and from the United States.

On 3 February 2022, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities adopted the following [motion](#):

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Committee undertake a study on [intercity] transport by bus in Canada; that no fewer than four meetings be set aside for this study; and that the impact of the cancellation of Greyhound bus service and the COVID-19 pandemic be examined as part of the study.

The Committee held four meetings on this study from 23 November 2022 to 7 March 2023 and heard from 20 witnesses.



IMPACTS OF CANCELLED SERVICES

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

Vince Accardi (President, Motor Coach Canada)

The Saskatchewan Transportation Company

The Saskatchewan Transportation Company (STC) was a Crown corporation of the government of Saskatchewan that provided passenger and freight transportation services in the province until it was shut down in May 2017, one year prior to Greyhound Canada's withdrawal from the western provinces.¹ The issue of the STC was raised by several witnesses over the course of the Committee's study.

According to Dr. JoAnn Jaffe, Professor with the Department of Sociology and Social Studies at the University of Regina (appearing as an individual), the provincial government's decision to shutter the STC was based on diminishing ridership and high per-passenger costs. Dr. Jaffe was critical of this rationale, however, alleging that the provincial government had stopped advertising bus services while ridership was increasing, restricted the STC's abilities to offer some services at a competitive price, and generally made it more difficult for people to access bus services. She added that, despite operating at a higher cost than a private sector operator, the STC provided other benefits, such as well-paid employment with good working conditions for a diverse group of employees that included a very high proportion of Indigenous people, persons with disabilities, and many women in management positions, in addition to using a balanced scorecard to meet multiple social and environmental objectives.

1 Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities (TRAN), *Evidence*, 44th Parliament, 1st Session: Dr. Alhassan (Assistant Professor, Department of Community Health and Epidemiology, College of Medicine, University of Saskatchewan (as an individual)).

The Committee heard that, prior to being shut down, the STC served 253 communities.² Despite the provincial government’s assurances that private operators would fill the gap left by the STC, only one of the ten operators that came forward continues to provide services today, and this only in three cities.³ According to [Dr. Sarah-Patricia Breen](#), Regional Innovation Chair in Rural Economic Development at Selkirk College (appearing as an individual), this has contributed to what she referred to as the current “vacuum” of intercommunity transit systems in the prairie provinces.

[Dr. Jacob Alhassan](#), Assistant Professor with the Department of Community Health and Epidemiology in the College of Medicine at the University of Saskatchewan (appearing as an individual), told the Committee that the STC’s budget had been below \$20 million per year at the time of its shutdown, with the provincial government estimating it would save \$85 million on a 5-year period by cancelling the service. However, [Dr. Cindy Hanson](#), Professor with the Department of Sociology and Social Studies at the University of Regina (appearing as an individual), insisted on the importance of evaluating the costs of transit systems on the basis of a social audit, comparing operational costs with the costs of not providing services.

The Committee heard, for example, that the provincial government previously relied on the STC for services such as transporting blood, vaccines, medical equipment,⁴ and library books,⁵ as well as to return people to their home communities following their release from prison.⁶ A social audit would therefore factor in the costs of alternative arrangements to provide these services (by taxi or private courier), or the social costs associated with not providing them at all.

[Dr. Alhassan](#) suggested that the closure of the STC illustrates the damaging effects that a loss of transportation services can have, as it led generally to isolation and has disproportionately affected vulnerable populations. [Dr. Hanson](#) expressed her concerns that, without safe and reliable bus services, many, in particular from Indigenous communities, are resorting to hitchhiking and that “northern Saskatchewan is quietly on its way to becoming another highway of tears.” [Dr. Adele Perry](#), Distinguished Professor of History and Women’s and Gender Studies at the University of Manitoba (appearing as

2 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Dr. Alhassan](#) (as an individual).

3 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Dr. Cindy Hanson](#) (Professor, Department of Sociology and Social Studies, University of Regina (as an individual)); [Dr. Alhassan](#) (as an individual).

4 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Dr. Alhassan](#) (as an individual); [Dr. JoAnn Jaffe](#) (Professor, Department of Sociology and Social Studies, University of Regina (as an individual)).

5 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Dr. Hanson](#) (as an individual).

6 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Dr. Jaffe](#) (as an individual).



an individual), echoed this concern, pointing to the ongoing crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit plus people in the Prairie Provinces, and its link to a lack of intercity bus transit.

Cancellation of Greyhound Bus Service

Greyhound Canada suspended services in Western Canada in 2018. The company indicated this decision was due to “years of declining ridership and the impact of a changing and increasingly challenging transportation environment, including deregulation and subsidized competition such as VIA Rail and publicly owned bus systems.” Services in Ontario and Québec were maintained until they were suspended temporarily in May 2020, and finally cancelled on a permanent basis on 13 May 2021. The company pointed to pandemic-related travel restrictions and a “dramatic” 95% drop from normal operational volumes, adding that “[f]inancial investments from governments for Canada’s [intercity] bus sector have been negligible. Operations are not feasible absent of financial support.”⁷

Some witnesses pointed to the closure of the STC and other smaller carriers across Canada to illustrate that Greyhound’s departure was but one step in a series of service cuts throughout the country.⁸ Indeed, [Dr. Alhassan](#) and [Dr. Hanson](#) suggested that the loss of “feeder service,” smaller routes leading to a main long-haul line, from the STC likely had an impact on Greyhound’s profitability in Western Canada.

Nevertheless, several witnesses stated that the withdrawal of Greyhound in particular had a significantly negative and lasting impact.⁹ Of particular note was the loss of a connecting player for smaller bus carriers, as Greyhound served as agent for connecting carriers, allowing passengers to travel between provinces on a single ticket.¹⁰

[Terrence Johnson](#), President of Transport Action Canada, also pointed out that many of Greyhound’s former terminals were shut down and demolished after the company

7 Greyhound Canada, [Greyhound Canada Closes its Services in Canada](#), 2021.

8 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Terrence Johnson](#) (President, Transport Action Canada (Transport Action Canada)); [Dr. Adele Perry](#) (Distinguished Professor, History and Women’s and Gender Studies, University of Manitoba (as an individual)).

9 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Vince Accardi](#) (President, Motor Coach Canada (Motor Coach Canada)); [Matt Gemmel](#) (Director, Policy and Research, Federation of Canadian Municipalities (Federation of Canadian Municipalities)); [Dr. Hanson](#) (as an individual).

10 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Johnson](#) (Transport Action Canada); [Michael Cassidy](#) (Owner, Coach Atlantic Maritime Bus (Coach Atlantic)); [Dr. Perry](#) (as an individual); [Accardi](#) (Motor Coach Canada).

ceased operations, resulting in the loss of a safe place for passengers to wait for a connecting bus.

In order to fill the gaps left by the departures of both Greyhound and the STC, several operators expanded their own services.¹¹ This included Ontario Northland, a Crown Corporation of the government of Ontario, many private operators such as Rider Express,¹² as well as a variety of initiatives by municipalities or intermunicipal boards.¹³

According to [Dr. Breen](#), the current situation is one of instability, with many smaller carriers, particularly in rural areas, attempting to provide service on routes which are ultimately short-lived. Though [Kasper Wabinski](#), President of Kasper Transportation, agreed that the current network of services, which he qualified as “a national embarrassment,” is inconsistent, he nevertheless warned against developing a reliance on a new Greyhound-like monopoly.

Some witnesses were also critical of the level of service that was available under Greyhound,¹⁴ with [Dr. Breen](#) also pointing out that a much wider range of services exists as potential solutions.

Pandemic-Related Cancellations

As indicated by Greyhound Canada in its rationale for shuttering its services, the Covid-19 pandemic and related travel restrictions had a significant impact on bus transit ridership. [Vince Accardi](#), President of Motor Coach Canada, told the Committee that prior to the pandemic, the Canadian bus industry included over 1,000 companies, generating more than \$20 billion in operating and non-operating revenues, and providing over 118,000 full-time equivalent jobs. Since 2020, he said, hundreds of businesses have been lost, and with them thousands of routes.

11 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Tracy MacPhee](#) (Vice-President of Passenger Rail and Motor Coach, Ontario Northland (Ontario Northland)).

12 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Omer Kanca](#), (General Manager, Rider Express (Rider Express)); [Johnson](#) (Transport Action Canada); [Gemmell](#) (Federation of Canadian Municipalities).

13 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Samuel Roy](#) (Policy Coordinator, Union des municipalités du Québec).

14 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Gemmell](#) (Federation of Canadian Municipalities); [Dr. Sarah-Patricia Breen](#) (Regional Innovation Chair in Rural Economic Development, Selkirk College (as an individual)).



Several witnesses who appeared before the Committee indicated that their ridership, although increased in the past year, remains below pre-pandemic levels.¹⁵ [Jason Roberts](#), General Manager of DRL Coachlines Ltd., also stated that even where ridership numbers have stabilized, increased costs have added a further burden to carriers.

The Committee heard from some witnesses that government funding of transit operations was crucial to maintaining services both during the pandemic and during recovery.¹⁶ Both [Mr. Accardi](#) and [Marco D'Angelo](#), President and Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Urban Transit Association, also highlighted that intercity bus transportation is critical to Canada's post-pandemic economic recovery.

BENEFITS OF INTERCITY BUS TRANSPORTATION

“Transport policy is economic policy, rural development policy, agricultural policy, health policy, environmental policy, cultural policy and mental health and anticolonialism policy. It is also reconciliation policy.”

[Dr. JoAnn Jaffe](#) (Professor, Department of Sociology and Social Studies, University of Regina, As an Individual)

The Committee heard from many witnesses about the broad range of often invisible positive impacts intercity bus transit can have on individuals and communities. Some pointed to general economic benefits,¹⁷ whether from increased tourism¹⁸ or access to

15 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Pierre Maheux](#) (Administrator, Bus Carriers Federation (Bus Carriers Federation)); [Mr. Kanca](#) (Rider Express); [Marco D'Angelo](#) (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Urban Transit Association (Canadian Urban Transit Association)).

16 TRAN, *Evidence*: [D'Angelo](#) (Canadian Urban Transit Association); [Accardi](#) (Motor Coach Canada); [Kanca](#) (Rider Express).

17 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Gemmel](#) (Federation of Canadian Municipalities); [Dr. Breen](#) (as an individual); [Daniel Côté](#) (President, Union des municipalités du Québec (UMQ)).

18 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Gemmel](#) (Federation of Canadian Municipalities).

services.¹⁹ Some also indicated that public transit makes it easier for people to access job opportunities,²⁰ or education services²¹ in other communities.

Many also pointed to the critical role it plays in ensuring access to health services,²² with [Dr. Alhassan](#) adding that improved access to opportunities and services in itself improves population health. [Dr. Alhassan](#) also told the Committee that well-funded bus systems actually reduce the number of traffic fatalities as buses are less likely than private vehicles to be involved in accidents. [Mr. Accardi](#) also pointed to the role that bus operators can play in cases of evacuation or to provide emergency transportation for first responders.

The Committee also heard about the environmental benefits of intercity bus travel.²³ [Dr. Alhassan](#) and [Matt Gemmel](#), Director of Policy and Research with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, specifically argued that buses reduce the number of cars on the road, while [Dr. Hanson](#) and [Daniel Côté](#), President of the Union des municipalités du Québec, suggested bus transit as a means of achieving national environmental goals.

Negative Impacts of a Lack of Transportation Service

Witnesses not only spoke of the benefits of intercity bus services, but also of the significant negative impacts caused by a lack of such connectivity. These impacts, some witnesses argued, are disproportionately felt by marginalized communities.²⁴ For example, according to [Dr. Hanson](#) and [Dr. Jaffe](#), 60% of STC riders were women, and 71% were members of vulnerable populations. Similarly, [Dr. Perry](#) indicated that women have greater reliance on public transit in urban centres.

19 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Dr. Breen](#) (as an individual); [Dr. Jaffe](#) (as an individual).

20 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Dr. Alhassan](#) (as an individual); [Dr. Breen](#) (as an individual); [Dr. Josipa Petrunic](#) (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Urban Transit Research and Innovation Consortium (CUTRIC)); [Dr. Jaffe](#) (as an individual); [Côté](#) (UMQ).

21 TRAN, *Evidence*: [MacPhee](#) (Ontario Northland); [Dr. Breen](#) (as an individual); [Dr. Jaffe](#) (as an individual); [Côté](#) (UMQ).

22 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Accardi](#) (Motor Coach Canada); [MacPhee](#) (Ontario Northland); [Johnson](#) (Transport Action Canada); [Dr. Alhassan](#) (as an individual); [Dr. Hanson](#) (as an individual); [Dr. Breen](#) (as an individual); [Dr. Jaffe](#) (as an individual); [Jason Roberts](#) (General Manager, DRL Coachlines Ltd. (DRL)); [Maheux](#) (Bus Carriers Federation); [Côté](#) (UMQ).

23 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Gemmel](#) (Federation of Canadian Municipalities); [Dr. Breen](#) (as an individual); [Accardi](#) (Motor Coach Canada); [Kanca](#) (Rider Express).

24 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Dr. Alhassan](#) (as an individual); [Dr. Breen](#) (as an individual).



According to [Dr. Jaffe](#), “mobility is more and more an intersection of inequality, particularly for already disadvantaged rural and remote people,” and while improved access to transportation can help alleviate poverty, its lack can deepen and intensify negative impacts. She added that “the right to stay in rural places and the ability to live a good life are increasingly contingent on the right to move.” Similarly, [Dr. Hanson](#) argued that the ability to realize mobility rights is required under the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), to which Canada is a signatory.

Some witnesses also pointed to the role intercommunity public transit can play in helping people flee domestic violence or other situations of vulnerability, with the alternatives of hitchhiking or walking coming at great risk.²⁵ The Committee heard about the link between a lack of intercommunity public transportation and the violence addressed by the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.²⁶ Some witnesses²⁷ referred to the Inquiry’s Call for Justice 4.8:

We call upon all governments to ensure that adequate plans and funding are put into place for safe and affordable transit and transportation services and infrastructure for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people living in remote or rural communities. Transportation should be sufficient and readily available to Indigenous communities, and in towns and cities located in all of the provinces and territories in Canada. These plans and funding should take into consideration:

- ways to increase safe public transit;
- ways to address the lack of commercial transit available; and
- special accommodations for fly-in, northern, and remote communities.²⁸

[Mr. Johnson](#) stated that, in light of the Inquiry’s findings, “our federal government has an undeniable moral responsibility to restore an essential network of safe mobility that reaches all communities, large and small.” [Dr. Perry](#) added that transportation policy can

25 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Dr. Hanson](#) (as an individual); [Dr. Jaffe](#) (as an individual).

26 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Dr. Hanson](#) (as an individual); [Gemmel](#) (Federation of Canadian Municipalities).

27 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Dr. Hanson](#) (as an individual); [Dr. Perry](#) (as an individual); [Gemmel](#) (Federation of Canadian Municipalities).

28 National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, [Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#), Vol. 1b, 2019, p. 182.

provide “real and tangible” steps towards reconciliation by helping connect Indigenous communities with each other and with other communities.

[Mr. D’Angelo](#) argued that a lack of transit results in a negative impact to the economy, while [Dr. Hanson](#) equated it to a lack of participation in society. [Dr. Jaffe](#) echoed this by pointing to the significant investment in time required of people who do not have sufficient access to transportation.

Key Requirements for Benefits from Service

Throughout this study, the Committee heard witnesses touch on several requirements for transportation to be able to provide the social and economic benefits previously mentioned.

Of critical importance to some witnesses was safety.²⁹ [Dr. Josipa Petrunic](#), President and Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Urban Transit Research and Innovation Consortium, pointed to a variety of methods available to ensure safety at bus stations or waiting locations (such as safety buttons, noise machines, signage advertising mental health supports, and artificial intelligence to track patterns of unsafe behaviour), while [Dr. Breen](#) stressed the importance of also ensuring the safety of passengers during the first and last mile to and from stations or bus stops.

Some witnesses also indicated that bus transit should be affordable, particularly to ensure access by vulnerable populations that have an increased reliance on intercity bus services.³⁰

Accessibility was also raised as a key consideration,³¹ with [Mr. Johnson](#) reminding the Committee that the loss of services and lack of dependability are amplified for passengers with disabilities, adding that not all motorcoach models are accessible. [Dr. Hanson](#) quoted Scott Streiner, then-Chair and CEO of the Canadian Transportation Agency in a 2019 news release³²: “Accessibility is a fundamental human right and we are committed to ensuring that this right is realized in practice.” [Dr. Alhassan](#) also

29 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Accardi](#) (Motor Coach Canada); [MacPhee](#) (Ontario Northland); [Kasper Wabinski](#) (President, Kasper Transportation (Kasper Transportation)); [Dr. Hanson](#) (as an individual).

30 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Kanca](#) (Rider Express); [Cassidy](#) (Coach Atlantic); [Gemmel](#) (Federation of Canadian Municipalities); [Accardi](#) (Motor Coach Canada); [MacPhee](#) (Ontario Northland).

31 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Cassidy](#) (Coach Atlantic); [MacPhee](#) (Ontario Northland).

32 See Canadian Transportation Agency, [Canadian Transportation Agency issues International Working Group's recommendations on mobility aids and air travel](#), 10 September 2019.



highlighted the importance of ensuring that people with disabilities are able to exercise their right to mobility.

Finally, several witnesses spoke to the Committee about the importance of reliability.³³ [Dr. Jaffe](#) and [Mr. Wabinski](#) also stated that increased access to reliable public transportation tends to attract more riders.

SOLUTIONS

“[T]ransit is a space where innovation can be implemented tomorrow to create greater levels of safety for Canadian riders in order to encourage people to return to transit in the way we need: in the interests of climate action and addressing congestion, and for all the reasons that public mobility helps people live a better life.”

[Dr. Josipa Petrunic](#) (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Urban Transit Research and Innovation Consortium)

In terms of improving intercity bus transportation services in Canada, the Committee heard that many private and public entities have implemented a range of creative solutions. These include on-demand services,³⁴ public versions of which [Dr. Petrunic](#) argued could be extended beyond jurisdictional limits though federal-provincial alignment with municipalities. [Dr. Hanson](#) also pointed to smaller services being provided by some Indigenous governments to connect with urban centres, while [Dr. Breen](#) mentioned combinations of municipal fleets with local car shares to meet local or regional connectivity needs. [Dr. Petrunic](#) also indicated that some luxury coach services are expanding to meet the needs of middle-class riders who are able to afford higher-cost tickets.

Public and Private Models

As the Committee heard from [Mr. D’Angelo](#), route gaps are currently being filled not only by private companies but also by provincial and municipal transit services. For example,

33 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Gemmel](#) (Federation of Canadian Municipalities); [Côté](#) (UMQ); [MacPhee](#) (Ontario Northland); [Kanca](#) (Rider Express); [Johnson](#) (Transport Action Canada).

34 TRAN, *Evidence*: [D’Angelo](#) (Canadian Urban Transit Association); [Dr. Breen](#) (as an individual).

some witnesses spoke positively about BC Transit's role in ensuring a stable, reliable network of rural routes,³⁵ though [Dr. Breen](#) underscored that the system is not perfect.

[Tracy MacPhee](#), Vice-President of Passenger Rail and Motor Coach with Ontario Northland, also touted her own organization as an example, which [Mr. Johnson](#) agreed has been instrumental in closing service gaps. As [Ms. MacPhee](#) told the Committee, Ontario Northland's provincial funding is allocated in accordance with its annual business plan which includes a ridership estimate. The Crown Corporation monitors a cost per passenger and works to ensure that costs to customers remain affordable, with provincial funding available to make up for shortfalls. She argued that this system allows routes to be expanded at short notice to plug gaps caused by work stoppages or service cancellations.

[Dr. Alhassan](#) and [Dr. Jaffe](#) argued that a public transportation system allows more of a focus on mobility as a human rights issue, whereas private operators must necessarily focus on profitability, which can result in inconsistent route networks. [Dr. Hanson](#) also told the Committee that replacing public systems with private ones shifts the focus from "citizens" to "consumers," which has a disproportionate impact on marginalized groups. According to [Dr. Breen](#), a private operator's focus on profitability can be particularly impactful in rural areas as many routes cannot be profitable while remaining affordable, simply due to the distances and dispersed nature of the populations involved. [Omer Kanca](#), General Manager at Rider Express Transportation Corporation, similarly argued that Canada's population density means it cannot be financially viable for a private operator to maintain a large network of smaller routes without government support. [Mr. Côté](#) added that a route may well be unprofitable to the carrier while remaining "essential to the vitality of the regions served."

As private operators, both [Mr. Roberts](#) and [Pierre Maheux](#), Administrator of the Bus Carriers Federation, told the Committee that they make significant efforts to maintain services despite routes being unprofitable. This can be a challenge, however, particularly given the disparity in public funding between urban and rural transit. As [Mr. Maheux](#) explained, a private operator would need a customer to pay "the full costs plus, in principle, a profit margin," while urban or suburban public transit systems are heavily subsidized, requiring customer revenues to cover "only 35%, 45% or 55% of operating costs." This, he argued, results in a significantly higher cost for rural routes as opposed to urban or suburban routes, sometimes for similar distances.

35 [TRAN](#), *Evidence*: [D'Angelo](#) (Canadian Urban Transit Association); [Johnson](#) (Transport Action Canada); [Dr. Breen](#) (as an individual).



Yet, according to [Mr. Accardi](#), a Canada-wide network is not possible without partnership between the public and private sectors. [Mr. Gemmel](#) pointed out that a mix of public, private and non-profit is the current model in urban transit and argued that it can be expanded to include intercity transit. [Mr. Accardi](#) added that private operators are willing to work together to achieve a single-ticket cross-Canada trip, but that they need the mechanisms and support to reach this goal. For her part, [Dr. Petrunic](#) indicated that “there is money to be made on all sides of that equation,” and that therefore both public and private operators should play a role.

Jurisdictional Issues

Many witnesses spoke about the jurisdictional challenges involved in improving intercity transit in Canada. [Joel McKay](#), Chief Executive Officer of the Northern Development Initiative Trust, argued that transportation falls mainly under provincial jurisdiction and as such provincial governments should provide the primary leadership on this issue. [Mr. Accardi](#) and [Mr. Maheux](#) pointed out that jurisdiction over interprovincial bus lines was delegated to the provinces by the federal government through the [Motor Vehicle Transport Act](#), which created a gap in which interprovincial carriers struggle to find support. [Dr. Perry](#) echoed this critique, suggesting that the presumption of provincial jurisdiction has led to the current “patchwork” of services.

Witnesses provided varying testimony with regards to provincial involvement in intercity transit. [Mr. Wabinski](#) stated that “[b]esides the maritime provinces, there is little to no private-provincial co-operation in achieving a form of sustainable busing.” [Firat Uray](#), President of Rider Express Transportation Corporation, told the Committee that while his company has had success in discussing support with the government of British Columbia, it has not been successful with the governments of Alberta, Saskatchewan, or Manitoba. [Mr. D’Angelo](#), on the other hand, indicated some success in building relationships with the provincial governments of the Prairie Provinces, particularly Alberta.

Meanwhile, [Michael Cassidy](#), Owner of Coach Atlantic Maritime Bus, indicated that the governments of the four Atlantic provinces are eager to collaborate with the federal government in developing intercity bus networks, while both British Columbia and Québec provided crucial support to provincial carriers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

[Dr. Hanson](#) argued that, regardless of provincial jurisdiction, a national transportation system would necessarily be interprovincial in nature and should therefore involve the federal government. Indeed, [Mr. Gemmel](#) indicated that the federal government already provides funding for municipal public transit, and that intercity transportation should be

no different. Several other witnesses called for collaboration between orders of government regardless of jurisdictional issues.³⁶

Creating a National Network

As [Ms. MacPhee](#) told the Committee, ensuring connections between carriers is rife with complications, such as the need to coordinate potentially incompatible schedules over long distances and ensuring safe locations to wait for a connecting bus. Several witnesses recommended establishing a national intercity transit system and were of the view that federal leadership would be needed to achieve the goal of ensuring cross-Canada coordination between carriers.³⁷ [Mr. Johnson](#) proposed a national clearing-house-style system to this end.

[Dr. Petrunic](#) argued that a national strategy would in fact be insufficient, proposing instead a North-America-wide approach, while [Mr. McKay](#) advocated for a more province-led system, with the federal government providing assistance to integrate provincial networks. Meanwhile, [Mr. Wabinski](#) recommended the establishment of a national highway intercity transportation board as well as a national essential bus transportation Act.

Some witnesses warned against adopting a single “one-size fits all” approach in developing such a national network, arguing that transit needs vary from region to region, requiring a variety of specifically-tailored solutions.³⁸ For example, [Mr. D’Angelo](#) indicated that different strategies should be considered in Atlantic Canada in comparison to Northern Ontario, to reflect the difference in distances between communities. [Mr. Gemmel](#) was of the view that these diverse regional needs should be coordinated at the federal level, while [Dr. Jaffe](#) stressed the need for proper local consultations, as “[t]he wrong investments can advantage richer regions at the expense of poorer areas.”

36 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Dr. Breen](#) (as an individual); [Roberts](#) (DRL); [Cassidy](#) (Coach Atlantic); [Johnson](#) (Transport Action Canada).

37 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Dr. Alhassan](#) (as an individual); [Accardi](#) (Motor Coach Canada); [Dr. Hanson](#) (as an individual); [Gemmel](#) (Federation of Canadian Municipalities); [Dr. Breen](#) (as an individual); [MacPhee](#) (Ontario Northland).

38 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Gemmel](#) (Federation of Canadian Municipalities); [Cassidy](#) (Coach Atlantic); [Dr. Breen](#) (as an individual); [Côté](#) (UMQ).



Intermodal Connections

[Ms. MacPhee](#) spoke to the Committee about the benefits of intermodal connections between Ontario Northland buses and urban centres or municipal transit. [She](#) specifically mentioned intercity bus line connections with Go Transit stations in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area, as well as at the Toronto Pearson Airport.

Similarly, [Dr. Petrunic](#) recommended ensuring connections between transit hubs across North America. In particular, [she](#) pointed to Transit Windsor as an example of clean, safe, and efficient international public mobility and public transit, with excellent connectivity and integration with the Detroit transit system.

[Ms. MacPhee](#) recommended federal funding for intermodal stations to allow for single-location connections of all modes of public transportation. [Mr. Johnson](#) expressed a similar idea of federal funding to re-establish union terminals in key cities, ideally at or near train stations, which would include Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV) fuelling stations.

In establishing a national network, the Committee heard about the need to ensure connections not only between major cities, but also with smaller rural communities. Indeed, it is these shorter connections that often provide the social and economic benefits previously mentioned in this report.³⁹ [Mr. Johnson](#) gave the example of the United States' Amtrak Thruway system, in which private carriers operate shorter routes off of Amtrak's main lines to expand service areas. [He](#) suggested adapting a similar model to the Canadian context, whereby VIA Rail would provide rail services on main trunk routes, with shorter connections ensured by bus carriers. [Mr. Gemmel](#) and [Mr. D'Angelo](#) also supported the development and expansion of passenger rail, with the potential of links with shorter bus routes, while [Ms. MacPhee](#) indicated that Ontario Northland already strives to ensure connectivity with passenger rail services.

[Mr. McKay](#) expressed doubt that rail transportation could be affordable and reliable in Western Canada, while [Dr. Breen](#) pointed out that VIA Rail's network does not currently cover the entire country. [Mr. Maheux](#) and [Mr. Johnson](#) both indicated that bus carriers have often operated in competition with VIA Rail, with the latter suggesting that this was to the detriment of both modes of transport.

One further challenge to this type of connectivity, which was identified by [Mr. Cassidy](#), is that interlining depends on different modes of transportation being on schedule, whereas VIA Rail trains tend to arrive late. [Dr. Petrunic](#) suggested that ensuring dedicated tracks for VIA Rail would "improve reliability overnight" by avoiding schedule

39 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Cassidy](#) (Coach Atlantic); [MacPhee](#) (Ontario Northland); [Dr. Breen](#) (as an individual).

conflicts with freight trains, but that in the shorter-term, real-time data sharing arrangements would allow other carriers to adjust their own schedules in accordance with the train's actual expected time of arrival.

Information

According to [Dr. Petrunic](#), the operative questions to passenger transportation ought to be: "Who do we want to move? How many Canadians? Where and at what cost, and how fast between those marketplaces?" These questions, she proposed, would provide the foundation of a passenger transportation strategy, allowing logistical details to flow from the answers, while also providing performance metrics that can be used to calculate subsidies. To determine the number of people that need to be moved, it is imperative to gain more information on who uses public transit and for what purposes. This was a key point raised by other witnesses as well.⁴⁰

According to [Dr. Hanson](#), Canada lags internationally in terms of transportation studies. What information is available on intercity travellers, according to [Dr. Breen](#), is based primarily on the habits and needs of transit users in "larger urban-adjacent communities, particularly those in southern Ontario, southern Quebec and British Columbia." She recommended federal funding to address knowledge gaps and emphasized the need, when making decisions in the interim, to be aware of these gaps and the biases inherent in the information currently available.

[Dr. Petrunic](#) explained that, unlike many private companies, public transit systems do not collect rider information. As such, it is difficult to evaluate the needs of transit users and tailor services accordingly. She suggested that this data can easily be obtained through a transit app, by which passengers could consent to exchanging their data "for a better service." She also recommended leveraging data from VIA Rail to allow local transit providers to have a better idea of where VIA Rail passengers are going once they get off at the station, thereby allowing them to provide improved service.

[Dr. Petrunic](#) also suggested that improved data analytics could help identify why and where otherwise apparently "random" physical attacks are occurring.

[Dr. Hanson](#) and [Dr. Perry](#) both underlined the importance of ensuring the involvement of users, and in particular those who are members of marginalized communities, in evaluating transit services.

40 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Dr. Perry](#) (as an individual); [Dr. Breen](#) (as an individual); [Dr. Jaffe](#) (as an individual); [Johnson](#) (Transport Action Canada); [MacPhee](#) (Ontario Northland).



Technology

[Mr. D'Angelo](#) and [Mr. Accardi](#) both recommended that the Government of Canada provide leadership to bring operators and technology innovation together to facilitate connections between regional services. [Mr. Cassidy](#) also pointed out that while carriers have reservation systems, they need a communications platform to allow seamless travel between carriers for passengers as well as parcels.

On this topic, [Mr. McKay](#) told the Committee about the Northern Development Initiative Trust's (NDIT) efforts to provide a connected network to allow travellers to transfer among services in northern British Columbia. Using technology already deployed in Western Europe, the NDIT will launch a pilot project for such a network in the summer of 2023. [Mr. Johnson](#) also indicated that private companies Busbud and Expeditus are offering similar services, although for brokerage fees that many carriers cannot afford. For this reason, [he](#) recommended a non-profit, national clearing house.

Electrification

In terms of electrification, some witnesses told the Committee that, while battery-powered buses are coming to the industry, their use in long-distance intercity transit is limited by current battery technology.⁴¹ [Mr. D'Angelo](#) nevertheless expressed optimism that manufacturers are showing leadership on this front, while he and [Mr. Accardi](#) both pressed the importance of the Zero Emission Transit Fund (ZETF) to offset the costs of electrification. [Dr. Petrunic](#) suggested that, while the ZETF is a good start, more federal support is needed.

[Mr. Gemmel](#) said that the cost of electric buses, and particularly their batteries, is much lower than it used to be and continues to drop. Nevertheless, according to [Mr. Cassidy](#), the cost of an electric coach remains a significant capital investment at \$1.2 million, as opposed to \$725,000 for a diesel bus. [Mr. D'Angelo](#) also pointed to high operating costs for ZEVs.

Furthermore, [Dr. Petrunic](#) raised the issue of inter-regional infrastructure planning to support electrification efforts, ensuring high-powered charging stations along bus routes, particularly to address reduced battery range in cold weather.

While the current technology is not optimal for long-range transportation, the Committee heard that electric buses are already practical on shorter distances, for

41 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Cassidy](#) (Coach Atlantic); [Dr. Petrunic](#) (CUTRIC); [Maheux](#) (Bus Carriers Federation).

example by tour operators.⁴² [Mr. Cassidy](#) also pointed to their effective use in municipal transit, though he indicated that electrification of municipal fleets is largely due to public funding, highlighting the importance of equivalent resources being provided for intercity carriers.

[Mr. Gemmel](#) also raised the option of hydrogen-powered vehicles, particularly for heavier, long-range transportation. He added that such a transition could benefit the Canadian economy as a world-leading hydrogen producer.

Funding

According to [Dr. Breen](#), while the benefits of transit are spread across many individuals, businesses, communities, and indeed society as a whole, its costs are often solely borne by the service provider. [Dr. Jaffe](#) also pointed to the externalized costs of truck and automobile-based transportation systems, which she stated are higher than they appear to be.

[Mr. Gemmel](#) and [Dr. Breen](#) spoke to the need for long-term, predictable and stable funding for intercity passenger bus services, while [Mr. Wabinski](#) specifically proposed that private operators be eligible to receive federal funding.

Rural-Specific Funding

One of several funding-related issues that some witnesses raised was insufficient rural-specific funding.⁴³ According to [Mr. Gemmel](#), both current and previous federal governments have shown strong support for urban public transit funding, while not providing sufficient focus on rural and intercity transit.

According to [Mr. Accardi](#), it is a much bigger financial risk for carriers to reopen a rural route than an urban one, while [Mr. D'Angelo](#) told the Committee that, while some carriers are making efforts to expand outside of urban areas, they cannot do so without government support.

Both [Dr. Petrunic](#) and [Dr. Breen](#) acknowledged the Rural Transit Solutions Fund (RTSF) as a positive example, though they stressed the need for more. [Mr. Wabinski](#) explained that many small rural municipalities do not have the resources or the desire to prioritize connectivity with other communities. [Mr. Côté](#) and [Mr. Maheux](#) called for the federal

42 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Accardi](#) (Motor Coach Canada).

43 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Dr. Breen](#) (as an individual).



government to reach a permanent agreement with the government of Québec to extend the RTSF to municipalities of that province, expand its budget, and include funding for inter-regional transportation.

Operational Funding

[Dr. Breen](#) also recommended expanding the RTSF to cover operational funding to address another key funding gap. Indeed, according to [Mr. Maheux](#), while the government of Québec provides funding for operational costs, intercity bus carriers receive no direct federal assistance for this purpose. [Mr. D'Angelo](#) also recommended the renewal of federal supports for operational costs that were put in place to assist carriers during the pandemic.

Capital Funding

In terms of capital funding, [Mr. Roberts](#) insisted on the importance for long-haul carriers to have dependable vehicles to ensure reliable service even in bad weather. [Ms. MacPhee](#) recommended federal funding for both private and public intercity carriers to acquire capital assets, particularly wheelchair-accessible coaches. [Mr. Johnson](#) also proposed financing options such as low-interest loans, lease financing and tax relief of vehicles, for the same purpose, while also pointing to the need for accessible infrastructure at bus terminals.

In terms of infrastructure funding, [Mr. Maheux](#) indicated that recent federal accelerated capital cost allowance measures have been helpful, although they are not directly targeted at transportation. [Dr. Petrunic](#) and [Mr. D'Angelo](#) stressed the importance of permanent transit funding, while [Mr. Cassidy](#) proposed that for-profit carriers be eligible to receive future capital infrastructure funding.

[Dr. Petrunic](#) also expressed the need for a “transit innovation supercluster-style strategic innovation fund focus,” to leverage the tools of the Ministry of Innovation, Science and Economic Development to ensure a safe and resilient transportation system that could continue to operate in the event of future pandemics or epidemics. She added that the Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated the essential nature of transit, with frontline workers often having no other way to get to work. [Mr. Gemmel](#) and [Mr. Côté](#) were both of the view that intercity bus transit should be considered an essential service, with the latter arguing that it should therefore be tax exempt. [Mr. Maheux](#) echoed a proposed tax exemption.

Taxes

[Mr. Accardi](#) indicated that private carriers would greatly benefit from being eligible for federal programs or grants. [Mr. Wabinski](#), and [Mr. Maheux](#) specifically spoke of tax rebates on fuel costs.

Carbon pricing in particular was discussed by [Mr. Accardi](#), who said that any additional cost to private operators is necessarily passed on to riders. [Mr. Uray](#) added that low ridership during the pandemic prevented operators from compensating for the additional expense imposed by carbon pricing, while [Mr. Wabinski](#) indicated that a rebate in this matter would be helpful.

[Mr. Kanca](#) suggested that high government-imposed fees and costs have deterred some private operators from providing inter-provincial services. [He](#) suggested that harmonizing licence requirements across provinces, or alternatively providing a universal licence, would help simplify inter-provincial routes and reduce costs to carriers that otherwise must pay licensing fees across multiple jurisdictions.

Subsidies

According to [Dr. Hanson](#), the cost of urban public transit in Canada is subsidized up to 60%. [Mr. Roberts](#) gave the example of the St. John's transit system, which provides service to 200,000 people and receives \$16 million in subsidies per year, whereas a private rural operator on the Island of Newfoundland may provide service for 250,000 people but receives no funding.

The Committee heard that relatively small subsidies could very well make the difference between maintaining and cancelling an otherwise un-sustainable route.⁴⁴ According to [Mr. Wabinski](#), the cost of subsidizing routes across all of Canada could be as little as \$30–85 million per year. [He](#) specifically proposed a route-specific subsidy model based on the Amtrak Thruway approach, in which new routes would be subsidized to ensure reliability, which in turn will attract more riders, allowing the subsidy to then be reduced.

[Mr. Maheux](#) spoke of his carrier's route to Chisasibi, which was made possible by the efforts of several Indigenous communities and the Grand Council of the Crees, who applied for the Quebec *Programme d'aide au développement du transport collectif*. [He](#) explained that “[w]hen a municipality agrees to support a private carrier and maintain a

44 TRAN, *Evidence*: [Wabinski](#) (Kasper Transportation); [Maheux](#) (Bus Carriers Federation); [MacPhee](#) (Ontario Northland).



service, for every dollar it invests, three dollars are invested” by the provincial government under this program.

[Mr. D’Angelo](#) also pointed to the disproportionate effects that seniors suffer at the loss of intercity bus connectivity and praised an initiative by the City of Montreal through which seniors will travel free of charge on municipal transit as of 1 July 2023.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this study, the Committee heard about not only the benefits of intercity bus transportation, but also the significant negative impacts on both individuals and communities at the loss of this service. Canadians rely on intercity buses for a variety of reasons, from shopping to critical medical appointments, education, employment, or to escape domestic violence. A loss of connectivity is disproportionately felt by members of marginalized communities.

The Committee heard a range of recommendations on how to develop and maintain a national intercity transit network that is safe, affordable, accessible, and reliable.

APPENDIX A LIST OF WITNESSES

The following table lists the witnesses who appeared before the committee at its meetings related to this report. Transcripts of all public meetings related to this report are available on the committee’s [webpage for this study](#).

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Canadian Urban Transit Association Marco D'Angelo, President and Chief Executive Officer	2022/11/23	41
Motor Coach Canada Vince Accardi, President	2022/11/23	41
Ontario Northland Tracy MacPhee, Vice-President, Passenger Rail and Motor Coach	2022/11/23	41
Rider Express Omer Kanca, Witness, Firat Uray, President	2022/11/23	41
Transport Action Canada Terence Johnson, President	2022/11/23	41
As an individual Jacob Alhassan, Assistant Professor, Department of Community Health and Epidemiology, College of Medicine, University of Saskatchewan Cindy Hanson, Professor, Department of Sociology and Social Studies, University of Regina	2022/11/30	43
Coach Atlantic Maritime Bus Michael Cassidy, Owner	2022/11/30	43
Federation of Canadian Municipalities Matt Gemmel, Director, Policy and Research	2022/11/30	43
Kasper Transportation Kasper Wabinski, President	2022/11/30	43

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
As an individual Sarah-Patricia Breen, Regional Innovation Chair in Rural Economic Development, Selkirk College Adele Perry, Distinguished Professor, History and Women's and Gender Studies, University of Manitoba	2023/02/16	55
Canadian Urban Transit Research and Innovation Consortium Josipa Petrunic, President and Chief Executive Officer	2023/02/16	55
Northern Development Initiative Trust Joel McKay, Chief Executive Officer	2023/02/16	55
As an individual JoAnn Jaffe, Professor, Department of Sociology and Social Studies, University of Regina	2023/03/07	56
Bus Carriers Federation Pierre Maheux, Administrator	2023/03/07	56
DRL Coachlines Ltd. Jason Roberts, General Manager	2023/03/07	56
Union des municipalités du Québec Daniel Côté, President Samuel Roy, Policy Coordinator	2023/03/07	56

APPENDIX B LIST OF BRIEFS

The following is an alphabetical list of organizations and individuals who submitted briefs to the committee related to this report. For more information, please consult the committee's [webpage for this study](#).

Bus Carriers Federation

REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this Report.

A copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* ([Meetings Nos. 41, 43, 55, 56 and 64](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Peter Schiefke
Chair

Conservatives call for removal of inflationary carbon tax on intercity bus travel

Introduction

Conservative Members of Parliament on the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities would like to thank the Committee, its staff, analysts, and number of witnesses who shared their valuable insights concerning intercity bus travel.

While the Conservative Members support the general direction of the report, we are concerned that the recommendations of this report have not addressed the inflationary nature of the carbon tax and its negative impact on intercity bus transit.

For this reason, we are tabling this supplementary report. Conservatives recommend:

That the Government of Canada, to make intercity bus travel more affordable for passengers, recognize that the carbon tax has driven up the costs for carriers and that those costs have been passed on to passengers, mitigate higher prices by axing the carbon tax altogether, or at the very least providing a rebate to intercity bus operators to offset the cost of the carbon taxes they pay.

Background:

The Committee heard from private operators that the carbon tax was an additional cost for which they had no option but to pass on to their riders. A witness suggested that a rebate of the carbon tax would be helpful.

The Conservatives members of the committee believe that during this affordability crisis when people are struggling to put food on their tables and a roof over their heads, the government should not be compounding the problem of inflation by driving up the cost of intercity bus travel with an additional tax.

Conclusion

Canadians are suffering through the worst period of inflation in forty years. Conservatives will continue to call on the federal government to make life more affordable for all Canadians including those who travel by intercity bus.

**DISSENTING REPORT
OF THE
NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA**

Improving bus connectivity in Canada

Canada's New Democrats are disappointed by the recommendations made by the Standing Committee on Transportation, Infrastructure and Communities in the report *Improving bus connectivity in Canada*.

The body of the report refers to strong testimony from witnesses who described at length the abysmal state of Canada's inter-regional passenger bus services; the impact this lack of service has on Canadians, specifically those of marginalized populations; and potential solutions to help Canadians access a national network of safe, reliable, and accessible bus service. However, the Committee's lackluster recommendations convey neither the urgency and importance of this issue, nor the overwhelming call from witnesses for the federal government to take a leadership role in addressing it.

Specifically, the Committee's recommendations do not adequately address testimony calling for:

- The establishment of a public, nation-wide bus network;
- Leadership action from the federal government and Minister of Transport to consolidate inter-provincial and territorial bus travel;
- A comprehensive study of the current state of inter-regional bus transit in Canada;
- Funding for intermodal connection infrastructure; and
- Expanded eligibility for the Rural Transit Solutions Fund, in conjunction with increased financial resources for the fund.

Establishing a Public, Nation-Wide Bus Network

However imperfect, Greyhound Bus Ltd. once allowed passengers to travel across the country bus on a single ticket. Since the cancellation of this service, provision of inter-regional bus service has devolved into a patchwork of for-profit and public providers with varying service levels and major gaps in connectivity. For longer trips, passengers are often forced to navigate a complicated system involving multiple, poorly integrated service providers. In many cases contiguous bus service simply doesn't exist.

Interprovincial bus travel is particularly problematic. The *Motor Vehicle Transportation Act* delegates jurisdiction for interprovincial bus service to the provinces, and while some provincial governments have invested in intra-provincial service, there is little incentive for provinces to collaborate across their borders.

As indicated in the body of the Committee’s report, witnesses pointed to the patchwork nature of the system as a deterrent for Canadians who want or need to use intercity bus services. They explained that this patchwork creates safety concerns, complexity, additional cost for multiple tickets, and lack of services in many areas.

To fix this problem, the NDP recommends, based on witness testimony from [Dr. Alhassan](#), [Dr. Jaffe](#), and [Dr. Hanson](#), the creation of a national network of inter-regional bus operations, which is publicly funded and operated as a crown corporation.

“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.”

- [Dr. Cindy Hanson](#), Professor, Department of Sociology and Social Studies, University of Regina, TRAN Meeting 43, November 30, 2022

The successful operation of a national bus service would provide more than a convenience for Canadians. Rather, it would deliver a broad societal good. Accessible, safe, reliable bus and rail service helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improves access to job opportunities and services such as healthcare, and ensures vulnerable populations who might otherwise hitchhike have access to a safe mode of transportation.

Northern, rural, and remote communities are the most affected by the current lack of reliable bus service in Canada. In sparsely populated areas with long distances between centres, there is little financial incentive for private operators. Instead of providing heavy subsidies to private carriers to operate these routes, a publicly owned national carrier could operate these vital routes in the public interest while retaining any revenues the network generates.

“With profitability no longer in the picture, operating these routes is no longer advantageous for private carriers, but it is still essential for the vitality of the regions served. It is above all the financial support of governments, particularly municipal governments, that keeps these routes active.”

- [Daniel Côté](#), President, Union des municipalités du Québec, TRAN Meeting 56, March 7, 2023

Federal Leadership

While witnesses acknowledged inter-city bus services fall under provincial jurisdiction, most witnesses who spoke to jurisdictional issues – including academics, private operators, and advocacy groups – indicated the federal government must take a

leadership role to address the gaps in the current bus network, especially gaps in interprovincial services.

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

-[Vince Accardi](#), President, Motor Coach Canada, TRAN Meeting 41, November 23, 2022

In previous testimony before the Committee, the [Minister of Transport](#) indicated he has offered to work collaboratively with the provinces and territories on the issue of bus transport. However, in the absence of a provincial response to his overtures, he has refused to take any further action on a matter that is clearly in the national interest. The NDP recommends the Minister heed the witness testimony by leading discussions between provinces and territories, and by creating incentive programs for the provinces and territory to integrate their bus systems.

“As we've heard, this is not in the constitution of provincial responsibility. That is delegated. The federal government can re-issue the role of regulator, especially across interprovincial bus services, which is the whole national network. What gets cut in one place harms the whole ecosystem.”- [Terrence Johnson](#), President Transport Action Canada, TRAN Meeting 41, November 23, 2022

Assessing and Addressing Knowledge and Service Gaps

The NDP supports the spirit of the Committee’s recommendation entitled *Assessing and Addressing Knowledge Gaps (Habits of Intercity Transit Users)*, which seeks to “assess and address the current knowledge gaps with regards to the habits and needs of intercity transit users.” The NDP would expand this assessment beyond the habits and needs of users to include other dimensions of the issue.

“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.

The federal government should continue to support efforts to address these gaps, not only through academic research but also through funding communities and regions to assess their needs and evaluate potential solutions.”

- [Dr. Cindy Hanson](#), Professor, Department of Sociology and Social Studies, University of Regina, TRAN Meeting 43, November 30, 2022

The government should conduct a comprehensive study of the current state of bus service in Canada, including identifying where gaps in service exist. The current patchwork of smaller bus services has yet to replace the routes lost when Greyhound pulled out of Canada, not to mention the gaps that existed prior to that. A comprehensive assessment is key to inform future strategies aimed at improving bus service in Canada.

The Committee's recommendation does not indicate how the information collected through an assessment should be used to drive improvements in bus transportation. The NDP recommends the government's assessment be used to create a comprehensive national bus transportation strategy and action plan, including implementation timelines.

Intermodal Connections

The Committee's recommendation entitled *Intermodal Connections* suggests the Government "encourage" all stakeholders to coordinate intercity bus routes with passenger rail and air travel. Several witnesses highlighted the need for intermodal connections, and the NDP supports the spirit of this recommendation. However, the urgency of the situation requires more from the government than passive encouragement. The NDP feels the government should commit to concrete steps, such as funding for intermodal stations to allow for single-location connections of all modes of public transportation, as recommended by [Ms. MacPhee](#) and [Mr. Johnson](#).

Expanding the Rural Transit Solutions Fund

The Committee's recommendation entitled *Expanding the RTSF to Cover Private Bus Carriers and Intercity Routes* calls on the government to expand eligibility for the Rural Transit Solutions Fund to private intercity bus carriers that operate in rural regions. Given the current fund's modest capacity, the NDP supports its focus on public and not-for-profit bus service providers. Expanded eligibility should be accompanied by expansion of the fund.

Recommendations

Further to the recommendations contained in the Committee's report, the NDP recommends the following:

Recommendation 3- Ministerial Responsibility

That the Minister of Transport demonstrate the federal leadership needed to reconnect Canadian communities with affordable, safe, convenient, low-emission bus service, including bus service between provinces and territories.

Recommendation 2- Assessing and Addressing Knowledge and Service Gaps

That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with all stakeholders, including provincial and territorial governments, Indigenous communities, municipalities, as well as public and private operators, conduct a thorough study to determine the current state of bus service in Canada, identify where gaps exist, and use that information to create a comprehensive national bus transportation strategy and action plan, including implementation timelines.

Recommendation 1- Establishing a Publicly Owned National Network

That the Government of Canada collaborate with all stakeholders, including provincial and territorial governments, Indigenous communities, municipalities, as well as public and private operators, to establish a publicly owned national network of safe, affordable, accessible, and reliable inter-regional transit routes, operated as a crown corporation.

Recommendation 4- Intermodal Connections

That the Government of Canada collaborate with all stakeholders, including provincial and territorial governments, Indigenous communities, municipalities, as well as public and private operators, to encourage the coordination of intercity bus routes with passenger rail and air travel, including by planning and funding intermodal stations to connect all forms of public transport.

