

FACT SHEET 1:

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION & INTERSECTIONALITY

This is the first 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.



We recommend an intersectional approach to examine how advantages and marginality are created in public transportation. Intersectionality has three main points:

1. how experiences of oppression and privilege in people's individual/community lives are lived;
2. how structures of power impact upon people's lives; and
3. how structures and systems – social, political and economic – produce and reproduce inequalities.

The Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAW-ICREF), a national feminist organization, outlines an intersectional approach on systems thinking and on the relations of power and privilege in interactions with individuals and communities.¹ Working with CRIAW and using an intersectional approach, we framed social and other forms of inequality experienced by people and places with transportation. Framing inequality involved naming social positions (including race, gender, class, geography, age, and ability) and noting how these positions are impacted by systems of power (for example, economic, social, and political) and social hierarchies or structures (like colonialism, sexism, racism, and ableism).

Why intersectionality in public transportation?

Intersectionality furthers our understanding of topics directly related to transportation rights and justice, such as social inclusion, mobility, and public and community health impacts. It also highlights how transportation compounds other sources of disadvantage and exacerbates inequalities. The intersectional approach pulls us away from generalizations and enables us to engage with community needs and experiences all the while recognizing transportation's differential impacts and the systems and institutions of power that inform them.

"Intersectionality recognizes that people's experiences may be affected by several interacting systems of power that combine, reinforce or challenge each other. These systems construct people's experiences of marginalization and oppression, or of power and privilege."^{2(p136)} For instance, Mimi Sheller's³ notion of mobility justice recognizes bias in the way mobility and transportation systems are constructed. She suggests ways to look at mobility as a system "...under surveillance and unequal – stratified by gender, race, ethnicity, class, caste, colour, nationality, age, sexuality, disability, etc. *which are all in fact experienced as effects of uneven mobilities* [sic]."^{3(p10)}

Gender differences are further structured through socio-economic activity, safety, violence, and travel patterns.⁴ Our approach illustrated the processes and practices by which intersections of social identity can be used to advance a more just notion of mobility.

Situated Intersectionality: Why does place matter?

Yuval-Davis's⁵ theory of *situated intersectionality* enhanced our understanding of social, economic, and personal inequalities in the context of transportation. Situated intersectionality looks critically at the “geographical, social and temporal locations of the particular individual or collective social actors,”^{5(p95)} discouraging generalizations across contexts, space, and time. Power and social stratification translate differently in different situations. Naming challenges to and enablers of transportation justice *within RR locations* thus becomes necessary to get a more nuanced and accurate description of how location and geography influence transportation access and control. Homogenizing communities of people erases experiences and views outside of normative perspectives. Normative transportation-related policies and programs suggest an urban bias; *situated intersectionality* advocates for a more flexible and situated response. (See case study & examples in the report). Using intersectionality results in rich explanations of experience: Cohen's⁶ research, for example, emphasizes diversity in access to transportation, health care, food and housing on older adults depending upon their specific intersections of older age, rurality, and income. Hailemariam et al.'s⁷ research uncovered how “social identities, power structures, and legal and policy frameworks”^{7(p2)} along with the needs of specific populations (defined as “young women, perinatal women and new mothers, older women, women with disabilities and LGBTQIA.”^{7(p2)}) experienced lack of access to services and how lack of transportation options affected their food security, health care, personal safety, and employment. The study's avoidance of homogenizing populations provided data to build sustainable community-based solutions. Tools such as, gender audits, case studies and community-led processes help build appropriate transportation service policy and provisions (see report for examples).

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

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REFERENCES

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Case study:

The Saskatchewan Transportation Company (STC) was a public transportation system that provided an infrastructure for the delivery of services, goods, mobility and safety to RR people in Saskatchewan for 70 years providing residents an affordable, accessible, safe and environmentally friendly way to move around. It enabled many in rural areas to exercise full citizenship rights and enjoy amenities and services similar to their urban neighbours.

The 2016 STC annual report⁸ demonstrated:

- over 60% of STC users were women and 70% were low income;
- riders were diverse: the elderly, youth, Indigenous, or marginalized populations;
- STC medical passes linked patients with medical needs to essential health services (for a low annual fee);
- STC's freight arm was profitable while supporting farmers and rural businesses;
- drivers were unionized and,
- STC employees included diversity (e.g. Indigenous folks, people with disabilities)

STC used the *Balanced Scorecard*, an alternative measure to bottom-line profitability, to track its performance and progress in meeting a range of social, environmental and economic goals.

Safety audits documented performance in disability-related accessibility, and high satisfaction ratings among its users. STC demonstrated how public transportation is pivotal in serving areas of low population density and RR communities. (Adapted from full case study in report p. 13).