

# Nelson Playmor Feasibility Study 1997

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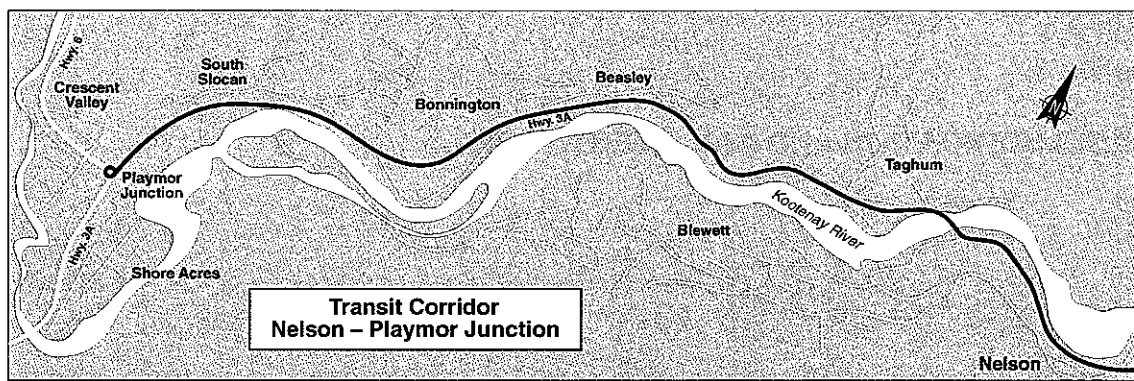
## INTRODUCTION

This report examines the feasibility of providing transit service to sections of Electoral Areas "E" and "F" of the Regional District of Central Kootenay, from the City of Nelson to Playmor Junction. Possible types of transit service which could be introduced in the study area vary from demand responsive handyDART service, solely for those persons with disabilities, to fixed route/fixed schedule conventional service available to all residents, or a combination of both types.

In this report, the evaluation process and options for service leading to final recommendations are derived from the characteristics of the study area, including its geographical layout and population distribution, which affect the potential for transit ridership and viability of transit as a whole.

This study was undertaken by BC Transit for the Regional District of Central Kootenay and the City of Nelson under the terms and responsibilities laid out in the Annual Operating Agreement for the Nelson Transit System. All recommendations are made with the understanding of both local jurisdictions that transit service in the study area will not be an extension of the conventional Nelson Transit System, due to the low density and significant distances involved. Depending upon the level of service which the area may be able to sustain, other less expensive methods of delivering such service will be investigated and presented, including the operation of both fixed and demand-responsive trips by local taxi or van/limousine operators.

The following map illustrates the study area.



## POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The most basic indicators of potential transit ridership are characteristics of the area population: total population, geographic distribution and demographics. These characteristics will be compared to similar communities in the Province.

### Population

The table below displays 1991 Census figures for the study area. These figures were obtained from the Central Statistics Bureau and the Regional District.

**Table 1 Population of Study Area**

South Shore - Blewett	1,022
North Shore - Taghum, Beasley, Bonnington	678
South Slokan/Crescent Valley	627
<b>Total:</b>	<b>2,327</b>

An appropriate form of transit service in this area can be supported by such a small population base because of its proximity to Nelson. The 1991 estimated total population for the area of 2,327 is comparable to other regional areas in the Province into which existing transit systems have extended in recent years.

A projected moderate population growth over the next decade (an average of 1.5% per annum) spurred by a continued stable regional economy is another factor promoting the introduction of transit in this area.

### **Population Distribution**

This transit study involves a long linear area of approximately 17 kilometres from the City of Nelson to Playmor Junction, which has a relatively small population in relation to its size. The dispersed distribution of the population is not particularly conducive to transit service. Unlike the area between Nelson and Balfour, residential development in Bonnington-Blewett is a significant distance away from the highway, making access to transit difficult.

The policy of the Regional District, as stated in the Official Community Plan, is to retain the primarily rural nature of the area through low density residential land designations. The Plan also confines to existing areas most of the region's higher density residential development, such as under hamlet, mobile home and resort residential designations.

### **Demographics**

The demographic makeup of the population has an effect on transit ridership. Without other organized forms of transportation such as school district busing

and vehicles operated by private facilities, certain groups such as teenagers, seniors and young adults traditionally have a higher propensity to use public transit.

In 1991, 33.2% of the population was under the age of 24. The census noted that 12.6% of the population were seniors which is slightly lower than the provincial average (13.1%). Although translating into a relatively small number of seniors and youths, these are the markets which suggest that transit should be investigated.

The exact size of the disabled population in the study area has not been determined. Information from local community groups and social service agencies suggests that the number of eligible handyDART registrants would be relatively small but that a large number of residents, particularly seniors, would benefit from a door-to-door service because of difficulties of getting to a conventional route with bus stops. These difficulties include long walking distances, inclement winter conditions, no sidewalks and poorly lighted streets.

### **Summary**

The overall size of the population and its distribution is marginal and warrants a limited level of transit service. The population profile and anticipated demand suggests that pure conventional transit in this area would perform marginally; the combination of conventional and door-to-door service would be the best option. This translates into limited fixed route, scheduled service and the availability of on-demand accessible service.

## **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

The feasibility of transit service is affected by the overall development of a community; not only its physical layout but also other components such as the provision of services, recreation facilities, commercial or industrial activity. This development influences local and regional trip types and the times these trips are made.

### **Existing Transportation Services**

Although there may be overall demand for organized transportation services such as public transit, this demand may already be met by existing services. The availability of these additional services and their status affects demand for transit.

### Nelson Paratransit

The Nelson Paratransit service has one vehicle in service. The service operates a total of 8 hours per day Monday through Friday and has averaged over 5,000 rides per year. The Nelson Paratransit system provides service through to Crescent Valley on Wednesdays and to Slocan City on Thursdays. The operator reports that while they have the ability to serve the Taghum, Blewett and Bonnington areas there have been very few requests for transit service to or from there.

### Nakusp Paratransit

The Nakusp Paratransit System provides scheduled service to Nelson each Tuesday and Thursday and the operator reports that there are occasional pickups along the highway as far south as Krestova. There have been no requests from the Taghum and Blewett areas. It would be difficult to divert the bus from Highway 3A due to time constraints, however the Nakusp vehicle lays over in Nelson from 11:00am until 2:30pm on these two days. It would be possible to provide one trip to Playmor Junction during this period.

### School Busing

In general, school commuters, particularly to secondary and post-secondary institutions, form a large component of public transit riders. However, the existence of school district busing often meets the needs of the public school portion of this market. Within the study area there is one elementary school and no secondary schools. With the exception of a few students who must walk up to 1-1/2 km to Blewett Elementary School, all public school commuting needs of students are met by school district busing. The small number of students who are not bused and the relatively short walk distance for most indicates that there is little demand for school commuting on public transit.

### Taxis

There are two taxi companies which provide service to the study area. Due to the long distances involved and the cost factor, there is expected to be little overlap between taxi patrons and potential transit riders, an expectation based to a degree on experience in other communities.

### **Transit Destinations**

The orientation of most transit systems is toward commercial centres, particularly core areas, due to the diversity of possible trip purposes, such as work commuting, shopping, medical appointments and consumer services, and the high density of development. Shopping centres and alternate areas where these facilities or services are located, educational institutions, hospitals and major industrial facilities are other traditional destinations of transit users. The study area is absent of the above mentioned facilities. Nelson would be the primary destination for users of a transit service from the study area.

Primary generators of transit travel within Nelson include Downtown, Chahko-Mika Mall and Kootenay Lake District Hospital. All these locations are served by the Nelson Transit System.

### **Summary**

In summary, handyDART service is currently traveling through the study area three days per week. Due to lack of awareness, low frequency and inappropriate times of these trips there have been very few requests for service. The existing service could be convenient for shopping and medical appointments and is available to all residents.

## **TRANSIT SERVICE PLAN**

There is a limited need within the study area for the movement of people for work, school, medical, commercial, and social visits. A portion of the ridership will be seniors who currently must rely on family and friends for transportation. The remaining riders will be adults who do not have access to a vehicle and students or young adults who cannot drive.

The following two service options are based on indicated travel demand and characteristics of the study area. The first option offers marginal service under existing operations while under the second, a separate service would be provided to all market groups. A description of the two options is as follows:

Based on the review of demographic and travel demand information and comparisons with communities of similar size, the most desirable option which addresses the needs in the study area is TaxiDART service.

### **Service options**

#### *Option 1 - Promotion and streamlining of existing services*

As noted in the *Existing Transportation Services* section, the Nelson and Nakusp Paratransit systems travel through the study area at midday each Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. The fact that very few passengers are served on these trips can be attributed to lack of promotion, improper scheduling for commuters and the perception that the handyDART vans are for eligible clients only. As a result, residents of the area believe that there is no service to Nelson which they can use.

This option has two components: a) the implementation of a marketing campaign to inform residents of the existing three-day-per-week service and b) the establishment and promotion of a single source of schedule information and trip booking, at the present Nelson Paratransit office.

Neither component is costly to implement and would likely result in some additional passengers using the existing services. However, given the low frequency and inappropriate trip timing for most residents, the number of such additional passengers can be expected to be low. Nonetheless, this option can be recommended, particularly since it involves little cost and it results in better utilization of existing services.

### *Option 2 - TaxiDART*

*TaxiDART is a new concept developed to provide a combination of conventional and handyDART service in areas where the potential number of riders is too small to warrant the deployment of an additional transit vehicle in the community. The service is provided instead by a taxi company with an accessible van at a set flat rate per trip. Passengers pay regular fare and the remainder of the trip cost is shared between the Municipality and BC Transit, similar to other transit costs.*

In this proposal, TaxiDART would operate at least three conventional service, scheduled return trips between Nelson and Playmor Junction Monday to Saturday along Hwy 3A. The service would be open to all residents of the study area. Door-to-door eligible patrons can book rides up to 24 hours in advance, or arrange for pick-up on an ongoing basis, to be guaranteed a ride. When such requests are made, the van can deviate along appropriate routings through Taghum, Blewett, Beasley, Bonnington or South Slocan to carry out door-to-door pick-ups or deliveries. If such deviation were to cause too much inconvenience to the conventional service passengers, a separate door-to-door trip can be operated.

An agreement with a local taxi company would establish the area to be served and the guaranteed rate for each trip. Under this proposal, the passenger pays an established fare and the remaining portion of the taxi cost is shared by the Municipality and BC Transit.

This service should only involve a minimum number of trips per week initially, with the potential for increases as demand develops. It is targeted primarily at the work commuter, student, shopper, medical and social trip market. Transfer privileges to the City of Nelson Transit System would be provided.

Thus, TaxiDART will provide basic transportation through the study area at a reasonable cost to the passenger and acceptable funding level. There is good degree of management and accountability through a contractual agreement with the taxi company. The taxi company will bill monthly for the number of trips operated; the passenger fares are paid directly to the taxi operator and accounted for. The TaxiDART program essentially runs itself administratively other than monthly invoicing and recording of rides.

Vehicles Required.....	0
Annual Revenue Hours.....	0
Annual Passengers Carried.....	4,680
Annual Cost.....	\$41,000
Municipal Share.....	\$11,600
BC Transit Share.....	\$20,000

Option 3 - Paratransit

This option involves the operation of an accessible minibus to provide service to all residents within the study area. This would be an expansion of the existing Nelson handyDART system, necessitating the deployment of an additional van to operate three round trips per day, five days per week.

Like TaxiDART, Paratransit affords a basic level of service by providing the opportunity for travel not presently available. When this initial level of service becomes inadequate, expansion can take place both in frequency of trips and days of operation.

The same passenger market would be served under this proposal as under TaxiDART. Again, the basic routing would be along Hwy. 3A, with deviations through adjacent communities upon request. Also, transfer privileges to the City of Nelson Transit System would be provided.

Due to full utilization of the existing Nelson handyDART system, an additional vehicle and driver would be required, making this option more costly.

Vehicles Required.....	1
Annual Revenue Hours.....	1,200
Annual Passengers Carried....	4,000
Annual Cost.....	\$48,000
Municipal Share.....	\$16,500
BC Transit Share.....	\$23,500

**RECOMMENDATION & IMPLEMENTATION**

The analysis described in the body of this report leads to the following recommendation:

A TaxiDART system be implemented in the study area, providing three trips daily Monday through Saturday.

If this recommendation is approved, a request for proposals to provide the service will be issued and an operating company selected. Following this process, service could be implemented three months after Regional District approval.

