



Navigate NRRM

Comprehensive Passenger Transportation Plan

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To the attention of:
Northern Rockies Regional Municipality

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Introduction.....	4
1.1	Project Background.....	4
1.2	Project Overview.....	5
2	Current State	5
2.1	Existing Transportation Services.....	5
2.1.1	Northern Rockies Seniors’ Society Seniors’ Bus	6
2.1.2	First Nation–led Transportation	6
2.1.3	School Bus.....	6
2.1.4	Informal Carpooling and Ridesharing	6
2.1.5	BC Bus North	7
2.1.6	Northern Health Connections.....	7
2.1.7	Hitchhiking	7
2.1.8	Air Transportation.....	7
2.2	Public Engagement Findings	8
2.2.1	Engagement Activities Summary	8
2.2.2	Who We Heard From	9
2.2.3	Current Transportation Habits.....	9
2.2.4	Transportation Priorities.....	10
3	Passenger Transportation Solutions	12
3.1	Needs and Gap Analysis.....	12
3.2	Methodology.....	13
3.3	Potential Solutions.....	14
3.3.1	Fort Nelson Community Shuttle	14
3.3.2	Expanding Seniors’ Bus Operating Hours	16
3.3.3	BC Transit Operation of Local Shuttle Service	17
3.3.4	Subsidizing Local Taxi Service	18
3.3.5	Safe Rides for Friday Nights Out.....	20

3.3.6	Employee Shuttle	22
3.3.7	Improving Pedestrian Access	23
3.3.8	Formalizing Carpooling and Ridesharing	24
3.3.9	NRRM Northwest Shuttle	26
3.3.10	Park-and-Ride at the NRRM Recreation Centre	27
3.3.11	Formalizing Hitchhiking.....	29
3.3.12	Bikeshare.....	30
4	Implementing Solutions	31
4.1	Implementation considerations.....	31
4.2	Solutions Pathways	32
4.2.1	Local	32
4.2.2	Regional.....	35
4.3	Funding Glossary.....	37
4.3.1	Canada Public Transit Fund.....	37
4.3.2	BC Transit	37
4.3.3	Rural Transit Solutions Fund	37
4.3.4	Active Transportation Fund	38
4.3.5	Northern Development Initiative Trust	38
4.3.6	Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada and Indigenous Services Canada 38	
4.3.7	Community Sponsors	38
4.3.8	Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program.....	39
4.3.9	The Canada Community-Building Fund	39
4.3.10	Transit Minor Betterments Program	39
4.3.11	Passenger Transportation Accessibility Program	39

1 Introduction

The Northern Rockies Regional Municipality (NRRM) is a large rural area of around 85,000 square km, bordering the Yukon and the Northwest Territories to the North, and Alberta to the East. The region is situated within the traditional territories of the Dene, Cree, and Dunne Tsa'a people of Fort Nelson First Nation and Prophet River First Nation. There are several distinct communities within the NRRM. The largest is Fort Nelson, which accounts for 66% of the just under 4,000 total population of the region. Currently, there are limited passenger transportation options for residents to travel within and outside of the NRRM region. Regional connections to the South, such as Fort St. John (380 km south), are critical for access to specialized healthcare, education, and recreation. Northern regional connections relate to tourism, employment, and seasonal recreation.

1.1 Project Background

The NRRM has undertaken a comprehensive passenger transportation plan (Navigate NRRM) to assess and identify community needs related to passenger transportation and to develop innovative solutions to address needs. This project focuses on ground passenger transportation within the regional municipal boundaries, while also considering different transportation needs including air transportation and regional connections. In some cases, the need to access air transportation leads to the need for ground transportation, such as when someone drives to Fort St. John to catch a flight.

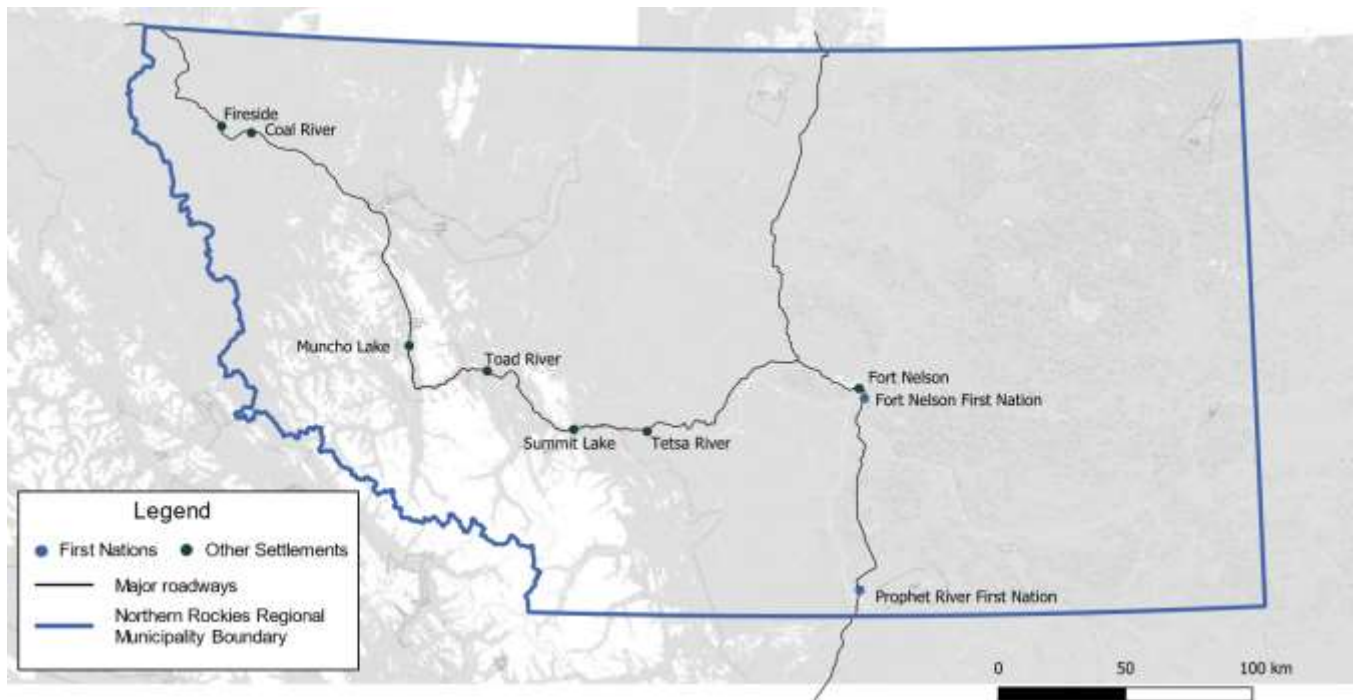


Figure 1. A map of the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality

1.2 Project Overview

The Navigate NRRM project was funded in part by the Northern Community Transportation Booster program from the Northern Development Initiative Trust to increase capacity for planning efforts in Northern BC. The project timeline was just over three months, from late September to December 2024. Figure 2 below shows the different project tasks and their respective durations.



Figure 2. Project task overview

2 Current State

Several activities were completed to develop a fulsome understanding of the current state of passenger transportation in the area, including a data and document review, discovery meetings with staff and key partners, and public engagement.

2.1 Existing Transportation Services

Those who do not have consistent access to a personal vehicle may have the following alternative modes of transportation to travel within and beyond the region. Figure 3 below provides an overview.

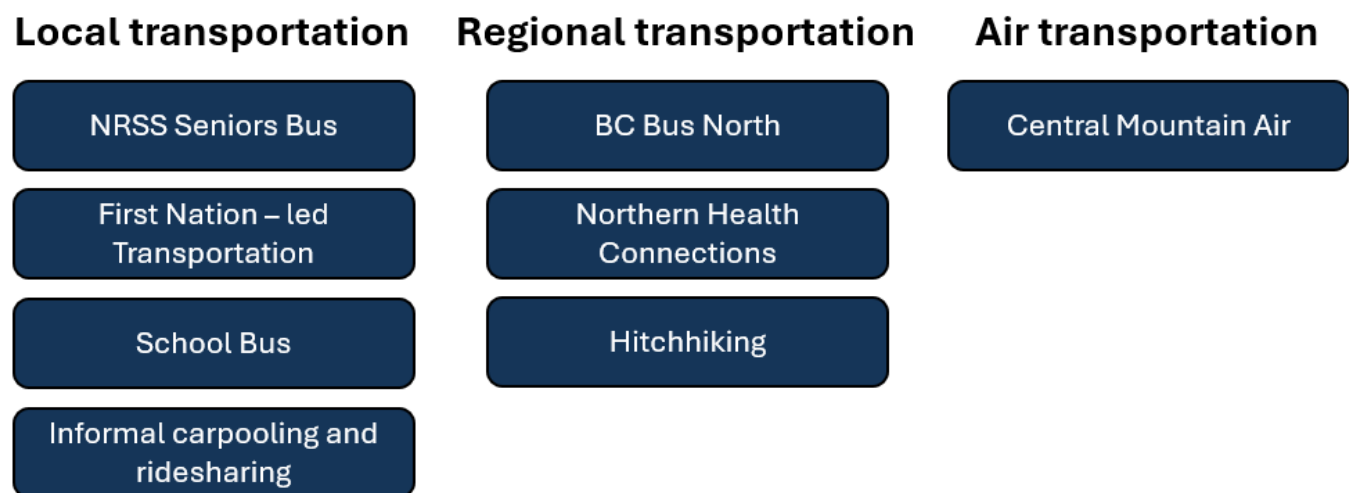


Figure 3. Overview of existing transportation services

A notable gap in existing services is the lack of a taxi service in the region. There used to be a taxi operating in Fort Nelson, but it stopped operating several years ago. The loss of the taxi service led to some changes in the eligibility for users of the Seniors' Bus and may be connected to more informal carpooling and ridesharing.

2.1.1 Northern Rockies Seniors' Society Seniors' Bus

The Northern Rockies Seniors' Society (NRSS) is a non-profit organization that operates the Seniors' Bus, in addition to an 8-bed seniors' residence in Fort Nelson. Historically, the Seniors' Bus was only available to seniors and people with disabilities but has become open to everyone since the local taxi stopped operating. The name of the service still leads to some confusion about who can use the service and the NRSS is considering changing the name.

The Seniors' Bus operates Monday to Friday from 9am to 4pm, on a door-to-door and on-demand basis. People needing rides call the main driver directly to book a ride. There are two accessible vehicles that operate the service, with between 1 and 2 being in service during a given day. The service primarily operates in Fort Nelson and Fort Nelson First Nation, with a \$5 per day in-town rate and \$10 per day out-of-town rate.

Separate from their regular transportation service offerings, the Seniors' Bus has been hired for specific events, such as for safe-rides programs and WorkBC events. These are typically outside the regular Seniors' Bus operating hours.

2.1.2 First Nation-led Transportation

Both Fort Nelson First Nation and Prophet River First Nation provide some transportation services. Some of these services are related to specific users and/or specific types of trips. For example, Fort Nelson First Nation has a health and wellness shuttle for elders to access medical appointments and essential trips, like grocery shopping. Prophet River subsidizes some designated community members who provide limited transportation for Elders.

2.1.3 School Bus

There is school bus transportation across the region, which focuses on student trips to and from school. Diversified Transportation operates the school bus transportation for School District 81 and Chalo School in Fort Nelson First Nation.

2.1.4 Informal Carpooling and Ridesharing

With very limited transportation options, there is a significant amount of informal carpooling and ridesharing occurring in the region. This can look like friends and family sharing rides with one another and can also include someone posting on Facebook to see if they can get a ride with someone else.

The informal nature of this mode means that its availability and cost is highly dependent on an individual's connections within the community and the nature of the type of trip needed. A senior mother who cannot drive may be able to rely on her children that she lives with for frequent and reliable transportation. A newcomer living in a rural area outside of Fort Nelson may only occasionally ask a neighbour for a ride into town. A family member may get access to shared rides for free, but a long-distance rideshare established on Facebook may come with an expectation of contributing gas money.

2.1.5 BC Bus North

BC Bus North is an inter-city bus service open to the public and funded by NDIT¹. There are trips between Fort Nelson and Fort St. John on Mondays and Fridays, with one trip in each direction per day. In total, there are 2 trips each way between the communities every week. Trips leaving from Fort Nelson leave at 7am and trips leaving from Fort St. John leave at 4:20pm. A ticket for a one-way trip costs \$57.

2.1.6 Northern Health Connections

Northern Health Connections is an inter-city bus service limited to medical trips and any trip purpose for users 60 years-old and above. There are two trips every week. On Tuesdays, there is a trip from Fort Nelson to Dawson Creek leaving at 8am. On Thursdays, there is a trip from Dawson Creek to Fort Nelson at 8am. A ticket for a one-way trip between Fort Nelson and Fort St. John costs \$10, and between Fort Nelson and Dawson Creek costs \$20.

2.1.7 Hitchhiking

Hitchhiking is the least formal mode of transportation, with instances on the highways throughout the region year-round, although increases in the summer months related to tourism and seasonal employment. There are significant safety concerns with hitchhiking for both riders and those picking them up, involving both road safety and personal safety.

2.1.8 Air Transportation

Fort Nelson has an airport that is served primarily by Central Mountain Air. The current schedule has flights on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays². The price is variable depending on destination and time of year, although generally tickets can be purchased for approximately \$300 to \$500 for one-way travel between Fort Nelson and Prince George. Findings from the discovery meetings identified that many residents prefer to fly out of Fort St. John because of improved flight options and due to challenges with CMA's flight reliability. Both Air Canada and WestJet have flights to and from Fort St. John, with at

¹ Funding for the service is provided through the Inter-City Passenger Transportation funding stream from NDIT. The Province of BC has committed funding to the program at least until 2026/2027 according to [BC Gov News](#).

² Up to date as of writing: December 2024.

least one of the two providing a flight every day of the week to major centers such as Calgary or Vancouver.

2.2 Public Engagement Findings

Hearing directly from the public was an important part of understanding the current state of passenger transportation in the region. This provides some information on what public engagement activities were undertaken and the findings from them. The main goals of the public engagement were to identify what challenges residents are currently experiencing and hear about residents’ ideas and hopes for change in the future.

2.2.1 Engagement Activities Summary

To understand the local transportation context and community perspectives, a series of in-person engagements were conducted across Fort Nelson at diverse venues and events. These were strategically selected to reach different demographic groups. Large-scale events provided opportunities for extensive survey distribution and mode choice data collection, while smaller gatherings enabled in-depth conversations and richer insights into resident experiences.

Table 1. Summary of engagement activities

Activity Description	Date	Who Participated
Public Survey: Available online through Microsoft Forms and as paper copies at various community events and locations.	Oct 31 to Nov 13, 2024	55 respondents.
Track Social: Engagement boards and paper surveys were made available at the Track Social event held at the Recreation Centre. Attendees were invited to discuss transportation challenges.	10am – 12pm Oct 31, 2024	About 20 touchpoints.
Spookerama: A booth was set up at the Spookerama Halloween event near the entrance of the Recreation Centre. Engagement boards, treats, and paper surveys were available.	5:30 – 8:30pm Oct 31, 2024	About 200 touchpoints.
A&W: Engagement boards and paper surveys were made available at the A&W. Conversations were held with both customers and staff.	8 – 10:30am Nov 1, 2024	About 35 touchpoints.
Fort Nelson Farmers’ Market: Engagement boards and paper surveys were made available near the entrance to the	9am – 1pm Nov 2, 2024	About 25 touchpoints.

Activity Description	Date	Who Participated
Farmers' Market. Conversations were held with both market visitors and vendors.		

2.2.2 Who We Heard From

The engagement activities captured diverse community perspectives on transportation challenges and future priorities, as illustrated in Figure 4. However, it is noted that the survey responses show notable demographic skews. While 98% of respondents were Fort Nelson residents, Census data from 2021 indicates that Fort Nelson residents comprise only 66% of the NRRM population. Additionally, no responses were received from individuals under 18, despite youth under 19 representing 26% of the NRRM's population.

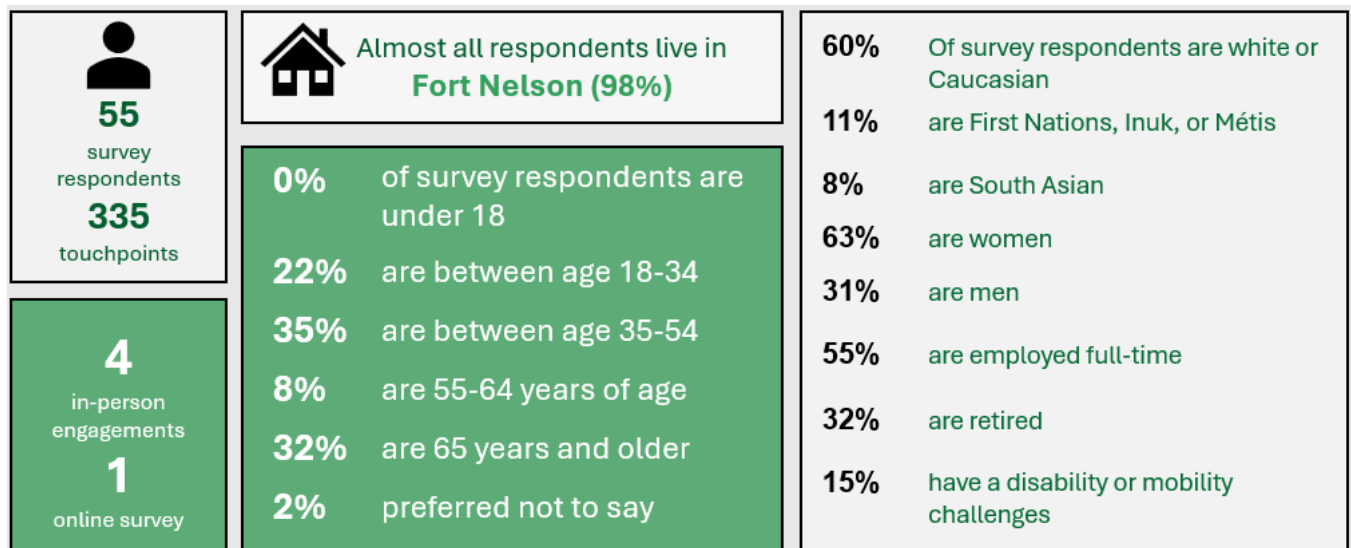


Figure 4. Snapshot of who we heard from the survey

2.2.3 Current Transportation Habits

Current transportation patterns show a strong reliance on personal vehicles, with 72% of survey respondents using them as their primary mode of travel. Another 11% depend on rides from friends or family, though this percentage may be higher since the survey didn't capture any survey responses from those under 18. Given Fort Nelson's relatively compact size, 15% of survey respondents walk as their main mode of transportation. In talking with residents, many people did not feel the need to fill out the survey because they primarily use their personal vehicles.

As shown in Figure 5, getting rides from family or friends and walking are the most common alternative mode of travel, while 21% use bicycles. Several respondents noted seasonal variations in their travel modes, with biking in summer and snowmobiling in winter.

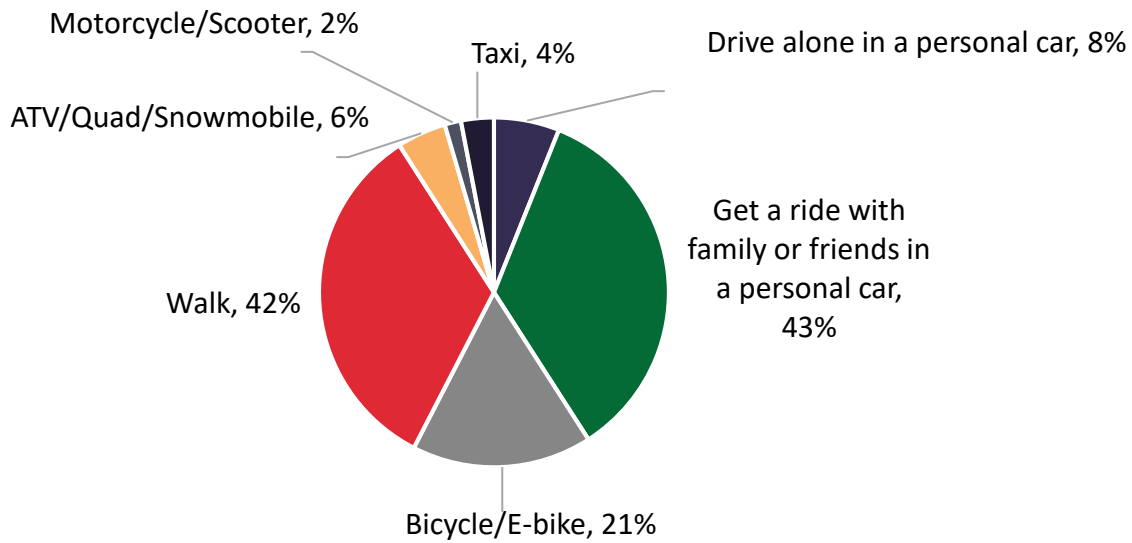


Figure 5. Non-primary modes of travel

Looking at the reliability of available transportation modes, 28% of survey respondents indicated that they have had to cancel plans or appointments because of a lack of transportation in the past year. Looking at frequency, 13% reported cancelling plans or appointments very often and 15% experienced this occasionally. Additionally, 22% of respondents reported they do not have reliable access to a personal vehicle.

Utilization of available transportation services³ is somewhat low among respondents, with 58% reporting no use of these services in the past year. Among those who did use these services, BC Bus North saw 20% usage, followed by the Seniors Bus at 15% and Northern Health Connections at 4%.

Regarding travel patterns, key destinations that respondents mentioned within Fort Nelson include the Recreation Centre (20 mentions), IGA (17 mentions), Save-On-Foods (16 mentions), and the Post Office (16 mentions). For travel outside Fort Nelson, residents most frequently visit Fort St. John (30 mentions), followed by Dawson Creek and Grande Prairie (7 mentions each), Prince George (4 mentions), and Vancouver (3 mentions).

2.2.4 Transportation Priorities

Public engagement activities helped identify key transportation priorities for NRRM residents. For local Fort Nelson services, the Seniors Bus currently operates as the only option, running weekdays from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM. Four respondents expressed the need for extended operating hours for this service.

³ Those listed in the survey were: Northern Rockies Seniors' Society Seniors Bus, BC Bus North, Fort Nelson First Nation Elders Transportation, Prophet River First Nation Transportation Services, and Northern Health Connections.



“I would like to see the Senior Bus have extended hours and weekend hours.”

– Survey Respondent

At the regional level, residents prioritized two main improvements: increased frequency of BC Bus North and Northern Health Connections services (10 mentions), and enhanced air travel options at the local airport with better frequency, reliability, and affordability (10 mentions).



“I have had specialist appointments that I have waited a long time for and decided to drive and take the risk, as the north bus and the northern health bus do not allow for same day (or even next day) return.”

– Survey Respondent

When asked about preferred transportation solutions that could benefit them personally and receive the NRRM support, respondents prioritized four main options: taxi service, shuttle service connecting Fort Nelson to other communities, improved air transportation, and an internal community shuttle system within the NRRM.

What kinds of transportation services or strategies would you personally benefit from and would like to see supported by the municipality?

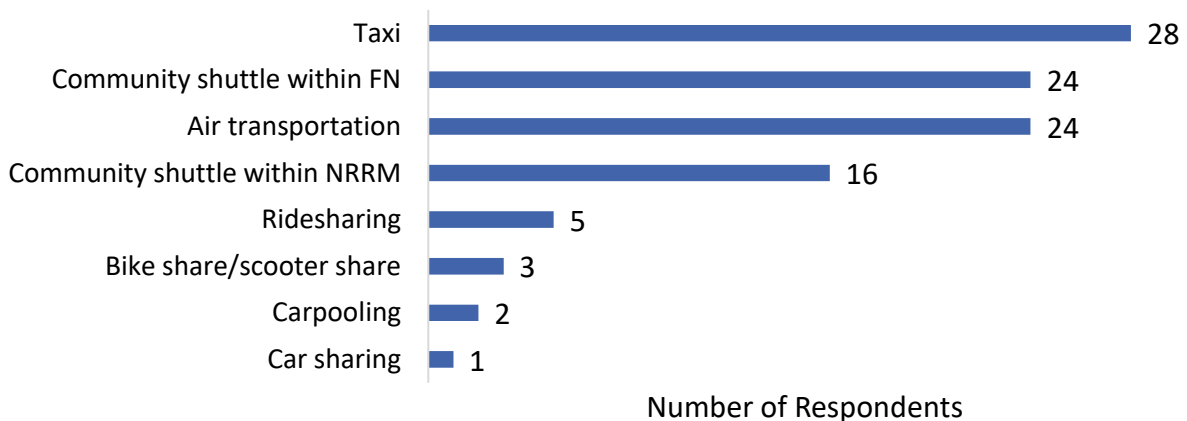


Figure 6. Transportation solutions

Additional suggestions from respondents included establishing public transit or bus service to replace the former Greyhound service (5 mentions) and implementing same-day shuttle service to Fort St. John (1 mention).

3 Passenger Transportation Solutions

In order to develop potential solutions for further consideration by the NRRM, resident needs and the current gaps in passenger transportation were outlined clearly. This section consolidates the current state findings to identify specific needs, outlines the methodology for identifying potential solutions, and then discusses the relevant potential solutions.

3.1 Needs and Gap Analysis

Reviewing the existing transportation services and the learnings from public engagement provides clarity on the current state of transportation in the region and helps identify needs and gaps.

One of the critical findings is that most people drive, and driving is considered the default mode of transportation. In the public engagement, we heard from people that currently drive that they have limited interest in this project since as drivers, they won't be directly affected. Others that currently drive acknowledged that one day in the future, they will not be able to drive and wondered about what options there might be for them to age-in-place. The resulting gap is that if someone does not or can not drive, they have limited to no transportation options. If they are a newcomer to the region, or without strong relationships with others that can drive, they have even fewer options.

The second critical finding is that long distance travel is a necessity living in the region. Related to this, Fort Nelson and Fort St. John are key hubs that people need to access regularly. With this understanding, the main transportation needs of the region can be categorised into three types of trips:

1. Within your local community
2. To and from Fort Nelson
3. To and from Fort St. John

Below, we further elaborate on the specific challenges and needs associated with each type of trip.

Within your local community

This refers to trips one would take in and around the community they live in. They are the shortest trips of the three categories, and have the most transportation options currently. Depending on the season, weather, and mobility of a specific person, active transportation i.e. walking and biking, is an option. The First Nation-led transportation services and the Seniors' Bus in Fort Nelson also support these types of trips, if they fall within the specific use, eligibility, or hours. The Seniors' Bus, for

example, does not work well for people that work a 9 to 5 job, nor does it accommodate evening or weekend activities.

To and from Fort Nelson

The options available to and from Fort Nelson are highly dependent on where in the region you are coming from or going to:

- Fort Nelson First Nation residents can access the Seniors' Bus, provided they want to travel during its operating hours.
- Prophet River has a BC Bus North stop and can therefore get to Fort Nelson using the service. This is limited to Monday and Friday trips.
- Communities North and West of Fort Nelson have **no** transportation options.

To and from Fort St. John

BC Bus North and Northern Health Connections provide limited service outside of the region. Both services are only available once you are in Fort Nelson or Prophet River. For residents elsewhere in the region, they first need to get to one of those stops.

Hitchhiking and informal carpooling/ridesharing are also options for all three types of trips. However, there are safety risks for the driver and the passenger. The risk and perception of risk can be heightened for specific groups, such as Indigenous women and newcomers⁴.

3.2 Methodology

A list of potential solutions was developed based on reviewing case studies of rural transportation solutions, industry best practices, and within the context of the three types of trips identified in the previous section. Solutions were then scaled and modified based on the capability of the NRRM to implement the solution. For example, having another BC Bus North trip during the week would be a valuable addition to the existing service, but that is outside the scope of what the NRRM could accomplish on their own.

As part of the process to develop these solutions, a workshop was held on November 20 with NRRM staff and representatives from Fort Nelson First Nation, Prophet River First Nation, Northern Rockies Seniors' Society, and Diversified Transportation. At the workshop, the current-state findings and public engagement findings were shared. Then, participants were invited to help define transportation needs

⁴ This comes from anecdotal conversations with communities and is well documented by the inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG).

and validate the types of trips within the region. Lastly, solutions were discussed and participants provided feedback and identified further case studies to explore their relevance to the NRRM context.

3.3 Potential Solutions

In total, there are 12 potential solutions that are presented in this section for further consideration by the NRRM. They vary with respect to the scale of the solution, implementation requirements, cost, and what challenge or gap they are addressing. To help describe and compare the solutions, the following information is provided for each:

- **Effectiveness:** High, medium, or low. This depends on how effective the solution is in addressing a specific need or gap and how impactful the specific need or gap is.
- **When to consider:** Near-term, medium-term, or long-term. This indicates the recommended time window for the NRRM to consider the solutions.
- **Ease of implementation:** Simple, moderate, or difficult. This relates to whether it would be easy or difficult to implement the solution. One key factor is if the NRRM has the resources, capacity, and jurisdiction to implement a solution on their own or not.
- **Overall Cost:** Low, medium, or high. This refers to the initial cost and ongoing investments required.
- **Formality:** Low, medium or high. This refers to the level of direct involvement from the NRRM on an ongoing basis, either to provide support or operational oversight, or ownership of the service.
- **Description of the solution:** High-level description of the solution.
- **Implementation requirements:** What the NRRM would need to do to implement the solution.
- **Risks and limitations:** Potential risks of the solution, related to its implementation or ongoing operation.

The solutions are presented in order from least to most formal. The solution options are also provided in an attached summary.

3.3.1 Fort Nelson Community Shuttle

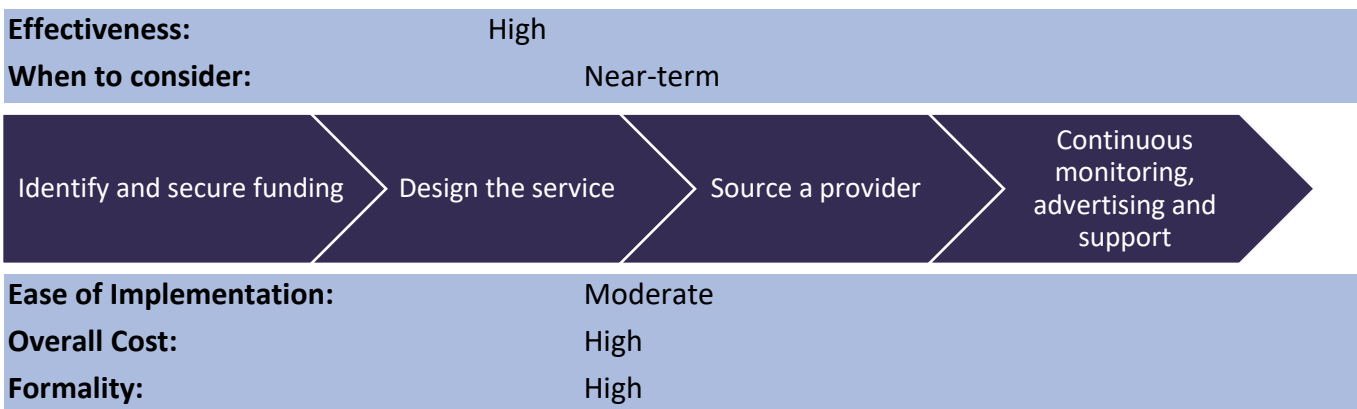


Figure 7. High-level implementation steps for Fort Nelson community shuttle

At the time of writing this plan, a community shuttle has already been designed and the NRRM is waiting to hear back on some potential funding⁵. This solution involves creating a fixed-route shuttle that goes around key locations in Fort Nelson and Fort Nelson First Nation at regular, scheduled timings.

A community shuttle, in addition to the more demand-responsive Seniors' Bus, has a number of important benefits. By having a fixed-route and scheduled service, it can more efficiently move residents in and around the area. With improved efficiency, the community shuttle can accommodate more trips and riders. The introduction of the community shuttle can also alleviate capacity issues experienced by the Seniors' Bus, ensuring this service is more readily available for those who require a door-to-door service (e.g., people with disabilities and mobility challenges).

Implementation requirements

The specifics of the implementation requirements are dependent on whether the NRRM is interested in directly operating the service or not. Based on the design of the community shuttle submission, the NRRM will seek a partner in the operations like the NRSS. In this case, the NRRM may be responsible for elements of the administration of the service and securing the grant funding.

Both operating and capital funding will be important for this solution, as at least one vehicle will be required to operate the service. Another spare vehicle would be valuable to ensure the reliability of operations. Operating costs incurred every year include driver wages, gas, insurance, and vehicle maintenance and will likely increase annually. Extensive marketing of the service when it is introduced is also key to uptake by residents.

Continuous monitoring of the community shuttle service will be an important element to ensure the success of the service. Typically, it can take up to three years for the full potential ridership of a new service to be realized. The community needs to learn about the service, see it in the community, and trust its reliability before they change their travel behaviour. As part of continuous monitoring, ridership and which stops are busiest would be valuable data points. Public engagement would also be useful to understand what changes to the service may make it more useable for the public. As the service continues, the NRRM and any operating partners should revisit the details of the service and make adjustments to the stops and schedule based on the data and public engagement findings.

Risks and limitations

⁵ The NRRM and community partners, notably, the NRSS, submitted an application to the NDIT Community Shuttle program grant on October 18, 2024. The application included a community shuttle with fixed-route elements as well as continued funding for the NRSS Seniors' Bus.

The community shuttle represents a significant investment in passenger transportation in the region. The key risk is related to the sustainability of the investment. Securing grant funding for the capital and operating costs is a great mitigation of this risk. Designing the fares for the service that balance financial sustainability of the service and affordability of the service will be another key element. If the community shuttle continues and is anticipated to be a long-term solution, seeking additional funding through [BC Transit](#) may be another key mitigation tactic.

3.3.2 Expanding Seniors’ Bus Operating Hours

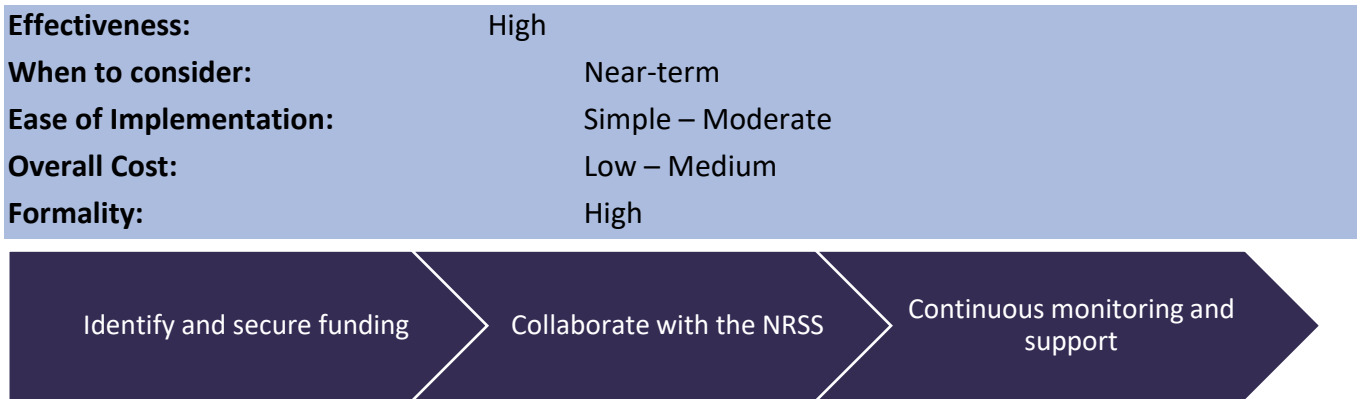


Figure 8. High-level implementation steps for expanding Seniors’ Bus operating hours

The NRSS Seniors’ Bus is the only public transportation service in the Fort Nelson and Fort Nelson First Nation area. It is already benefitting residents and further expanding its hours would increase the benefits to community. A common piece of feedback from the public engagement was that longer Seniors’ Bus hours and availability on the weekend would be beneficial.

Since the service is currently open to all residents and is also accessible, the increased hours would benefit any Fort Nelson and Fort Nelson First Nation resident in need of the service.

Implementation requirements

The NRRM does not have jurisdiction over the Seniors’ Bus but can collaborate with the NRSS and financially support an expansion of service hours. Since the NRSS already has two vehicles reserved for the service, the main implementation requirements are to ensure that there are enough drivers available for the additional service and advertise the expanded hours.

Ongoing support would include committed financial support and monitoring around how many people are using the additional service.

Risks and limitations

There is no significant risk to expanding the hours of the Seniors’ Bus. If the additional service is not as productive as the current hours, or if the additional operating costs are unsustainable, the current service hours can be maintained.

3.3.3 BC Transit Operation of Local Shuttle Service

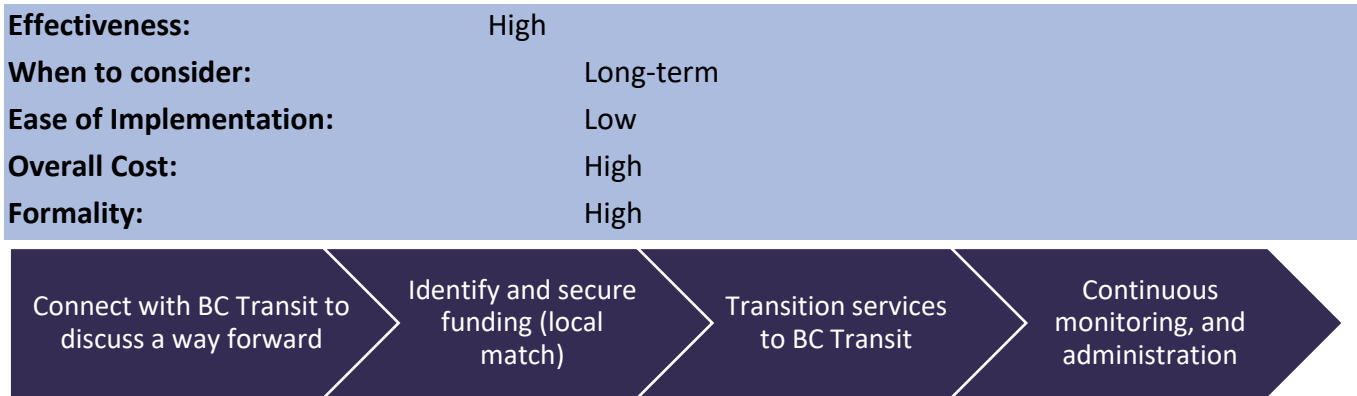


Figure 9. High-level implementation steps for BC Transit operation of local shuttle service

For the Fort Nelson urban area, including Fort Nelson First Nation, local shuttle service could evolve in the medium- to long-term into a formal fixed-route and on-demand service that could attract funding from the province through BC Transit.

As a BC Transit partner, the NRRM would be responsible for 53% of the operating costs of transit services in the communities, and Fort Nelson FN could also be a partner if included in the service. This contribution could come from:

- Transit fares
- Property taxes
- Local government revenue or specific funding decisions (e.g., municipal transportation budget or FNFN funds)

The NRRM, and FNFN if a partner, would also help plan service delivery and could adjust routes or schedules based on specific community needs.

Typically, BC Transit service is provided through a series of agreements between the municipality and BC Transit:

- **Transit Service Agreement (TSA):** This would be a formal agreement between BC Transit and the NRRM/FNFN outlining cost-sharing, responsibilities, and service expectations.
- **Annual Operating Agreement (AOA):** This agreement comprises yearly operational budget, service levels, and funding contributions.
- **Long-Term Transit Future Plans:** These are community-focused plans to guide system expansion and development. For small communities, these are typically prepared cooperatively by BC Transit and the municipality.

Currently, there are several BC Transit-supported systems of similar or smaller size than Fort Nelson, including Nakusp, 100-Mile house, Ashcroft-Cache Creek-Clinton, Kaslo, and Slovan Valley. These systems share several characteristics that might be part of a Fort Nelson service:

- **Limited Frequency:** Most systems operate just a few days per week or provide on-demand service.
- **Small Fleets:** Often 1-3 buses or shuttles, designed for low ridership.
- **Focus on Accessibility:** Systems prioritize seniors, medical trips, and essential travel.
- **Regional Partnerships:** Services are often supported through partnerships with regional districts, community organizations, or provincial funding programs.

Implementation requirements

Establishing an agreement with BC Transit requires time and effort on the part of the municipality. Typically, consultations between BC Transit and the NRRM would lead to an assessment of the transit potential in the NRRM. For a community of this size, this would most likely be a cooperative effort between the municipality and BC Transit, as opposed to a formal consultant study that often informs the process for larger systems.

Once the nature and extent of the service is established, it is formalized in the TSA and updated annually in the AOA. Service is typically operated by a local contractor with a multi-year contract.

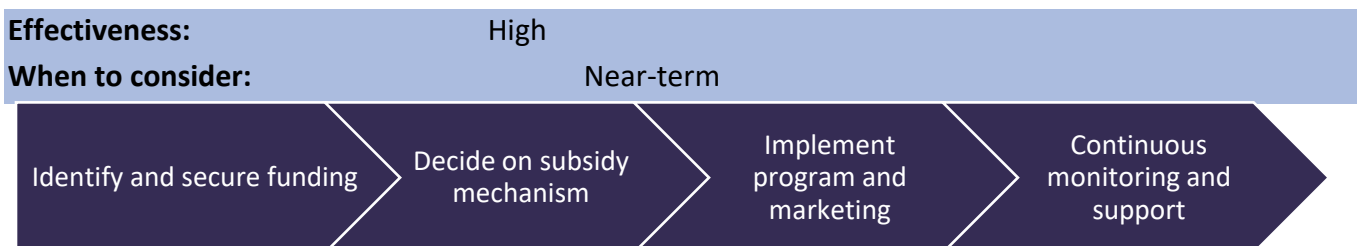
Risks and limitations

Commitment to formal service through an agreement with BC Transit is a long-term commitment. BC Transit will want to ensure the viability of the service and the commitment of the partners to its funding.

If ridership does not develop according to the plan, local fare revenues may fall short of the intended budget, increasing the burden on the local partners.

While BC Transit works collaboratively with the local communities, it also exercises some control over the extent and level of service. For example, if the municipality wants to increase service beyond what BC Transit thinks is viable, BC Transit may decline to fund the additional service.

3.3.4 Subsidizing Local Taxi Service



Ease of Implementation:	Difficult
Overall Cost:	Medium - High
Formality:	High

Figure 10. High-level implementation steps for subsidizing local taxi service

Of the transportation solutions presented to the public, a taxi received the most interest from survey respondents. Especially since it is a solution that people are already familiar with, there is less of a need for public education associated with this solution. While the details of why the previous taxi service shut down are not known, it is possible that the overall business was not profitable enough to remain in operation. A potential solution then is to subsidize the taxi service to encourage continued operation.

There are two options for providing the subsidy to taxi companies. One is to directly subsidize the cost of operations of the taxi. This could look like a per kilometre or per trip subsidy, or a subsidy equivalent to maintaining appropriate license fees. The other main option is to subsidize specific taxi customers to encourage their use of the taxi.

Aligned with the second option, there are examples in both the Taxi Saver Program in Mackenzie⁶ and the Taxi Pass Program in Peace River⁷. Both examples require customers to purchase a value of credit for use to spend on taxis, and the government subsidizes the remaining amount. For example, an eligible customer purchases \$60 worth of taxi credit for \$30. From the examples, eligible customers may be seniors, people with disabilities, and families with very low incomes.

Depending on how the subsidy is implemented, there may be direct benefits for targeted groups and more vulnerable groups in the region that have less access to other modes of transportation. If the subsidy is more directly provided to the taxi company, the benefit would be shared across all taxi customers.

Implementation requirements

The NRRM would be able to implement the taxi subsidy on their own through connecting with local taxi license holders. The NRRM would then need to decide what subsidy mechanism (direct or indirect) is more aligned with their goals and fund the solution as needed. Depending on the mechanism, the NRRM would also need to advertise to local taxi companies or to residents that the subsidy is available. With respect to ongoing support required, the subsidy would continue on an ongoing basis as long as the program exists.

⁶ <https://districtofmackenzie.ca/public-services/taxi-saver-program/>

⁷ <https://www.peaceriver.ca/taxi>

Risks and limitations

This solution is only feasible if there is a local taxi company that is in operation. While there is no active taxi company, there is a licensed taxi operator in Fort Nelson that could be approached about the subsidy. One risk is that if other taxi operators begin operating in Fort Nelson, the NRRM would need to adjust the program to not favour one business over another. If there were multiple taxi companies, a direct subsidy may no longer be needed at all. In the case of an indirect subsidy, it could apply to all taxi companies without preference, so that customers are able to select the taxi company they prefer.

3.3.5 Safe Rides for Friday Nights Out

Effectiveness:	Medium
When to consider:	Near-term
Ease of Implementation:	Moderate
Overall Cost:	Low – Medium
Formality:	Moderate



Figure 11. High-level implementation steps for safe rides for Friday nights out

There is currently a transportation gap for accessing nightlife and evening activities in Fort Nelson, which reduces social and community benefits and has an impact on local businesses. Even for people who do drive, they may refrain from or limit activities (e.g., drinking alcohol); or take risks (i.e. riding with an unknown person, driving impaired), to make sure they can get home safely. If there was a reliable alternative for them, they may be encouraged to enjoy the nightlife more, get home safely, and subsequently spend more money at local businesses.

This solution involves making safe rides available in the evening hours that are available to all residents. This can be done either by providing a vehicle that takes people home at the end of the night, or by having designated drivers drive people home in their own cars (e.g., Operation Red Nose).

Implementation requirements

Assuming that the NRRM will not be providing the rides directly, then the main implementation requirements relate to sourcing a provider and sponsoring the initiative. One option is the Seniors' Bus that has experience providing event-based safe rides. If a local taxi starts up again, it would be another option. Since one of the benefits of the solution is increased local spending, there is an opportunity to approach local businesses to sponsor the safe rides initiative and advertise it to their patrons. If something more similar to Operation Red Nose is of interest, then recruiting drivers is a key next step.



Operation Red Nose is a volunteer-run chauffeur service available in the month of December. Someone can call and have a volunteer drive them home in their own car. The service is free, with any donations for the service provided to the organizing non-profit.

The specific platform is intended to be a novel fundraising model for non-profits.

In any case, public education on the available service is an important step. The NRRM could collaborate with participating local businesses to advertise the service.

With respect to ongoing support and requirements, the NRRM will be responsible for administering the initiative and encouraging local businesses to promote the program and sponsorship opportunities. While the solution could be implemented initially as a pilot or limited test, it is likely to be more successful overall if there is some regularity to the initiative. For example, Operation Red Nose focuses on the month of December every year.

Risks and limitations

A key risk is related to how residents' change in behaviour will align with the available service. At one end, there is a risk that people don't use the service or that there is very little uptake. In that case, the anticipated increased local spending and community benefit does not match the investment. At the other end, there is a risk that the service becomes so popular that there is more demand than capacity. If the service is not available when needed, there is a risk that people may resort to unsafe driving (impaired driving) having planned to use the service.

Closely monitoring these risks and limitations can identify opportunities to engage further with the community and local businesses, and provide insight into potential public transit expansion should demand warrant.

3.3.6 Employee Shuttle

Effectiveness:	Medium
When to consider:	Near-term
Ease of Implementation:	Moderate
Overall Cost:	Medium - High
Formality:	High



Figure 12. High-level implementation steps for Employee Shuttle

An underserved transportation need in the region is employees getting to and from work. In general, not having reliable transportation is a barrier to gaining and retaining employment. From discussions with members of the public, this is a particular challenge for newcomers to Fort Nelson. There are several local businesses that employ newcomers that may benefit from an employee shuttle. There may be other local businesses who would also benefit from an employee shuttle.

The employee shuttle would operate at hours that align with the working hours and shifts of employees. This shuttle would also focus on connecting employees with specific work locations, which would be different for a public shuttle that would be designed to connect the general public with all kinds of key destinations within Fort Nelson. The employee shuttle would improve local businesses’ access to the labour force and help residents gain and keep employment opportunities.

Implementation requirements

Within the NRRM’s economic development purview, they are well-suited to initiate the employee shuttle and coordinate with the various local businesses. The NRRM would first need to determine which businesses are interested in the employee shuttle and what their specific transportation needs are, such as shift hours and how many employees may use it. Coordinating potential schedules with multiple businesses may involve aligning shift times and identifying appropriate stop locations near or on their property. The NRRM would then need to source a provider with sufficient capacity. Oftentimes, the cost of operating an employee shuttle is covered by the participating local businesses. Participating local business are also in the best position to support appropriate advertising of the service to their employees.

Appropriate ongoing monitoring would include tracking the overall ridership, use by business, and changes in local businesses’ employment. For example, if employee retention improved since the introduction of the shuttle. The NRRM would also continue to manage the administrative side of the employee shuttle (e.g., contract administration with the service provider).

Risks and limitations

The success of the employee shuttle is directly related to how many businesses are interested in participating and contributing financially. There is a risk that there will be a misalignment between the amount of service and the number of users. This can be mitigated by confirming the number of potential users with local businesses in the planning phases and appropriately scaling the capacity of the service. Establishing clear timelines and metrics can help to guide outreach and identify appropriate timelines for scaling the service to meet the needs of employers and their staff.

3.3.7 Improving Pedestrian Access

Effectiveness:	Medium
When to consider:	Near-term
Ease of Implementation:	Moderate
Overall Cost:	Low – Medium
Formality:	Moderate



Figure 13. High-level implementation steps for improving pedestrian access

Improving active transportation options like walking and biking can improve passenger transportation through two key outcomes. First, active transportation can be a good transportation mode for short local trips, particularly when weather conditions are favourable. Second, it can enhance and improve access to more formal transit solutions, such as the shuttles, or future fixed route transit.

Sidewalk connectivity in urban areas is critical for both outcomes, since the proximity of services can promote walking and cycling or skiing trips, as well as facilitate access to regional service stops. The pedestrian network within Fort Nelson is fairly well-developed but essentially non-existent elsewhere in the Region.

The formal and informal recreational ski trails (with rental and borrow programs at the Recreation Centre) are good for promoting skiing for recreation and fitness. Further development could promote skiing as well as biking as transportation options. This might include secure storage facilities at bus stops, ski/bike repair stands, and ski/bike racks on the vehicle.

Outside of Fort Nelson, key pedestrian connections should be identified to support specific highway service solutions, allowing walking, biking and skiing access. This is especially true for the areas where the residential development is more remote from the highway, particularly Fort Nelson First Nation and Prophet River First Nation.

Implementation requirements

Effective pedestrian networks require year-round maintenance, particularly snow-clearing. All weather surface treatments for trails suited to pedestrian and ski access can improve accessibility and reduce maintenance.

Risks and limitations

Requirements for winter maintenance can limit the effectiveness of pedestrian networks, imposing significant mobility and accessibility limitations during inclement weather events or for those using mobility devices, strollers or buggies. Ski access may be limited by lack of groomed trails, and secure storage facilities at key destinations within the community.

3.3.8 Formalizing Carpooling and Ridesharing

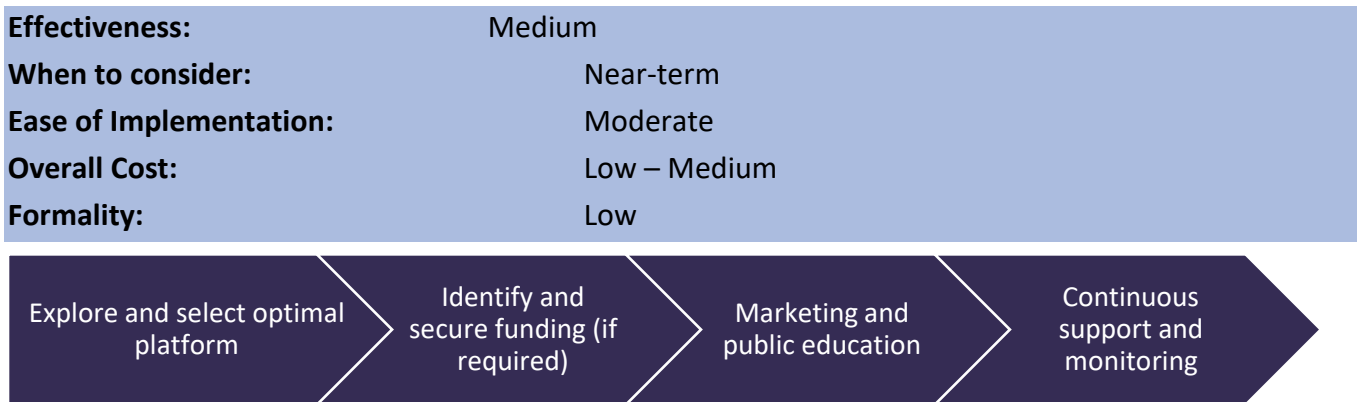


Figure 14. High-level implementation steps for formalizing carpooling and ridesharing

A formalized carpooling and ridesharing program is the logical next step to address the limitations of the hitchhiking program. The key difference in a ridesharing program is the communication and accounting that links driver and passenger, addressing many of the shortcomings of the simple hitchhiking program.

A ridesharing program is based on a digital platform to connect drivers and passengers. This can be as simple as a social media group where people post rides and requests, to a more formal website or app for similar functions.

Using an app or website increases the accountability of the system, requiring riders and drivers to register and provide basic identification details. Members can be vetted and rated based on driver qualifications, passenger responsibilities, and be bound by a code of conduct to retain their membership.

Payment for rides can be arranged between drivers and passengers but are established and agreed to in advance. A rating system can help promote accountability and increase user confidence in the system.

One example of a simple web platform is ride-share.org, which has several sites throughout British Columbia, including kootenay.ride-share.org serving the Nelson area with rides sought and offered to and from points across the province. It provides a simple bulletin-board-style interface to promote rides and requests, payment suggestions, a code of conduct, and a simple passenger-driver rating system.

Platform fees are based on volume of trips and population. There is no user fee. Several of the BC applications have sponsors, including, for example, Chambers of Commerce, colleges, and commercial enterprises.

The location-specific site is linked to other ride-share sites in other areas, so a ride passing through another area served by the platform will be available on the local system. For example, if someone was driving from Fort Liard to Grande Prairie, someone in the NRRM could join the trip partway through. This helps both drivers and passengers make more connections. The NRRM could also work with other communities to promote participation in the program to increase the network and its effectiveness.

Another example that requires less oversight of the NRRM is a website like poparide.com. Instead of being specific to the NRRM, it is the same platform for all users. It has the benefits of user profiles and ratings, and payment can be managed in the app.

As a low-cost, low-risk solution, ridesharing could be part of a multi-faceted solution.

Implementation requirements

Platforms such as ride-share.org typically operate as turnkey platforms, with all functionalities provided within a template website for the subscription fee. Poparide.com does not have any associated fees.

Promoting the system within the community and encouraging use would be the NRRM's responsibility.

Risks and limitations

The principal limitation of these systems is the availability of drivers willing to seek and accept passengers. The approved payment system can help improve the driver pool, but at the same time, limit the number of potential passengers. The NRRM could consider a subsidy program that compensates drivers for the completion of a trip at a lower rate to the passenger. Subsidies could be

managed through the platform in the case of rideshare (the owner has access to the data), and the availability of a subsidy added to the driver’s profile.

Given the lack of interest in other similar programs previously discussed in the region, namely Coastal Rides ride-hailing⁸, it is likely that this solution would require some subsidy, incentive, or convincing marketing to encourage use, at least initially.

3.3.9 NRRM Northwest Shuttle

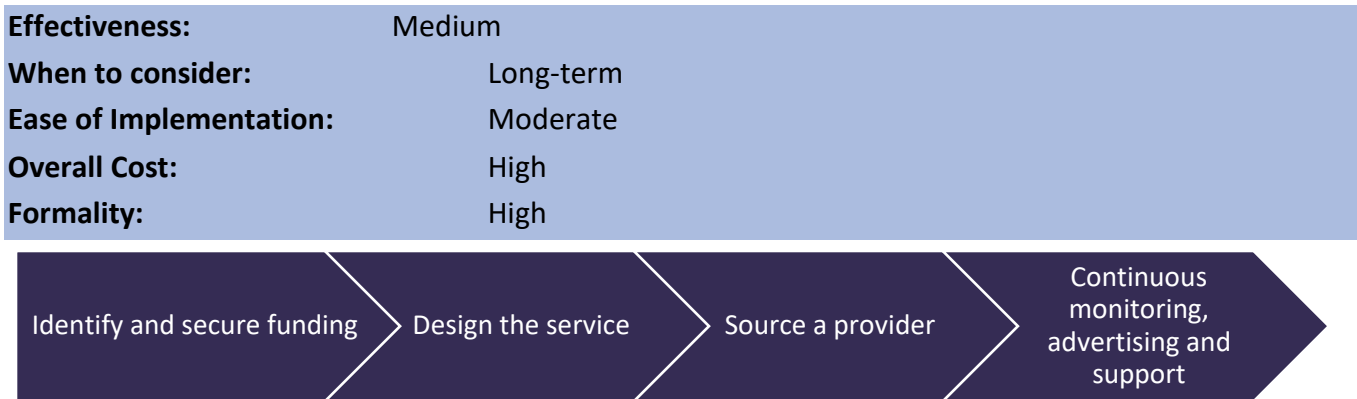


Figure 15. High-level implementation steps for NRRM northwest shuttle

Communities North and West of Fort Nelson currently have no transportation alternatives to a private vehicle. This solution would involve implementing a shuttle that is more regional in nature within the NRRM geographic boundary. This would look like a limited fixed-route service operating on Hwy 97 West and North from Fort Nelson, serving communities along the corridor, and potentially further South to Prophet River. Access to the highway stop locations would be facilitated with other transportation solutions, like rideshare and active transportation.

The NRRM shuttle would accomplish two key objectives. First, it would provide access to Fort Nelson and its community services to the other communities in the region. Second, it would facilitate remote communities’ access to connections beyond Fort Nelson through the BC Bus North and Northern Health Connections. The frequency and timing of the NRRM shuttle would depend on the demand and the schedule of the regional services. An additional benefit of the NRRM shuttle would be to provide inter-community travel among the smaller remote communities in the region.

⁸ Coastal Rides is a ride-hailing program within several areas in BC, including Fort St. John. An initial post by the organization asking for interested drivers on Fort Nelson’s social media platform X (previously Twitter) did not receive sufficient interest to move forward with implementation.

Implementation requirements

The NRRM would be responsible for finding a service provider and for securing ongoing financial support for the NRRM shuttle. Depending on the capacity of other services (e.g., Seniors’ Bus or Fort Nelson community shuttle), the same resources could be leveraged for operating this service.

The NRRM, with any operating partners and in consultation with the remote communities that would gain access to the service, would design the service including the schedule and stops. Advertising of the service will be key to attracting users. Similar to other solutions, the usage of the service should be continuously monitored and adjustments made to better serve the communities.

Risks and limitations

The financial sustainability of the service is a key risk and is heightened because of the long distances between communities and the small population base that may use the service.

3.3.10 Park-and-Ride at the NRRM Recreation Centre

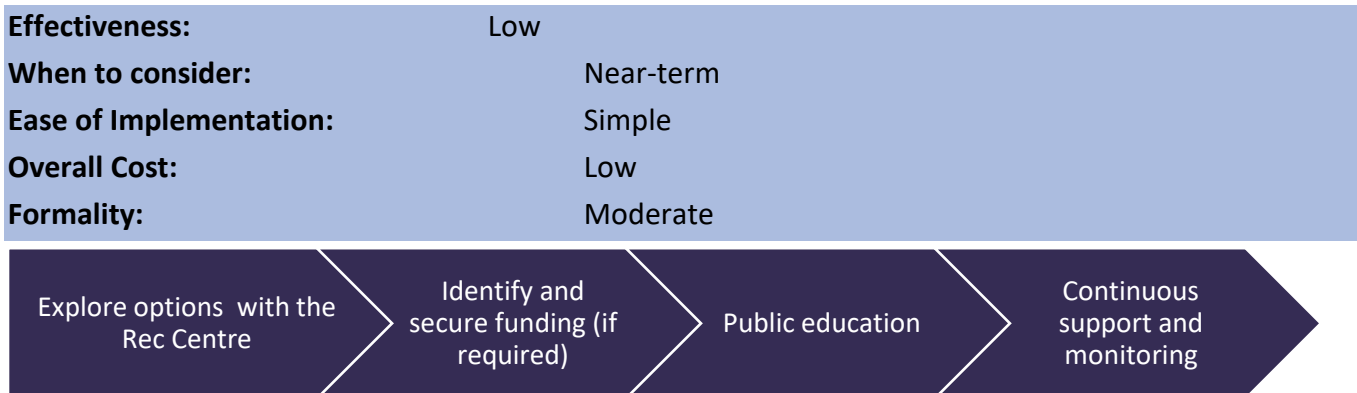


Figure 16. High-level implementation steps for park-and-ride at the NRRM Recreation Centre

One of the current challenges is that regional services like BC Bus North and Northern Health Connections do not go further North and West of Fort Nelson. The more remote communities within the NRRM cannot easily access these vital services. A potential solution is developing a park-and-ride at the NRRM Recreation Centre. This solution would allow residents that have their own vehicles to park at the Recreation Centre and connect to regional services. The BC Bus North stop is on the side of the Recreation Centre building. Designating parking spots close to this location further increases the potential benefit of the solution.

This solution may be particularly valuable in the winter, when long-distance driving has increased safety risks due to challenging road conditions. Since accessing Fort St. John is critical for many in the region, the park-and-ride would provide a practical solution for reducing people’s driving distances. The feature would help attract riders to the regional services and bridge the gap between rural areas and Fort Nelson.

This initiative may also support environmental sustainability by reducing individual vehicle emissions and fuel consumption, which could be further improved when combined with other solutions, such as formalized carpooling.

Implementation requirements

The park-and-ride should be considered and implemented in partnership with the Recreation Centre. First, the capacity of the existing parking should be considered and whether they are at or near full capacity at any time of the year or time of the day. If there are concerns about current parking capacity, the feasibility of this solution may decrease, particularly if moments of peak capacity could conflict with anticipated park-and-ride usage.

Once it is confirmed that there is sufficient capacity, the NRRM and the Recreation Centre can consider the details, including which parking spots could be reserved for the park-and-ride, signage, and policies on how long people can park there for. Since it is using existing Recreation Centre parking, it is assumed that maintenance of the parking facilities (e.g., snowploughing) is already covered.

A comprehensive communication plan would be a key element of implementation, so that residents are aware of the service.

Risks and limitations

The Recreation Centre hosts numerous classes, sports activities, and community gatherings throughout the year, making parking demand analysis crucial to ensure the park-and-ride initiative doesn't interfere with regular facility operations. Clear signage should be implemented to designate specific spaces for park-and-ride users, distinguishing them from spaces reserved for Recreation Centre patrons.

The initiative's effectiveness also depends heavily on public awareness and education efforts. Underutilization of the park-and-ride is a possibility but does not pose a significant risk since it only requires minimal ongoing support.

There is an additional risk that because the BC Bus North schedule is limited to trips on Mondays and Fridays, vehicles may end up being parked at the park-and-ride for long periods of time. This may create additional capacity challenges.

3.3.11 Formalizing Hitchhiking

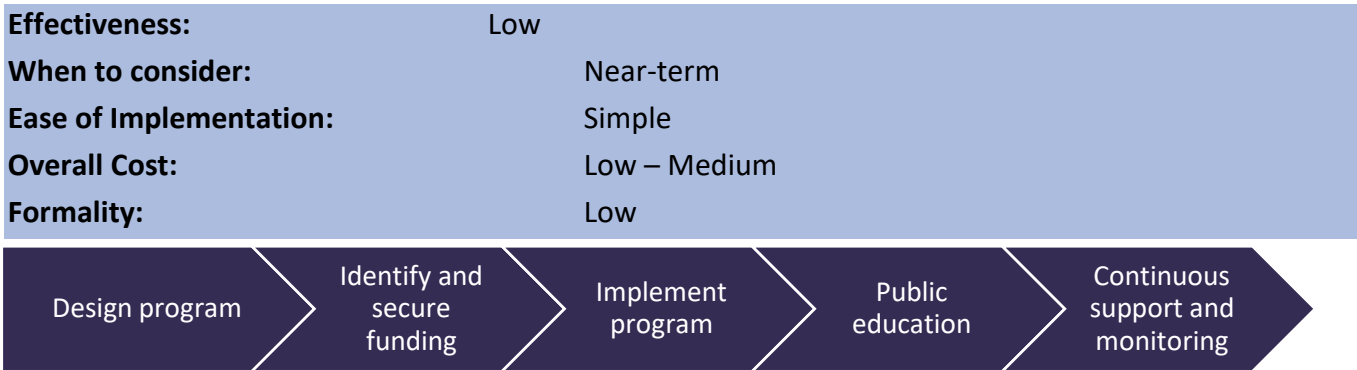


Figure 17. High-level implementation steps for formalizing hitchhiking

A formalized hitchhiking program involves designating specific locations as hitchhiking pick-up points within the NRRM to improve the safety of hitchhiking. This would discourage hitchhiking in dangerous areas (e.g., along the highway) and also provide people willing to pick up hitchhikers with a safer place to pick them up. A formalized hitchhiking program is similar to rideshare programs, except rides are not pre-arranged. Pick-up points can be established at safe locations in urban areas or other spots known to be origin points or destinations.

A formalized hitchhiking program could be a pre-cursor to more elaborate programs, as well as part of a broad-based solution to fill specific gaps and address specific needs around the safety of hitchhiking.

Implementation requirements

Infrastructure can be added at key points to improve access and safety. In urban areas, these might include designated points with lighting, pedestrian access, shelter and such; in rural or highway areas, safe pull-offs can be inserted at key points. Adding infrastructure increases the overall cost of the solution, but existing infrastructure can be leveraged. For example, the pull-offs along the Alaska highway could be designated points for hitchhikers.

Public education of the solution for both locals and visitors will be critical to its uptake.

Risks and limitations

Unlike the ridesharing program, there is not any prior communication connecting driver and rider. This limits the reach and effectiveness of the program but makes it easy to implement. Potential riders simply wait at designated points; potential drivers can choose to make short detours to check for passengers at the pick-up points.

Formalizing the locations makes the pick-up and drop-off process easier and somewhat safer but does not address the safety issue of unknown parties riding with each other. One partial solution to this is

to have a community-based vetting program where potential drivers can apply for a designated driver certification and identification for their vehicle. Certification might include entry in a registry, vehicle identification, police records check and such.

As a voluntary program, applicants for registry and certification might be low, and limit the value of establishing a program.

3.3.12 Bikeshare

Effectiveness:	Low
When to consider:	Medium-term
Ease of Implementation:	Moderate
Overall Cost:	Medium
Formality:	Moderate



Figure 18. High-level implementation steps for bikeshare

A bikeshare program in Fort Nelson would provide residents with an additional active transportation option for local trips. Ideally, the program promotes active transportation and environmental sustainability while offering convenient access to services within Fort Nelson, including connections to BC Bus North at the Recreation Centre.

This initiative offers multiple community benefits. It promotes physical activity and reduces short-trip vehicle emissions. When integrated with other transportation solutions such as formalized carpooling and hitchhiking, bikeshare could address first-mile/last-mile connectivity challenges. The result would be enhanced mobility options throughout Fort Nelson.

Implementation requirements

The NRRM will need to identify overall investment levels which will inform the number of bikes and station locations that will be implemented. Station locations should be in various areas around town, including priority locations like the Recreation Centre, grocery stores, and other community hubs. Ensuring that stations are relatively spread out will increase availability to residents.

The NRRM should also establish clear operational policies. These include system management, maintenance schedules, and daily procedures. An early key decision will be around whether the bikeshare will be available in the winter or not. If yes, steps should be taken to ensure winter biking

safety features for the bikes. Infrastructure needed for the solution include bike racks, maintenance facilities, and clear station signage.

To ensure proper return of bikes, a user registration system would be necessary. This could include a deposit system or credit card authorization. For additional security, each bike could be equipped with GPS tracking for location monitoring, which can also help the NRRM understand usage patterns. Regular inventory checks would help maintain accountability, equipment quality, and ensure proper distribution across stations.

A comprehensive communication strategy to ensure public awareness and education would be another key element of the solution. Educational materials must be clear and thorough. They should explain access procedures, winter riding safety guidelines, and program policies.

Risks and limitations

Introducing a bikeshare comes with some risks. First and foremost, there are some safety risks related to potential conflicts between different road users. Information about road safety and helmet use should be part of the bikeshare program and registration. Clear policies could address liability concerns and equipment use. Over time, improved cycling infrastructure (e.g., bike paths, multi-use paths) can be implemented to improve the cycling experience and road safety.

Second, if the bikeshare is limited to seasonal use, there will only be benefits during those seasons. If the bikeshare is available in the winter months, this may also come with increased costs, maintenance, and safety hazards.

Lastly, there is a risk that it is not well-utilised and does not justify the investment. In order to mitigate this risk, consistent engagement with the community is necessary to identify preferred station locations, improvements to cycling infrastructure, availability of bicycles and awareness of the service.

4 Implementing Solutions

The previous section discussed implementation requirements for individual solution options and this section will consider them more holistically and in relation to one another. Additional information on potential funding opportunities is also provided in the funding glossary.

4.1 Implementation considerations

There are a number of steps the NRRM should take following the publication of this plan. First, a comprehensive review and prioritization process should be undertaken based on the solution options. This involves evaluating all proposed solutions against community needs, feasibility, and potential impact to confirm the relative importance of each solution. Different constraints on the NRRM may

provide additional context that makes certain solutions more or less feasible in the near future. Certain solutions such as formalized carpooling might be prioritized initially due to their minimal implementation costs and immediate community benefits.

Following prioritization, the NRRM should identify and explore relevant funding sources. The availability of funding is likely a deciding factor in whether a solution can be implemented or not. In that sense, any funding tied to a specific solution may lead to the more immediate implementation of that solution. The Rural Transit Solutions Fund could potentially support the NRRM shuttle initiatives or expansions to the Seniors' Bus service, while the Active Transportation Fund might be appropriate for pedestrian improvements or bikeshare programs. A full funding glossary is provided in Section 4.3.

With funding sources identified, the NRRM can proceed with preparing and submitting funding applications. This stage requires developing detailed project proposals and budget estimates that align with specific program requirements. The NRRM can proceed with implementing low-cost or readily achievable solutions while pursuing funding opportunities for more resource-intensive initiatives. This approach ensures continuous progress in improving transportation options without being entirely dependent on external funding sources. Implementation should follow a phased approach based on funding availability, project complexity, and solution priority as determined by the first step. For example, the formalized hitchhiking program could start with signage at highway pull-offs, but could be further expanded to include community vetting for drivers.

As part of designing the details of each solution, additional public engagement and a monitoring and evaluation plan should be developed. Engaging the public with more fleshed-out solutions will elicit more and better-quality feedback that can then be used in the design of the solutions. A monitoring and evaluation plan will ensure that the NRRM is tracking the progress and impact of each solution. Ongoing monitoring involves measuring usage rates, gathering community feedback, and assessing the economic and social impacts of new transportation options. Regular evaluation will help the NRRM identify when to adjust strategies and inform future transportation planning decisions. This will ensure the continued effectiveness of implemented solutions.

4.2 Solutions Pathways

When considering how the solution options relate to each other and could be implemented, there are two main categories of solutions: local and regional. Each pathway shows a sample timeline of implementing the relevant solutions and discusses how the various solutions build on each other.

4.2.1 Local

The local solution pathway focuses on how to build up and improve the local transportation context primarily within the Fort Nelson and Fort Nelson First Nation area.

Figure 19, on the following page, highlights a four-year pathway to implementing the relevant solutions. Note that there are not specific years associated with each solution, but the pathway is intended to give a sense of the scale of the implementation and anticipated staging. The timelines shown are related to the implementation timelines and do not show when specific services would start operating.

Securing funding is a key first step for all of the transportation solutions. Given that the community shuttle has already been submitted for funding, this is considered the first high-priority solution that can be reasonably implemented. The various shuttle options, including current, planned and future programs, can form a staged development of services, coupled with a monitoring program to track progress and plan next steps. With a successful funding application for the community shuttle, the combined shuttle and Seniors' bus represents a solid base for on-going development of local service.

The remaining solutions are staged based on their anticipated implementation timeline and relative priority. For the most part, they are staged in a sequence to lead to consistent effort on the part of the NRRM. The notable exception to this is around Year 2 Q3 with subsidizing taxi service, formalizing carpooling and ridesharing, employee shuttle, and improving pedestrian access all set to begin implementation around the same time. These solutions' implementation start times are grouped to ensure that they are designed in a way that complements each other and does not conflict with one another. For example, if a subsidy was granted to both taxi drivers and rideshare volunteers around the same time, it may be confusing to the public what differentiates the services. The timeline for improving pedestrian access is additionally lengthened with the understanding that the design and implementation of active transportation infrastructure may take several years. The bikeshare program would be the next solution, followed by potential partnership with BC Transit for the ongoing Fort Nelson community shuttle.

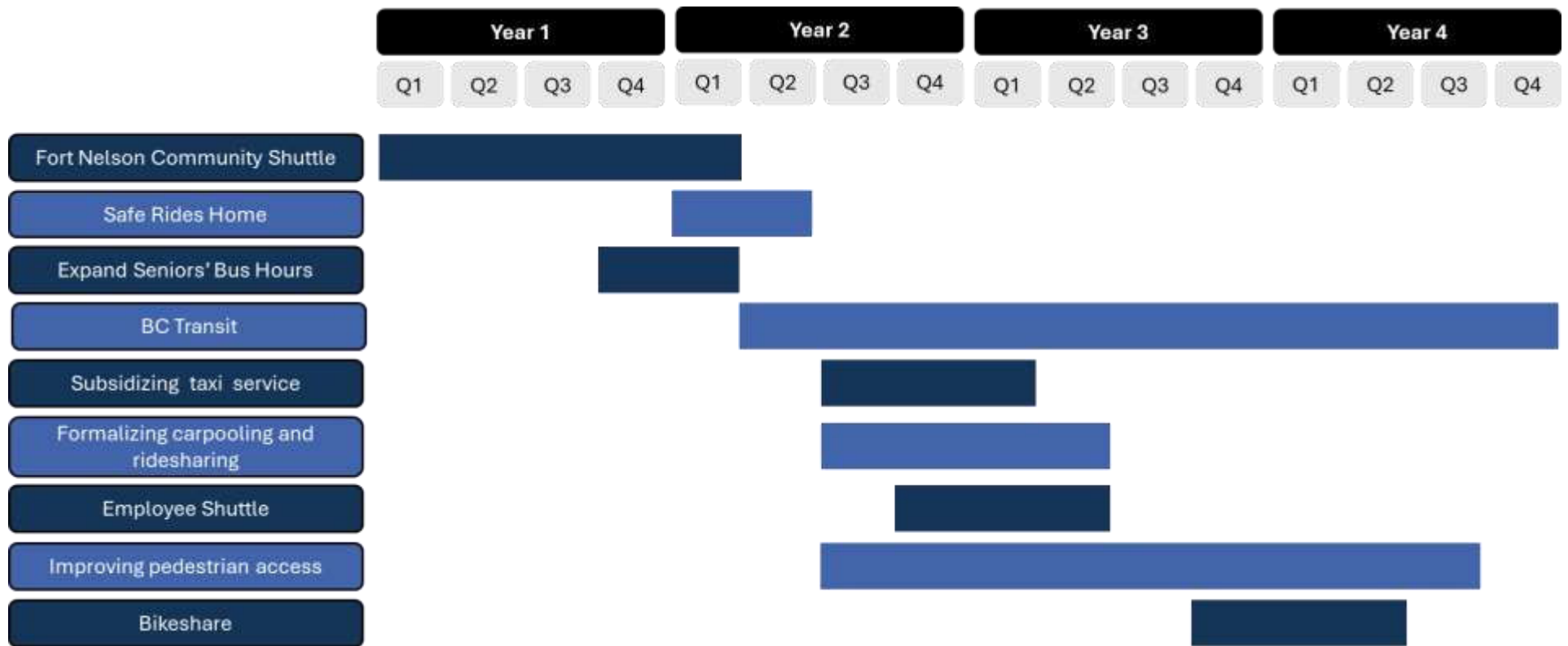


Figure 19. The pathway for local transportation solutions

4.2.2 Regional

The regional solution pathway highlights the various solutions and a sample implementation timeline for solutions that address regional travel needs. The pathway is shown in Figure 20 on the following page. There are three solutions that are common across the local and regional pathways. Their timing is consistent between both pathways.

As they are both relatively low-cost and easy-to-implement, the park-and-ride at the Recreation Centre and the formalized hitchhiking program could be implemented in the near-term. Similar to the local pathway, the subsidizing taxi service, formalizing carpool and ridesharing, and improving pedestrian access are the next set of solutions. The subsidized taxi service may have limited use in the regional context based on the long distances in the region, but carpooling and ridesharing may be more successful. Improving pedestrian access in a regional context includes improving access for the smaller communities in the region. This will have a benefit for short local trips, but also facilitate access to a regional NRRM shuttle in the longer-term.

For all the solutions, but perhaps especially the regional solutions, it is important to take a phased approach and consider the varying levels of investment. For example, the formalized hitchhiking program will benefit from lighting and shelters at pull-offs along the highway but may start first just with signage. Similarly, the park-and-ride could be expanded or improved based on usage data and community feedback. The NRRM shuttle will involve very long distances and so a phased approach will be critical to ensure that the service is aligned with the use and acceptable investment levels.

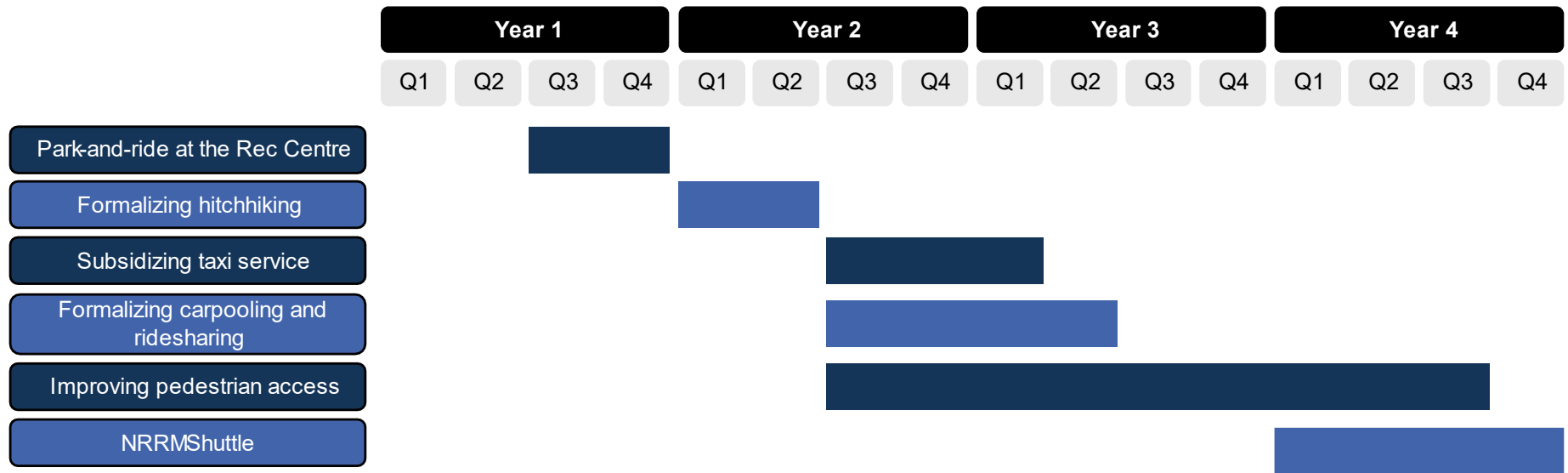


Figure 20. The pathway for regional transportation solutions

4.3 Funding Glossary

The following are funding opportunities that are relevant for the NRRM and the solutions presented.

4.3.1 Canada Public Transit Fund

The Canada Public Transit Fund (CPTF) represents a significant federal funding opportunity that could support select transportation initiatives in the NRRM. Starting in 2026, the program will provide funding through two relevant streams that could benefit the community.

The Targeted Funding stream, allocating \$500 million annually, could potentially support specific NRRM proposals such as active transportation infrastructure or rural transit solutions. This stream is particularly suited for smaller communities and could help implement selected initiatives from the NRRM's transportation plan. It is crucial to note that operating expenses and regular maintenance costs are not eligible under this funding program.

4.3.2 BC Transit

BC Transit supports transit service in small communities across British Columbia through a partnership agreement, sharing operating costs at a rate of 47% for conventional transit services (fixed route and on-demand) and 67% for transit service for people with disabilities (HandiTrans).

The municipal share (53% for conventional and 33% for HandiTrans) comes from local sources including fares (typically 5% to 15%), property taxes, or other dedicated local funds.

Support is provided through a Transit Service Agreement (TSA) between BC Transit and the municipality and monitored through an Annual Operating Agreement (AOA). Municipalities also required to maintain a future-focussed plan to guide future services and agreements.

4.3.3 Rural Transit Solutions Fund

The Rural Transit Solutions Fund (RTSF) is a \$250 million federal initiative launched in 2021 that specifically targets transit development in rural and remote communities over five years. This fund offers significant opportunities through two distinct funding streams that could support local transportation initiatives.

For the Capital Projects stream, the NRRM could apply for up to \$3 million to cover costs of conventional transit solutions, or up to \$5 million for zero-emission transit solutions. These funds can support various eligible expenses including vehicle procurement, charging stations, construction of bus stops, and software for transit operations.

The Planning and Design Projects stream, on the other hand, provides grants up to \$50,000 for transit planning activities such as feasibility studies, needs assessments, and public engagement. This stream accepts applications on a continuous basis until funds are fully committed.

4.3.4 Active Transportation Fund

The Active Transportation Fund (ATF) is a \$400 million federal investment over five years to support active transportation infrastructure across Canada. It offers two funding streams:

Planning Projects through the Active Transportation Fund support the creation or enhancement of strategic planning documents for active transportation in the NRRM. This includes developing comprehensive plans, conducting feasibility studies, and carrying out stakeholder engagement activities to ensure community needs are met.

Capital Projects under this fund focus on tangible infrastructure improvements. This could mean building new pathways, enhancing existing trails, or implementing safety features throughout the NRRM. The fund can support various infrastructure elements that make active transportation more accessible and safer for community members. The Capital Projects stream is currently open for applications until February 26, 2025 (April 9, 2025 for indigenous communities and First Nations)

4.3.5 Northern Development Initiative Trust

The Northern Development Initiative Trust (NDIT) provides a variety of programs to support northern development in housing, infrastructure, economic development and community supports. It also administers the Northern Passenger Transportation Service fund, which is responsible for BC Bus North. The NRRM has made an application to the NDIT's Northern Community Shuttle Program to support the development of the community shuttle program in Fort Nelson.

4.3.6 Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada and Indigenous Services Canada

Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC) and Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) are two government agencies that contribute funding for transportation for First Nations. Fort Nelson and Prophet River First Nations both receive a variety of funds through agreements with CIRNAC and ISC funding programs. Some of these funds have local flexibility to support a range of transportation services and could potentially be applied to partnership projects with the NRRM. It is possible that these funds are already allocated to the First Nations-led transportation services, however.

4.3.7 Community Sponsors

It is common for transportation solutions in small areas to be sponsored or otherwise supported by local organizations, including local businesses and post-secondary institutions. From a local business's perspective, improved transportation may increase their business directly by allowing more people to shop there. It additionally benefits local businesses by increasing their access to potential employees and ensuring that employees are able to reliably get to work. Post-secondary institutions, like the Northern Lights College, may see the benefits for current and prospective students. Partnerships or

sponsorships may be organized based on the specific solution or the service. For example, a local business may contribute to the Employee Shuttle, but Northern Lights may be interested in paying for reduced Fort Nelson shuttle fares for students and employees.

4.3.8 Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program

The Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) Public Transit Stream could potentially support the NRRM's transportation initiatives through funding for transit infrastructure and service improvements. The program provides up to 40% federal funding for new transit projects and 50% for rehabilitation projects, with additional provincial cost-sharing required. While specific eligibility requirements include minimum ridership reporting and Provincial Gas Tax funding criteria, future program intakes might adapt to serve communities like the NRRM.

4.3.9 The Canada Community-Building Fund

The Canada Community-Building Fund (CCBF) offers more immediate and flexible funding opportunities for the NRRM's transportation solutions. This program provides predictable, long-term funding that can support public transit infrastructure, local roads, and active transportation facilities. The fund specifically allows for capital costs related to transit infrastructure, making it particularly relevant for initiatives like park-and-ride facilities, pedestrian improvements, or community shuttle infrastructure.

4.3.10 Transit Minor Betterments Program

The Transit Minor Betterments (TMB) Program is administered by the Transit Strategy & Policy Branch (TSPB) at the B.C. Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MOTI). It provides up to \$100,000 for transit-supportive projects that align with key objectives including safety, accessibility, and equity. This program could potentially support smaller-scale improvements such as transit shelters, wayfinding signage, or bus stop improvements. The program's focus on supporting partners and improving transit accessibility makes it particularly relevant for the NRRM's proposed solutions. Projects that are not completed within the fiscal year of approval are not eligible for reimbursement.

4.3.11 Passenger Transportation Accessibility Program

The Passenger Transportation Accessibility Program (PTAP) offers specific support for wheelchair accessible vehicles through two rebate streams. The WAV Maintenance and Operation Rebate provides funding for ongoing maintenance, while the WAV Acquisition and Conversion Rebate offers up to 20% of acquisition costs (maximum \$11,000) and 50% of conversion costs (maximum \$9,000). This program could be particularly relevant if the NRRM's transportation solutions include accessible transportation services like the Seniors' Bus or community shuttle. Applications for the WAV Maintenance and Operation Rebate are being accepted until February 14, 2025, at noon. The WAV Acquisition and Conversion Rebate program accepts applications continuously while funding remains available.