



May 11th, 2018

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OPEN LETTER: Response to the *Seniors Transportation: Affordable, Appropriate and Available* report

Dear Ms. MacKenzie,

Thank you for the *Seniors Transportation: Affordable, Appropriate and Available* report and for the extensive research and public consultation that went into it. Seniors on the Move agrees with your appraisal that more must be done in order to meet the transportation needs of an aging population. We know that transportation is a social determinant of health and is foundational to an independent, socially involved and active life for older adults. We appreciate the fact you recognize “the increased opportunity for isolation and loneliness that can occur” when seniors are no longer able to drive.

Your report identifies a number of opportunities and addresses some of the barriers experienced by seniors, but, in our opinion, it fails to provide a comprehensive approach to meeting the transportation needs of an aging population. The report acknowledges that it “is not all encompassing of every transportation need,” however, we feel the recommendations left significant gaps, particularly for those most vulnerable.

Background

Seniors on the Move is a collective impact project working to remove transportation barriers and reduce isolation amongst seniors in Metro Vancouver. The over twenty transportation stakeholders involved in this project recognize that the lack of transportation options can be a significant obstacle for a senior wanting to connect with friends and family, participate in social programs or even get out in the community for ordinary activities. We are working with seniors directly in the region in order to address some of these issues. Specific solutions being tested include:

- Recruiting additional volunteer drivers to provide rides to seniors, particularly those with low-incomes, beyond medical trips, and enable them to go where they want to go, and partnering with Modo, the car share co-op, to enable access to vehicles for volunteers who do not have their own cars, or don't want to use them;
- Building on the Bus Buddies program (referenced in the report) which was initially developed by Voices of Burnaby Seniors (VOBS) in 2009, we have implemented transit training for seniors. Working with TransLink we have been refining the sessions through multiple reiterations and will be starting a new three-tiered training offered in June at Collingwood Neighbourhood House focusing on trip-planning, how to use Compass Cards and transit safety;
- Supporting seniors to plan ahead for 'life without driving' by creating community resources to inform seniors of transportation options and help with the conversation around when to stop driving based on ability, to be distributed in part through ICBC, also as recommended in your report;
- Working with ICBC to host driver cessation workshops;

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- Expanding the Bus Co-op, a bus sharing organization, to increase community organizations' access to vehicles for social bus trips like those now being offered by SHARE Family and Community Services and community shuttles like Silver Harbour Seniors' Activity Centre's Go-Bus referenced during the report release event;
- Advocating for improvements to HandyDART similar to those contained in the report; and
- Working with bc211 and Better Environmentally Sound Transportation (BEST) to establish a Seniors Transportation Hotline and Resource Hub so seniors looking for transportation options can call 211, a 24/7 multilingual hotline that will house all of the relevant transportation information for their region. We will be testing the first phase of the Hotline in June throughout Metro Vancouver and then scale-up across BC.

During the Consultation

To facilitate the OSA's consultation process regarding transportation, we convened several groups of seniors and service providers to provide insight and solutions, and participated in a number of your teleconferences. During these consultations we heard about a range of improvements needed to the transportation system for seniors, including:

- Senior-friendly built environments - this means more benches, washrooms and curb cuts, longer crosswalk timers, protected bike lanes for all ages and abilities;
- Fully accessible public transit in Metro Vancouver to increase transit use among seniors – this means more bus shelters, more seating for seniors, more bus stops to decrease walking distance on select routes and more neighbourhood routes that go where seniors want to go, as well as more buses running more often;
- Increased funding to community organizations so they can provide more rides for seniors unable to use HandyDART or public transit - due to increasing demand, many programs have lengthy waiting lists;
- A comprehensive transportation plan that includes an 'age-friendly' land use plan - seniors need more affordable housing options in walkable, amenity-rich areas that connect to good public transportation networks; and
- Resources to help seniors and their families navigate their transportation options and promote lifelong transportation planning. To help seniors learn about their transportation options, select the options most appropriate for them, and navigate the system, we must help seniors plan ahead for their changing abilities and transportation needs.

We saw some, but not all of these concerns expressed in the report. And, sometimes these issues were not explored in a nuanced way that would have highlighted the complexity of the problems for seniors with multiple barriers and those most vulnerable. In many ways, each of these issues could have merited separate reports to better capture the voices heard during the consultation.



Reflections on the Report

Reviewing the feedback provided through the consultation, we are uncertain that the limited recommendations in the report will address the myriad of concerns seniors have about their transportation options.

We should note, Seniors on the Move supports in principle eleven of the fifteen recommendations in the report. Specifically, information sharing about transportation alternatives, changes to DMER, more pedestrian-friendly communities, improvements to the Taxi Saver program and its acceptance, the implementation of “Bus Buddies”,

benches at bus stops, driver training on supporting seniors transit users, and increasing availability and access to HandyDART (recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12 and 14). There are some refinements we would suggest.

We agree that DMERs should be standardized and should not be a cost burden to seniors (recommendations 2 & 3). Additionally, we recommend that healthcare professionals should be better equipped to help people appreciate when their declining health impairs their ability to safely drive, learn about their transportation options, and select the options most appropriate for them.

While the Taxi Saver program is a positive experience for many seniors (recommendation 6 & 7), it has its issues which are not addressed by the recommendations. For example, many taxi drivers even if required will be reluctant to accept Taxi Saver vouchers, for a variety of reasons, including not feeling compensated for the additional time of helping seniors in and out of cars. Therefore, taxi drivers should be mandated to go through a similar training program on supporting senior users. In addition, taxis (and ride-sourcing vehicles if approved) will need to have a wider range of accessible vehicles on the road at one time, and senior-friendly drivers.

However, some of our concerns are more fundamental and significant. While providing tax deductions for family, friends and neighbours to provide medical related appointments would be appreciated (recommendation 5), it keeps the burden on caregivers to ensure access to primary health care. As you clearly identified in your 2017 report *Caregivers in Distress: A Growing Problem*, 31% of informal caregivers feel they are unable to continue in their caregiver duties are expressing feelings of distress, anger, or depression. By recommending this tax deduction, you are implicitly releasing the government from its responsibility to help residents access health care services.

We also have significant concerns about the means testing that would be required for the annual seniors bus pass with fees based on income (recommendation 10) and the recommended review of HandyDART fees (recommendation 13). Means testing tends to be inefficient, unfair and not to the benefit of those most vulnerable. There can be significant bureaucratic apparatus in implementing means tests that divert those who need the benefits the most, because they don't know about them, that they are eligible for them, don't know how to claim them or get overwhelmed by the application/re-application process. Means testing also does not treat BC's older adults with the respect they deserve.

Finally, we would like to reflect on recommendation 15, which seems to be the most substantial innovation in the report to address the transportation gap. We are sceptical of the efficacy and efficiency of the “new model”. Throughout the province, local solutions have been developed by seniors and community-based organizations. Instead of recommending investments in these approaches and other solutions which would fit in with the overall transportation system, the report recommends a costly health care driven approach.

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For example, one program, community shuttle buses—which was frequently referenced by seniors during the consultation as a preferred model—was completely overlooked in the report. Community shuttles offer timely service, stop at senior-oriented destinations, and provide opportunities for social interactions. The North Shore Seniors Go-Bus has long been the most talked-about solution to seniors transportation issues in Metro Vancouver. Based on comments made during the report release event, it sounds like it might also be a viable option for places like Salmo, BC.

Furthermore, during the consultations we also heard feedback about the stigma associated with using HandyDART (not reflected in the report). While we do not condone this negative perception, we need to be sensitive to it. Presumably the same stigma would be experienced by those using the proposed health-authority run transportation service.

Our Recommendation

Seniors on the Move recommends that the OSA return to the findings of your year-long consultation with seniors and members of the community-based seniors serving sector. Throughout the process we heard many innovative approaches from seniors about how to meet their needs. It is our hope that you will reconsider all of the feedback provided through the consultation and recommend increased support for a range of transportation options that are accessible, affordable, acceptable, adaptable and available.

In conclusion, we would like to thank you again for elevating the issue of seniors transportation. It is a significant social determinant of health and foundational to independence and social participation.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of member organizations of Seniors on the Move.



Stephen D'Souza

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Seniors on the Move is a collective impact project working to remove transportation barriers and reduce isolation amongst seniors in Metro Vancouver. Project partners include Burnaby Community Services, Collingwood Neighbourhood House, Silver Harbour Seniors Activity Centre, Share Family and Community Services, Better Environmentally Sound Transportation (BEST), the United Way of the Lower Mainland, among other transportation stakeholders. *Seniors on the Move* is a project of *Allies in Aging*.

Allies in Aging collaborates to connect seniors across our communities through leadership, outreach, transportation, training and advocacy. Projects are designed to connect seniors who are 75+ with people and services to reduce isolation due to disability, low income, language or cultural barriers.

Founded in 1971, *Burnaby Community Services* is a charitable society providing a voice, resources and opportunities to people who need support. We believe change can only happen when people are empowered to improve their lives and their community. Currently, we offer a range of programs and publications to support families with low income and isolated seniors. Burnaby Community Services is the Host Agency for *Seniors on the Move*.

Project Lead for *Seniors on the Move*, Better Environmentally Sound Transportation (BEST) is a non-profit charity with a long history of advocating for better transportation solutions. BEST works to enable people to choose sustainable transportation options through initiatives and programs. BEST has been working on issues related to seniors transportation since 2011.

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