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Chair: Mr. Peter Schiefke

Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 56 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, February 3, 2022, the committee is meeting to discuss its study of intercity transport by bus in Canada, and for committee business.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of Thursday, June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

[*English*]

I wish to inform the committee before we proceed that all witnesses have been tested for today's meeting. They have passed the sound test for the benefit of our translators.

Appearing before committee today by video conference as witnesses are Dr. JoAnn Jaffe, professor, department of sociology and social studies, University of Regina, and Dr. Adele Perry, distinguished professor, history and women's and gender studies. Welcome.

[*Translation*]

We also welcome Mr. Pierre Maheux, administrator of the Bus Carriers Federation.

And next, from the Union des municipalités du Québec, we have Mr. Daniel Côté, president, and Mr. Samuel Roy, policy coordinator. Both will be participating via videoconference.

[*English*]

Finally, from DRL Coachlines Limited, we have Jason Roberts, general manager, by video conference.

We will begin our opening remarks today with Dr. JoAnn Jaffe.

The floor is yours. You have five minutes.

Dr. JoAnn Jaffe (Professor, Department of Sociology and Social Studies, University of Regina, As an Individual): Thank you for inviting me. I'm joining from Treaty No. 4.

I'm going to make four points.

First, transportation is critical infrastructure, and this is true for rural and remote communities as much as it is for urban ones.

Second, the right to stay in rural places and the ability to live a good life are increasingly contingent on the right to move—that is, on mobility and the ability to get around as one needs and wants.

Third, mobility is more and more an intersection of inequality, particularly for already disadvantaged rural and remote people.

Fourth, the market cannot be expected to solve this problem. Innovative, integrated, system-wide public and co-operative models are needed to realize the full potential and benefits of public transportation.

I will take these in turn.

Transportation is critical development overhead capital. It is critical infrastructure for rural places. Its absence results in disadvantages and vulnerability for rural communities and the people who live there. Transportation substantially influences how and where social and economic activities take place, and the development path of rural communities. It plays a crucial role in shaping the relationship between places and the flows of people, goods and services.

However, it is easy to overlook the network and systems that constitute critical infrastructure, because the roles they play in enabling activities and providing public and private goods and services are often invisible. Transport policy is economic policy, rural development policy, agricultural policy, health policy, environmental policy, cultural policy and mental health and antilongness policy. It is also reconciliation policy.

The right to stay in rural places and our right to vibrant, sustainable rural places are increasingly dependent on mobility, or what people sometimes call accessing the rights to the city in and from rural places. Rural restructuring in Canada has meant more inequality in rural places, more poverty and food insecurity, more low-wage and temporary workers and more immigrants, while services, both public and private, are leaving rural places and centralizing in larger towns and cities. People are increasingly living their lives across regions, with jobs, education, family, health care, social services, shopping and leisure activities spread across distances. As the private sector and governments improve their bottom lines for consolidations and service reductions, these costs are transferred onto rural users, who must pay more and travel farther or else forgo services.

These same people are less likely to have access to communications technologies to compensate for the loss of transportation and access to services, such as the ability to find medical advice online or shop online. For people to live and thrive in rural places, they need transportation.

Places play a role in perpetuating poverty, as does the uneven development between places. Constraints on transport-based accessibility “tend to deepen these socio-spatial inequalities leading to multidimensional deprivations and, eventually, poverty traps”. They also intensify and worsen the experience of disability and make it harder to leave situations of domestic violence and abuse.

In contrast, transportation accessibility and mobility in poor regions can improve access to higher-quality public goods and social services for disadvantaged people living in those areas, and promote poverty alleviation and a better quality of life for both individuals and communities.

However, we should not expect the market to solve this problem. As opposed to democracy, in which it is “one person, one vote”, markets respond to money, and more money equals more votes. Markets respond to the possibilities of private profitability. Depending on markets to decide whether or how transportation operates is unlikely to yield solutions to the problems I have outlined here.

Besides, society has created an uneven playing field between public transportation and private automobiles. The entire system is shaped by automobility—the default assumption of widespread access to and dependence on the car—and pervasive but mostly invisible subsidies to automobiles and trucks in the form of public dollars going to the construction and maintenance of physical infrastructure and to dealing with the effects of accidents, pollution and lost opportunities.

Governments can and do intervene in transportation networks to shape systems that better reflect public policy objectives, such as facilitating access to health care, education and work.

It is true that improving transportation can be a double-edged sword for rural regions. The wrong investments can advantage richer regions at the expense of poorer areas. However, with proper consultation and recognition of local needs, the effects of public transportation investments are likely to be equality-enhancing and poverty-alleviating, benefiting both populations and regions.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Jaffe.

I'd like to take a special moment to welcome back Dr. Perry. It's good to see you again. We look forward to hearing from you at this meeting.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maheux, we now continue with you, and you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Pierre Maheux (Administrator, Bus Carriers Federation): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My name is Pierre Maheux, from Autobus Maheux, a bus transportation company. This family business, which acquired its first school bus in 1958, 65 years ago, now has about 200 vehicles and 330 employees.

It provides various types of bus transportation, including school, charter, intercity and package transportation. More specifically, it now provides in the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region a portion of the services previously offered by Voyageur. It covers nine intercity routes in the Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Montreal and Outaouais regions.

Autobus Maheux therefore has a certain experience, not to say expertise, in bus transportation, especially in serving our regions and our populations whose intercity transportation services are suffering greatly.

In fact, the intercity transportation network, particularly in Quebec, is currently facing a major problem, with 2022 ridership not being what it was in 2019. Most carriers are still in recovery mode, which causes concern for regional transit lines.

In the case of Autobus Maheux, the main line providing the link between Rouyn-Noranda, Val-d'Or and Montreal is the one that has always financially supported the seven other regional lines. There is therefore a cross-subsidization, which is important to take into account in view of the question period that will follow.

Today I am addressing your committee primarily on behalf of Autobus Maheux, but I am also a director of the Fédération des transporteurs par autobus, the Bus Carriers Federation, in Quebec, the result of a merger between the Association des propriétaires d'autobus du Québec, APAQ, and the Association du transport écolier du Québec, ATEQ.

In 2002, as part of my duties as a director at the time, I had the opportunity to appear before the Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communications, then chaired by Senator Lise Bacon. I made much the same case there that I feel I have to make to the federal government today.

As the lady who testified before me mentioned, the problem remains the same. Rural areas will see services disappear. Although the primary responsibility for transportation services to the regions rests with the provinces, particularly through assistance programs, it is the federal government that has given them this responsibility.

But as I mentioned in 2002, the federal government may not have to regulate provincial assistance programs, but it does get involved in intercity transportation anyway. I am thinking in particular of Via Rail Canada, which receives huge amounts of federal money and does not refrain from competing with intercity bus carriers on various routes, such as Montreal-Quebec City or Montreal-Senneterre.

In my opinion, the federal government could offer assistance programs that would have a huge impact in the regions. In Ottawa, Montreal or other major centres, 25 extra passengers on an urban line is a negligible statistic, but it's different on a regional line, where 10 extra passengers can guarantee the line's existence and prevent its demise.

Rural areas are not the preferred target of governments and municipalities, who favour urban areas, which is logical, as that is where the critical mass is. However, I think it is important that the federal government pay more attention to the problem of abandoned regional lines.

In terms of the financial assistance that can be provided, I can submit proposals. However, I can tell you that the 2022 ridership on the network in our region is down by 50% from 2019. On our main line, which is supposed to be the one that sustains the network, ridership is down by 30%. According to my colleagues at Intercar, ridership has dropped by 50% in the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean and Côte-Nord regions, and only 25% of the clientele remains on these regional lines.

• (1110)

The closer you get to the major centres, the better the situation. For Montreal and Sherbrooke, Transdev Canada confirms it is still 20% to 25% short of its usual volume.

To get an idea of the problems in smaller cities, we need only look at Beauce, where my colleague Pierre Breton, of Autobus Breton, has announced the end of service between Beauce and Quebec City via Saint-Georges, Sainte-Marie and Saint-Joseph-de-Beauce, because it is a loss-making route, like three other routes we operate: Rouyn-Noranda to Toronto, through Ville-Marie and North Bay, with Ontario Northland; Rouyn-Noranda to La Sarre; and Val-d'Or to Chibougamau northward, with Intercar.

In rural areas, many lines are loss-making, but some still exist for the simple reason that the Quebec government has provided them with emergency financial assistance. I think the federal government has a more important role to play regionally.

• (1115)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Pierre Maheux: I would have more to say, but I understand that five minutes goes by in a snap. I will continue by answering questions.

The Chair: There will indeed be questions later. Thank you.

[English]

Next we have Mr. Roberts for five minutes.

Mr. Jason Roberts (General Manager, DRL Coachlines Ltd.): Good day.

I didn't get the interpretation of the previous speaker, so I'm going to go with what I have in turn.

The bus situation in Canada, as one of our speakers said before, is very binding in terms of bringing areas of our province and our country together with the outlying areas and the rural areas. For me in Newfoundland, we call it the Trans-Canada from Port aux Basques to St. John's. St. John's is our major hub. Most of the major activities that happen in someone's life will take place in St. John's, be it medical, be it at the largest airport, or be it the full gamut of whatever takes place.

For me, I've been at this for 27 years, operating from St. John's to Port aux Basques. After a Crown corporation gave it up because they were losing so much money, we decided to buy it.

I think one of the biggest things I want to really stress to everybody here is the out-migration. The numbers are coming down, but even with the numbers being stable right now.... They are pretty good right now in terms of the number of people who are using transportation. It's always very interesting to me why we, as a carrier going to the major centres and back and forth to all the other towns and cities in between, are treated differently from our metropolitan areas. They get this great big subsidy to operate their service. Where do we stand?

I can use our Metrobus service in St. John's, Newfoundland. Between Metrobus, the hub and Wheelway, which are three different divisions of the city transit, they receive a subsidy of approximately—I'm going to stay on the safe side—\$16 million a year to operate the service. They service around 200,000 people. We service 250,000 people and we get no money—none.

There was a comment made yesterday on the news in Newfoundland about how the province would love to see more intercity and rural transit available to help with pollution or to help with whatever, with greenhouse gases and the whole gamut, but to me, just leave the greenhouse gases and treat society equally. That's the way I look at it. We want equality of some degree across the province of Newfoundland and across the provinces in Canada. We need it. I don't care who does it; I'll give it up to the government. If they want to do it and subsidize it, it doesn't matter.

The reason that I've kept going and that we've kept going is that we feel it's detrimental if we don't. It's one more thing gone out of our society that will never be there if people like us don't keep it going, always living for the brighter day. I'm living for the brighter day when there's going to be a little more people and a little more availability of some funds to help with capital infrastructure.

It just amazes me; there was a big announcement in St. John's yesterday about electrifying the Metrobus buses, but we still have to go and pay our price for our nice Prevosts to go up and down the road there, and we get nothing. It really makes me wonder about the full picture. How can this not be fixed so that we're treated with a little more equality across the full country? How can we not make this happen?

We're the only operator running this route. When we stop, it's over. No one else is going to be crazy enough to do it, I can promise you. Thank God I'm operating some other business. I'm still looking for the big day and for this to really earn its own way, but after 27 years, no. It still won't happen.

I've been promised and committed to for umpteen years, for 15 or 20 years, that there's money that's going to come available. There's infrastructure money available. Newfoundland got \$111 million for infrastructure funds for transportation, but guess what? We're not included in that. It's just the City of St. John's and the City of Corner Brook. They don't know where to spend it. They got so much funding they don't know where to spend it. It's going to go back to the federal coffers. What better place to put some of that?

• (1120)

I would operate three times a day, right across the island, if I had per capita for the people we're serving in comparison to the city with its subsidies. I would offer service that would blow you away with what you can do in Newfoundland by getting on public transit. It would really make.... It would give us interest to know that someone really cares, but right now, I don't think anyone cares. Leave it; let it die, drop, go away. When it's over, it's done and gone and it's forgotten about.

I can promise you that we're not going away yet. We have to keep going because we have people who depend on this. I ran through COVID, and there were days that I ran two motor coaches 2,000 kilometres for as little as \$800 in a day, with no conversation whatsoever—none whatsoever. There were people who needed to get to that doctor and had no other way to go.

I feel a bit of commitment to society and to try to keep this going as long as we can, but believe me, some subsidy, some help.... I don't care how it's done. I don't want to make money; just make me break even. I want to keep it going. It's a bit of our culture. Our company has been in business for 102 years. This is our 102nd year. This is something we took on 30 years ago, and we don't run away from things easily. Mr. Rogers there, he's from Newfoundland. He knows we don't run away.

I really think that there's some way, or some shape, to make this happen.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much for your opening remarks, Mr. Roberts.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Côté and Mr. Roy, it is now your turn and you have five minutes.

Mr. Daniel Côté (President, Union des municipalités du Québec): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Members of the committee, thank you for having us. I also thank the other witnesses for being here.

I am the mayor of the city of Gaspé, Quebec, and the president of the Union des municipalités du Québec, UMQ. I am accompanied by Samuel Roy, director of policy at the UMQ. Thank you for allowing the Union des municipalités du Québec to speak to your study.

First of all, it is important to recall that, for more than 100 years, the UMQ's mission has been to bring together municipalities from all regions of Quebec in order to mobilize municipal expertise, to support its members in exercising their jurisdictions, and to promote municipal democracy. The UMQ represents more than 85% of the population of Quebec and the territory of Quebec, as well as 95% of municipal budgets in Quebec.

In our view, the mobility of people over a territory as large as Quebec is an extremely important lever for stimulating economic vitality, but also for opening up the Quebec regions. The latter must be linked to the major centres and to each other by solid and reliable intercity transport networks, in order to ensure access to services and jobs for all.

In Quebec, a significant portion of intercity bus transportation is provided by private carriers. Since the pandemic, as previous speakers have mentioned, there has been a drop in frequency, which is associated with a drop in ridership on several bus routes. We are talking about buses linking Quebec City and Montreal, which is often the busiest route in Quebec, but also buses that link Quebec City and Havre-Saint-Pierre, on the North Shore, via Saint-Siméon, in Charlevoix, for example. There are also other links in Gaspésie and Abitibi.

With profitability no longer in the picture, operating these routes is no longer advantageous for private carriers, but it is still essential for the vitality of the regions served. It is above all the financial support of governments, particularly municipal governments, that keeps these routes active. As such, the UMQ would like to share with you two recommendations to be implemented to improve intercity bus transportation.

Our first recommendation is to modify the Rural Transit Solutions Fund and increase its budget envelope, so that it fully achieves its objectives. The union believes that the fund should allow for the financing of operating expenses and not only infrastructure expenses, a point I insist on, in order to contribute to the maintenance of intercity transport services. The needs on the ground are substantial, and increasing the amounts provided would make it possible to go even further and develop current services, in addition to consolidating those that are in place.

Our second recommendation is that the federal government and the Quebec government quickly reach permanent agreements to allow for the distribution of the funds provided by the Rural Transit Solutions Fund and the Zero Emission Transit Fund. At present, Quebec municipalities and transit operators are the only ones in Canada that do not have access to the money in these two funds. There are surely reasons for this, which we will discuss in question period. However, these amounts are necessary to meet the needs of municipalities and operators on an ongoing basis.

For example, projects covered by the August 2022 transitional agreement under the Rural Transit Solutions Fund were funded, but projects that were not included in the transitional agreement were not funded, even though the federal government had responded positively to the applications. It is therefore important that the federal government come to an agreement with the province.

With regard to the Zero Emission Transit Fund, its implementation should help accelerate things in terms of electrification. I don't need to remind you that this is essential to meeting greenhouse gas reduction targets, including those of the federal government.

In conclusion, I would like to remind you that intercity transportation allows us to occupy our territory, counteracts its devitalization and prevents the isolation of rural communities. It is an important economic vector, but it is also an essential service in the regions. This is why we are asking the federal and Quebec governments to come to an agreement, so that Quebec operators and municipalities have access to additional funding to ensure the sustainability of intercity bus transportation.

I'll stop here and wait for the question period for the rest. Thank you.

• (1125)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Côté.

[English]

We will now transition to the question period of this meeting. We will start with Mr. Strahl.

The floor is yours. You have six minutes.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, everyone, for your presentations.

We heard about funding and subsidized ridership, etc. I want to get into that a little bit.

I think what we've heard previously is that there is an enormous subsidy per rider for something like Via Rail. Obviously there are

massive investments, with hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars going into more money for Via Rail. What I note about that line and what we've heard about the Windsor-Quebec City corridor is that it's already quite urban. It's already quite well served by other modes of transport. It's not that difficult to get to a major airport, for instance, from places along that line, yet there is still an effort to increase service and pour billions of dollars of government subsidies into it.

I'd like to follow up with Mr. Roberts.

I found your testimony compelling when you talked about what you could do if you were given a bit of support. What is your view when you see the federal government putting billions of dollars into well-served markets while markets like yours in Newfoundland and Labrador, as you said, get nothing? Is there an equality issue here that you feel needs to be addressed, and how should the government address it?

Obviously, Via Rail is a Crown corporation. I'm not sure if your brighter day would include being made into a Crown corporation, but I'm interested to know how you think the federal government could support those rural communities and individuals who don't have easy access to other modes of transport and would rely almost exclusively on the bus if they're looking for an option other than a personal vehicle.

• (1130)

Mr. Jason Roberts: We speak about equality. We'll leave Via Rail for a minute, because that's right in a major hub of the world. I just look at equality when it comes to a smaller city. Even Corner Brook in Newfoundland, which is a very small city, does get funds from the infrastructure fund for transit.

If we could avail ourselves of a portion of the funds there, even as a private operator.... I know sometimes you'll get private operators, but throw it on the table: "There are the books. That's where we're at. Look at the cost per kilometre for metro buses or some transit or whatever, and look up what we can do it for."

I think one way it can be done is if there were some assets that could be put there to operate motorcoaches, just some way to recoup some of the costs. Also, what kind of service do you really want to have? We're running once a day from St. John's to Port aux Basques. It's about 1,000 kilometres each way, 986 kilometres each way. It's a long jog, but a very little help per kilometre per year would make a significant difference in what we could carry out as enhanced service, with twice-a-day service for a portion of the area to try to give more availability.

The dollar value is not significant to make this happen. We're the last game. When we stop, there will be no public transit across the island. We're it. It's not like somewhere that, as you're saying, has Via Rail or some operators or some shuttles and whatever. No one's leaving Port aux Basques, Newfoundland, on a shuttle bus and going to St. John's. That's 986 kilometres. It's not happening. They're not going from Corner Brook. They're not going from central Newfoundland. It just doesn't happen.

It's not only that; we operate in some pretty harsh, rough conditions there. If we're not out there in something that's good, dependable and durable, as my good Newfoundland saying goes, we'll be in the rhubarb before you know it. We have to operate this so that we won't be where we don't want to be.

Thanks.

Mr. Mark Strahl: I appreciate that. That sounded like my old logger father there for a minute.

Mr. Maheux, you mentioned that perhaps governments aren't as interested in funding activities in rural Canada as they are in urban Canada. I think you mentioned that for governments maybe there's a cost-benefit analysis, and a dollar spent in an urban centre, where there are a lot more voters, is perhaps prioritized.

Can you just give a little bit more on whether the government should have a rural transit strategy or equality between urban and rural when it comes to serving populations?

Again, I think urban centres have a lot of options. People in urban centres often have many choices for how they get around, but in rural Canada, perhaps that's not the case.

Can you expand on that?

Mr. Pierre Maheux: Yes. Thank you.

I'll answer in French. I'm very bad in English.

[*Translation*]

Clearly, there is a huge inconsistency and difference between rural and urban needs, and those needs are not handled in the same way.

Jason Roberts says he serves a catchment area of 250,000 people. This is not the case in our network and in many places in Quebec. Instead, we go from towns of 3,000, 5,000 or 10,000 people to a town of 40,000 people, 80 or 100 kilometres in the centre of our region. That's a whole other problem.

The needs of 10 people, from Ville-Marie, La Sarre or elsewhere, who have to go to the oncology department of the Rouyn-Noranda Hospital are as important as those of any person living in the Montreal or Ottawa region. Yet there are needs that are not being met.

Curiously, despite its good will, the federal government has made some decisions—just anecdotally—that are a bit sad. In its first term, this government announced millions and billions of dollars for infrastructure, in Montreal for the Réseau express métropolitain, in Ottawa for OC Transpo, or in Toronto or Vancouver. This money is very much geared towards urban areas. This is normal because that's where the population is concentrated.

On the other hand, however, in 2017, the federal government announced the abolition of the tax credit for public transit. Yet, we need to talk to the users about it, because they are the ones who need it. In rural, less populated areas, people need this measure—

• (1135)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Maheux. Unfortunately, your time is up. However, I think someone else may ask you the same question.

[*English*]

Before we turn it over to Mr. Chahal for his line of questioning, I want to make sure, Mr. Roberts, that you finally have translation to ensure that any of the francophone members who'd like to ask you questions are able to do so.

Did you receive the number, sir, from our clerk?

Mr. Jason Roberts: I did, thank you. It's all good.

The Chair: Perfect.

We've also resolved issues with Ms. Perry.

Ms. Perry, I want you to deliver your opening remarks. Would you be willing to do that now?

Dr. Adele Perry (Distinguished Professor, History and Women's and Gender Studies, University of Manitoba, As an Individual): Absolutely.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Perry. We'll turn the floor over to you. You have five minutes.

Dr. Adele Perry: I'd like to thank the committee and the staff for allowing me to appear virtually from Treaty No. 1 territory. I do so as a settler whose primary expertise is in the field of history.

On the topic that concerns this particular committee, I want to share some of the central findings of the research I undertook with Dr. Karine Duhamel and Dr. Jocelyn Thorpe that examined the existing literature that connected the changing landscape of intercity transportation in western Canada—with a particular focus on Manitoba—and the ongoing crisis of murdered and missing indigenous women, girls and two-spirit-plus people.

The continent-wide shift toward automobility hit Manitoba in a particular way. Many of the smaller bus lines and passenger train routes closed in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. It is within this context that the near collapse of intercity bus transit occurred in the 2010s. Of course, as we are all aware, Greyhound withdrew from its already diminished western Canadian routes in 2018. In the same year, Jefferson Lines cancelled its remaining trip, which ran between Winnipeg and Fargo, North Dakota. A year later, the third company to try the Winnipeg-Selkirk route in a decade ceased operation.

Five years later, it is clear that the existing landscape is not sufficient to maintain reliable fixed-schedule bus routes in the province. There's a shifting patchwork of operators covering some routes at some times. Only two offer daily service. They are the shuttle running between Brandon and Winnipeg's airport, and NCN Thompson Bus Lines, owned by Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, running a Winnipeg-Thompson route. You can take Maple Bus Lines from Winnipeg to Thompson five days a week, Mahihkan Bus Lines from Winnipeg to Flin Flon five days a week, and Ontario Northland eastward six days a week.

As a sidebar, I'll note that the relative strength of north-south links, in comparison to east-west ones, suggests the importance of indigenous governments to any transit solutions in this context.

There is only one bus running weekly from Winnipeg to Regina, leaving after midnight on Saturdays. In late January 2023, you could book a trip through from Winnipeg to Vancouver that would take three transfers, cost about \$419, and take about 37 hours. Something has changed since then, and as of last night, that route was no longer available. That leaves Via Rail's twice-weekly trip between Toronto and Winnipeg, with all the limitations this committee is well aware of, as the only possible public transit connecting western Canada's eastern and western parts.

The highly limited and confusing possibilities of existing intercity bus travel in Manitoba affect some people and communities more than others, as Dr. Jaffe has spoken to. We have too little data on exactly who depends on the bus in the age of automobility and air travel. The cratering of intercity operations in Manitoba and the prairies as a whole means that it's difficult to collect the kind of data that we all agree needs to be gathered to design the sort of transportation system that will adequately serve people and the communities they are a part of in the 21st century.

We know that women have a greater reliance on public transit, both around the world and within Canada. We know that around 18% of people in Manitoba are first nations, Inuit or Métis. We know the national patterns of violence against indigenous women, girls and two-spirit-plus people come to rest in particular ways in this place. We know that indigenous peoples experience higher rates of poverty, which makes the shifts towards automobility come to rest in particular ways.

That the sharp diminution of intercity transit options had implications for indigenous women, girls and two-spirited people was a point made in the wake of Greyhound's withdrawal from its western Canadian routes. The Native Women's Association of Canada explained in 2018 that they were deeply concerned for the safety of indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people. A year later,

the final report of the national inquiry on murdered and missing indigenous women offered an important analysis of public transit, one that I think deserves more attention than it has received in this context. Chapter 7, in particular, explains how a lack of safe and affordable transportation can mean that people are forced to rely on methods such as walking or hitch-hiking, not only to escape dangerous situations but simply to travel for education or for employment. In this way, inadequate infrastructure and transportation, or transportation that itself becomes a site for violence, effectively—and I quote here—“punishes indigenous women”.

• (1140)

Two of the national inquiry's calls for justice directly concern transportation: Number 4.8 calls 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.”

In conclusion, I would say that effective transit policy must consider the needs and lived experiences of its users, who are not interchangeable but are people whose lives are shaped at the intersection of gender, economic resources, location and indigeneity.

The current lack of intercity public transit in Manitoba is a crisis in service, but it is also, by extension, one in data. Learning about the users of a service that currently does not exist presents particular challenges.

One thing I would urge your committee to do is to listen to those who have connected the lack of a reliable, accessible intercity public transit option to ongoing patterns of violence against women, and particularly violence against indigenous women, girls and two-spirit-plus people, and consider how a revitalized network of national transportation might play a role in addressing that.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Perry, and thanks once again for your patience with some of the audiovisual challenges we have had.

Now we'll turn it over to Mr. Chahal.

Mr. Chahal, the floor is yours. You have six minutes.

Mr. George Chahal (Calgary Skyview, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses for providing testimony today. We've had a really good discussion on the impact to rural communities.

In 2017, the Saskatchewan provincial government ended its public funding for the Saskatchewan Transportation Company after 71 years. Dr. Jaffe, I want to direct this question to you, since you are from Saskatchewan. What rationale did the province offer at the time for eliminating public funding for the Saskatchewan Transportation Company, and what was the impact on the community?

Dr. JoAnn Jaffe: That is a very important question, because the STC was, I think, a very good example of what a provincial bus service could look like, and did look like, and it begins to show us what happens when you shut these services down. Of course, we don't have as much information as we need at this point, but there have been some studies that have been done, including at least one that I have participated in.

The stated rationale by the provincial government was quite simply that they felt that ridership was declining and that the per-passenger subsidy.... In particular, what they were talking about was that the per-passenger cost for the province was continuing to increase.

This was in light of the fact that the provincial government was actually starting to make it more difficult for people to ride the bus, I will say. This was in the face of rising prices. As ridership was going up, the province ceased advertising for the bus. They put some straitjackets on the way the bus was operating in terms of its ability to offer charters and under what conditions and what those costs would be, and so on. They actually set up a situation in which the costs per rider would be higher than they might be otherwise.

The impact has been quite interesting, and that is to say that although the ridership was supposedly low, the riders who were using the bus were very dependent upon it, and I also might add—before I elaborate on that, because I don't want to forget this point—that this bus was not just used for riders; it was also used to move goods around the province. It was used to move lab tests for soils. For medical services, it was used to move blood. It was used to take prisoners back to their home communities when they were released from prison. There were so many things that people were depending on that bus for. Also, of course, it had a low-cost service for people to be able to get to their health services.

When the bus service shut down, it had a tremendous impact on many people. Besides the fact that we can talk about the inequalities, which Dr. Perry referred to, which were quite significant here, we know that most of the people who used the bus were women, they were elderly, they were first nations, they were overwhelmingly young, and they tended to be lower income. Those folks were often left without any options. In some cases, people have moved to cities to get closer to their health services; in some cases, they're going without. We're hearing about people going without. We're hearing about people who are having difficulty getting out of problems of domestic violence. We're seeing more people hitchhiking.

We're also hearing, in rural areas, about businesses that are beginning to shut down because the small subsidies that they were receiving to be the depots in rural places made the difference for them in terms of their sustainability. Farmers are having more trou-

ble getting parts, particularly small farmers and medium-sized farmers who were depending on the bus in order to access parts from the city.

The impacts are so large and so interesting. You have the first-order impacts and the second-order impacts on people. It really is something that I think in many ways was not predicted by the folks who ended up taking that decision, and it is a decision that refuses to die.

I was out in a rural area last weekend, talking to some folks who normally vote Saskatchewan Party, and they said to me that this is the one decision that would make them leave the party. It was very interesting, because they felt that it affected so many people across the board and was such an ill-considered decision that it makes them question the capability of the party to govern the province.

• (1145)

Mr. George Chahal: Thank you so much for that in-depth answer. You actually answered several of my questions with that.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Chahal.

Thank you, Dr. Jaffe.

[*Translation*]

I now give the floor to Mr. Barsalou-Duval for six minutes.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good morning to all the witnesses, I'm glad to have you with us today for this study.

Mr. Maheux, from the Fédération des transporteurs par autobus, the Bus Carriers Federation, you mentioned in your statement the fact that you seem to be having difficulty finding the clientele that was there before. This is not only the case for your company, but also for others elsewhere. It seems that post-pandemic volumes are not at the same level as they were before and that it takes a long time to recover the client base.

Firstly, do you expect this recovery to take place? Secondly, do you believe that the clients you lost have simply stopped travelling, or have instead switched to other means of transport?

Mr. Pierre Maheux: To my knowledge and subject to reservations, because I must always maintain a certain humility even if I am supposed to have become an expert over the years, the current non-return of a good part of the clientele can be attributed essentially to telecommuting, especially for the shorter distances. I'm thinking, for example, of my colleague who does the Montreal-Sherbrooke route.

For longer distances, I think that transport costs are also an important element and a brake. We are facing a very significant increase in these costs. In intercity transport, which is provided by private companies as opposed to public transport services, the customer pays the full costs plus, in principle, a profit margin. By comparison, customer revenues in urban and suburban transport networks are only 35%, 45% or 55% of operating costs.

This leads to aberrations. When a bus operated by a company under contract with a public transit company leaves Joliette or Sainte-Julie for Montreal, the customer will pay five or seven dollars for his or her “urban” ticket, while for the same distance, the customer would have to pay \$25 or \$30 to a private intercity transport company. Yet, in our rural areas, the rider would normally be entitled to that same trip for a similar cost, which might encourage them to take the bus, allowing them to go to the city, not only for cancer treatment, but also for pleasure, to visit family and to go shopping.

As I said earlier, there is a double standard for people living near major urban centres, and those living in sparsely populated or more remote settings.

Speaking of distance and isolated places, I just heard Ms. Perry talk about indigenous people and Ms. Jaffe describe the situation in Saskatchewan. In 2016, we launched a new service to the village of Chisasibi, near the shores of James Bay, from Val d'Or, a journey of almost 1,000 kilometres. Along the way, we do pass through Amos and Matagami, but we also stop in the communities of Némiskau, Eastmain, Wemindji and Waskaganish. Why do we do it?

It's not because the federal government is helping us, but because the indigenous communities and the Grand Council of the Crees decided to put money in to benefit from the Quebec Programme d'aide au développement du transport collectif, which allows us to use this money to reduce our operating costs as a carrier.

There is no doubt that the private sector is the solution to intercity transport operations, which Mr. Roberts will be pleased to hear me say. Earlier, Mr. Strahl was talking about turning all this into a public transportation company. The Saskatchewan Transportation Company had to close because its operating costs per kilometre travelled, which were double ours, had become too high. This closure had caught my attention.

I agree that service should be provided, but there are limits to creating public transport companies that cannot maintain reasonable operating costs while ensuring adequate working conditions, safety, vehicle maintenance and compliance with all rules. In intercity transport, therefore, it is clear that the private sector is the solution. As for rural areas, I will take the example of our line between Val-d'Or and Chisasibi. Ms. Jaffe rightly pointed out the whole issue of transporting parcels, goods and equipment for various services, which take up a large part of our luggage bays on that line.

There are other small steps that could be taken as well. I can mention them if, by chance, I am asked a question about them.

• (1150)

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: My time is almost up, but I will ask you a short question.

What federal financial support is currently available to private carriers?

Mr. Pierre Maheux: To my knowledge, the federal government does not provide any direct financial assistance to operations, unlike the provincial government.

Mr. Côté's suggestion to modify the Rural Transit Solutions Fund...

• (1155)

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Is there anything in terms of infrastructure?

Mr. Pierre Maheux: Since 2018, the Government of Canada has introduced several accelerated capital cost allowance measures, which are not specifically focused on transportation, but which we use extensively. Also, since 2021, our acquisitions can be part of our expenses, up to \$1.5 million. That certainly helps us.

If I may, I would now like to make some suggestions to help communities and users.

The Chair: Unfortunately, the member's time is up, but...

Mr. Pierre Maheux: You must hear my proposals, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, we want to hear them, and Mr. Barsalou-Duval will soon have the floor again for two and a half minutes. You can certainly take the opportunity to tell us about them at that time.

Mr. Pierre Maheux: Very well.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

Next we have Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Bachrach, the floor is yours. You have six minutes.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to our witnesses. This has been some great testimony.

I represent a very rural part of Canada, dominated by very small communities, many of them remote. Dr. Jaffe, what you said about rural equity really hit home and is a dominant theme in the region I represent. I'd like to start with some questions for you.

I'd like you to imagine that you're the federal transport minister, knowing what you do about the need for rural equity and the importance of rural communities in the fabric of our country. What would you do when it comes to the need for bus transportation? What federal approach would you take, as minister?

Dr. JoAnn Jaffe: Oh, man—you don't give me the easy question. Yes, that is a tough question.

There are some things that I think we need to consider. There are a few principles we want to remember, to begin with, including the issues around the fact that this transportation policy does impact all these other policies and that transportation also facilitates many other activities and programs and policies in rural places.

One thing to understand is that the cost of transport is also a cost that can be attributed across these other activities. I think we also want to remember that other kinds of activities receive certain kinds of subsidies. We've talked about automobility today. We've talked about the way that systems of transportation have developed so that they really favour the automobile and they favour trucks. They essentially externalize the costs of automobiles and trucks onto the general public. Their costs are actually higher than they appear to be. I think I would start by keeping those two things in mind.

Then I would also understand that there are many kinds of creative solutions that one can engage in at this point and that one can take advantage of—for example, new technologies. One can be thinking, in some ways, about developing systems of transportation so that one can take advantage of things that are happening in other places and piggyback on systems that are already in place.

Also, I think one important thing is that we need to start to change what it means to ride the bus and what it means to use public transportation, and particularly in rural areas—and this is taking this in a direction that perhaps is a little bit less expected. That includes paying attention to the marketing aspects of transportation and also thinking about the services that are available and the extent to which people are able to rely upon the bus. The gentleman from Newfoundland who was talking about being able to offer the bus more frequently, I think, is really thinking about this in the right way. We know that when people have more access to public transportation and it's quite reliable and they know that it's there and that it's safe, they tend to use it more.

On the other hand, I think one thing we tend to do, as we heard in speaking about Saskatchewan here, is that as costs go up, we tend to retract services, which means that people use them less. What we need to do is start thinking about the expansion of service and then what people are looking for in these services, and as Dr. Perry was talking about, start looking at the different users and potential users of services and the needs they have in order to use these services so that we are responding to the actual needs that people are expressing.

That's where I would start.

• (1200)

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Dr. Jaffe.

I'm interested in a few aspects of what you said. One of the themes that have dominated this study on bus transport is the question of the best model to pursue nationally, whether that's a purely public model, a purely private model, or some sort of hybrid in between. You've advocated a public approach to bus transport quite strongly.

Can you talk briefly about why you advocate that approach?

Dr. JoAnn Jaffe: I advocate that approach for several reasons.

One reason is that we tend to see, in many places.... Dr. Perry alluded to this. You look one day, and these services are available. Then, another day, they're not available. Private operators must respond to conditions of private profitability. This is no criticism of them. It is simply the reality of participating in a capitalist market.

You have to respond to private profitability, and generally speaking, you're looking for a lower cost.

We can use STC as an example. This was a service that—yes, it's true—operated at a higher cost, perhaps, than in the private sector, but it also had very good conditions of work. It had union labour. A very high proportion of its workers were of indigenous status or people with disabilities and so on. It had many women working in management. It was using a multiple evaluation, called a balanced scorecard, in order to make sure it was satisfying multiple sets of objectives—not just moving people from place to place, but doing so in such a way that they were satisfied and it was meeting environmental objectives and a whole variety of things.

The Chair: Thank you—

Dr. JoAnn Jaffe: I'm sorry. I'm running out of time. I'm a professor. I talk too much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Jaffe.

Mr. Bachrach will have another round, so perhaps he'll want to continue along that line of questioning.

Next we have Mr. Muys. Mr. Muys, the floor is yours. You have five minutes.

Mr. Dan Muys (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for their perspectives today.

I'd like to ask this of Mr. Roberts.

You mentioned—hopefully I heard this correctly—that the service has been running for 102 years across Newfoundland. That's a very large, expansive, 1,000-kilometre trek. You indicated your commitment to maintaining that service. Offering service to people in all parts of Newfoundland is laudable, and you certainly make some good points.

I want to understand this. I'm presuming that over the course of 102 years, there have been times when it's been profitable and times when it's not been profitable. There have been peaks and valleys. Perhaps there's a trend line.

Can you speak a bit about that?

Mr. Jason Roberts: I'll just clarify that we as a company have been in business for 102 years, but our bus business has been on the go for 30 years.

We took it over from Canadian National when they privatized back in 1996. They were losing \$3.6 million a year in the last year, when we looked at their books, by operating the service across the island. We still decided to buy it, believe it or not, so if you want to tell me there's a lot wrong, yes, there is. Over that period, there were some decent times, but, as you know, more and more people became dependent on the automobile, with the independence to go when they want to and when they could.

However, I'll show our credibility. The service was offered when Roadcruiser was the vision of CN. It operated a run per day from St. John's to Port aux Basques. Over the last 30 years, there have only been 41 days when we have not operated, and that's due to weather. Every other day, the schedule was as close as we could keep it, given weather and conditions. We have not bowed out and said, "No, we're not going." During COVID, there were days when there were three people on the bus, but we still left Port aux Basques and went to St. John's.

There's an expression in Newfoundland: "If the bus is not going, don't no one else move." It's not fit. It's not good. It's not whatever. They always call and say, "If the bus is going, there's a possibility we might be able to go." We have credibility about running, yes; dependability, yes; profitability, no. It's being subsidized by another part of my business, but I'm still living for that great day, as we say.

I just wanted to explain that to you.

• (1205)

Mr. Dan Muys: Thank you, sir, for that explanation. That's incredible: 41 days in 30 years.

One of the other services you offer and that I think you spoke on—and I know that other witnesses have touched on it—is parcel or package delivery and getting things from point A to point B. If your service were not operating—and you're generously subsidizing that, as you pointed out—and someone had to send something via courier or FedEx or in a different way, I'm presuming that it would take longer than the 13 hours for your bus to get there. What would be the typical delivery time across the island?

Mr. Jason Roberts: If you were sending something from St. John's to—I'll just pick a decent spot—Corner Brook, it would probably be done in 48 hours. From St. John's to Port aux Basques, you're probably talking about 72 hours. You're looking at that anywhere.

We are right now pursuing that as an add-on. I have an expression: "If there are no bones in the seats, I have to have cargo in the hold." I have to try to get revenue where I can. Only one thing pays for the bus: someone paying for a ticket or someone paying for a package. We don't get paid to go down the highway and just look nice and pretty.

I'll just tell you about our service and what we do to try to make it attractive. We have an onboard attendant. If you want to put your unaccompanied minor who is 9 years old on our coach to go from Corner Brook to St. John's, we'll take them and sign them on and look after them just like an airline does. If you want to put your mom on there who's 89 and doesn't know exactly where to get off, and you're afraid she's going to get off at the wrong stop, we'll look after her and make sure she gets there.

Someone would say, "That costs a lot of money." Well, it's sure cheaper than the \$600,000 that CN lost the last year they operated due to people not giving them the money for the tickets they sold. It's a loss of revenue.

Mr. Dan Muys: If it's not bones on seats or cargo in the hold, what are some of the cost challenges that you've seen in, say, the last five or 10 years that are really impacting your ability and that are costing you at the end of the day? Obviously, declining rev-

enues are one aspect, but there must be upticks in costs. What are they?

The Chair: I'm sorry about that, Mr. Muys. Unfortunately, there's no time left. However, perhaps one of your colleagues would generously contribute their time to allow him to respond.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Koutrakis, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'll be splitting my time with Mr. Rogers.

I would now like to yield my time to Mr. Maheux to give us his recommendations. It would be very interesting for the committee to hear them.

Mr. Pierre Maheux: Thank you very much, madam.

My first recommendation is one that Mr. Daniel Côté, president of the Union des municipalités du Québec, made. As he mentioned, the federal government's Rural Transit Solutions Fund does not take into account operating expenses. These expenses would have to be eligible. Furthermore, this fund does not include inter-regional transportation, but only local transportation. There is therefore a contradiction between the federal government's desire, if it is indeed its desire, to support communities and keep them connected and the real usefulness of this fund. To be funded, projects must cover a village or town of 20,000 or 25,000 people. This does not work. The fund needs to be changed to fund interregional transport. People need to be able to access the nearest community that offers the services they are entitled to. So I certainly support that proposal.

With regard to the UMQ's second proposal, which is to improve the Zero Emission Transit Fund, I fully agree. I'll just digress for a moment regarding technology. Today, in intercity transport, the technology does not yet allow electric buses to travel long enough. They can travel 80 kilometres and come back, but that is not what we call intercity transport in the major regions of Canada. You have to be able to go 500 kilometres, and there's no technology to do that right now, even if we wanted to.

We have a lot of electric vehicles at home, especially in school transportation. At our congress, we were just trying out a new fully electric coach from MCI, and it had a range of 200 or 300 kilometres, round trip. It's not enough yet, but we'll get there one day, for sure.

The other proposal is the one I mentioned earlier. The federal government, while investing billions of dollars in infrastructure, has abolished the transit tax credit that was available to transit pass holders making intercity trips. It should be reinstated because it is important for riders in small communities. For example, to get here to Ottawa, our riders can use our Grand-Remous-Maniwaki-Gatineau-Ottawa route, which we have been operating for years with the help of the Gatineau Valley Regional County Municipality. We had users who paid a monthly transit fare, and when this tax credit was withdrawn, it had a significant impact on the use of this line. So that measure should be reintroduced.

I talked about bus companies that have a contract with public transit companies, which is very common in Quebec. I gave the example of a customer who gets on a bus in Joliette and pays five or seven dollars to go to Montreal. This customer does not pay any tax on his or her ticket. Why should people have to pay a tax on intercity transportation services? If you want people to use it and you want it to be fair, a tax exemption would be in order.

Here is another proposal. In Quebec, there is a gas tax rebate. This rebate does not exist at the federal level. The federal government could contribute by refunding a portion of the excise tax to carriers. That would certainly help...

• (1210)

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: Excuse me for interrupting you, Mr. Maheux, but I would like to leave some time for my colleague Mr. Rogers to speak.

Mr. Pierre Maheux: No problem at all.

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Rogers; the floor is yours.

Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.): Thanks, Chair, and thanks to all the people who are with us today from the transport industry.

I'm going to go straight to Jason. Mr. Roberts, for the benefit of the committee members, would you identify your primary market? Who rides your buses? Would you agree with Transport Canada's statement that says busing is a provincial responsibility?

Mr. Jason Roberts: Our market is very wide. Our biggest users are mainly people who have no other means to travel. We do have more and more people, and that's why....The question was asked about our costing, and I didn't get a chance to answer, because I ran out of time there. It's a wide range. We carry everybody.

I spoke to a gentleman a couple of days ago. He was from Revenue Canada, going to do an audit somewhere on the west coast of Newfoundland. He couldn't get a flight there, so he took the bus. It's a wide range of people.

We have a lot of people who do not have other means. This time of year, in the winter, we have a lot of people who take the bus who really need to get there and can't afford to miss their medical appointment in St. John's. They take the bus. We are known as, "You want to get there? You get on the bus, and we're going." It's day in, day out, 365, without a stop.

We're diverse. There's a diversity of all types of people who ride the bus around the province with us. The numbers have levelled

pretty well off on ridership. It's not declining, but expenses have gone through the roof, so we have to look for more riders to stay at the same ratio.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Roberts and Mr. Rogers.

[Translation]

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, the floor is yours for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Maheux, thank you for all your proposals. I take very good note of them. I have listened carefully and we will see if we are able to incorporate as many as possible in the report that the committee will produce.

Mr. Côté, from the Union des municipalités du Québec, I may have a trick question for you. From what I understand, Mr. Maheux, other witnesses and you mentioned that it was important for the federal government to fund not just infrastructure, but also operating expenses. This is something that the public transit companies often tell us.

Some of the witnesses have come before us with an interesting question that I would like to hear your thoughts on. Not so long ago, a witness told us that investments in intercity transport were certainly an important subject of study, but that in terms of public or mass transport, we should first invest in the type of transport that someone needs in their daily life. We can think, for example, of transport to get to work, to school or to the hospital. This witness said that it was local transport that would be his priority.

As president of the UMQ and mayor of a regional city, what do you think of this statement? There are other means of transport that exist. We can think of the Quebec government's famous high-frequency train project, train transportation, which also goes to your region, air transportation, which is a major problem in the region, and bus transportation.

If you were given \$1 billion, what would be your priority and where would you put the money first?

• (1215)

Mr. Daniel Côté: In fact, we cannot be asked to make a priority choice. All means of transport are important. It depends on who it is for and it depends on the needs.

If you ask me what my need is as an elected official, it would be to have a reliable, predictable air service that makes sense, which is not the case at present. I hear the Quebec government talking about regional air transportation, but unfortunately I don't often hear the federal government talking about it, even though it falls under its jurisdiction. You will surely have the opportunity to work on this again at this committee.

As for other means of transportation, it depends on the needs. I understand that there is a certain concentration of people in cities and that there is intra-urban public transport, often with a high priority. But again, the operating costs are financed almost essentially by the municipal administration, which does not have the means to achieve its ambitions. There should therefore be some form of assistance for the operation of public transit, as well as intercity transport which, for people in the regions, is sometimes the means of getting to work or to hospitals or schools. It is important to take this into account.

I was hearing Mr. Maheux's proposals and I almost totally share his concerns. Coach tickets are taxed. Yet it is an essential service. Why do we tax essential services? Why are we taxing regional air service, which is also an essential service? Why do we have to pay the goods and services tax and the Quebec sales tax, among others, on these services, which are essential? Normally, an essential service should not be taxed.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Côté.

Thank you very much, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[English]

Next we have Mr. Bachrach. The floor is yours. You have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a question for Professor Perry.

I appreciated your testimony and the way that you highlighted the impact of the loss of services on marginalized communities.

A lot of this conversation has been about intercommunity transportation within regions and within provinces, but another important aspect of this question is interprovincial transport. With Greyhound, riders used to be able to buy a single ticket and move between different regions of Canada. I wonder if you could speak to the way that the loss of those longer-haul routes has affected the marginalized communities that you've based your research on.

Dr. Adele Perry: Thank you very much for the question.

The British North America Act is a complicated document. Where transportation fits is something that has been an object of discussion and debate, but we also know that in Canada's history, there have been times when we revisited the extent to which ideas about provincial and federal jurisdiction work. I think that in this case, with this particular form of transportation, it seems fairly clear that the idea of bus transportation can be easily met with provincial jurisdiction doesn't go very far.

A national carrier offered, however imperfectly, the capacity to buy one ticket with one carrier to travel between provinces. The shift from that to the current patchwork, which is both imperfect within the context where it exists and also extraordinarily difficult to access and to coordinate, is a real problem. Manitoba makes that clear, in the sense that there are connections with Ontario Northland to the east but extremely limited connections now with our provincial neighbours to the west, running literally once a week and leaving after midnight.

What we see there is the limit of the presumption that provincial jurisdiction can work to offer people the sorts of services they need, not simply to access resources and services within a provincial context but to maintain ties with friends and family, to pursue opportunities for work and to have a community that may exist beyond provincial borders.

These borders are not necessarily the most relevant ones in any given context. In a context in which the question is the possibility of a national bus service, I think we can really see that kind of service acting as a social, economic and environmental good. It's one that requires us to think about policy and practice beyond profitability as a generator—

• (1220)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor Perry. Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

Next we have Dr. Lewis. The floor is yours. You have five minutes.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

I would like to also thank all of the witnesses for presenting today. My question is for Dr. Perry.

I'm going to refer to something that Dr. Jaffe said. She stated that reconciliation requires transportation equity. I'm paraphrasing her.

Adjacent to the region that I represent, Haldimand—Norfolk, is the Six Nations reserve. We know that many of these rural communities, including the Six Nations reserve, have limited access to the cities by way of public transportation, and that impacts on the quality of life.

I would like to hear from Dr. Jaffe how she believes reconciliation can be facilitated through transportation equity.

Dr. JoAnn Jaffe: You started off by saying you wanted to ask this of Dr. Perry.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Yes. I'm sorry. It's Dr. Perry. Thank you.

Dr. Adele Perry: Thank you for the question.

I'm happy to share my time with Dr. Jaffe as well, who I think could speak to this in very real ways.

The challenges of reconciliation are material. They're substantial. They are much more than symbolic, as I think the lived practice of transportation shows us in real and tangible ways. Many of the things that would make a measurable impact on the outcomes that are critical to a different relationship between non-indigenous communities and indigenous communities can be seen in something like transportation policy. It would work to provide connections between indigenous communities and other communities, but also tie indigenous communities to each other.

Some of these issues get us to think beyond our urban-rural dichotomy. We are often talking about communities, such as Winnipeg and Brandon, that meet any definition of an urban community. These issues of connectivity—the inability of a private market, the lack of interest from provincial governments in providing transportation—particularly affect certain communities. Indigenous communities, and especially indigenous women, are certainly among those affected.

This is a very concrete way that the federal government can respond to the calls to justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and in less direct but also important ways respond to the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Would Dr. Jaffe have anything to add to that?

Dr. JoAnn Jaffe: I think that Dr. Perry did a great job, but I do want to add one thing.

When we were working on our research with “Here Today, Gone Tomorrow”, which was our knowledge synthesis project on public transportation and vulnerability in rural and remote Canada, we held a stakeholder meeting, and quite a few people from indigenous communities came. They discussed their problems with the lack of public transportation and how living in remote communities meant that when they wanted to go anywhere, it would take a tremendous amount of time. Whenever they had a health appointment, a social services appointment or whatever it might be, they were forced to go from this bus to that bus to this service, waiting for something else to happen, and then get a ride here and hitchhike there or whatever it might be. What might take you or me two hours if we're living in cities would take them perhaps three or four days.

It's worth understanding that it speaks to our values as a society that values time when people are excluded from participation in society because of the time and the effort that it takes to do things.

• (1225)

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Thank you both.

My next question is for Mr. Roberts.

Mr. Roberts, I want to start by thanking you for the sacrifice you've made in keeping the transportation in your province alive. You stated that you operate DRL at a loss and that you're subsidizing it through your other businesses.

How much longer do you believe you can continue to operate at a loss and continue the level of services that you're currently providing?

Mr. Jason Roberts: That's a good question.

I think the merit of that question comes to my desire to continue to do it. If you see that someone really cares about what you're doing and is willing to come to the plate with you and play ball with you....

How much longer can we do that? I don't know. As long as I can do it I will do it, but it would be so, so good to know that someone was coming on board to help the situation so that we can take care of the 250,000 other Newfoundlanders who are not in the big city

and are across the 900 kilometres that are outside of the city perimeters.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Roberts, and thank you very much, Dr. Lewis.

Before I turn it over to Mr. Iacono for the final line of questioning for five minutes I want to apologize to Dr. Perry. I've been referring to you as Professor Perry, but I didn't have it in my notes. I just did some research and saw that you received your senior Ph.D. from York University. Dr. Perry, I apologize.

Now I will turn it over to Mr. Iacono.

[*Translation*]

You have the floor.

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank all the witnesses for being here. This will give us a little more direction.

Mr. Côté, dear colleague, I congratulate you on your very interesting career. I listened to your opening remarks and your recommendations.

Has the Government of Quebec expressed an interest in working with other levels of government to re-establish intercity bus lines?

Mr. Daniel Côté: I can't speak for the Quebec government, but it would be interesting if the links were re-established between Quebec City and Ottawa, both for air transport and intercity transport or other. We can see that relations are difficult, and it is the citizens and regions of Quebec that are paying the price.

I would like us to find common ground. One way to do this is to respect the jurisdictions of each level of government, municipal, provincial and federal. If everyone respects these jurisdictions, it will make things easier.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Mr. Côté, I understand that you cannot speak for the Quebec government. That said, what did your exchanges with the province of Quebec lead to? What does the province of Quebec want? As mayor, you must have discussions with the Government of Quebec. What are your discussions about? What are your demands? What has Quebec said?

Mr. Daniel Côté: We have frequent discussions with the Quebec government, yes.

The Quebec government is always willing to help us and support the municipal and intercity transportation community, but we want both levels of government to work together according to their respective jurisdictions.

Today, we are addressing the federal government, but we have also asked the Quebec government for help. In fact, the Quebec government has told us that it would like to contribute.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Have innovative transportation policies been implemented at the municipal level, in Quebec? If so, can you tell us more about them?

• (1230)

Mr. Daniel Côté: Mr. Roy, can you help me answer this question?

Mr. Samuel Roy (Policy Coordinator, Union des municipalités du Québec): Yes, of course.

In all regions of Quebec, various regional county municipalities or intermunicipal boards have put forward certain initiatives, which have made it possible to maintain services to the population.

As some stakeholders mentioned earlier, if we want to achieve the objective of maintaining the offer of services, we must most of the time be able to count on financial assistance from the municipal and provincial environments.

There are initiatives and people in the municipal sector are creative, but there are also challenges in terms of the resources needed to maintain an effective service offer for the benefit of the population in all regions of Quebec.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you, Mr. Roy.

Mr. Côté, I invite you to share with us the initiatives that have been presented to you by Quebec. The problem is always related to resources, to the financial aspect. On our side, if we could have an idea of how the province will react, that would orient and guide us. If you have any other recommendations, you can send them to the clerk and we'll be happy to look at them.

Mr. Maheux, it's a pleasure to see you in person; thank you for coming all the way here.

What is your long-term success strategy given the long downward trend in coach ridership?

Mr. Pierre Maheux: Our strategy is relatively simple. In fact, the Abitibi to Montreal route was profitable and busy enough to subsidize our other regional routes, five of which, as Mr. Roberts mentioned, are rather unprofitable. However, the decline in ridership on our main line means that we are left with a money-losing network, which we could not operate without government assistance.

I'd like to quickly return to the question you asked just before. The Quebec government has done something special: it has put in place an assistance program that I think does not exist in other provinces. When a municipality agrees to support a private carrier and maintain a service, for every dollar it invests, three dollars are invested through the Programme d'aide au développement du transport collectif. Despite this, some municipalities do not have enough funds. However, many routes, in our region in particular, have been supported by...

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you, Mr. Maheux, but unfortunately I am running out of time.

Could you send your proposals to us by addressing them to the clerk? You have mentioned some of them, but we have not had the opportunity to hear them all. You can give us some guidance, since you are in the field and are currently experiencing these difficulties. So your recommendations would be very valuable to us.

In particular, you could specify what type of financial assistance would be beneficial to you and what it could do for you.

Mr. Pierre Maheux: Thank you. I will most certainly forward them to you.

I would just like to raise an important point. Does anyone here in the committee or in the room know where the bus terminal is in Ottawa?

It no longer exists since the Greyhound operator got into financial trouble, as we did, and discontinued service across Canada, including in your riding of Vaudreuil-Soulanges, Mr. Chair. Your bus service is therefore no longer offered.

Intercity services in Canada are ailing, the proof being that there is no longer a bus terminal in Ottawa, where a real estate developer is developing the site of the old terminal. There are four or five carriers serving Ottawa. There is our new service that covers Montreal, Laval, Gatineau and Ottawa, if I may say so. There are also Keolis Canada buses, which run on Highway 417, and Ontario Northland buses, which come in from Sudbury and North Bay.

However, where do these buses stop to unload passengers loaded with luggage? They have to stop on street corners, in snow banks. The fact that Canada's capital doesn't have a bus terminal really does not make sense.

I think the solution involves public transit companies, which should provide access to platforms and services using the subsidies they receive from municipalities, the provincial government and the federal government.

• (1235)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Maheux and Mr. Iacono.

On behalf of the committee, I thank all the witnesses for taking the time to participate in today's meeting, both in person and virtually.

[English]

I'll ask all of the witnesses who are joining us now to please log off as we move into committee business.

With that, this meeting is suspended for two minutes.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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