

Provincial Consultation on Seniors' Transportation: Life Without Driving?

This report provides a summary of the Provincial Consultation on Seniors' Transportation held on September 28, 2021.



Photo credit: Langley Seniors Resources Society and The Bus Co-op

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on behalf of the Provincial Working Group on Seniors' Transportation*



Executive Summary

This report captures the highlights of the **Provincial Consultation on Seniors' Transportation: Life Without Driving?** held on September 28, 2021. A total of 128 participants from across BC attended the three-hour event hosted by the Provincial Working Group on Seniors' Transportation.

Shaping the Consultation is the basic premise that transportation is a key determinant of health, and therefore an important factor in seniors' ability to live independently in community and thrive.

The Consultation set out to 1) **to convene** a diverse group of stakeholders with an interest in driving cessation and community-based transportation services for older adults, in order 2) **to learn** how the existing transportation system in BC supports or fails to support seniors' ability to 'hang up the keys' and still get around to meet their daily needs; and 3) **to propose** solutions to the problems that exist.

The Consultation captured information on the meaning and experience of hanging up the keys, adaptations being made by seniors, family members and friends, as well as local communities, and priority actions that participants identified.

Key findings from breakout group discussions

- The process of hanging up the keys represents a significant transition in people's lives, often marked by loss of independence and increased isolation and loneliness.
- Driving cessation was most often described as a stressful experience from both the seniors' and caregivers' perspective, however, some felt a sense of relief.
- Seniors are resilient and are adapting to this transition, often with family and friends, by finding new ways of getting around, accessing transportation and delivery services online, and moving to communities with greater transportation options.
- Communities are adapting by providing transportation services for seniors, but more services are needed, particularly in rural settings and for transportation to medical appointments.
- **The top priority areas for action** identified by participants were to 1) secure more funding for the community-based transportation sector, 2) advocate for better transportation services to medical appointments, and 3) take a coordinated 'system-wide' approach to seniors' transportation across the province.

Next steps

Information gathered from the Consultation will inform Working Group activities and the Seniors on the Move project. Upcoming activities include the development of a **transportation survey** for older adults in BC, a **toolkit for community dialogues** on driving cessation and life after driving, and a **short video** as part of the ROVING project - short for "Raising Our Voices In support of non-ageist ways of Getting around."

The Working Group is guided by the Community-Based Seniors Services Leadership Council and is supported by United Way British Columbia's Healthy Aging staff; Seniors on the Move is led by BEST and funded by a Vancouver Foundation System Change Grant; and ROVING is funded by a New Horizons for Seniors Grant.

For more information about the Consultation, the Provincial Working Group on Seniors' Transportation, or contents of this report, please contact Dr. Beverley Pitman at beverleyp@uwbc.ca

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Introduction

This report captures the highlights of the **Provincial Consultation on Seniors' Transportation: Life Without Driving?** held on September 28, 2021. It is intended for those who participated in the event as well as others with an interest in the future of older adults' transportation in BC – including older adults themselves, family members and friends, and those in the transportation, health, and municipal government sectors.

The Consultation was convened by the Provincial Working Group on Seniors' Transportation. The Working Group was created in 2020 after regional consultations held by United Way Healthy Aging indicated a clear need to address seniors' transportation challenges across the province.

The Working Group is guided by the Community-Based Seniors Services Leadership Council and is supported by United Way British Columbia's Healthy Aging staff. All are engaged in community development work aimed at supporting BC's older adults realize their desire to age-in-place for as long as possible. All recognize transportation as a determinant of health, and as such, a key factor in seniors' ability to live independently in community and thrive.

'Hanging up the keys' is a common way of referring to driving cessation in BC. Despite its focus on a seemingly small and final event, the phrase stands in for a process that can be long, emotionally charged, and life-altering in practical terms, given most people rely heavily on driving to get around.

The Working Group felt it important to better understand what the future holds in store for the growing number of British Columbians who will be transitioning into a 'life without driving?' The question mark signals the doubt and the angst many feel. *Will alternative ways of getting around be available, affordable, accessible in their community when they need them to get on with their lives?*

Overview of the event

The Consultation set out to 1) **convene** a diverse group of stakeholders with an interest in driving cessation and community-based transportation services for older adults, in order to 2) **learn** how the existing transportation system in BC supports or fails to support seniors' ability to hang up the keys and still get around to meet their daily needs, and to 3) **propose solutions** to the problems that exist.

The Consultation was designed to gather information from participants on five key questions:

- 1) What does it mean to hang up the keys?
- 2) What is the experience of hanging up the keys? What is the ideal experience?
- 3) How are seniors, families, and friends adapting?
- 4) How might your community adapt to meet these needs?
- 5) What are priority actions for moving forward?

The three-hour session, which was held online, opened with a welcome, an Indigenous land acknowledgement, and introductory remarks from the Chair of the Provincial Working Group on Seniors' Transportation, Sahra-Lea Tosdevine-Tataryn (Project Manager for City of Surrey's Age-Friendly Strategy). She introduced the two other co-hosts of the event, Better Environmentally Sound Transportation (BEST) and SHIFT Collaborative, and then briefly described a project the Working Group is engaged in, called Seniors on the Move (more details provided in the box on page 5). Consultation findings will inform Working Group and Seniors on the Move project activities.

Seniors on the Move

Seniors on the Move is a 3-year systems-change project, led by BEST and funded by the Vancouver Foundation, that aims to increase older adults' options for getting around. The activities and initiatives of the Provincial Working Group and Seniors on the Move project overlap. The two initiatives are timely for three main reasons:

- 1) **Population aging** – 1 in 4 British Columbians will be 65+ within the decade which means more people than ever before will be hanging up their keys
- 2) **Health and well-being** – transportation is essential for seniors to access daily needs, medical appointments, recreation opportunities, and social connections
- 3) **Global warming** – alternative ways of getting around, including sustainable and shared-mobility options, can serve seniors and help address climate change

Annwen Loverin, Co-Chair of the CBSS Leadership Council (Executive Director, Silver Harbour Seniors Activity Centre) set out the purpose of the Consultation and identified the five framing questions.

Kate Hosford, PhD Candidate in the Faculty of Health Sciences at Simon Fraser University, presented a profile of seniors' transportation and community-based alternatives to the car available to seniors in BC. See 'Profile of Seniors' Transportation' below. Several polls followed, then breakouts in small discussion groups and report-backs on group responses to the five questions.

Last, Anthony Kupferschmidt set out next steps following the Consultation. (Anthony, Executive Director, Langley Seniors Resource Centre, is a member of the Leadership Council and the WG.)

The full agenda for the Consultation can be found [here](#) and the presentation slides can be found [here](#).

Profile of Seniors' Transportation

- Driving, either as a driver or passenger, is the main way that older Canadians are getting around, followed by public transit, taxi or paratransit, and walking and cycling.¹
- Three-quarters (78%) of older adults aged 65+ have a driver's license in BC. This proportion declines steadily with age; from a high of 90% among those 65-69 to a low of 20% among those aged 90+.²
- Whereas more older adults hold driver's licenses today than ever before, the proportion of young people holding licenses has decreased since the early 2000s.³
- Older Canadians living in rural communities are more likely to drive (93%) compared to those in urban areas (85%), and this divide becomes more pronounced with age.⁴ For example, the proportion of residents aged 80+ with a driver's license is 88% in rural communities compared to just 70% in urban areas.⁴

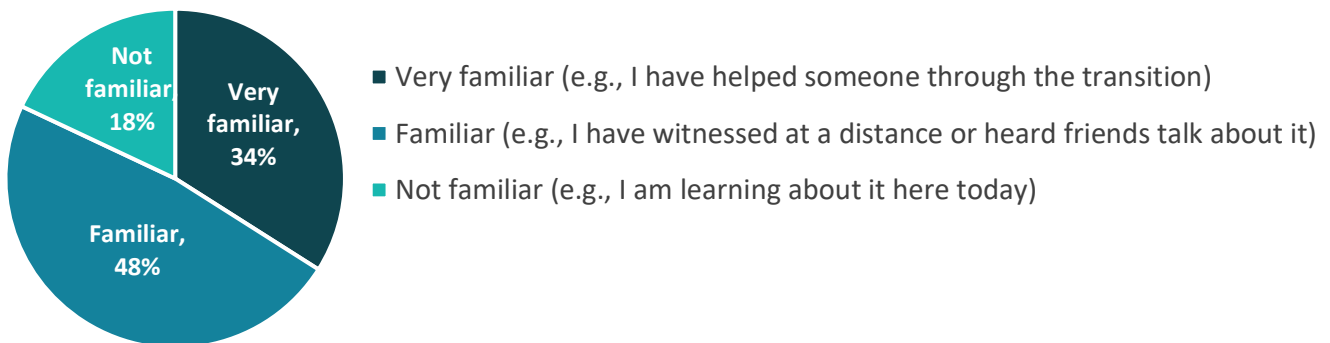
Participants

The Consultation engaged 128 participants, the majority of whom were directors, managers, and coordinators of non-for-profit senior-serving organizations (61%) or people working in the senior-serving sector in either paid or volunteer roles (14%). Also present were staff and elected officials from local governments (8%), the health sector (8%), seniors from the general public (5%), the transportation sector (3%), and academia (2%).

While the event was targeted towards British Columbians, a small number of people joined from Alberta and Ontario. There was good representation across geographic contexts. Half (52%) of participants were from large urban centres, a quarter (24%) from medium-sized cities, and a quarter (26%) from small and rural communities.

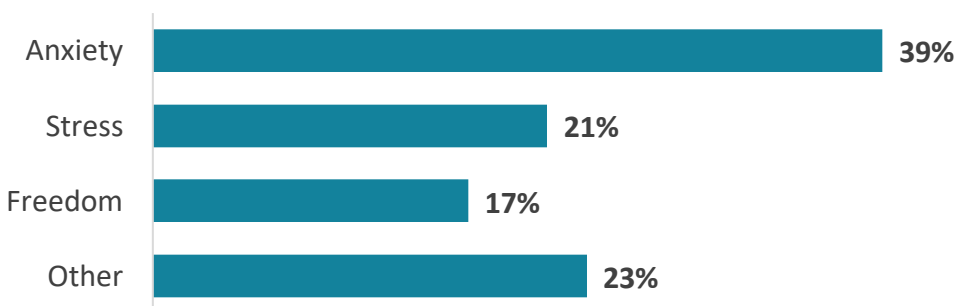
Early on, participants were polled on their familiarity with driving cessation. Most were either familiar or very familiar with the topic. Just under a fifth stated that they were not familiar.

Poll Results: How familiar are you with the topic of driving cessation?



A second poll was conducted to understand what word came to mind when participants thought about hanging up the keys. Most associated the phrase with anxiety or stress and about 1 in 5 associated it with freedom. In the chat, a few participants shared they were interpreting freedom in terms of a 'lack of freedom'. Other responses mentioned in the chat included loss, sadness, worry, dependence on others, isolation, disconnection, grief, vulnerability, and 'feeling less than'.

Poll Results: What word comes to mind when you think about hanging up the keys?



Summary of breakout group discussions

Participants joined two back-to-back discussion-focused sessions (each 40 minutes long) that addressed the five discussion questions. Ten breakout groups were created based on the size of participants' home communities. Five groups included people from predominantly urban centres, and five had people from small communities and rural areas. The summaries below highlight the main themes that emerged as well as the differences that arose in urban and rural discussion groups.

What does it mean to 'hang up the keys'?

The first discussion question asked participants about the meaning of the expression 'hanging up the keys', in terms of its various emotional, cultural, and physical levels of significance. Participants shared that it related to a loss of independence and the possibility of increased isolation and loneliness.

In rural contexts, hanging up the keys may mean having to move to an entirely new community; possibly leaving behind their friends and sense of community. A few participants noted that hanging up the keys was a marker of aging; a time when they had to come to terms with the fact that they were getting older.

Some participants referred to more positive meanings connected with a sense of relief, a kind of freedom, and a chance to explore new ways of getting around.

There was also recognition that the meaning of hanging up the keys varies depending on one's location, access to other transportation options, proximity to family and friends, and health.



What is the experience of 'hanging up the keys'? What is the ideal experience?

The second question was a two-part question. The first part asked about participants' experience with hanging up the keys, from their perspective as a senior, caregiver, family member, or from their professional experience. The second part asked about what the ideal experience would look like in terms of the supportive structures that would need to be in place, the type of alternative transportation they would like to see, and other ideas for making this transition better.

The comments raised in this discussion were grouped into four categories: the emotional experience, the process of driving cessation, experience with alternatives, and the ease of reaching destinations.

	Experience	Ideal experience
Emotional experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stressful from both the seniors' and caregivers' perspective Triggers strong emotions, such as anger, frustration, sadness, shame, embarrassment, fear, and anxiety Some noted a sense of relief 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People are comfortable using different modes and technology to access transportation services
Process of driving cessation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often a point of conflict between seniors, family members, and doctors Decision to hang up the keys commonly triggered by health issues, or in some cases, a collision Driving tests can be costly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning for driving cessation starts earlier Increased education and awareness about alternatives offered through a Central Hub
Experience with alternatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Few alternatives, especially in rural contexts Coordinating transportation becomes cumbersome and time consuming Language barriers can prevent use of public transit Some participants reported saving money when they gave up their driver's license, while others said alternatives were too expensive The personal connection provided by volunteer driver programs was appreciated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alternatives tailored to seniors, such as shuttle buses and reliable volunteer driver programs Burden placed on caregivers to provide transportation has been lifted Solutions consider culture and language Affordable options Needs beyond transportation are considered, such as help carrying groceries and escorts to medical appointments
Ease of reaching destinations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transportation to medical appointments, everyday needs, and parks is difficult 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transportation to medical appointments and everyday needs is provided Home care services and delivery services are easily accessible

How might your community adapt to meet these needs?

Participants provided examples of community adaptations as well as suggestions for how they would like to see their communities adapt (listed in the table below). In some smaller communities, taxi services are stepping up to fill the gap left by the departure of Greyhound. Other participants shared examples of community-based volunteer driver programs switching from providing all-purpose trips to transportation to medical appointments, given the importance assigned to this kind of trip.

Suggestions for community adaptations were grouped into three categories: expand transportation services, provide supportive built environments, and provide supportive social structures.

Examples of already-existing community adaptations	
Smaller communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northern Health Connections provides low-cost transportation to medical appointments for residents of Northern British Columbia • Wheels for Wellness provides transportation for out-of-town medical appointments for residents of Vancouver Island • Squamish Volunteer Driver Cancer Program provides transportation to cancer treatments in Vancouver for residents of Squamish
Larger communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delta Seniors Bus provides a free transportation service for seniors 65+ • The Maple Ridge Seniors Mapping Program is an online mapping tool that allows users to map a variety of local amenities and community resources in relation to their home address or destination, including transportation

Suggested community adaptations	
Expand transportation services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide transportation to medical appointments • Hire drivers in rural settings • Provide inter-regional transit options in rural settings • Expand existing services, such as HandyDART and community shuttles • Introduce new senior-specific transportation services
Provide supportive built environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate an age-friendly lens in planning • Build more benches and washrooms • Build complete communities based on the ‘15-minute city’ concept • Improve pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, and ensure mobility scooters are accommodated
Provide supportive social structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a Central Hub to direct seniors to appropriate transportation services and resources • Provide personalized support to help with the transition, such as a buddy system for learning how to use public transit • Implement an information and awareness campaign about alternatives

What are your priority actions for moving forward?

The discussion groups landed on three top actions for moving forward solutions for seniors' transportation:

- 1) Secure **more funding** for the community-based transportation sector, to purchase community vans and shuttles, hire drivers in smaller communities, and operate transportation services
- 2) Advocate for better **transportation services to medical appointments** across BC, and
- 3) Advocate for a **coordinated approach to seniors' transportation across the province**, recognizing that while needs and solutions vary from community to community, a coordinated 'system' needs to be put in place

Other priority actions identified were:

- Support seniors to bring their transportation challenges to elected officials
- Advocate for more senior-tailored transportation services, such as community shuttles, expansion of HandyDART services, ride-hailing services, and volunteer driver programs
- Advocate for age-friendly built environments that include washrooms, benches, easy to read signage, and infrastructure for electric mobility scooters
- Develop training programs for teaching seniors how to access delivery and transportation services online
- Develop training programs for people working in the senior-serving transport sector so best practices for supporting seniors' travel can be embedded in the services

Next steps

Learnings from this Consultation will inform the activities of the Provincial Working Group and the Seniors on the Move project. They have three major projects on the horizon.

First, a **transportation survey** is being developed for older British Columbians. Survey results will produce the first comprehensive understanding of seniors' transportation patterns and plans for driving cessation in BC

Second, a **toolkit for community dialogues** on driving cessation and life after driving is being created. Here, the point is to support conversations amongst older adults about 'hanging up the keys' and to encourage local advocacy – to ease the current worry and concern and involve seniors in developing solutions.

Third, a **short video** is being developed as part of the ROVING. project - short for "Raising Our Voices In support of Non-ageist ways of Getting around". The video will document seniors' mobility and transportation challenges.

For more information about the Consultation, the Provincial Working Group on Seniors' Transportation, or contents of this report, please contact Dr. Beverley Pitman at beverleyp@uwbc.ca

References

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