

Exploratory Transportation Call

September 20, 2022

Presenters

Anastasia Lukyanova, City of Powell River

Marci De Witt, Alberni-Clayoquot Health Network

Kelly Taylor, Urban/Rural Rides (Westmorland-Albert)

City of Powell River: Zunga Bus On-Demand

- Transit Context:
 - o Long waiting times
 - o Infrequent buses, windy routes, lots of transfers
 - o Poor or non-existent pedestrian infrastructure
 - o Aging population, rising housing costs
 - o Unreasonably long times to get to work – barriers to child care or other things users might have to get done
- Model inspired by Belleville Ontario. Their model was:
 - o Flexible routes which is good for low-density single-family homes; created by algorithms in real-time based on rider requests
 - o Eliminated transfers and created shorter waiting and travel times
 - o Wider coverage than you can get from a fixed route
 - o More cost effective
- Resources: BC has software and Government of Canada has funding ([Innovative Solutions Canada](#)) to do this. The grant bought the software and the bus too. City only had to come up with funds to buy the bus driver's time.
 - o Note: The city did *not* receive the grant. It went to the [software developers](#)
- Started with a section of the community to pilot.
- Book via app or phone call – tells you when bus will pick you up and gives real-time updates
- Operator can see all pick-ups and drop-offs through the software and can make the route as optimal as possible to accommodate everyone
- Mixed door-to-door and stop-to-stop
- Results
 - o 99% positive experiences
 - o Really helped with senior isolation.
 - o A single mother booked rides for her eldest child to reduce shuttling two children around
 - o Data helped analyze the bigger transportation system and replaced one fixed route with Zunga Bus and expanded the Zunga service area. Also consolidated two routes into a high-frequency express bus during peak hours, and merged the Zunga bus with the HANDYdart bus, as one shared fleet and service.

Alberni-Clayoquot Health Network: Multiple small transportation Initiatives

- Context:

- 3 municipalities, ten Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations, and population of ~30,000 people.
- No grant money
- Health Network is doing transportation as a health equity initiative. How to travel from A to B to access health services or things that can make people healthy?
- 2014 Travel Snapshot explored costs (time & financial) from getting from place to place E.g., going to a medical appointment
- 2014-2015 consultations and brought decision-makers together in dialogue. Formed a Regional Transportation Action Table and West Coast Transportation Working Group
 - Created transportation Google asset map to show challenges with rural transportation and how much of it is infeasible. A tool for each community to use to create their case
 - Created lots of passion in the community.
 - Regional group didn't get far because didn't have much in common
- ACHN now supporting local community groups to do more micro-scale projects that build on existing community assets
 - Example: Wheels for Wellness Pilot – takes people to medical appointments 60km+ in Port Alberni in the same day. There was no same-day service before. Quickly mobilized support and demonstrated need in under 3 months. Got business and local government to purchase the van
 - Found other programs in the community already operating that they could expand. No grant or developer for software, so finding partners was essential.
 - One bus was connecting the community to beaches and expanded to connecting workers to town.
 - Connected 5 communities with paved road access to BC Transit. Health Network did an engagement with youth and others to identify transportation priorities of those most in-need
 - Region is now paying taxes towards community-to-community, door-to-door service and will start soon
- Learned: experiment; bring together community; and take on small pieces well. Use community stories to move forward with what makes most sense

Westmorland-Albert: Urban/Rural Rides

- Context:
 - 2 counties, 14 municipalities
 - Far distances, NO form of alternative transportation, limited fixed routes in the surrounding 3 cities, and frustration with how long they take to get around
 - Started in 2008
- Province created a (poverty reduction) funding stream to start transportation services – 3 organizations popped up organizing volunteer drives door-to-door:
 - Rural rides
 - Tele-drive
 - Volunteer Centre SENB drive program

- The three groups amalgamated in 2013 to create urban-rural rides
 - o Created one paid admin staff because seniors often can't use smart phones. The ride request comes in 48 hours in advance, and the need is matched with drivers.
 - o Will pick up at door, spend time during their journey, wait and return them home. Drivers don't handle money; they're invoiced at the end of the month.
 - o \$50,000 per year grant from province. They are filling a gap that regular transportation can't fill.
 - o Regional Service Commissions (local government) get some gas tax to support it, and municipalities offer funding. Community groups like rotary club also donate.
 - o Goal will be to provide ALL types of rides in the future, not just health
 - o Applied to federal government to purchase accessible vans.

Results:

- o Reduces isolation, helps volunteers gives back to the community
- o Makes individuals feel valued because someone willing to drive him. One person forgot about their chronic pain when talking to volunteers – not just a drive
- o Primarily for seniors to help them age in place. Rides are *not* made accessible
- o Expanding to other regions in the province – the province is very supportive of these transportation initiatives

Q&A and Discussion

- None of these models have been done to provide emergency services or paramedical support
- BC Transit has a “suite” defined by services and fleet. On-demand isn't part of their toolkit yet, though it's supposed to be a few years out.
- Getting buses is more difficult than just finding and purchasing the bus – also need to find space to store and funds to maintain them.
- Zunga bus is a set rate as it's within city limits, but could look at rate zones.
- How did you get word out?
 - o Powell River: Flashy bus design! Bright yellow in a small community – you learn about it by seeing it
 - o Westmorland-Albert: Word-of-mouth, community partner referrals, social media, etc. The hardest part is recruiting volunteers – mostly through word of mouth and radio ads. Looking now for champions within their community.
 - o Alberni: Network of service providers. They're the seed organization, so they pass it off once the initiative is seeded
- There are 21 organizations in Nova Scotia that provide rural transportation. They can all be found here <https://ruralrides.ca/>. Most organizations have paid drivers (some volunteers) and they're all non-profits. They get up to \$85,000 per year from the province
- How do you do evaluation?
 - o After each ride in real-time via the app (no process or phone-in bookings yet)
 - o Quick evaluations after pilot projects
 - o Ride coordinator and volunteer assessments

- Evening needs
 - Needs extra funding to expand to earlier in the day and later at night. Lots of requests in tourism towns for early morning and late evenings; youth looking for rides to employment.
 - Biggest issue is staffing (drivers)
 - Volunteer drives does evenings but doesn't advertise them