
CLEARWATER FEASIBILITY STUDY

Thompson Nicola Regional District

BC Transit
Municipal Systems Program
June 1995

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Baker, Gordie,	Clearwater Taxi
Eric Shishido	TNRD
Carol Shaffer	TNRD Director Area "A"
Peter Louwerse	Top Hat Mini Coach

1.0 Introduction & Objectives

A review of public transit needs in Clearwater has been undertaken as an addendum to the TNRD Feasibility Study completed in January 1993. The 1993 Study reviewed the western regions of the Regional District including electoral areas 'E', 'I' and 'J'. Although Clearwater was not included in the original terms of reference, it has become apparent that there are transportation issues in Clearwater that need to be addressed. The area studied includes Clearwater from Vavenby Road to Roundtop.

The objectives for the study which were reviewed with the Regional District include:

- To develop a local transit system which emphasizes the needs of seniors and persons with a disability
- To focus service on the Clearwater area from Vavenby Road to Roundtop
- To set service concepts and costs which are in line with the size of the population and area served, as based upon experience in similar communities throughout B.C.

Regional travel to Kamloops including Barriere and Little Fort were not included in the terms of reference. Once a service becomes established in the Clearwater area, however, it would be prudent to review the needs of the larger area.

The review is based on an analysis of population data, comparisons to other similar communities and interviews with stakeholders in Clearwater. Data gathered by the Clearwater Mobility Club is also used in the assessment.

It should be stated up front that there is no funding in the current BC Transit budget to implement a new transit service in Clearwater. Subsequent to Regional District approval, BC Transit will request funding from government in its 1996/97 corporate budget.

2.0 Existing Transportation Services

Greyhound

Greyhound provides a regional service and is not useful to meet the local transportation needs that are the subject of this study.

Clearwater Taxi

Clearwater Taxi has four licenses but only two cars on the road. The company has recently been sold to the owner of Top Hat Mini Coach pending Motor Carrier approval. The original owner has indicated that business is slow with the main markets being low-income people and those employed in forestry. The interviews indicated that for various reasons the taxi is used only as a last resort.

Top Hat Mini Coach

Top Hat Mini Coach provides charter tourist services throughout B.C. out of Vancouver. During the off season the company's 7 minibuses are stored in Clearwater and are available for local service. The owner indicated that the buses are used to provide charter service for seniors, sports groups, foresters etc. The owner also expressed an interest in acquiring an accessible vehicle for the taxi service once Motor Carrier approval is granted.

Clearwater Mobility Club

The Clearwater Mobility Club was established in June 1993 to provide door-to-door transportation for seniors and persons with a disability. The area served extends from Vavenby to Round Top Road. The Club acquired funding for a three month trial period and began service in August 1994 with a leased bus. The service operated until October 28th (49 operating days) and carried 710 passengers or about 14 per day. The bus operated about 8 hours per day for an average productivity level of just under 2.0 rides per hour. Discussions with the Operator indicate that efforts were made to provide the service as efficiently as possible by combining trips. The fare was \$2 for a return trip.

While these figures are quite low in comparison to other existing door-to-door services, the overall performance of the service should be considered a success within the context of the trial period. Only 55 people out of a market base much larger actually used the service. Three months is not sufficient for a service to establish itself in a community. People require time to adjust their travel habits and move from a state of dependency on others to self reliance. The potential market is in the range of 200-300 people.

Bill Morse and Ken Smith of the Clearwater Mobility Club have stated that they are continuing efforts to gain community support, and to acquire a motor carrier license to continue to operate the service. The Club states that it has financial commitments from various sources, including local fundraising, to acquire a vehicle for the service.

Volunteer Driver Program

A volunteer transportation program is operated out of the Access Centre for medical trips to Kamloops. There are currently four drivers providing 8 - 10 trips per month. The service is provided for a "donation" of \$0.18 per kilometre.

Home Support

Clearwater Home Support Service provides programs to residents of the North Thompson from Blue River to Round Top. The organization employs 13 Long Term Care Aides that assist families and individuals in their own homes. Right now the service has about 40 clients. The LTC Aides can provide transportation for clients when hours have been allocated for this purpose.

Summary

From the review of existing services, it is clear that for those without an automobile, transportation options are extremely limited. The Clearwater Mobility Club bus, which only operated for a brief period, demonstrated that there is a need for public transportation. The key issue is the size of the market and the best way to accommodate the demand.

3.0 Market for Transit

3.1 Population

Clearwater is located 82 miles north of Kamloops on the Yellowhead Highway at the gateway to Wells Gray Park. Personal transportation in the Clearwater area is very difficult for those without access to an automobile. The population is spread out over a large area and there is no concentration of services per se. Commercial, shopping and medical services are located on both sides of the Yellowhead Highway, North Thompson River and Clearwater River. Walking is out of the question for most, in particular seniors and persons with a disability.

A survey of seniors in small towns in British Columbia conducted in May 1990 (Hodge & Mckay) asked seniors what their travel needs were and how they were being met. The survey indicates that 42% of senior households have no driver. The percentage in this category increases to 53% for those over 75. Over 20% of seniors stated they have difficulty getting around, the main reason cited being "don't like asking for a ride". Almost one-quarter require a mobility aid when traveling outside the home. The main trip purposes include shopping, banking, visiting and medical trips. Almost 65% stated they would consider paratransit as a transportation option. About 45% liked the idea of a taxi subsidy.

There are approximately 4,500 people in the study area of which 600 are seniors. There are several examples of transit operating successfully in other similar communities including Nakusp, Kaslo and Princeton. In most cases service in a small area is geared toward providing access to a larger centre for medical and shopping trips. In the case of Clearwater the demand is local and any service options needs to be flexible

3.2 Specific Demands

The main trip need identified was for individuals living in their own homes for medical and shopping trips. As well, specific needs identified during the interviews include:

- Programs at Access Centre for people with developmental disabilities
- Seniors Programs at Evergreen Acres
- Adult Education Program at Star Lake Campus
- Hospital services (bath program) for seniors

4.0 Service Options

There are several options available to address the needs that have been identified. These options include 1) taxis 2) paratransit and 3) volunteer drivers.

Taxi Scrip

Taxi scrip was launched in B.C. in July 1991 in Greater Vancouver under the name "Taxi Saver". The program is directed to eligible handyDART (a door-to-door service for persons with disabilities who are unable to use conventional fixed route transit) clients and provides 50% subsidy to the user for travel using taxis, up to a maximum monthly amount. This innovative program was recognized by the Canadian Urban Transit Association who awarded BC Transit the 1992 Mobility Award for Innovation in Accessible Transit.

Eligible clients purchase coupons at a discount for use on a taxi. For example, a book containing coupons with a face value of \$40 is sold to eligible individuals for \$20. The purchaser then uses the coupons for \$40 worth of taxi travel, the balance being subsidized by the local transit authority and BC Transit. Once an individual has a book of coupons, they contact the taxi service directly to book their ride.

The Program has since been implemented in Prince George, Victoria, Prince Rupert, and Summerland and is scheduled for implementation in several other communities.

A subsidized taxi service provides the following:

- flexible/on-demand service
- available in emergencies
- more affordable than private taxi
- encourage taxi operators to acquire accessible vehicles

This option would provide a limited amount of affordable transportation for seniors and persons with a disability. It is designed to subsidize a few trips per month. It is anticipated that the subsidy would be used mainly for shopping and medical appointments. The main drawback is the uncertainty around the existing taxi company and the absence of an accessible vehicle. Also, this option would not be able to accommodate the needs of those persons requiring daily travel to programs.

The total cost of this option is estimated at \$15,000 with a local share of \$5,500. Based on an average trip cost of between \$6 and \$7 per ride, the approximately \$30,000 worth of travel will provide for about 4,500 rides.

2.0 Taxi Based handyDART

Taxi based handyDART is a new concept that was developed to provide a form of handyDART service in areas where the potential population of riders is small enough that an extra vehicle in the community is not required. The service is provided instead by a taxi company, preferably with an accessible vehicle. The service is similar to handyDART except that seniors without a disability can also use the

service. An agreement between the taxi company and the other partners establishes the area to be served and the guaranteed rate for each ride. The first area to utilize this form of service will be Kitimat which should begin service by July 1995. Patrons should book rides up to 24 hours in advance to be guaranteed a ride and must be preapproved to use the service.

The total cost of this option is estimated at \$35,000, which is based on 5,000 annual rides at an average of just below \$7 per ride. Administration and marketing expenses are included in the total. The local share is estimated at \$6,000.

Paratransit

Paratransit involves having a dedicated vehicle available at regular hours to provide a combination of door-to-door and fixed schedule service. This service would operate in much the same way as the service that was provided by the Clearwater Mobility Club. The demand identified in the study and the actual experience of the Mobility Club indicates that a full time service is not warranted. In order to achieve a minimum acceptable level of productivity, the service would only operate on a limited schedule; either 4 hours per day Monday to Friday or 8 hours per day three days per week.

This schedule would meet the needs of seniors for shopping and does provide some flexibility in scheduling medical appointments. Unlike the taxi options the van could be used by anyone in the community although priority could be given to seniors. This is the most expensive option as it involves hiring a driver and maintaining a scheduling and dispatch centre. While the latter was provided at no cost during the brief period the Mobility Club operated, the continuation of volunteer or donated services cannot be assumed.

The total cost of this option is estimated at \$40,000 with a local share of \$11,000. The budget is based on a donated vehicle. It is estimated that the service would provide 3,000 annual rides.

Volunteer Driver Programs

Other studies recently completed by BC Transit for similar areas, including the original Feasibility Study for the TNRD have suggested the creation of a ride sharing or volunteer driver program to accommodate the needs of rural residents. This option involves an organizing function that would typically be handled by a social service agency. This form of transportation is used most frequently for longer distance trips, typically from a small town or rural area to an urban centre. For example, the volunteer program in Clearwater is focused on providing transportation to Kamloops. The volunteer option, therefore, is not considered as a solution to the transportation problems in the Clearwater area.

Summary

The options are summarized in the following table.

	Taxi Saver	Taxi handyDART	Paratransit Van
Total Cost	\$15,000	\$35,000	\$40,000
BC Transit Share	\$9,500	\$21,500	\$25,000
Regional District Share	\$5,500	\$6,000	\$11,000
Rides	4,500	5,000	3,000
Cost/Ride	\$3.33	\$7.00	\$13.33

In the case of Taxi handyDART and Paratransit, the local share is based on the revenue generated from a \$1.50 fare for each trip. All revenue goes toward offsetting the municipal share. The BC Transit share of costs would decline from 62.5% in the first two years to 59% in year three and 56.69% in year four. For example, assuming an inflation rate of 2%, the Taxi handyDART option would cost \$38,000 in year four with a local share of \$9,000.

Recommendations

Based on the above analysis, the taxi based handyDART option provides the best transportation alternative. This option meets meet the needs of seniors and persons with a disability at the lowest overall cost and cost per ride. Obviously, this is dependent on the ability to obtain an appropriate vehicle.

Regardless of which option is selected, a call for proposals would be required to select an operator or taxi company for the service.

IT IS RECOMMENDED:

THAT THE THOMPSON NICOLA REGIONAL DISTRICT APPROVE THE TAXI BASED HANDYDART OPTION AND,

THAT REGIONAL DISTRICT STAFF AND BC TRANSIT PURSUE THE FUNDING NECESSARY TO IMPLEMENT THE APPROVED OPTION AND PROCEED TO THE IMPLEMENTATION PHASE OF THE SERVICE.

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