

Rural & Northern Transportation

Challenges, Innovations, and the Road Ahead

Ryan Gibson, Sarah Breen, Ela Mastej

Good Roads Conference
31 March 2026



UNIVERSITY OF
GUELPH



SLIDES



Outline

- Why rural and northern transportation is important
- Why rural and northern is different than urban
- Realities for rural and northern transportation
- Recent research



Libro Professorship

\$1 million gift from Libro Credit Union and two rural families

- Rural economic development
- Community investment funds
- Immigration/newcomers
- Wealth and philanthropy
- Workforce development
- Rural policy evaluation
- Place-based development

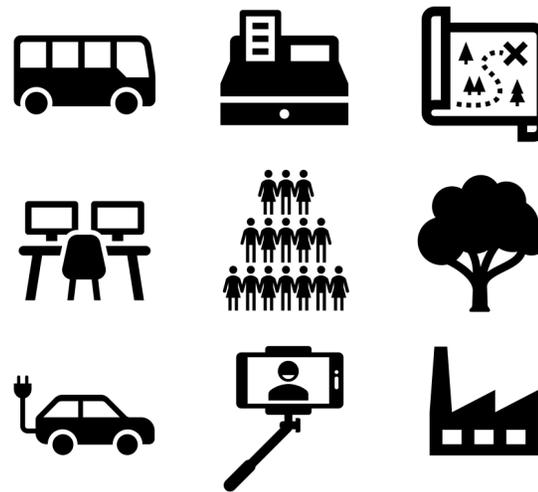
www.ruraldev.ca

Public Transit: Importance

Individuals



Communities



Libro Professorship

- \$1 million gift from Libro Credit Union and two rural families
 - Rural economic development
 - Community investment funds
 - Immigration/newcomers
 - Wealth and philanthropy
 - Workforce development
 - Rural policy evaluation
 - Place-based development

www.ruraldev.ca

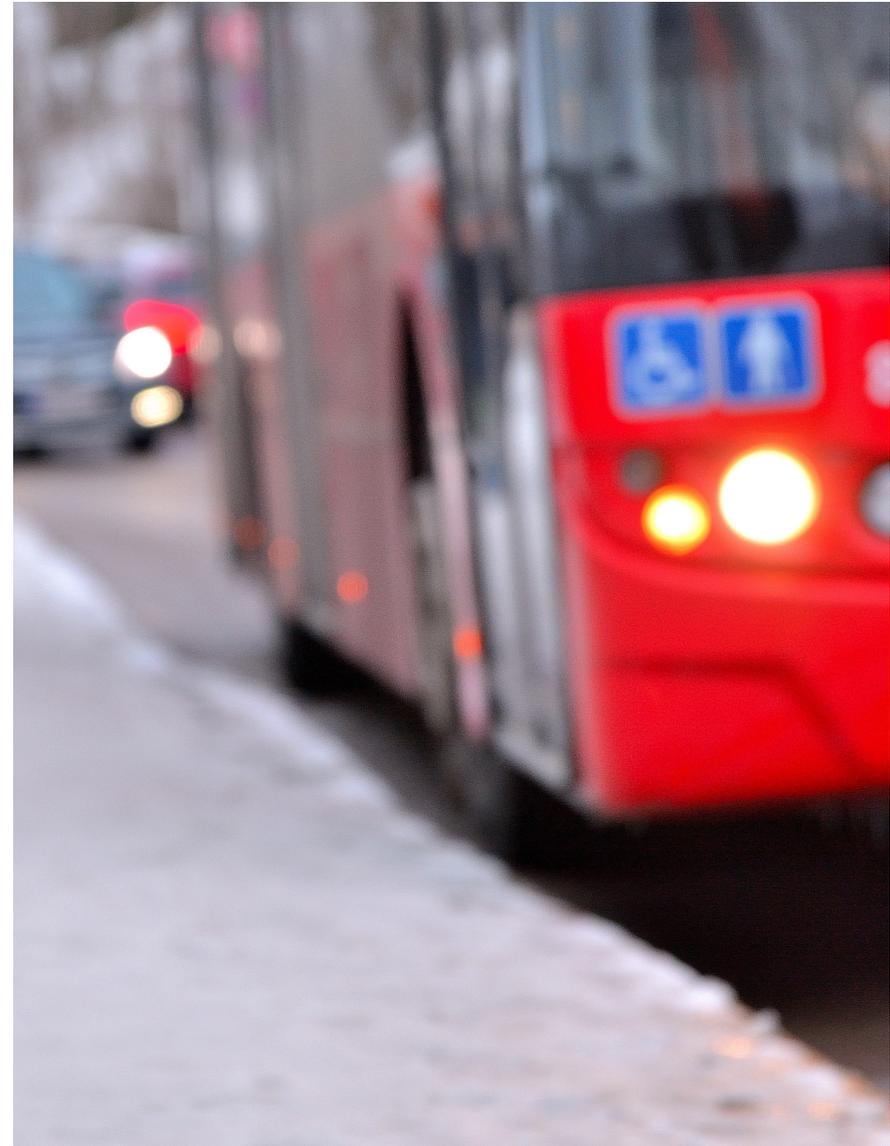
Uniqueness of Rural and Northern Transit

- Distance
- Density and Demand
- Infrastructure
- Service Models
- Costs and Funding



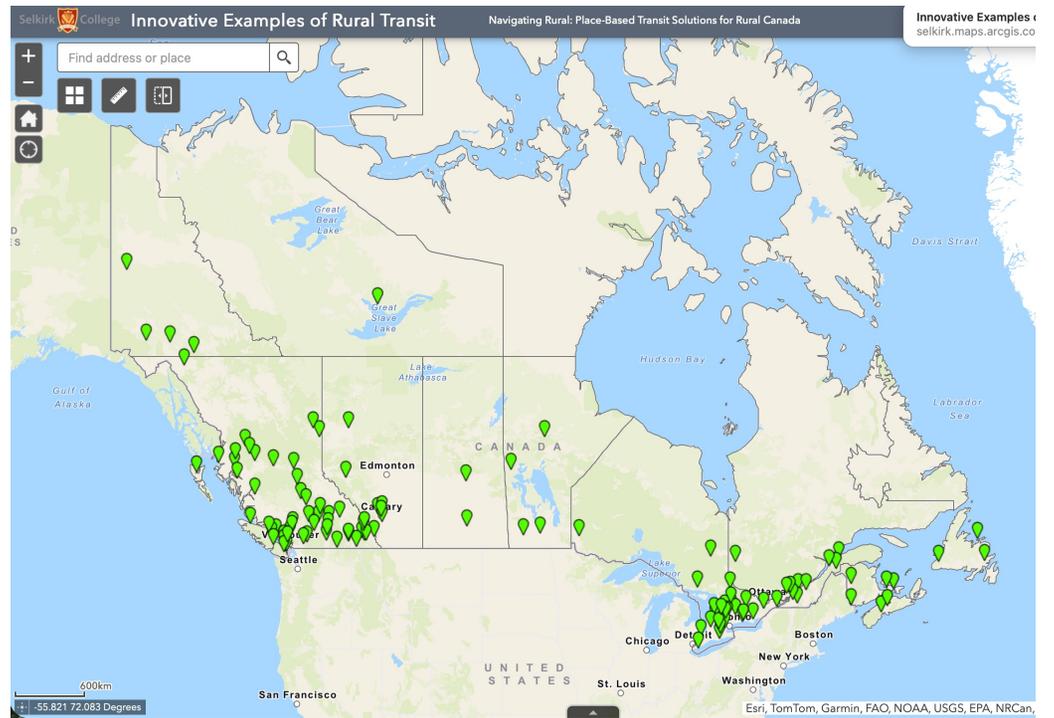
Public Transit: In Rural Canada

- Limited information available
- Multi-jurisdictional responsibilities
- Rural specific challenges
- “Rural” treated as homogenous
- Uneven knowledge – skews to urban-adjacent communities & select regions
- Mode – tradition and innovation



Recent Research

- Innovative map of rural transit systems



Recent Research

1. Has rural Canada been served by Federal Transit funding?
2. Is the Rural Transit Solutions Fund shifting patterns of Federal Transit funding?
3. Is the Rural Transit Solutions Fund meeting its goals?



Public Transit: Federal Funding Program

Building Canada Fund	Details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2007-2014, \$8.8 billion • Infrastructure related to stronger economy, cleaner environment, prosperous communities • 2/3 dedicated to major infrastructure, including public transit • Cost-shared with a maximum federal contribution of 50%
	Rural Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One third earmarked for communities under 100,000
Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program	Details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2020 – current, \$33 billion • Assist with environmental and climate goals, build strong communities, and ensure access to services • Dedicated Public Transit stream (capacity/quality/access)
	Rural Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated Rural and Northern Communities stream - excluded transit projects • “Rural and northern” determined by Provinces and Territories, but cannot exceed 100,000
Modernizing Transportation	Details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2017 – 2020, \$77 million • Subset of Investing in Canada Plan Trade and Transportation Programs
	Rural Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural and northern communities stream – no definition provided
Public Transit Infrastructure Fund	Details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2016 – 2019, \$3.4 billion • Part of the Investing in Canada Plan • Acceleration of municipal investments in rehabilitation of transit systems, new public transit capital projects, planning and studies for creating new systems
	Rural Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No dedicated rural funding
Rural Transit Solutions Fund	Details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2021 – current, \$250 million • Transit specific, including planning, design, and capital projects that expand or modernize transit
	Rural Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targets development of transit in rural and remote communities, 10% reserved for Indigenous • Applicants self-define as rural and must offer rationale for inclusion as ‘rural’ in the application

Investment: Basic Analysis

Province / Territory	Project Count	Project Funds (in millions of \$)	Funds per person
Ontario	908	10,223.9	\$719
Quebec (QC)	308	3,454.6	\$406
Alberta (AB)	86	2,280.9	\$429
Manitoba (MB)	73	269.1	\$535
British Columbia	69	2,147.7	\$200
Nova Scotia	44	102.3	\$33
Newfoundland and Labrador	37	20.2	\$106
Saskatchewan	17	37.9	\$19
New Brunswick	13	14.8	\$40
Prince Edward Island	10	6.6	\$43
Yukon	8	11.7	\$10
Northwest Territories	4	0.4	\$291
Nunavut	0	0	\$0
<i>Total</i>	<i>1577</i>	<i>18,570.3</i>	

ON % of funds by project #s

- 25% of Building Canada Fund
- 71% of Investing in Canada
- 100% of Modernizing Transportation
- 56% of Public Transit Infrastructure
- 14% of RTSF

% of projects by Applicant Type

- Local gov. 75%
- Transportation Authority 20%
- Crown Corporation 2.2%
- Gov. Ministry 1.3%
- Non-Profit 1.2%
- First Nations 0.7%

Investment: Case Analysis

	% of Projects
Census Rural	1%
Small Population Centres	13%
Medium Population Centres	16%
Large Urban Population Centres	69%
Undefined	1%

	% of Projects
Facilities	26.3%
Infrastructure	24.0%
Study	9.1%
Technology	14.5%
Vehicles - New	10.5%
Vehicles - Upgrade /Replace	15.6%

	% of Projects
Community	75.5%
Remote Community	0.0%
Inter-Community	23.4%
Undefined	1.1%

98.5% Existing Systems

	% of Projects
Fixed Route	61%
Flex Route	<1%
On Demand	4%
Combined	10%
Multimodal	8%
Active Transportation	12%
Unknown	4%

Investment: Rural Transit Solutions Fund

	Project Count	Project Funds (millions \$)
Nova Scotia	35	\$9.4
Alberta	19	\$18.9
Ontario	18	\$3.9
Saskatchewan	15	\$7.1
Manitoba	12	\$4.7
British Columbia	9	\$1.8
New Brunswick	8	\$3.1
Quebec	8	\$0.7
Northwest Territories	3	\$0.2
Nunavut	2	\$0.2
Prince Edward Island	2	\$0.6
Newfoundland and Labrador	1	\$0.2
Yukon	1	\$3.0
<i>Total</i>	<i>133</i>	<i>\$53.9</i>

% of projects by Applicant Type

- Local gov. 43%
- Non-Profit 33%
- First Nations 20%
- Transportation Authority 2%
- Crown Corporation 2%
- Gov. Ministry 0%

Investment: Rural Transit Solutions Fund

% of Projects	
Census Rural	18%
Small Population Centres	75%
Medium Population Centres	5%
Large Urban Population Centres	2%

% of Projects	
Community	17%
Remote Community	1%
Inter-Community	82%

64% Existing Systems

% of Projects	
Facilities	8%
Infrastructure	0%
Study	28%
Technology	2%
Vehicles - New	59%
Vehicles - Upgrade /Replace	3%

% of Projects	
Fixed Route	12%
Flex Route	2%
On Demand	53%
Combined	8%
Multimodal	3%
Active Transportation	0%
Unknown	23%

Recent Research

1. Has rural Canada been served by Federal Transit funding?
2. Is the Rural Transit Solutions Fund shifting patterns of Federal Transit funding?
3. Is the Rural Transit Solutions Fund meeting its goals?

- No
- Rural has been chronically under-represented in federal funding

- Yes
- Changes in patterns of regional and rural representation

- To some degree, issues remain
- Benefits some but not others
- Overlooks need for consistent, predictable, operational funds
- Limited scale

Parting Comments

1. Rural and northern transit exists because of innovation at the local and regional level
2. Continue and increase dedicated funding for rural transit
3. Revisit eligible funding expenses
4. Revisit program's place-based flexibility



Thank you Questions?



UNIVERSITY OF
GUELPH

**Beyond the City
Limits: Analysis of
Federal Funding of
Public Transit in Rural
Canada**



**Not In Service: A
Typology of Barriers
Facing Rural Transit
Systems.**

