

Community-Driven Solutions in Public Transit-Deprived Regions:

A case study of Rural Rides, a community transportation initiative in southeast New Brunswick

By

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Executive Summary

Introduction

New Brunswick has a higher proportion of rural communities than the rest of Canada at 50% rural compared to 20% rural (Hanson, 2008, page 1). As such, it suffers from a lack of economies of scale to provide meaningful public transportation to many of its residents. New Brunswick is a car dependent province overall. Compared to the Canadian average, New Brunswickers are more likely to commute by car; are more likely to commute between communities; drive more kilometres per vehicle annually; and emit more CO2 per vehicle (Bourgeois and Folster, 2014, page 2).



Figure A: New Brunswick in relation to other Atlantic Canadian provinces. The region surrounding Moncton is the focus of this study.

Rural Rides

In 2014, Rural Rides emerged as a community transportation initiative (CTI) and as a response to a lack of transportation options in the Salisbury-Petitcodiac region of Southeast New Brunswick, west of Moncton. Rural Rides operates as a volunteer driver program, where drivers are only reimbursed for gas and use their own vehicle. Rural Rides' service has received an overwhelmingly positive community response, with many residents living in villages using the service in particular to access regular medical appointments in the urban centres. Rural Rides' success in terms of community response and increased number of trips has led it to expand twice, first to the rural areas east of Moncton, and then to the rural areas south of Moncton.

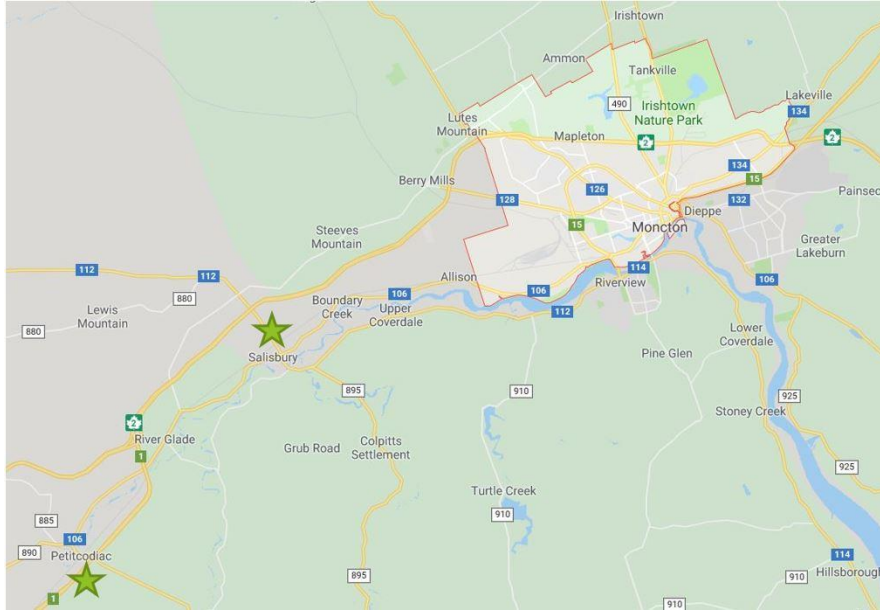


Figure B: The Salisbury-Peticodiac region, with the villages of Salisbury and Peticodiac starred in green and the municipal borders of Moncton outlined.

Report Structure

This report analyzes Rural Rides within its regional context and explores what can be learned from its model as a community transportation initiative, and whether this model could offer solutions or lessons for other public transit-deprived regions across Canada. The report concludes with recommendations for planners and transportation service providers on how community transportation initiatives such as Rural Rides could be further improved to benefit community members and to be operated in an efficient way.

Method and Research Question

This report uses an exploratory case study research design. The recommendations are based on triangulated research methods of a key informant interview and document analysis. Three types of documents are analyzed in this report: newspaper articles about Rural Rides, the municipal and rural plans of Salisbury and Peticodiac, and a provincial transportation strategy written by RUTAC (Rural and Urban Transportation Action Committee) that contains support for community initiatives like volunteer driver programs such as Rural Rides. The key informant interview was undertaken with Mr. Ross Alexander, the first president of Rural Rides, an original founding member, and a current volunteer driver. The research question is:

What can Rural Rides teach planners about how to remedy the lack of public transportation service in rural communities?

To understand what planners can learn from Rural Rides, three main objectives should be understood about Rural Rides:

- How Rural Rides emerged
- How Rural Rides currently operates
- How Rural Rides functions within the transportation, planning, and sponsorship context of New Brunswick

Community Planning in New Brunswick

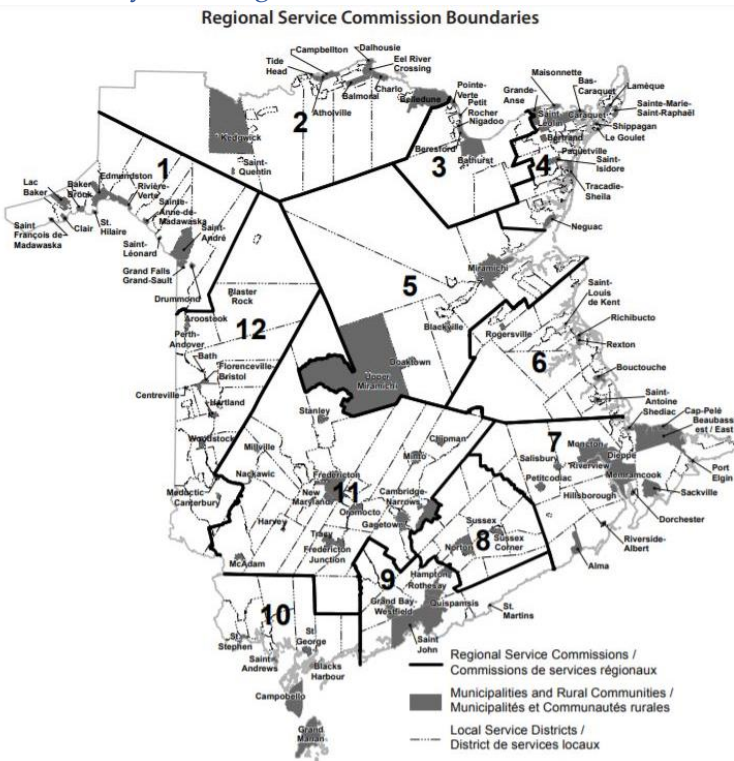


Figure C: The province of New Brunswick divided into 12 districts. Each district has a Regional Service Commission that conducts land use planning for that area. The Salisbury-Petitcodiac region is in District 7 under the Southeast Regional Service Commission.

The province of New Brunswick is divided into 12 districts. Each district takes care of the planning for the municipalities, rural communities, and unincorporated areas within its district. The Salisbury-Petitcodiac region is in District 7 and planning is done by the Southeast Regional Service Commission (RSC). The RSC model is a new model since 2012 with the aim of streamlining services between adjacent communities.

Transportation Options Analysis

There is currently no Uber or similar ride-sharing apps available in New Brunswick. A round-trip taxi ride between Salisbury and Moncton would cost over \$120. An intercity bus system, MaritimeBus, stops in Salisbury but not Petitcodiac, and is around \$12 one-way. MaritimeBus offers 2 or 3 trips a day, but no flexibility in times. The tri-city area of Moncton, Riverview, and Dieppe has a municipal bus system, CodiacTranspo, but this does not extend to Salisbury or Petitcodiac. Commute patterns suggest that many Salisbury residents work in Moncton, with 80% of Salisbury residents commuting outside their census subdivision. Comparatively, Rural Rides offers flexible, door-to-door service, and costs \$30 for a round-trip Moncton-Salisbury.

Document Analysis

The RUTAC 2017 strategy revealed strong support for CTIs such as Rural Rides and a recognition that they are especially important in rural communities. The strategy recommends a stronger role for the province and RSCs in funding them. Municipal plans of Salisbury and Petitcodiac demonstrated little to no engagement with transportation challenges such as commute patterns and mode shares highlighted in this report. Newspaper articles focused on the positive benefit Rural Rides brings to the community, as well as explaining the difficulties

Rural Rides has in securing municipal funding from Sackville despite launching a successful pilot project expansion in the Tantramar region.

Key Informant Interview

The key informant interview confirmed that Rural Rides receives funding from multiple provincial departments, from municipal and village councils, as well as from their Regional Service Commission (Southeast). The interview revealed that municipal sponsors want proof that their donation was spent on a trip to or from their municipality, and that Rural Rides is bogged down with tracking these trips. Rural Rides was an organic citizen response to a provincial travel survey conducted in 2013. Since emerging, Rural Rides has gathered knowledge including on how to run a successful pilot project and has increased rides per year from 1,000 to 10,000 since starting drives in 2014. Rural Rides changed from a non-profit corporation to a registered charity. Most drivers as well as clients are seniors and use the service to access medical appointments, therefore saving the province and taxpayer money on missed appointments, ambulance fees, and long-term care housing fees.

Recommendations

- 1) CTIs should accept lump sum donations from sponsors and apply these donations to any rides taken within their service area – in Rural Rides’ case, District 7. This would prevent cumbersome tracking procedures that link municipalities’ donations to rides taken to and from that location.
- 2) CTIs such as Rural Rides should present data visualization to prove the regional nature of the majority of their trips. This would be a useful tool to convince planners, politicians, and the public, that lump sum donations that apply across the region make more sense than municipally-based donations.
- 3) CTIs such as Rural Rides should refuse internal fundraising requirements associated with donations. With rides per year steadily increasing, and only two salaried employees, Rural Rides is too busy to fundraise themselves and need to focus on program delivery.
- 4) CTIs should target new relevant sponsors. This research shows that Rural Rides saves the New Brunswick taxpayer money across the healthcare and employment sectors, so organizations who work in those fields are ideal sponsors of Rural Rides.
- 5) Planners should leverage and translate CTIs such as Rural Rides’ expert knowledge about rural travel behaviour to design a transportation survey that assesses rural areas’ need for transportation services.
- 6) RSC planners and Rural Rides operators should continue to collaborate, as the regional scope of RSCs and the regional scope of Rural Rides’ trips are natural allies.
- 7) Multiple actors should collaborate to create a chronological history of all CTIs in New Brunswick to facilitate further lessons learned as CTIs may expand throughout the province.
- 8) Planners should listen to CTI operators and other local leaders. Much was learned through the key informant interview during this research, and planners concerned about public transit-deprived regions should learn from existing solutions rather than accidentally duplicating services or making a mistake that a CTI already addressed.