



SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION PROPOSAL

Briefing Document

MAY 2023





Overview

Being outside is the quintessential Canadian pastime. We are a nation of hikers, paddlers, skiers, hunters, dog-walkers, cyclists, climbers and pond hockey players. Over three quarters of Canadians participate in outdoor recreation every year, while international visitors flock here in the millions to visit our iconic wilderness destinations and experience a small taste of Canadian outdoor life.

We are rightfully proud of our natural heritage and its role in our culture. However, the complexity and cost of reaching these destinations is acting as an artificial constraint on the growth of Canadian outdoor recreation and tourism sectors.

Protect Our Winters (POW) Canada believes that this doesn't have to be the case, and that prioritisation of public transportation to outdoor recreation destinations can boost regional economies, create jobs and enhance tourism, while supporting Canada's emissions reduction objectives and improving equity.

This briefing is a summarised version of the attached Technical Background document. For case studies, detailed information and references, please refer to the technical background.

About Protect Our Winters Canada

Protect Our Winters Canada is a national nonprofit uniting the outdoor community in the fight against climate change. Established in 2018, POW has over 31,000 members across the country. As well as individual members, POW counts the majority of Canada's outdoor industry heavy-weight brands and resorts amongst its partners, including: MEC, The North Face, Patagonia, Arc'teryx, Big White, Blue Mountain, Tremblant, and over 40 other major employers.

Outdoor Recreation & Tourism In Canada: Brief Overview

- 75% of Canadians participate in outdoor recreation annually, with over a third doing so every week.
- A UBC study has found that outdoor recreation delivers \$98 billion in annual economic benefits to Canada, with Canadians spending approximately 2.2% of GDP on outdoor activities and associated expenses.
- Tourism employs over 2 million Canadians.
- Canada's outdoor recreation areas are major drawcards: 4 million people visit Banff each year, Blue Mountain receives 2.5 million visitors, Whistler attracts 24,000 people per day.
- Outdoor recreation participation jumped significantly during the pandemic, with trail use up by 40% and usage rates remaining steady since that time.
- 72% of trail users (hikers, cyclists, walkers) live in urban areas.

Current Challenges

Despite the popularity of outdoor recreation in Canada, our National Parks, resorts and trails are difficult to get to, with the vast majority requiring a private vehicle. The Library of Parliament reports that travel within Canada “can be expensive, difficult and time-consuming; this is true for travel both inter-regionally (e.g., visiting a national park from a large city) and within urban centres.”

Research shows, however, that public transport is considered by visitors to be an important tourism product and can increase overall satisfaction with a destination.

Economic Impact

Lack of public transport is acting as a constraint on the growth of the outdoor recreation economy, and limiting the ability of regional areas to maximise the value of tourism to their areas.

Canada’s mountain resorts list transportation amongst their most pressing concerns. While increased visitor numbers since the pandemic are a positive, severe traffic impact and the requirement for increased parking spaces are limiting growth, damaging the visitor experience and represent an operational and financial obstacle that they can’t resolve on their own.

Staffing shortages pose another challenge. Outdoor recreation destinations are particularly vulnerable to the current worker shortage because they are typically situated in remote regional areas, meaning staff must either be local residents or operators need to address accommodation issues. Affordable housing for staff, who are typically young hourly wage earners, is another major constraint in often expensive resort communities. If, however, an affordable regional transit option existed, resorts and associated businesses could draw from surrounding communities with far greater ease, injecting income back into the region.

Affordability Impact

Outdoor areas are a key component of Canada’s rich cultural heritage.

A major advantage of many outdoor sports is that they have low financial barriers to entry, making them accessible to people from all backgrounds. The cost to spend time in nature in Canada is relatively low, while the physical and mental health and social benefits are significant.

The common affordability impact for all outdoor sports is transportation. Simply getting to a destination can be prohibitively expensive. In this respect, Canada lags behind its global equivalents. In Europe, Japan and the UK, travellers can get from urban centres to outdoor recreation areas quickly, efficiently and, often, for the price of a local bus fare.

All Canadians should have the opportunity to access the spaces of which we're so rightfully proud.

Climate Impact

The dependence of outdoor enthusiasts contributes to Canada's transportation emissions, which already sit at 25% of the country's total. In fact, the number of cars and trucks on Canada's roads increased by 27% in the last year.

POW Canada has conducted research on 5 key recreational corridors, finding:

- Blue Mountain in Ontario receives 2.5 million visitors annually, amounting to 300,000,000km driven and the equivalent of 436 rail cars worth of coal being burned.
- Whistler has 24,000 visitors a day. With an average group size of 1.9, that amounts to about 12,500 cars on the Sea to Sky and 700 metric tonnes of carbon dioxide each day, from outdoor recreationalists and tourists alone.
- Tremblant receives 20,000 visitors a day, whose emissions would power 50 homes for an entire year.

Many of these corridors are also commuter routes, indicating a potential demand for public transport much higher than simply tourist traffic.

Opportunities

POW Canada has conducted a survey of outdoor recreationalists' experiences with public transport, garnering over 2000 responses.

Currently nearly all respondents drive to their destination, mostly alone. Journeys typically take 30 minutes to an hour, and 48% of respondents say they encounter heavy traffic most of the time or all of the time.

65% say that it is not at all convenient for them to reach their destination by public transport, but 85% would favour public transit if it was available and convenient.

Public transport has multiple benefits across all facets of society, from improved health to increased community cohesion. Key economic benefits include:

- Contributing to national productivity, adding \$6.2 billion to GDP;
- Creating 65,000 jobs from capital investment and 57,000 permanent full-time jobs;
- Reducing vehicle operating costs by \$12.6bn annually;
- Reducing annual greenhouse gas emissions by 4.7 million tonnes, valued at \$207 million;
- Saving about \$137 million in annual health care costs related to respiratory illness.¹

The cost of public transportation to the community is also substantially lower than for car use. Research shows that the cost to society of car travel is \$9.20 for every dollar spent by drivers, compared to just \$1.50 for every dollar spent on bus travel.²

Canada has a significant opportunity to boost regional economies, create jobs and support tourism growth by making outdoor recreation more accessible and affordable.



Proposal

POW Canada's preliminary research indicates significant gaps in public transportation outside of major urban centres, but a strong demand for services. A national Regional Public Transportation Strategy could be key tool for growth. However, more information is needed.

We propose that a Taskforce be established to further study the current gaps and opportunities for regional transportation in Canada, serving our key outdoor recreation destinations.

As a nationwide organisation with broad and deep ties to the outdoor community, including outdoor recreation municipalities, POW could support this work by engaging stakeholders and gaining buy-in and helping to identify key areas of need.

We suggest using the Inquiries Act task force mechanism to establish this group. This would allow the task force to be established and provide actionable recommendations quickly and cost-effectively. The Taskforce for a Just Transition provides a strong model, with this group producing two reports within a year of being convened, that are now informing the development of legislation.

The government's commitment to public transportation has already been demonstrated with the establishment of the Permanent Public Transport Fund. What we propose would be a logical extension of this investment, to deliver economic benefits to regional, outdoor and tourism-dependent communities in Canada.

Next Steps

We are asking that you support our proposal by:

- Raising and advocating for the benefits of regional transportation in committee meetings.
- Discussing this issue with your colleagues and gaining their support.
- Speaking with your constituents about public transport outside of urban centres.
- Supporting our proposal to fund the taskforce in the 2024 budget, as part of Canada's tourism growth and sustainable infrastructure development objectives.

What the Outdoor Community is Saying

Quotes from Transportation Survey, April 2023:

"I'd love to enjoy winter sports but it's really difficult to find public transport to get to the mountains."

"If I cannot find someone to drive with I cannot get out of the city as I do not drive because of medical reasons."

"My teenage kid wanted to get a job up Cypress mountain, but there is no shuttle."

"Not always having access to a car has severely impacted mine and my partner's ability to get out. Public transit where we live is not accessible for the outdoors."

"I could take a bus but would have to walk or hitchhike for the last 10km"

"There is a bus to Silver Star Ski Area but I have to drive 25 minutes to Salmon Arm to catch it. At that point, it is just easier to drive all the way."

"Before I was able to drive, I would've loved to be able to take the bus to the ski hill when my parents couldn't take me."

"Not only would I have to use an infrequent and expensive bus, but there's no public transit to take me to the ski area after arriving in the town."

"Zero options to get to any of the trailheads close by. AND only one bus service in town during the summer (2 in the winter)"

"Our community has a four lane highway running through it and has no safe form of active transportation infrastructure to access both sides."

"I think that better bike/ski racks or gear areas with routes that drop you off at trail head or similar would be advantageous to an increase in transit users."

"If there was a train that led to more areas outside the city, I would take it."



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