

FACT SHEET 4:

## LINKING ACCESSIBILITY, SAFETY, VIOLENCE & TRANSPORTATION

This is the fourth of four fact sheets produced by the study, *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow: Public Transportation and Vulnerabilities in Rural and Remote Canada* a scoping review of literature guided by the question: *How does the presence or absence of public transportation contribute to people's vulnerability in rural and remote locations?* The study explored how remote and rural (RR) places face complex social, political and economic obstacles in order to achieve sustainable, accessible, and appropriate transportation and exercise mobility rights. Growing vulnerability and inequality between RR places contributes to growing vulnerabilities and inequalities among RR residents and the rest of Canada. Unequal mobilities—especially affordable public transportation—shapes whether individuals and communities can achieve sustainable livelihoods, societal participation, personal and collective safety, and access to essential and non-essential services, resources, and rights.



**“Along the Highway of Tears, violence defines boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, personhood and exception, colonizer and colonized.”<sup>1(p307)</sup>**

Experiences of vulnerability due to the absence (or presence) of public transportation in rural and remote locations are multifaceted. Many socio-economic factors intersect with structural and service barriers to affect people unequally. These social factors exacerbate experiences of vulnerability, risk, and violence. Vulnerabilities create risks, which is evident in the examination of interpersonal violence or missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Historical patterns of racism, colonization, and citizenship – and the systems of power they produce – have led to these conditions. We provide three examples to help introduce the complexity of these issues.

### Urban and Rural Divide: Experiences of Older Adults in Rural Areas

Transportation shapes the lifestyle, physical well-being, and quality of life of older adults in rural areas. Due to a lack of transportation availability, older persons living in rural and remote places have more unmet travel demands and a higher number of trips missed than their urban counterparts.<sup>2-4</sup> Older adults who do not drive also struggle with issues of public transportation's accessibility, affordability, availability, and appropriateness.<sup>2</sup> Those with mobility challenges are further excluded by lack of bus shelters and benches, unwalkable sidewalks, and inaccessible public transit. Reduced mobility corresponds to lower household incomes and inequality as women are less likely to travel for social and daily amenities or services such as grocery shopping. Factors that influence rural older adults' ability to travel to meet their needs are health status, financial status, disability, and non-driving status.<sup>5</sup> Services such as paratransit in urban areas which can accommodate “a wheelchair and other walking aids” are not commonly available in rural places.<sup>6</sup> Service availability, social requirements, and (dis)abilities are all key considerations for policy makers in bridging the rural-urban divide in transportation.

### Transportation and Migrant Workers

Available literature is sparse on the ways that transportation policies and systems exacerbate the vulnerability of migrants. The mobilities of migrant workers are defined by and heavily tied to their workplaces.<sup>7</sup> For migrant workers, “Transportation exclusions are not incidental – they buttress existing race, citizenship, and class power hierarchies and systems of labour exploitation.”<sup>7(p321)</sup> Migrant workers can face the possibility of employers overcharging for transportation since in many cases migrants are structurally dependent on employers by way of work contracts.<sup>8</sup> Many migrant farm workers live in rural locations, meaning they must confront the politically produced reality of rural Canada where “transportation is scarce and expensive.”<sup>9(p49)</sup> Although social, political, transport, and geographical systems are

shaped by the automobile, vehicle ownership is prohibitive for migrant workers, and so bicycles are opted for as a mode of transportation. In many ways, structures of belonging and of who has the power within a place is perpetuated through the intersection of immigration status and rural location; it defines who is afforded rights, safety, and access to services. For temporary workers, “(im)mobilities are implicated in making citizens and non-citizens.”<sup>7(p309)</sup>

## Exclusions and Their Impacts on Safety

Transport-based exclusion has gendered differences.<sup>10</sup> Women are far more likely to experience sexual harassment or assault on public transportation and while hitchhiking. These gendered dimensions of exclusion can overlap with other positions such as racialized status. Highway 16, known as **The Highway of Tears**, has been the site of the murders and disappearances of many Indigenous women, so for people whose only transportation is to hitchhike, race and gender inevitably come to constitute elements of their mobility. Gender exclusions correlate with fear- and space-based exclusions. **Fear-based exclusions** stem from the fear of crime and perceived insecurity associated with certain sites and even the transport services that operate in or through them, which can lead people to avoid them.<sup>11</sup> Transphobic and homophobic harassment impinge on transgender individuals’ comfort with public transportation.<sup>10</sup> Stereotypes of certain subgroups lead to over-surveillance and discomfort, which limits participation and mobility. Far less studied are **space-based exclusions**. These include matters such as the design, surveillance, and management of space, which can discourage certain groups from using mobility systems. Most frequently impacted are those targeted by prejudice and discrimination, especially racialized groups.<sup>12</sup>

## Indigenous Women

The case of the Highway of Tears (a remote section of road in Northern British Columbia) confirms that the experience of mobility is not equal and cannot be generalized across every group, and that inequalities are structured through transportation or the lack of it. The Highway of Tears was frequently used for hitchhiking due to its remoteness, and provided an essential link to connect underserved remote communities with sporadic, expensive and uneven bus services until recently.<sup>1</sup> Up until 2021,<sup>13</sup> this area was highly vulnerable due to limited cell and transportation networks.<sup>14</sup> Noted as having “few rest areas, shelters or emergency services for hitchhikers and other travelers to access between communities”<sup>1(p302)</sup> and social conditions marked by “experiences of poverty, unemployment and inadequate education opportunities leading to social marginalization and increased risk of violence,”<sup>1(p304)</sup> the Highway of Tears was constructed similar to other remote locations in the north. That such markers are determined and reinforced by a colonial history that has also determined and in certain periods, lawfully restricted Indigenous mobility, cannot be overlooked. For example, the Indian Act of 1876 controlled movement of Indigenous peoples off reserve. Colonial history has constructed Indigenous women as “willing victims” who deserve the violence they face because of their “lifestyle choices.”<sup>15</sup>

**This fourth fact sheet was written by** E. Varley, C. Hanson, J.A. Alhassan, J. Jaffe, M. Krajewski, M. Tanaka, T.J. Nkhata.

**Copies of this report** are available without charge through the [University of Regina](#) or the [Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women \(CRIAW-ICREF\)](#).

**Here Today, Gone Tomorrow** was co-funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council & Infrastructure Canada.

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