



Missing the Bus: Indigenous Women and Two-Spirit Plus People and Public Transit in Western Canada

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Content warning

This report relates to missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and Two-Spirit+ people and its content may be disturbing or triggering for readers.

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A taxi sits in front of the Greyhound bus depot on 6th Street in Brandon, Manitoba. The Greyhound building is up for sale. Photo courtesy of Tim Smith/The Brandon Sun.

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Figure 1: Greyhound Bus Routes in Manitoba, Summer 2018. Map published as part of Macintosh, Maggie and Larry Kusch. 2018. "Fallout from Greyhound departure," Winnipeg Free Press, 10 July 2018, <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/greyhound-exit-487822171.html>

Figure 2: Inter-city Bus Transportation in Manitoba, Fall 2021. This map charts available intercity bus and shuttle routes in Manitoba as of October and November 2021. Information was gathered from websites and by phone. Research by Sarah Hourie and Adele Perry, and map by Weldon Hiebert.

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Figure 3: Timeline of Provincial Government Actions on Highway 16. Source: OAG, "Follow-Up", p. 33.

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Executive Summary

Missing the Bus explores the connections between uneven mobility and mobility justice in the context of Indigenous women and Two-Spirit plus people in Western Canada, with a particular focus on Manitoba. The effects of declining transit options on rural, northern, and Indigenous communities have been widely noted in both national and international media following the closure of Greyhound's western routes in 2018, and their remaining Canadian routes in 2021. We pick up on existing publications and ask what role public transit, or its absence, plays in the safety of Indigenous women and Two-Spirit plus people. Within the larger constellation of diminishing transportation options, Indigenous women and Two-Spirit plus people have important concerns about their safety and well-being.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the existing literature on this topic and identify gaps, thus informing future research to better understand what transit means for Indigenous women and Two-Spirit plus people. The larger goal is to recognize how what we know can inform the development of policies that succeed in challenging rather than reproducing inequities related to race, class, gender, and sexuality. It is a timely moment to explore these issues, given the rapidly decreasing spectrum of transportation options in both rural and urban contexts as well as the urgent need to transition away from fossil-fuel dependence. The study focuses on three types of literature: scholarly literature, "grey" literature (defined as research produced outside of traditional academic publishing, including reports by all levels of government, plans, working papers, unpublished graduate theses, and policy literature), and recent popular media, both digital and print. While the emphasis here is on western Canada, we also draw on the experience of other places.

The scholarly literature we reviewed shows that transit services can contribute to prejudice and can provide contexts for users to experience racism, discrimination, and, at times, violence. Scholars urge policymakers to listen to the experiences of diverse transit users in making decisions, while also recognizing the need for further research about the accessibility and affordability of transit in Canada in both regional and local contexts. The grey literature reveals that a dearth of safe, accessible public transportation options can reinforce inequalities, for example those related to healthcare and the justice system. Public media sources focus on three themes: transit users' experiences of racism and discrimination, the effects of diminishing transit services, and the value of accessible, affordable and safe transportation options.

Overall, the literature makes it clear that public transportation remains necessary for many people, allowing them to attend educational institutions, seek treatment, get to work, and connect with families and loved ones. Its availability makes possible the full participation of Indigenous women and Two-Spirit plus people in all aspects of society. Public transit, therefore, is not an additional or optional service, but a fundamental necessity. Our study also shows, however, that there exist gaps in understanding the localized and distinct experiences of diverse transit users, including Indigenous women and Two-Spirit plus people, as well as what safe, just public transportation should be. Key questions about public transit are not limited to its availability. Researchers and policy makers must explore ongoing barriers to its use, where is it most needed, and how it can best support the mobility justice (and rights) of all users.

A note on terminology

In this study, we use the term **Two-Spirit plus** as a shorthand to describe people whose gender identity and presentation fall outside of a heterosexual gender-binary model and may include people who identify as queer, non-binary, lesbian, gay, bi- or pansexual, transgender, transsexual, gender non-conforming, or Two-Spirit. We define **western Canada** broadly to include Northwestern Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia. By **Indigenous** we mean First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people. We define **intra-city public transit** as transit that operates within a city, including to or from neighbouring suburban areas. We define **inter-city public transit** as all schedules and routes, other than charter, that is operated beyond the limits defined under local or suburban intra-city transit.

Background

The current state of inter-city and intra-city public transit in western Canada reflects more than a century of policy decisions and social change. Across the western world, patterns of employment became decentralized over the course of the twentieth century. Especially in the years following World War Two, the ownership and use of privately-owned automobiles became common, and a social logic of “automobility” began to define almost all North American cities (see Wilt, 2020). In the past decade, Vancouver has been bucking the trend of increasing private car usage. Other western Canadian cities, however, conform to patterns of decreasing public transit use and increased automobile use. For example, 72% of Winnipeggers who work less than 5 kilometers away from the city centre travel by car to their downtown work (Savage, 2020, 7).

Throughout much of Western Canada, public transit options are limited within cities, and even more so outside of them. This has not always been the case. In the late nineteenth century, the first streetcar systems often stretched well outside city limits. Winnipeg’s street railways, for instance, linked the city to the town of Selkirk, some 35 kilometers to the north (Taylor, 2017, 14).

For much of the twentieth century, rail lines were also relatively extensive. Rail linked urban people to recreational opportunities at Winnipeg Beach, Lake of the Woods, and Shoal Lake (Barbour, 2011). Inter-city passenger rail service provided by the Canadian National Railway and Canadian Pacific Railway services declined sharply in the 1940s and 50s, and continued to lose ground in the 1960s and 70s. The establishment of Crown Corporation mandated to provide intercity passenger rail service across Canada, VIA Rail, in 1977 did not turn this pattern around. There was a 45% drop in annual ridership in 1989, and federal funding “declined continuously” throughout the 1990s. This decline hit the less populous regions of western and eastern Canada especially hard and, in 2015, a remarkable 85% of rail travel with VIA was within the Quebec City-Windsor corridor (Dupuis, 2015).

The late 2010s saw further critical losses to inter-city rail and bus services in Western Canada. The rail line linking Winnipeg to Churchill and providing connection for Indigenous communities between the two was sold to an American-based company in 1997, and ceased running altogether for much of 2017 and 2018 (CBC, 31 August 2018; CBC, 3 July 2018). The Saskatchewan Transportation Company, established as a Crown Corporation in 1946 with a mandate to link urban centres and rural populations, was shuttered in 2017 (STC Stories; Alhassan et al, 2021; Alhassan Smith and Hanson, 2021; and Alhassan and Hanson, 2019).

The decline in inter-city bus travel occurred differently in Manitoba than in Saskatchewan, but the results were much the same. Manitoba’s Grey Goose bus line was absorbed by Greyhound in 2008. After a decade of steadily decreasing service, Greyhound announced that it was ceasing all of its western Canadian routes with the exception of its Vancouver-Seattle route (Noakes, 2018; Doig, 2018). The regular bus routes linking Manitoba to the provinces to its east and west, and connecting Winnipeg to the northern communities of Flin Flon, Thompson, Cross Lake, and Gillam (see Figure 1) ended in October 2018. Greyhound’s closure of its remaining Canadian routes in 2021 (Global News, 14 May 2021; Evans, 2021) brought some attention to questions of rural and northern public transit, and confirmed long-term patterns of diminishing services and options.

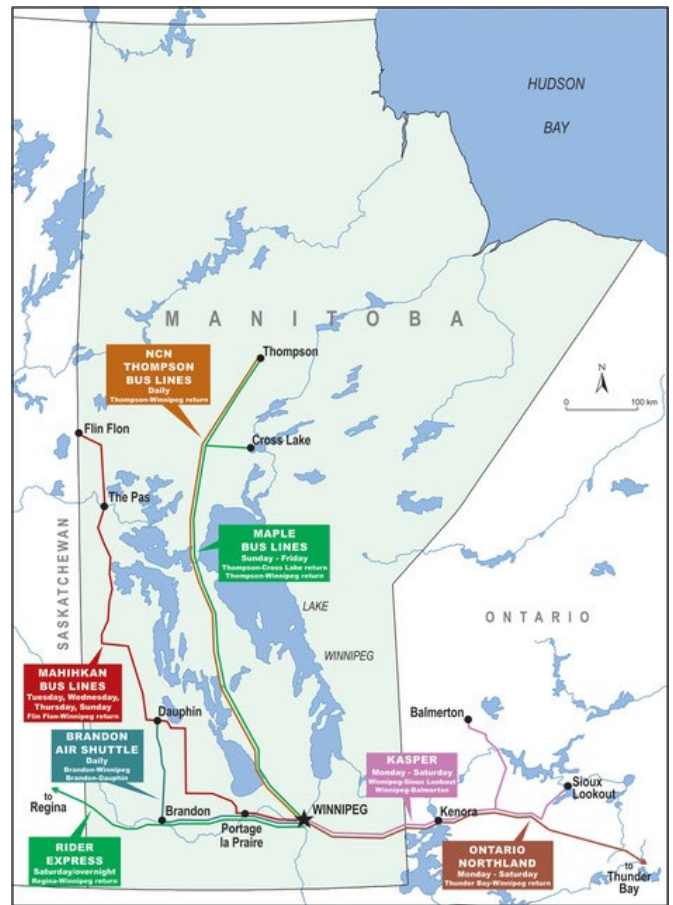
Figure 1: Greyhound Bus Routes in Manitoba, Summer 2018



Map published as part of Macintosh, Maggie and Larry Kusch. 2018. "Fallout from Greyhound departure," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 10 July 2018, <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/greyhound-exit-487822171.html>

Within the context of western Canada, only the province of British Columbia has taken up the federal government's offer to share the cost of inter-city bus travel. In the fall of 2021, a patchwork of private, First Nation, and Ontario-owned inter-city bus service was available in Manitoba, particularly linking Winnipeg to northwestern Ontario to the east and Brandon to the West, and northwards to Thompson, The Pas, and Flin Flon. The only services that run daily are Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation (NCN)-owned NCN Thompson Bus Lines, which has linked Winnipeg to Thompson since 2018; and the Brandon Air Shuttle, which connects Brandon and Winnipeg's airport. After years without regular bus service linking Manitoba and Saskatchewan, a once-weekly overnight bus between Regina and Winnipeg began being operated by Saskatchewan-based Rider Express in the spring of 2021 (CTV, 9 March 2021). Comparing the map of Manitoba Greyhound routes in 2018 (Figure 1) and the patchwork of private, First Nations and Ontario run busses and shuttles available in the fall of 2021 (Figure 2) makes clear how inter-city bus travel options have both changed and declined markedly in service and in important ways in scope.

Figure 2: Inter-city Bus Transportation in Manitoba, Fall 2021



This map charts available intercity bus and shuttle routes in Manitoba as of October and November 2021. Information was gathered from websites and by phone. Research by Sarah Hourie and Adele Perry, and map by Weldon Hiebert.

The implications for rural and poor people of the fragmentation and decline of inter-city bus travel in much of western Canada has been appropriately noted by advocates, journalists, and scholars (Leedham and Amalgamated Transit Union, 2019; and Alhassan and Lori Hanson, 2019). The particular effects on Indigenous communities have been discussed regularly since 2018 by Indigenous women's organizations, journalists, and policy analysts. In the wake of Greyhound's withdrawal from western Canada, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) explained that it was "deeply concerned for the safety of Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people" (NWAC, 2018). "What will First Nations who once relied on the bus service

do now that it's ceased operations in western Canada?" asked podcaster Rick Harp in the wake of Greyhound's 2018 announcement (Harp, Callison and TallBear, 2018). Policy analyst Emily Riddle argues that Indigenous women "deserve to travel our homelands free from violence, and while transportation is only a small component of the changes needed for that to happen, it is an important one" (Riddle, 2018).

This knowledge synthesis project picks up on these questions and asks what role public transit, or its absence, plays in the safety of Indigenous women and Two-Spirit plus people. Within the larger constellation of diminishing transportation options, Indigenous women and Two-Spirit plus people have important concerns about their safety and well-being. For instance, a study of Indigenous transgender and Two-Spirit plus people in Manitoba shows that many felt to some extent unsafe while travelling (Taylor, 2009). A diminished network of options can serve to exacerbate connections between violence and life for Indigenous women and Two-Spirit plus people.

For the last three decades, families and activists have worked to draw public attention to the patterns which serve to target Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit plus people for violence on a national scale with specific regional contours. The patterns that work to target Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit plus people are national in character but regional in shape. For instance, in Manitoba, the police-reported homicide rate for Indigenous women was 7.16 per 100,000 people, compared to 4.82 per 100 000 for Canada as a whole (Department of Justice, Canada, 2017).

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has introduced new variables and intensified existing ones. In May of 2020, NWAC surveyed 750 Indigenous women and gender-diverse people and found that "many more Indigenous women are experiencing violence during this pandemic than usual." Indigenous women under 35, those living in the north, and/or those who are financially impacted by COVID-19, tended to experience the directive to "shelter in place" as one that has exacerbated threats of violence (NWAC, 2020, 2), rather than ensuring health.

As Pamela Palmater notes, Indigenous women "faced societal racism, victim blaming in the media, government indifference, and a lack of priority even within Indigenous organizations" (2016, 255). The creation of the National Inquiry on Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls (henceforth, NI-MMIWG) in 2016, after decades of advocacy by family members of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit plus people, as well as survivors of violence, represents a key moment in the history of Indigenous women and Two-Spirit plus people's advocacy, and the response of the federal state. It should come as no surprise that transportation is a key factor in the NI-MMIWG.

The ways that travel, and the limited options for transit become a "pathway to violence" for Indigenous women, girls and Two-Spirit plus people, is carefully explained in Chapter 7 of *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous women and Girls*. The authors explain that "a lack of safe and affordable transportation can mean that people may be forced to rely on other methods, such as walking or hitchhiking, not only to escape dangerous situations, but simply to travel for education or employment." In this way, "inadequate infrastructure and transportation, or transportation that itself becomes a site for violence," effectively "punish Indigenous women trying to 'make a better life' through efforts to escape" (NI-MMIWG, 2019, Volume 1a, 551-552, 557).

Two of the NI-MMIWG's Calls for Justice directly concern transportation: 4.8 calls upon governments "to ensure that adequate plans and funding are put into place for safe and affordable transportation services and infrastructure for Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit plus people living in remote or rural communities" (2019, Volume 1b, 182). The inability to escape dangerous situations through safe, accessible and publicly funded services, and the related need to turn to alternative and unsafe forms of transportation in times of crisis, exacerbate many of the threats already facing Indigenous women, girls and Two-Spirit plus people.

A full year after the end of the NI-MMIWG, during which Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit plus people continued to be targets for violence, the government of Canada established a working structure to prioritize the NI-MMIWG's recommendations, including the first one – to work with Indigenous people to chart the more specific work ahead. Together, a series of working groups co-developed a National Action Plan to end the systemic causes of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit plus people, prioritizing the NI-MMIWG's recommendations as well as elaborating on them. (National Inquiry, 2021) As part of this structure, a 2SLGBTQIA+ Sub-Working Group produced its own report calling for the immediate implementation of the NI-MMIWG's recommendations, including for "safe transportation" (National Action Plan 2SLGBTQIA+¹ Sub-Working Group, 2021, 36).

The calls of the NI-MMIWG and the work undertaken by Two-Spirit plus people on the National Action Plan can be seen as exposing what sociologist Mimi Sheller calls "uneven mobility," and revealing the need for what she describes as "mobility justice." Uneven mobility refers to: a "terrain for movement in which there are divergent pathways, differential access, or partial connectivity;" kinds of movement that "have a greater or lesser degree of ease, comfort, flexibility, and safety;" and "spatial patterns, forms of mobility management, and control architectures that govern relations of mobility and immobility." Sheller argues that mobility justice involves understanding how the scales of the body and the street, the extended urban scale, the national scale, and the planetary scale are all "racialized, gendered, and uneven." "Mobility justice," she explains, "is an overarching concept for thinking about how power and inequality inform the governance and control of movement, shaping the patterns of unequal mobility and immobility in the circulation of people, resources, and information" (Sheller, 2018, 23, 30). *Missing the Bus* explores the connections between uneven mobility and mobility justice in the context of

Indigenous women and Two-Spirit plus people in Western Canada.

Objectives

Missing the Bus aims to document what we know and do not know about how public inter-city and intra-city transit – including the lack of it – shapes the lives of Indigenous women and Two-Spirit plus people in western Canada, with a particular focus on Manitoba. At the core of this knowledge synthesis project is a thorough analysis of the existing literature and knowledge about both inter-city and intra-city public transit. How might the conditions of public transit and diminishing options for inter-city public transit help to produce a world that too often targets Indigenous women and Two-Spirit plus people for violence?

We challenge the presumption that Indigenous women, girls and Two-Spirit plus people are somehow inherently vulnerable, or, as sociologist Sherene Razack explains, always on the brink of death (Razack, 2015). There is a long tradition, as historian Meghan Longstaff explains, of scripting violence against Indigenous women as inevitable and, in doing so, reinforcing harmful discourses, and hindering change (2017, 241). Here, we aim to disrupt this loop and instead draw attention to the circumstances, structures, and histories, including of transit, that can work to make Indigenous women and Two-Spirit plus people vulnerable to those who may harm them.

Within the context of this project, we define western Canada broadly to include Northwestern Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia. We make special reference to Manitoba, the province in which our project is located. For the purpose of our project, we use a modified definition of Jarrett Walker's definition of public transit. Walker argues that public transit must have regularly scheduled trips, be open to all paying passengers, be able to carry multiple passengers, and accommodate trips that have different origins, destinations, and purposes (2012, 13-14). This excludes a range of practices, including carpools, school buses, taxis, and both formal and informal ride-share arrangements, such as Uber. In his (2020) book, *Do Androids Dream of*

¹ 2SLGBTQIA+ is an acronym for Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and the countless affirmative ways in which people choose to self-identify.

Electric Cars? Public Transit in the Age of Google, Uber, and Elon Musk, James Wilt makes the argument that ride-share companies such as Uber are outside of what we might see as public transit, and indeed a real threat to it (Wilt, 2020, 6). Here we recognize the importance of these definitions, while also recognizing the importance of informal, community, and First Nation responses to insufficient transit, including ride-shares and First Nation-run medical transportation.

Methods

The core of the work is a literature review for the purpose of detailing extant knowledge and highlighting gaps. The project was led by Dr. Karine Duhamel, Indigenous historian and former Director of Research for the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls; Dr. Adele Perry, a settler historian of gender and colonization and Director of the University of Manitoba's Centre for Human Rights Research (CHRR); and Dr. Jocelyn Thorpe, a settler scholar working with her fantastic colleagues toward decolonization and social justice, and Director of the University of Manitoba's Centre for Creative Writing and Oral Culture. Much of the research was undertaken by three research assistants, all students at the University of Manitoba: Sarah Hourie, a graduate student in the department of Indigenous Studies; Betchel Belachew, a senior undergraduate student in the Department of Sociology and Criminology; and Hannah Bowers, an undergraduate student in the Faculty of Arts and the winner of an Undergraduate Research Award being supervised by Dr. Jocelyn Thorpe. We were assisted by Kayla Lariviere, who was working with the CHRR as part of the Indigenous Students' Summer Internship Programme. We were also assisted by librarians at the University of Manitoba, especially Asako Yoshida and Janice Linton, and by CHRR managers Dr. Pauline Tennent and Dr. Shayna Plaut, and by James Wilt, Zach Fleisher, and Rick Harp.

In a time of COVID-19, the research assistants worked remotely, and met either weekly or daily with the Co-PIs from May to August 2021, and less frequently into the fall. We relied heavily on the University of Manitoba's library holdings, as

well as resources available via open access on the internet. The researchers compiled scholarship and relevant materials, then wrote summaries of the literature, uploading their work to Zotero, an open-source data management system. We divided the existing published literature into three rough areas: scholarly literature, grey literature, and popular media (digital and print). By scholarly literature we mean peer-reviewed, published literature, including books, chapters and articles. We utilized academic search engines with relevant keywords. Based on conversations with other scholars working in the field, additional sources were located on the historical context of this analysis. Once these sources were exhausted, researchers broadened the parameters of the initial search to focus on the idea of accessibility, particularly as it relates to Indigenous women and Two-Spirit plus people, mobility justice, mobile commons, and issues associated with changing urban and rural landscapes including mobile commons, hostile architecture, austerity and transit equity.

In the second category, researchers examined grey literature. Particularly important here are the published records of provincial and federal inquiries and commissions. We examined the records of Manitoba's *Aboriginal Justice Inquiry* (AJI) (1991), the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (RCAP) (1996), *British Columbia's Missing Women Commission of Inquiry* (MWCi) (2012), the *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (TRC) (2015), and the transcripts and reports of the *National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* (NI-MMIWG) (2019). We focused particularly on two of these sources: the AJI and the NI-MMIWG. The AJI is from the early part of our temporal scope and the NI-MMIWG is from the end of it. The AJI was mandated by a provincial government (Manitoba), while the NI-MMIWG was called by the federal government but included a national inquiry alongside 13 separate but concurrent provincial and territorial inquiries. An additional area of inquiry was community-based studies such as the 2010 study of Two Spirit and LGBTQ migration and mobility and crowd-sourced projects undertaken in response to changes in transportation policy (i.e. Ristock and Zuccone, 2010; STC Stories).

The third category of relevant published knowledge examined was print and digital popular media. We searched using combinations of keywords such as Indigenous, Inuit, Métis, Women, Public Transit, Rural Transit, Greyhound, First Nations, Indigenous, accessibility, mobility justice, hate crime, discrimination, socio-economic, western Canada, Manitoba, British Columbia, Alberta, Canada, ticketing, warning, decolonization, infrastructure, and ridership. We found a modest body of media sources directly examining the intersection of Indigenous women, Two-Spirit plus people and public transit in western Canada. The role of Indigenous journalists and Indigenous media outlets including APTN producing this coverage is noteworthy. Popular media sources remain a valuable source for learning about the connections among public transit, accessibility, and quality of life for Indigenous women and Two-Spirit plus people.

We analyzed the three categories of sources through an intersectional feminist lens that drew on our respective training and experience in historical scholarship, environmental studies, women's and gender studies, and policy. We engaged in close readings of the available sources, and examined them in relationship to one another. We were attentive to absence as well as presence, and to what both might tell us about the connections between public transit and Indigenous women and Two-Spirit plus people in western Canada.

Discussion

Scholarly Literature

Few peer-reviewed publications directly address the connections among public transit, Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit plus people in western Canada, and justice. Nevertheless, there are scholarly sources that address relevant issues that can inform our analysis. This work comes from a range of disciplines, including sociology, geography, city planning and history, and often draws on interdisciplinary practices. The relevant scholarly research can be grouped into three interrelated categories: a) Mobility Justice and Public Transportation, b) Indigenous

Women and Two-Spirit Plus People, Public Transportation, and Safety; and c) Public Transit in Already Inequitable Spaces.

Mobility Justice and Public Transportation

The scholarship in this theme offers a framework for understanding the relationship between mobility and justice, arguing that the two are inextricably linked. Mimi Sheller argues that “the problem of mobility injustice begins with our bodies, and the ways in which some bodies can more easily move through space than others, due to restrictions on mobility relating to gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality and physical abilities” (2018, 24). Greater social justice requires greater access to mobility. For example, universal design principles could be implemented to make transit more accessible for people with disabilities. Instead, however, systems such as Winnipeg Transit Plus often (under)service people with disabilities, working therefore to segregate those with disabilities from other community members (Levesque, 2020).

This literature urges readers to consider who counts as “the public” if only some members are able to access public transit safely and affordably. As Nazari et al. (2019) argue, “since transit systems are a means to provide access to public space, it should be available to everyone as a precondition for participation in urban life” (89). Ari Vangeest (2020) further contends that “it is only through the people controlling public transit and making it free that we can begin to recreate our public transit to address poverty, environmental degradation, police violence, and unsafe workspace” (iii). With the cuts to public transit options in western Canada, it has become impossible to create equitable services for all.

Indigenous Women, Two-Spirit Plus People, Public Transportation and Safety

The most directly relevant category of scholarly literature for our project addresses how transit systems contribute to the absence of safety for Indigenous women and Two-Spirit plus people. It is worth noting that most of the existing work centres the experience of women and girls and

deals tangentially, if at all, with Two-Spirit plus or other gender diverse people.

A lack of inter-city transit forces people to travel by other means. Connie Deiter, an Indigenous woman living in Saskatchewan, states, “if you’re poor, you don’t have access to a vehicle, [...] a lot of our people don’t, the only option is to hitchhike and that’s already happening” (quoted in Wilt 2020, 159). With the closure of the Saskatchewan Transit Company, Marlene Bear explained that “the situation in Saskatchewan may turn into the new Highway of Tears” (quoted in Wilt 2020, 159). Since many Indigenous peoples cannot afford a licence or to register a vehicle (Raerino, Macmillan, and Jones, 2013), people have little choice but to seek alternatives. These alternatives can often provide opportunities for those who might harm Indigenous women and Two-Spirit plus people.

Common misogynistic and racist stereotypes about Indigenous women blame Indigenous women for their choices. These stereotypes are rooted in colonialism. As Cassidy Johnson (2019) states, Indigenous women are often portrayed in news stories as “victims that are ‘deserving’ of the violence because of their ‘choice’ to be risky” (30). Instead of blaming women for the violence inflicted upon them, this body of literature shows that it makes more sense to question the idea of “Canadian cities as modern, liberal, civilized spaces” that are safe for all (Lucchessi, 2019, 863).

International scholarship suggests how the absence of accessible and affordable public transit can also perpetuate dispossession and loss. For Indigenous peoples, the lack of public transportation generates a disconnection from their ancestral lands, families and community, as well as from the vital support networks these connections often contain. Indigenous peoples experience cultural and familial dispossession when they cannot easily access their ceremonial obligations. It becomes clear that “the travel patterns of Aboriginal people [are] very different from those of the non-Aboriginal majority for whom transport systems had been developed” (Raerino, Macmillan, and Jones, 2013, 60).

Public Transit in Already Inequitable Spaces

Another category of research shows how public transportation, including buses and streetcars, was designed for cis-gendered, able-bodied white men rather than the majority of the population. Donald Davis and Barbara Lorenzkowski (1998) argue that, historically, “streetcars and buses were essentially a male domain. Climbing onto streetcars, women met the first reminder that they were entering a man’s world; the steps were often too high for those short of limb, encumbered by small children, or dressed in long skirts” (435).

This scholarship emphasizes women’s particular patterns of gendered mobility. Almost all authors in this category provide evidence that women, specifically women from marginalized communities, take public transportation more frequently and for longer durations than do men. Ceccato and Loukaitou-Sideris (2021) refer to migrant women as transit captives, because they have no choice but to use public transit as their primary mode of transportation. Khosla (2013) argues that the built environment reflects male perspectives influences women’s decisions to take control of their own safety, as the systems do not prioritize their care. There is a common theme within this research that associate public transportation and areas identified as “high-crime” – where women are both potential suspects and “victims.” Shirgaokar and Lanyi-Bennett (2020) introduce similar complications for working women who spend more time in transit than men. Children, geography and the lack of transportation options influence women’s decisions to take public transit. As identified in North America, “transit systems are designed for peak load and largely focus on work commutes.” As Wilt (2020) argues, “many women ‘trip-chain,’ making multiple and sometimes lengthy stops that can become very expensive” (130).

A growing body of scholarship examines sexual harassment and violence women experience on public transit and in what scholars call the “whole journey,” recognized as beginning before the bus or train ride and ending only when the destination is reached. A 2021 comprehensive review of academic publications and grey literature

and found that sexual harassment “seems to be omnipresent in transit environments, yet remains, even today in the #MeToo era, largely underreported” (Ding, Loukaitou-Sideris and Agrawal, 2021, 277). They noted that there was limited research on the intersection of gender and other socioeconomic factors, but what work there was suggested that younger women and women with disabilities were more likely to be harassed, as were transgender and gender-nonconforming people (Ding, Loukaitou-Sideris and Agrawal, 2021, 271). One study of college students’ reporting of sexual harassment in transit environments in eighteen cities found that sexual harassment was both prevalent and variable, globally. The one Canadian city included (Vancouver) seemed to replicate the patterns of North America as a whole (Ceccato and Loukaitou-Sideris, 2021).

Sociologist Myrna Dawson (2021) reminds us that we cannot separate the kind of “public” violence and harassment that occurs in transit from violence against women at the hands of people they know. “Private and public violence complement and reinforce one another,” Dawson explains. Spicer and Song (2017) discuss the need to reform systems in order to emphasize and ensure the safety of users, and to convince users that the system can be safe. The literature within this category calls for a range of responses, including heightened surveillance to increase safety (Spicer and Song 2017; Ceccato, Näsman, and Langefors 2021). Authors also call for societal reform to reduce the power imbalance that allows sexual harassment to flourish and highlight how what appears to be gender-neutral often ends up centering the experience of cis-male subjects. Thus, Ceccato and Loukaitou-Sideris (2021) state, “current transportation agencies and [municipalities] can no longer afford to implement gender-neutral mobility policies” (15).

Grey Literature

The literature included within this category ranges from broad, national studies to those more focused at a regional or local level. Due to the relatively few included in this category, reports from official commissions of inquiry are included

as one component, while all other reports are grouped in the subsequent section.

Commissions or Inquiries Addressing Issues of Public Transportation and Indigenous People

To date, there has been no commission or inquiry specifically designated to examine the challenges of public transportation for marginalized groups, or for Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit plus people. However, the austerity of infrastructure and services available to Indigenous people has been a facet of marginalization analyzed by sections of major government reports, including: *The Aboriginal Justice Inquiry* (AJI) in Manitoba, *The Missing Indigenous Women’s Commission* (MIWC) in British Columbia; and *The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* (NI-MMIWG).

While none of these reports focus on public transportation, all touch on the issue either directly or indirectly, and all reach similar conclusions regarding government inaction, social and economic marginalization, and the ongoing realities of colonial structures, including barriers to services. All conclude that these systems are interconnected; as the NI-MMIWG notes, all oppressive systems, “whether it’s class exploitation, whether it is disability and ableist privilege, whether it’s racism or colonialism – all work in and through one another” (Vol. 1a, 78). Barriers to essential services create spaces where Indigenous people, especially those with intersecting identities (women, children, Two-Spirit plus people, and people with disabilities) face the risk of marginalization and inequality.

To frame their discussions on marginalization, the AJI, the MIWC, and the NI-MMIWG address First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people as distinct groups. The AJI report notes the significance of differentiating Indigenous concerns between rural, remote, and urban Indigenous communities, rather than their differences in identity. Similarly, the MIWC focuses on the particular challenges of British Columbia’s northernmost First Nations communities. In doing so, it identifies an important facet of inquiry as it may relate to research into

public transportation – that the experiences of distinct Indigenous groups may also differ within the groups, depending on geographic location and the extent of services in the respective territories and regions. The NI-MMIWG too, notes that distinctions may structure differing experiences with services for Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit plus people, and include both summative analysis of the commonalities between groups, as well as more distinctions.

The AJI, MIWC, and NI-MMIWG discuss the impact of transportation in rural and remote Indigenous communities and its connection to social and physical infrastructure. They found that the requirement for Indigenous people to transport from their communities to urban centres for things such as health care, education, and court mandated services, can result in jurisdictional neglect and culturally unsafe services. Furthermore, it can result in the denial of the human rights and Indigenous rights of the children and their families. All three reports also note that the lack of accessibility to safety from abusive households, especially in rural and remote communities, both inhibits the safety of Indigenous women and contributes to the over-incarceration of Indigenous peoples within a cycle of violence.

Neither the AJI nor the NI-MMIWG discusses how to create safer experiences while riding on public transportation, while the MIWC provides considerable detail. All three, however, note that the solutions for safe ridership must be provided and implemented by Indigenous people, specifically Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit plus people. Otherwise, the risk is inadequate, and even harmful, outcomes. That the AJI raised these issues in its 1991 report suggests the longevity of this set of concerns, ones that pre-date the critical changes to western inter-city public transit in the late 2010s.

Aboriginal Justice Inquiry (Manitoba) (1991)

The Aboriginal Justice Inquiry was established in 1988 in response to two specific incidents: the 1987 trial of two men for the 1971 murder of Helen

Betty Osborne, and the 1988 shooting death of J.J. Harper by a Winnipeg police officer. The AJI was mandated to “investigate, report, and make recommendations to the Minister of Justice on the relationship between the administration of justice and aboriginal peoples of Manitoba, guided by but not limited to the terms of reference set out in the Schedule.” That Schedule established a very broad scope for the Inquiry that included “all components of the justice system, that is, policing, courts, and correctional services” (AJI, Volume I, 3).

The AJI held over 123 days of hearings, received over 1200 presentations and exhibits, travelled more than 18,000 kilometres, and generated 21,000 pages of transcripts. Its final report, released in 1991, filled two volumes and contained 296 recommendations. Its recommendations can be roughly divided into those that address questions of Indigenous rights and those directed at reforms to existing institutions of the contemporary justice system. In terms of more specific content, “Volume II: Helen Betty Osborne,” “Chapter 13: Aboriginal Women,” and “Volume II: The Death of Helen Betty Osborne” describe, at least to some extent, how a lack of options for transportation puts Indigenous women at risk. Using the story of Helen Betty Osborne, who was kidnapped and killed by men driving on the road while she was walking home alone at night, the authors of the report make the point that the transportation options available to women like her in Thompson, Manitoba, were and continue to be scarce and often unsafe, leading women, girls, and Two-Spirit plus people to have to resort to other means of transportation.

The AJI also notes how women in rural and remote communities who are looking to flee abusive households are often unable to, due to lack of transportation and safe places to go. On a related note, Indigenous women who leave remote communities to relocate to urban centres may also face danger due to lack of safe and accessible transportation, depending on the cost of it, its location in proximity to where they live, and the safety of the services for them in urban centres where they travel to live and work.

The AJI further notes the lack of Indigenous-centred and physically accessible infrastructure for judicial services that contributes to the continued social and economic marginalization of Indigenous people. The distance and cost of transportation back and forth from their communities to legal aid, investigators, and police through the circuit court system causes significant delays and negatively interferes with sentencing and the livelihoods of the victims and community involved. The AJI also notes the importance of reducing the need for transporting Indigenous accused to court. Its report points out that Indigenous people face great economic impacts for the excessive court summons, especially considering the frequency of adjournments and excessive delays of their cases due to distance and travel costs. As the AJI proposes, the long-term solution is an Indigenous court system in rural and remote areas where the need for excessive transportation is eliminated and focuses on the principles of Indigenous self-government and the decolonization of essential infrastructures (see Chapter 8, "Court Reform").

Overall, the AJI report makes the point that the lack infrastructure available within rural and remote Indigenous communities denies Indigenous people the same level of service as non-Indigenous people and puts them at risk for violence and inadequate judicial services. In broader perspective, the AJI report discusses specifically the need to reform legal instruments, improve social services and programming, and reform the criminal justice system because of the intersection of violence against Indigenous women and Two-Spirit plus people with all infrastructures – or lack thereof.

Missing Women Commission of Inquiry (Oppal Commission) (2012)

In September of 2010, the Lieutenant Governor in Council of British Columbia issued an Order in Council establishing the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry (henceforth, MWCI), which examined the conduct of police investigations into the disappearance of nearly 50 women reported missing from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside

between 1997 and 2002. In December 2012, the Commission released *Forsaken – The Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry* (MWCI Report), which outlined 63 recommendations – 54 of which were directed to the Province – and two urgent measures to address the issues.

In a series of Northern Community Consultations, the commission addressed seven topics, including geography, colonialism, discrimination and racism, residential schools, poverty, violence, and what it termed "unhealthy lifestyles" (MWCI Report, Volume 3, 118). As Judge Oppal observes, "I recognized the indisputable need for public transportation that is responsive to community needs: without it, there will be no dramatic improvement in the safety of Aboriginal women and girls" (MWCI Report, Volume 3, 119). Oppal further points to the issue to persistent poverty: "All readers of this report should take note; the common contributing factor for both young Aboriginal women's and the young female student's disappearance along the Highway of Tears is poverty. This is not just an underpinning factor for young women placing themselves at risk along the Highway of Tears in British Columbia; it is an underpinning and contributing factor that leaves all of these women, across Canada, vulnerable to predation" (MWCI Report, Volume 3, 119). In summarizing its Northern Community Consultations, Oppal points to a number of proposals about the need for safe public transportation that is responsive to community need.

As the report emphasizes, structural factors underlie much of the violence against Indigenous women, particularly in the context of British Columbia's infamous Highway of Tears. As the report outlines, the number of missing and murdered girls in Northern British Columbia is unknown; people have disappeared along the highway network of Highways 16, 97, and 5 for decades and estimates, at the time of the MWCI, included between 18 and more than 40 victims. Contributing factors include the vast spaces between communities that could acutely increase women's vulnerability to violence given the lack of public transportation, which also creates additional challenges to the initial

search and investigation of missing persons. In addition, many of the victims were said to be hitchhiking when last seen. Community members who participated in the MWCI stated that abduction was a more apt description than disappearance (MWCI Executive summary, 134-135). As the report noted, hitchhiking – a relatively common practice – is a reality due to the lack of transportation infrastructure and poverty. The MWCI report also criticizes the government of British Columbia for its failure to fully implement the 33 recommendations contained in the 2006 Highway of Tears Symposium Report (MWCI Report, Volume 3, 44).

Specifically related to transportation, the MWCI makes two recommendations: to develop and implement an enhanced public transit system to provide a safer travel option connecting the Northern communities, particularly along Highway 16 (MWCI Urgent Measure #2); and to support fully the implementation of The Highway of Tears Symposium action plan, updated to the current situation and in a manner that ensures involvement of all affected communities along Highway 16 (MWCI Recommendation 6.1). In November 2013, the Province of British Columbia published a [status report](#) describing progress made to implement the recommendations of the Commission and enhance the safety and security of women in British Columbia. The report observes that the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure had assessed the transportation options currently available for communities along the Highway 16 corridor and was planning targeted consultations to identify and promote safe transportation options, listing the status of its response to the call as “in progress” (Safety and Security of Vulnerable Women in BC, n.p.). In December 2014, a second status report provided information on further progress made since 2013, speaking to how the intent of the recommendations would be used to inform future government action, including efforts to end violence against women and girls.

In December 2016, the British Columbia Office of the Auditor General (OAG) released the “Follow-Up on The Missing Women Commission of Inquiry,” examining the degree to which the Province

responded to the 21 recommendations and two urgent measures selected for audit by the OAG. The report found that eight recommendations had been implemented, six recommendations had been partially implemented, five had not been implemented, and four recommendations were not far enough along to determine whether the Province’s approach would address the intent of the recommendation. Specifically, and in reference to the recommendation to develop and implement an enhanced public transit system to provide a safer travel option connecting the Northern communities, the OAG report noted that the government of British Columbia was in the process of implementing its Highway 16 Five-Point Transportation Action Plan, the product of over 2 years of engagement with First Nations and stakeholders along the Highway 16 corridor. The Action plan included providing \$4 million to expand transit services and community transportation options, including inter-city public transit service, new transit shelters and web cams, a First Nations driver education program, grants for community vehicles, and improved coordination of existing transportation services delivered through Northern Health Connections and BC Transit. The Government of British Columbia also pointed out its successful negotiation of an additional \$1 million contribution from Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) to support additional safety infrastructure along the 800 km corridor (Follow-Up, 13).

As the OAG reported, action was underway. The provincial government had purchased transit shelters, held public engagement sessions and prepared an analysis of route options that considered community needs. Its engagement on the issue revealed that many First Nations communities had identified challenges with the funding and effectiveness of the five-point Transportation Action Plan. Most significantly, local governments were concerned that the funding provided would not be enough to meet community needs, and that municipal costs would increase at the end of the provincial government’s three-year funding commitment (Follow-Up, 33). Several were also critical of the engagement strategy, noting that key voices had not been included, notably those of service providers that

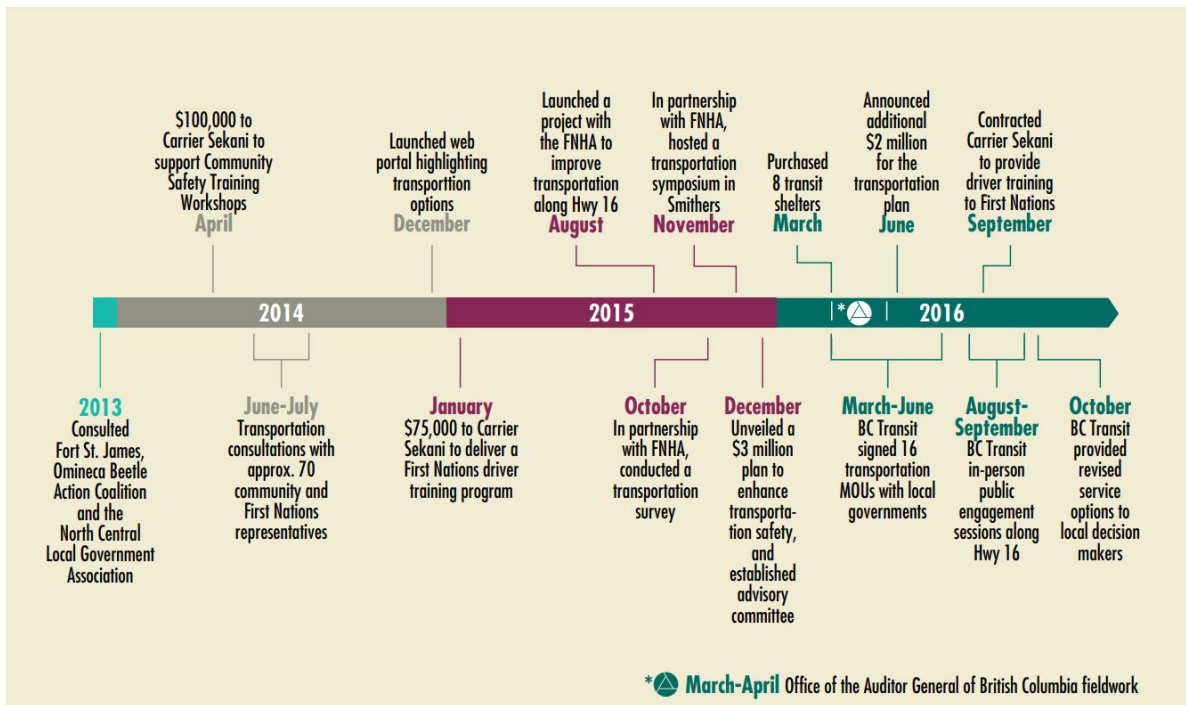


Figure 3: Timeline of Provincial Government Actions on Highway 16. Source: OAG, “Follow-Up”, p. 33.

supported Indigenous women (see Follow-Up, 68-71). As a follow up, the OAG report issued one recommendation: that the Province report publicly each year on how government’s actions are meeting the intent of the Commission’s recommendations.

In the Province of British Columbia’s 2018 status update, the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure noted a commitment of \$6.4-million in provincial and federal funding for the Highway 16 Transportation Action Plan. It noted the 2017 Carrier Sekani Family Services grant for their ongoing work in supporting families along Highway 16 by connecting and bridging the gap between service providers, such as RCMP and victim services, to address the issues of trauma and healing. Supports included but were not limited to supporting the costs of transportation for family members. In addition, it noted a number of measures accomplished for transit expansion along Highway 16, including new inter-community transit services operating along Highway 16 from Terrace to Prince George and a new commuter service between Smithers and Moricetown, between Burns Lake and Smithers, and between Burns Lake and Prince George. It also noted how

planning was in place to get larger buses to meet the public demand for service between Burns Lake and Prince George as well as new transit service between the Hazelton and Terrace to begin in November 2017. The 2020 [Status Update](#) did not specifically note expanded services.

Altogether, the MWCI makes clear the connection between lack of public transportation and violence, as well as outlining many of the underlying structural issues that contribute to the issue. In addition, it provides strong regional analysis that takes seriously the needs expressed by community members.

National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019)

In 2016, and in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s Call to Action #41, as well as decades of advocacy by family members and survivors, Canada established the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (NI-MMIWG). The NI-MMIWG’s mandate was the broadest ever provided to a commission or

inquiry in Canada, and included the need to look into and report on the systemic causes of all forms of violence against Indigenous women and girls, including sexual violence. The NI-MMIWG was asked to examine the underlying social, economic, cultural, institutional, and historical causes that contribute to the ongoing violence and particular vulnerabilities of Indigenous women and girls in Canada as well as to report on existing institutional policies and practices to address violence, including those that are effective in reducing violence and increasing safety. Nearly 3,000 individuals testified before the NI-MMIWG, most of them family members or survivors of violence. Their testimonies formed the basis of the two-volume Final Report, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, which reflected the breadth of the mandate. Thus, while the national inquiry was not focused only on transportation, its larger examination of the underlying issues as well as its specific notes on transportation comprise a useful intervention that echoes many of the ideas within the MCWI.

As relevant to the issue of transportation and as a way of signalling its basis in lived experience, the NI-MMIWG discusses the importance of intersectionality when discussing Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit plus people, as well as incarcerated people, sex workers, people with differing incomes, education and employment levels, as well as Inuit, Métis, and First Nation women. The report draws attention to intersectional structures of oppression, noting how members of particular Indigenous groups may encounter individual, institutional, and systemic violence differently. Within this context, the NI-MMIWG explicitly describes how barriers to public transportation puts Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit plus people in dangerous situations.

The discussion on public transportation within the NI-MMIWG's report appears in its chapter on Human Security, entitled "Right to Security," as well as within the context of the Guided Dialogues (Chapter 11) that brings together family members, survivors, and frontline workers to discuss services and their role in the active targeting of Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit plus people. Both of these sections feature experiences and testimonies from Indigenous family members

and survivors having to travel far distances using public transportation for education, employment, and essential services due to a lack of services in their communities, resulting in sexual and physical assault as well as death. The NI-MMIWG's examination of the right to justice also explains how people in rural and remote communities experience inadequate policing responses and investigating procedures due to the distance and cost of travelling. Altogether, the lack of secure transportation, or transportation at all, creates barriers for Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit plus people to escape dangerous situations.

One of the strengths of the NI-MMIWG report is its basis in survivor and family member testimony, which describes a direct link, in many cases, between violence and a lack of transportation. For instance, participants from remote communities noted in several instances the need to minimize transportation between services, stating that travelling from remote communities to urban ones to access services where there is inadequate or unsafe transportation exacerbates danger in concrete ways (NI-MMIWG, 2019, vol. 1b, 96). In addition, for Two-Spirit plus participants, gaps in transportation "can make it difficult to flee unsafe circumstances such as domestic violence, or individuals may resort to unsafe means of travel such as hitchhiking" (NI-MMIWG, 2019, vol. 1b, 158). One individual observed that the cancellation of key transportation services places women and Two-Spirit plus people directly at risk (NI-MMIWG, 2019, vol. 1b, 552), while a Métis participant also said that she saw "a lot of women on the highway every day" (NI-MMIWG, 2019, vol. 1b, 158). Participants throughout four Guided Dialogue sessions highlighted the success of "safe ride" programs in the absence of publicly funded and secure services for transportation.

In addition, in examining the particular situation of Inuit women, the NI-MMIWG assesses important gaps, including inaccessible services and infrastructure deficits in Inuit communities that result in Inuit women, girls, and Two-Spirit plus people not having access to essential services or having to travel out of their communities to access services. When Inuit women, girls, and Two-Spirit plus people must travel, they are at increased risk

for violence due to the “separation from the safety and security of their family and community” (NI-MMIWG, 2019, vol. 1a, 480) as well as “predation in urban centres where they are sent for treatment” (NI-MMIWG, 2019, vol. 1a, 480). The lack of social and physical infrastructure contributes to maintaining and perpetuating the high rates of violence experienced by Inuit women, girls, and Two-Spirit plus people.

The issue of disabled people’s access to transportation is also briefly discussed. Disabled Indigenous people experience unique marginalization in which “support for disability is one of the most common reasons for First Nations adults to move away from their community” (NI-MMIWG 2019, vol. 1a, 446), and “children who are First Nations and who live with disabilities struggle in obtaining services” (NI-MMIWG 2019, vol. 1a, 341). This is a significant finding given that Indigenous people already face social, economic, and political barriers to infrastructure. The intersection of disability reveals the extent of marginalization through inaccessible transportation in an already oppressive system.

Beyond the link between violence and unsafe transportation, the NI-MMIWG also notes how poverty and lack of transportation, combined, create barriers to education, training, and employment. Indigenous people have a disproportionately high percentage of incomplete education, unemployment, and overall economic marginalization, and transit can aid in breaking this cycle by providing access to opportunities of education and employment.

Finally, the NI-MMIWG’s Call for Justice 4.8, falling under the theme of Human Security, specifically calls attention to the need to strengthen public transportation and infrastructure:

We call upon all governments to ensure that adequate plans and funding are put into place for safe and affordable transit and transportation services and infrastructure for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people living in remote or rural communities. Transportation should be sufficient and readily available to Indigenous communities, and in towns and cities located in all of the provinces

and territories in Canada. These plans and funding should take into consideration:

- ways to increase safe public transit;
- ways to address the lack of commercial transit available; and
- special accommodations for fly-in, northern, and remote communities.

In addition, Call for Justice 8.1, directed toward transportation service providers and the hospitality industry, notes the need for “all transportation service providers and the hospitality industry to undertake training to identify and respond to sexual exploitation and human trafficking, as well as the development and implementation of reporting policies and practices” (NI-MMIWG 2019, vol. 1b, 190).

As is evident throughout the final report and the Calls for Justice, policy decisions in this area, as well as across barriers to safety that threaten Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit plus people, are hampered by the inconsistent use of gender-based and culturally relevant analysis of government programs and policies. As such, solutions proposed to this or to other issues must be led by those with lived experience and expertise. As the report notes, “Rights to culture, health, security, and justice are based on another foundational right: the right to self-determination” (NI-MMIWG 2019, vol. 1a, 122). The Final Report of the 2SLLBTQQUIA+ Sub-Working Group, completed in 2021, affirms the NI-MMIWG’s calls related to a range of concrete social and economic issues, including the need for “immediate (next 2 years) action around transportation” (2SLLBTQQUIA+ Sub-Working Group, 2021, 36).

Other Reports

There are limited additional reports addressing the relationship among transportation, violence and Indigenous women and Two-Spirit plus people. Studies in other areas, however, including urban planning, provide useful context for a more specific and intersectional treatment of the issues. For instance, “Measuring Winnipeggers’ Convenient Access to Public Transit” by Kyle Wiebe (2018) describes what convenient transportation is, how to measure it, and why

it is significant “to develop informed decisions and target policies to improve ridership and riders’ experiences” (9). This report is limited by the lack of available data and attention to how different people and communities have different experiences of public transit, or the lack of it, even within one city.

Deepa Chandrahan’s thesis, *Transportation Inclusion and Community Wellbeing: Exploring Public Transit Accessibility of Winnipeg’s North End Neighbourhoods* (2017), is a useful document. A Master of City Planning thesis, it explores the perceptions of accessibility through the lens of those who live in the North End of Winnipeg, the majority of whom are Indigenous. In the research, Chandrahan notes several important characteristics about Winnipeg’s North End that structure the experiences of residents. Specifically, Chandrahan cites the socio-economic marginalization of the North End, its relative isolation from the rest of the city, its mainly Indigenous community members, the limited nature of commercial activities in the area, and the identification of transportation as a major challenge for the area’s inhabitants. In addition, Chandrahan notes the lack of statistics or studies available on the community’s demand for transit services and transit accessibility and how this lack of information speaks to a reflection of what populations are deemed worthy of attention in the city.

Chandrahan’s research includes both quantitative and qualitative components. The quantitative component includes spatial and basis statistical analysis data from Winnipeg Transit, while the qualitative component focuses on the products of a series of semi-structured interviews to capture the demand for transit dimension, as well as other research questions. Research questions used for the study focus on the perceived barriers to accessing transit services in the North End as well as the socio-economic implications of this lack of accessibility.

The thesis presents important findings related to the safety and experiences of Indigenous women and Two-Spirit plus people. For instance, it demonstrates that there exists relatively easy

physical accessibility to bus stops and extensive hours and days of service. However, negatives were also presented to include long wait times (33% stops >25 minutes wait times), poor transit-related facilities (only 22% stops have shelters; 27% stops have benches), and poor connectivity with other important locations in the city. These shortfalls have direct effects on the experiences and potentially on the safety of transit users. Participants in the research identified important barriers to use, including cost, poor service frequency, discrimination and safety concerns. In turn, participants sought out free rides or alternate methods of transportation that may not be secure. Importantly, Chandrahan’s work also connects explicitly to policy considerations, noting the need to include social dimensions in transit planning and to consider transit through an intersectional lens, rather than only in terms of numbers of users. The study is important in its consideration of localized barriers to access and specific implications for neighbourhoods or specific constituencies, including Indigenous women.

NWAC’s 2018 report entitled *Accessibility and Disability for Indigenous Women, Girls, and Gender Diverse People: Informing the New Federal Legislation* also provides valuable information. The study is based on engagement with eighty-five participants, most of them being First Nations women living off-reserve, and more than half self-identifying as having a disability or disorder (Quinlan, 2018, 9). This study found that costs of travel were significantly higher for Indigenous people with disabilities in “remote and isolated communities,” and that people often lacked safe and affordable options to access health services (11-12). One recommendation was that there needed to be more services close to Indigenous communities, and that “alternative methods of transportation that are accessible, reliable, and affordable” be invested in, especially in “rural, remote, and isolated communities” (Quinlan, 2018, 15).

Finally, Janice Ristock and Art Zuccole’s (2010) examination of Two-Spirit and LGBTQ migration and mobility, which also focuses on Winnipeg, provides important context for the discussion of transit for Two-Spirit plus people, but no specific

examination of their experiences. As the report notes, the majority of those interviewed for this localized project mentioned having moved away from their Indigenous communities to the city, or between cities, rather frequently throughout the course of their lives, many citing that they moved more than 10 times and several noting being forced from the community. Many also mentioned travelling back to their home communities for specific reasons or rather regularly, at least once annually. Given the important safety implications noted within the NI-MMIWG's Final Report specific to Two-Spirit plus people, Ristock and Zuccole's work makes an important case for intersectional studies of transportation needs in localized and population-specific contexts.

Popular Media (Digital and Print)

Popular (print and digital) media is another source of information on the transit landscape, and how it might affect Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit plus people in western Canada. We focused on the years between 2017 and 2021, and identified two overlapping categories: a) Transit users, racism, over-enforcement, discrimination and lack of safety; and b) The effects of decreasing transportation services.

Transit Users, Racism, Over-enforcement, Discrimination, and Lack of safety

Many popular media sources reveal public transit as a space of racism and discrimination for racialized riders throughout western Canada, both inside and outside of major urban centres. In a 2017 opinion piece in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, historian Mary Jane Logan McCallum suggests that this has been the case for some time. McCallum explains that the City of Winnipeg's Community and Race Relations Committee was struck in 1981, and that one of its major concerns was racial discrimination in a range of settings, including public transit (McCallum, 2017). A CBC story from 2020 built on an Indigenous passenger's Facebook post. Here Violet Baptiste asked why Winnipeg bus riders and drivers did not respond to anti-Indigenous racism and explains what it costs her to ride the bus with agitated and racist co-passengers (Bergen, 2020). This also

suggests the current importance of social media for articulating concerns about transit and the experience of Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit plus people. Experiences which are rarely included in the established media are increasingly communicated via Facebook, TikTok, Snapchat, and Instagram.

A small spate of recent articles confirms that public transit continues to be a space of racism in cities across Canada. For instance, Mohatarem (2021) notes several issues in Edmonton Transit, including an examination of who is being targeted by authorities, and how they are being targeted as seen through the lens of financial penalties, physical interactions with peace officers, and discrimination within the system. The article cites a citizen-led advisory board report that brought to light the unfair treatment of non-white riders – in particular Black and Indigenous people – who were involved in 61.5 % of all interventions by peace officers between 2016 and 2020. 86% of the riders given warnings by peace officers were Indigenous (Mohatarem, 2021). The article suggests several ideas about how to tackle exclusivity and racism on Edmonton Transit, including the option of removing peace officers from enforcing fare evasion tickets and including anti-racism training within the workplace.

Edmonton Transit is elsewhere associated with the disproportionate penalization of Indigenous and other racialized riders. Wyton notes that, "since 2009, Indigenous peoples – who make up six per cent of Edmonton's population in the 2016 federal census – have been the most or second-most ticketed or warned racial group on Edmonton Transit Service, making up an average of 43.8 per cent of tickets and 44.5 per cent of warnings where race is recorded each year." The article also notes increasing fares and rising numbers of tickets given for fare evasion and suggests the destabilization of mobility for these communities (Wyton, 2019).

These patterns are confirmed by reporting from other regions of Canada. One article notes a strong hostility between the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) transit police and Black and Indigenous transit riders. Black and Indigenous

riders have been overrepresented in enforcement incidents in the last decade because they were more likely to be charged or cautioned by TTC than white riders (CBC, 2021). Citing an independent review performed by the University of Toronto on the TTC of 12,819 cases spanning from 2008 to 2019, the data describes racial disparities in policing riders; both Black and Indigenous people were more likely to be ticketed, despite being minorities in Toronto. More specifically, despite “making up 8.8% of the total population of Toronto, Black people account for 19.2% of total enforcement incidents. Indigenous people, who comprise less than 1% of the population, accounted for 3% of the total incidents” (CBC News, 2021). The article notes that researchers are meeting with racialized communities to produce recommendations on what the TTC should do.

Beyond the issue of unfair enforcement, popular media sources show that racialized people experience transit as an unsafe space. In London, Ontario, public spaces have become a safety concern for women, who have been targeted by sexual violence. In 2018, a study identified the spaces in which women from different groups – Indigenous, LGBTQ2+, immigrant and disabled – were most targeted. Over a six-month period, it was found that the most common spaces women felt unsafe were public; this included parks, transit, residential areas, businesses, online, workplaces, night clubs/spots, and schools. In response, London’s municipal government has released the “2021–2024 Safe Cities Action Plan.” The article notes the plan’s focus on community awareness and its nil cost, just one example of the unwillingness to seriously invest in improvements to systems that feed harm (Newcombe, 2021).

The Effects of Decreasing Transportation Options

Other sources focus on the absence of transportation options in western Canada. The effects of declining transit options on rural, northern, and Indigenous communities have been widely noted in both national and international media following the closure of Greyhound’s western routes in 2018, and their remaining

Canadian routes in 2021 (for instance, Doig, 2018, Lalonde, 2021). In 2018, it was Indigenous authors who most clearly articulated the gendered and racialized dimensions of this change. In a 2018 article in *Maclean’s*, Pamela Palmater connects the shuttering of Greyhound’s western Canadian routes to the disproportionate rates of murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls in Manitoba and Saskatchewan (Palmater, 2018). Emily Riddle explains that the shuttering of Greyhound routes in western Canada affected First Nations people, who were more likely to live in rural and remote locations, and who depended on the bus to access basic healthcare (Riddle, 2018 B).

The announcement that Greyhound was discontinuing its remaining Canadian routes in 2021 prompted a return to this connection. Media coverage (for instance Lao, 2021; Rodrigues, 2021) documents how the declining options of transit particularly affects Indigenous and rural residents, including Indigenous women. The coverage of declines in national and regional service is mirrored by media stories documenting declining funding for urban transit, and sometimes, the closure of it. The failure of three private operators to sustain the bus service linking the town of Selkirk to Winnipeg has occasioned particular notice (Thompson, 2019; Pindera, 2019).

Media sources also draw attention to the ways that limited and decreasing transit options can limit the lives of Indigenous women. Winnipeg currently has no public transit options linking the city to nearby beaches and other places that are important to families with small children. In 2021, a CTV news story reported widespread support for a “bus to the beach” linking downtown Winnipeg to the beach at Birds Hill Provincial Park (Arsenault, 2021).

Popular media also documents the development of Indigenous-led ride-shares and related initiatives, which demonstrate both the need for new and different modes of transit and people’s interest in developing and sustaining them. Established in 2016, Ikwe Safe Rides offers an alternative to taxis for Indigenous women in Winnipeg. Attention to their work was renewed in 2021 when a taxi driver was

charged with assaulting an Indigenous woman passenger (Bernhardt, 2021). Wilt rightly cautions us against seeing ride-shares as a solution to enduring problems with public transportation, but organizations like Ikwe Safe Rides indicate the need for more and different transportation options with Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit plus people in mind.

Results

More often than not, the review of literature – scholarly, grey, and popular – identified absences, ellipses, and silences. There is much about the intersection of issues of gender, sexuality, Indigeneity and transit in western Canada that is poorly understood and studied in scholarly literature, popular media and grey literature.

Primary thematic gaps identified from this process include:

- Experiences of diverse Indigenous people and transit within intersectional frameworks;
- Regional/local, including rural/urban, considerations;
- What “good transportation” looks like for different people, including questions of safety and access; and,
- What data may be available, or developed, to determine the success of particular systems or policies.

Experiences of diverse Indigenous people and transit within intersectional frameworks
There is a need for future work to fill in the gaps of transit inequities in western Canada. It cannot be a coincidence that the areas that demand additional research also pertain to marginalized populations struggling to ensure their safety, those who live in the areas that are deemed unsafe, and those who are afraid of taking matters to the police for fear of being stigmatized. These gaps are the most helpful in the context of our research as they indicate which areas need the most direct action. As several scholars have noted, to ensure equity for all, we must dismantle the capitalist and colonial structures that limit Indigenous peoples’ interaction with everyday life (Simpson 2016), that alienate them from their traditional landscapes (Raerino, Macmillan, and Jones 2013)

and continuously threaten the lives of Indigenous women (Razack, 2016). What limited attention has been paid to these issues tends to focus on the particular context of British Columbia’s Highway of Tears, and the shuttering of Saskatchewan’s STC. We need to pay more attention to the effects of diminished public transit options throughout western Canada, including in Manitoba.

Regional/ Local Considerations, including Rural/ Urban Considerations

In addition, the necessarily localized nature of any examination of transit, alongside intersectional considerations for transit users, make it clear that further studies are needed with special attention paid to the lived experiences of transit users. Just as importantly, the contexts of different transit systems are crucial when considering how to improve these systems for the future.

What “Good Transportation” Looks Like for Different People, including Questions of Safety and Access

Identifying the needs of users in different contexts, including regional and local, rural/remote and urban, and within the context of different Indigenous communities and identities is a key project for the future. This includes developing understandings of what “good transportation options” look like according to different groups and regions, including key questions of safety and access as defined by users, as articulated in a preliminary way through various literatures identifying the shortcomings of current systems. We need to pay attention to the history of transit in western Canada, and be careful to avoid romanticizing earlier times. We also need to pay attention to women’s routines and the way they utilize and manage public spaces and transit services. To think about what ‘good transportation’ looks like for Indigenous women and Two-Spirit Plus people, we must, as Dorries and Harjo argue, imagine city planning in ways that do not replicate settler colonial violence (2020).

What Data may be Available, or Developed, to Determine the Success of Particular Systems or Policies

In the area of transit, data is required to provide decision-makers with sound information upon which to move forward with enhancing existing or creating new models. In this area, studies that identify what data is available, or what needs to be developed in both quantitative and qualitative terms, will form an important supporting area for all of the themes above. Doing so means collecting data that makes visible the patterns of who most depends on public transit, both within cities and between them.

Strengths of Existing Literature

Strengths in the existing, available literature include the writing, research, and scholarship on violence against Indigenous women in the North American context. This research is evident in scholarly, grey, and popular media sources. In different ways, this research recognizes the connections between transportation or the lack of it and circumstances that support the targeting of Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit plus people. We see this in the grey literature analyzed here, from the AJI to recent work by the NI-MMIWG. The robust analyses produced by Indigenous journalists and scholars (see Harp, Callison and TallBear, 2018; Riddle, 2018; Riddle, 2018 B; Palmater, 2018) provide crucial starting points for a wider discussion of the effects of transit and transit policy on Indigenous peoples. The uptick in popular media following the closure of STC in 2017 and the shuttering of almost all Greyhound's western Canadian routes in 2018 is notable. So too is ongoing social media discussion of what these changes have meant and continue to mean.

Implications for Policy, Practice, and Research

The lack of information in the area of transit in western Canada is largely related to intersections on issues of gender and Indigeneity. These intersections are most usefully addressed through the lens of experience, drawing on qualitative research methodologies that place the considerations of those most affected to the fore. In this way, the geographic and otherwise distinct experiences of transit users, or potential users, can be used to identify what is most needed in the context of further research and of policy development.

The historical context of the emergence of inter- and intra-city transit, as well as the evolution of these systems over the course of the last century, make clear that the current state of transit reflects the needs of particular segments of society which have, in large part, moved away from public transit usage. As such, new and improved transit systems that consider the experiences and needs of today's users are urgently required. The key questions about public transit, then, are not limited to its availability. Beyond that, researchers and policy makers must explore ongoing barriers to its use, where is it most needed, and how can it best support the mobility justice (and rights) of all users. As Morton points out (2016): it is counterproductive to stigmatize the methods of transportation employed by those who have few if any choices.

In addition, the research makes clear that public transit remains, for those "on the margins," a key service that permits people to attend educational institutions, seek treatment, get to work, connect with families and loved ones, and sustain relationships of care and mutuality. Its availability further allows Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit plus people to engage with key services as rights holders, including health and wellness services, employment, and educational opportunities. As a service that undergirds access to essential services therefore, the discussion of accessible transit is one that belongs not only within the realm of transportation, but more broadly, as a foundational service that enables and supports the right to safety and to human security per international and domestic human rights instruments.

We must address the barriers to transit use, including those rooted in the substantial and justifiable anxieties that many women and Two-Spirit plus people have about public transit. In this we must be skeptical of efforts to address concerns about safety and transit through forms of securitization. Research makes clear that Indigenous and racialized riders are issued tickets and warnings disproportionately in both Toronto and Edmonton (CBC, 2021; Wyton, 2019) and this reflects wider and deeper patterns whereby Indigenous and racialized people are more likely to be targeted by police and security processes. Developing public transit that addresses the needs of Indigenous and racialized communities means doing so in ways that do not reinforce or rearrange existing patterns of exclusion and marginalization.

The need to support transit also dovetails with other pressing priorities, including the lack of infrastructure in many Indigenous communities (providing access to other resources), the need to combat climate change (by reducing automobile emissions), and more. As we draw attention to the infrastructure gap between First Nations' and settler communities that is more than a century in the making, we should consider where transit fits into this equation, and how it sustains inequalities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

For these reasons, available and accessible transit in both urban and rural contexts is a lifeline and must be funded and supported by all levels of government, with an eye toward eliminating any interjurisdictional gaps or neglect that may persist.

Three years after the withdrawal of Greyhound from most of western Canada's routes, there is a shifting patchwork of inter-city bus service in Manitoba illustrated in Figure 2. In spring of 2021, four private bus companies formed a coalition and proposed an "extensive national bus network covering essential routes using shared software for booking reservations and shipping packages" (Kirby, 2021; Pittis, 2021). But the last five years have made clear that private interests are poorly equipped to provide reliable and accessible inter-city public transit in western Canada. They have also made clear that most western Canadian provinces, including Manitoba, seem at best

disinterested in addressing the dwindling options for inter-city public transit.

We join those who call on the federal government to create and sustain a national inter-city transit systems, one that prioritizes the needs of Indigenous women and Two-Spirit plus people. Scholars Jacob Albin Korem Alhassan, Cindy Hanson, and Lori Hanson call a "national, publicly funded system integrated across provinces and informed by social, environmental, economic, health and accessibility concerns" (2021). NI-MMIWG commissioner Marion Buller and MMIWG advocates in calling for all a national, reliable, and affordable bus system. (Martens, 2021).

Conclusion

In the last decade alone, western Canada has witnessed a significant decline in available public transit, particularly between cities, towns, settlements, and reserves. The connections between this and the ongoing crisis of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit plus people deserves our attention. These points are made in pockets throughout the scholarly literature, grey literature, and popular media but there is a need for more comprehensive systemic attention. Here we have examined the available research on western Canada, with a specific focus on Manitoba. We conclude by calling on researchers and policy makers to pick up these points and analyses and centre them in a discussion of public transit that takes seriously Indigenous women and Two-Spirit plus people and their safety and comfort. The absence of reliable, consistent inter-city transit in western Canada is a factor that contributes to the circumstances that too often make Indigenous women and Two-Spirit plus people vulnerable to those that might harm them. It is one that could be mitigated by a substantial and robust policy response.

Knowledge mobilization activities

The Missing the Bus project includes a range of knowledge mobilization activities. First, we will present our findings and make them available. This

report will be posted open-access on the University of Manitoba's [Centre for Human Rights Research website](#). We will work with University librarians to make sure the report is accessible by university library catalogues.

Our research team will present our project at relevant fora, including a webinar organized by the Rural Policy Learning Commons based at Selkirk College in December 2021, the SSHRC Mobility and Public Transit Knowledge Synthesis Grant Forum in January 2022. The Centre for Human Rights Research at the University of Manitoba also hopes to organize a webinar for the winter of 2022, where we will invite research groups with related projects on public transit, equity and intersectionality to discuss their recent research. This webinar will build on two meetings we held in the summer of 2021 with other research teams that were part of the SSHRC Knowledge Synthesis programme and who shared our commitments to examining western Canada and working from an intersectional feminist and anti-oppressive lens. We are investigating further options for publication and dissemination.

We produced a stand-alone [podcast documenting Missing the Bus](#). This will build on the important work done by Leedham and Amalgamated Transit Union (2018) and Harp, Callison and TallBear (2018) to raise discussion around questions of transit, infrastructure, and inequity in western Canada, especially around Indigenous people, and utilize the particular medium of podcasting.

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