

FACT SHEET 3:

## TRANSPORTATION EQUITY THROUGH PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

This is the third 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.



**“Consumer voice and citizen voice are not the same. Market solutions rest on the logic of individual self-interest and this constrains their ability to address the broader collective well-being of the region.”<sup>1(p83)</sup>**

### The Impacts of Austerity and Privatization

Despite being vital public infrastructure, today's transportation systems are shaped by the logics of neoliberal capitalism. Characterized by the diminishing role of the state, the expansion of private ownership, and the promotion of individualism, neoliberalism has today become the dominant ideology underpinning our social structures.<sup>2</sup> This has led to cuts to public transportation, the rising popularity of public-private partnerships, and the proliferation of private services such as Uber and Lyft.<sup>3,4</sup>

When public systems are replaced by private ones, “citizens” are replaced by “consumers.”<sup>1</sup> The privatization of transport then leads to a loss of citizen voice. Neoliberal restructuring – including government rollbacks and regionalizing service delivery – has increased transportation needs in many rural communities and shifted costs onto users.<sup>5-7</sup> When the private sector steps in to address the failures of underfunded and inadequate public systems, mobility may be improved for some.<sup>8</sup> Ride-hailing services such as Uber and Lyft, for example, are said to be providing a “new automobility,” operating in urban, suburban, and even rural areas to provide access to the resources and services that automobility offers.<sup>9</sup> It is also common for voluntary organizations to step in to meet the needs of members of the community – often focusing on a niche group such as elderly or people who need to access health services.<sup>5,6</sup> Too often, however, immobility and inequality are worsened by private transportation models that increasingly benefit the already well-off, while creating gaps in transportation access for others – particularly those in isolated and remote areas.<sup>6-8</sup>

These private and voluntary solutions emerge as a direct result of choices made in transportation policy-making that privilege automobility and private profit at the expense of the public good.<sup>7</sup> While these alternatives may benefit some, they serve to erode the role of the state, put further pressure on the social economy sector, and lead to the further de-prioritization of an equitable public transportation system.<sup>4,7,10</sup> Canada is in danger of developing a permanent mobility underclass in which structural immobility intersects with other sources of disadvantage and “limits their ability to obtain and keep jobs, access basic services, contribute to society or maintain a reasonable quality of life.”<sup>8</sup> Transportation needs to serve more than those who can pay, and must ensure democratic decision-making, equitable outcomes, and community benefit.

### Democracy and Public Participation

Public involvement is fundamental to the democratic governance of transportation as a public good.<sup>1,11</sup> People have the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives and communities – particularly people of colour, low-income

people and others who have been historically disadvantaged by transportation policy.<sup>11,12</sup> Effective public involvement can reduce the negative outcomes of transportation projects (or their withdrawal) and lead to more equitable policy-making.<sup>11,12</sup>

There are several examples and proposed models of public participation in transportation decision-making. Each reflects ways that the public can have more control over their mobility and help to institutionalize transportation equity:

1. Unger et al.'s guidance document outlines the role of the public in shaping the definition of social and economic sustainability and the ways that transit agencies work toward it.<sup>13</sup>
2. Comprehensive transportation assessments and/or community-wide needs assessments bring a diverse group of community members and stakeholders to the planning table.<sup>5</sup>
3. The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation's *Every Voice Counts* project includes a Public Involvement Strategy and Checklist with a number of important considerations for engaging affected populations with the transportation planning process to promote more equitable and just outcomes.<sup>12</sup>
4. Triplett proposes a 6-step public participation process to achieve civic engagement in transportation policy-making.<sup>11</sup>

### Rethinking Transportation Outcomes: From Economy to Equity

The turn to democratic decision-making for equitable outcomes pushes against the dominant economic approach to transportation policy. Traditional cost-benefit analyses appear to be apolitical, but they ignore local needs, priorities, and members of the public; exclude important impacts; value economic efficiency over equity; and unequally distribute costs and benefits – largely to the harm of already marginalized groups and the benefit of those who are already more privileged.<sup>14,15</sup> Equity-oriented approaches to transportation policy and appraisal include triple bottom line measurements,<sup>13,16</sup> the social return on investment methodology,<sup>10</sup> the balanced scorecard approach,<sup>26</sup> various equity analyses,<sup>15,17</sup> and additional models that expand the parameters of transportation appraisal and considerations for transportation decision-making.<sup>14,18-22</sup>

Push-backs against neoliberal changes to transportation are emerging, not only through the shifts to democratic decision-making and more equitable transportation described above, but also through returns to public ownership and creativity in the public sector. The rising return to public ownership and innovative public service models reflects the shortfalls of private ownership and has the potential to be more economically stable, democratic, and equitable.<sup>23-25</sup>

**This third fact sheet was written by** M. Krajewski, J. Jaffe, C. Hanson, E. Varley, M. Tanaka, J.A. Alhassan, 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 \(CRIA-W-ICREF\)](#).

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

### REFERENCES

1. Warner M, Hefetz A. Applying market solutions to public services: An assessment of efficiency, equity, and voice. *Urban Aff Rev* 2002; 38: 70–89.
2. Harvey D. *A brief history of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
3. Opara, M. *Public private partnerships in Alberta's transportation infrastructure: A study of the evolution of the institutional environment*. Athabasca University, 2014.
4. Kaye-Essien CW. 'Uberization' as neoliberal governmentality: A global south perspective. *J Asian Afr Stud* 2020; 55: 716–732.
5. Dize V. *Getting around in rural America*. Journal of the American Society on Aging 2019; 43(2):33–39.
6. Halseth G and Ryser LM. *The deployment of partnerships by the voluntary sector to address service needs in rural and small town Canada*. *Voluntas* 2007; 18:241–265. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-007-9042-8>.
7. Wilt J. *Do androids dream of electric cars? Public transit in the age of Google, Uber, and Elon Musk*. Between the Lines, 2020.
8. Roy A. *Forget universal basic income. We need universal basic mobility* [Internet]. 2025 AD; 2018. Available from: <https://www.2025ad.com/forget-universal-basic-income-we-need-universal-basic-mobility>
9. Brown A. Redefining car access: Ride-hail travel and use in Los Angeles. *Journal of the American Planning Association* 2019; 85(2):83-95. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944363.2019.1603761>.
10. Waikar RD, Kalagnanam SS, Findlay IM. *Financial proxies for social return on investment analyses in Saskatchewan: A research report*. A report for Community-University Institute for Social Research, 2013. Canada: University of Saskatchewan.
11. Triplett KL. *Citizen voice and public involvement in transportation decision-making. A model for citizen engagement*. *Race, Gender & Class* 2015; 22(3/4):83–106.
12. Triplett KL and Johnson GS. *Environmental justice and transportation: An analysis of public involvement at Pennsylvania Department of Transportation*. *Race, Gender & Class* 2011; 19(3/4):348–371. Available from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43496853>.
13. Unger H, Heller A, Lane LB, Matherly D. *Social and economic sustainability performance measures for public transportation: Final guidance document*. The National Academies Press 2019. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.17226/25461>.
14. Hickman R and Dean M. *Incomplete cost – incomplete benefit analysis in transport appraisal*. *Transport Reviews* 2018; 38(6):689–709. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01441647.2017.1407377>.
15. Shi J and Zhou N. *A quantitative transportation project investment evaluation approach with both equity and efficiency aspects*. *Research in Transportation Economics* 2012; 36:93–100. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.retrec.2012.03.002>.
16. Jones P and Lucas K. *The social consequences of transport decision-making: clarifying concepts, synthesizing knowledge and assessing implications*. *Journal of Transport Geography* 2012; 21:4–16. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2012.01.012>.
17. Bills TS and Walker JL. *Looking beyond the mean for equity analysis: Examining distributional impacts of transportation improvements*. *Transport Policy* 2017; 54:61–69. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tranpol.2016.08.003>.
18. Mahmoud M, Hine J, Kashyap A. *Stakeholders' perspectives towards bus quality indicators*. *Transport* 2014; 167(3):156–177. <https://doi.org/10.1680/tran.11.00083>.
19. Geerlings H, Klementzschitz R, Mulley C. *Development of a methodology for benchmarking public transportation organisations: A practical tool based on an industry sound methodology*. *Journal of Cleaner Production* 2006; 14:113–123. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2005.03.021>.
20. Rohanna K and Tayman J. *Census data for transportation planning, analysis, and implementation*. *Journal of Economic and Social Measurement* 2006; 31:167–183.
21. Federal Highway Administration. *Planning for transportation in rural areas*. Report for the Federal Highway Administration, July 2001. December 2004. Washington, USA.
22. Petterson D and Hrelja R. *How to create functioning collaboration in theory and in practice – practical experiences of collaboration when planning public transport systems*. *International Journal of Sustainable Transportation* 2020; 14(1):1–13. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15568318.2018.1517842>.
23. Hanna TM. *Reclaiming democratic control: The role of public ownership in resisting corporate domination*. *J World-Systems Res* 2019; 25: 42–48.
24. Farmer S. *Chicago's public transportation system - The contradictions of neoliberalism in the global city*. Binghamton University, 2009.
25. Sterns R, Antenucci V, Nelson C, Glasgow N. *Public transportation service models*. *Generation* 2003; 27(2):20-22.
26. Saskatchewan Transportation Company. *Saskatchewan Transportation Company Annual Report 2016-2017*. 2017.

