

Addressing Transportation Inequities for Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+



by Dr. Tiffany Hind Bull-Prete

THE LACK OF SAFE AND ACCESSIBLE intercommunity mobility options for Indigenous Peoples in rural and remote First Nation communities across Canada has urgent social, economic, and cultural implications. Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people face unique risks of sexual and gender-based violence, as highlighted in the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls' Final Report, **Reclaiming Power and Place (RPP)**. Addressing this issue is crucial for social justice and equity for all Indigenous Peoples within rural and remote First Nation communities.

Linking Contemporary Transportation Inequities to Settler Colonialism

Safe and sustainable transportation is crucial for enhancing community well-being and facilitating access to social services, economic opportunities, education, and social-cultural ties. However, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis (FNIM) communities often face transportation barriers due to historical and ongoing colonial policies. Reserves themselves serve as an example of colonial geography in that they are deliberately located in remote and inaccessible areas. Policies such as the Indian Act and the pass system limit access to transportation options, perpetuate intergenerational poverty, pose safety risks, and hinder infrastructure investment on FN reserves.

Historical examples, such as the pass system, the role of Indian Agents, and the reserve system, demonstrate how colonial policies and practices have long been used to control and limit Indigenous Peoples' mobility.

The ongoing consequences of colonialism continue to profoundly affect FNIM Peoples, yet the Canadian body politic often possesses a limited understanding of its systemic nature. Society often views colonization as historic acts rather than a systemic, ongoing attempt to dispossess Indigenous Peoples from land, culture, and identity through physical and assimilationist means.

Contemporary transportation inequities are part of a series of ongoing settler colonial tactics aimed at constraining Indigenous Peoples' movement. A clear example of this is the gradual reduction of bus and train services to northern and remote FN communities, which largely affects Indigenous Peoples. The impact of this issue is even more apparent when considering the intersection of race and gender, as seen in the Highway of Tears/Highway 16, where Indigenous women and girls are disproportionately targeted and victimized.

The lack of reliable and affordable transportation options has significant implications for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ peoples. Limited mobility options increase their vulnerability to exploitation and violence, hinder access to essential services, and perpetuate economic, educational, and social disparities. The termination of Greyhound bus services has further isolated Indigenous communities, exacerbating the challenges related to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) and impeding efforts to address these issues.

Reclaiming Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ Peoples' Place on the Road

The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls highlights the significant violence and vulnerabilities faced by Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ peoples, offering 231 recommendations to address ongoing colonial violence.

Call for Justice 4.8 specifically calls for immediate action to improve limited mobility in rural and remote areas. Addressing this call requires holistic action and acknowledging that the lack of transportation is rooted in colonization.

While these recommendations focus on First Nation communities, they are intended to benefit other rural and remote communities as well.

Recommendation #1: Systemic Issues

Current health policies often fail to address the significant barriers First Nations face when accessing essential services from reserves, leading to negative impacts on First Nations' health and well-being nationwide. These essential services include health care, affordable food, social support, and economic opportunities. To address these issues, we recommend that the Government of Canada align with the UN's definition of sustainable transport by recognizing mobility as a social determinant of health. This recognition should be accompanied by significant investments in safe and affordable intercommunity mobility for First Nations, with established measurable outcomes and annual reviews to ensure the increase of such transportation options. Furthermore, we recommend partnering with the Assembly of First Nations and First Nation Governments to co-create safe and affordable intercommunity transportation options for their communities.

Recommendation #2: Inadequate Infrastructure

To address the mobility gap and chronic underfunding in First Nation communities, we propose targeted federal funding initiatives to enhance public transportation infrastructure. Recommendations include establishing a grant funding call tailored for First Nations to create safe, affordable, and sustainable public transportation within and between communities. Funding would sustain public transit and support municipal transportation system expansion

into First Nations. Measures include using a gender-based analysis plus approach to ensure the safety and needs of Indigenous women and girls, MMIWG, and the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community are met.

Recommendation #3: Data, Research, and Needs Assessments

Research involving community advocates, Indigenous scholars, Elders, knowledge keepers, and practitioners is essential for understanding rural and remote transportation challenges. Recommendations include enhancing transportation data in First Nation communities through gender-based analysis plus and First Nation-led assessments. The Tri-Council Agencies should create a grant funding call for sustainable transportation needs of MMIWG and 2SLGBTQQIA+. A First Nations Community Driven Think Tank should be formed for tailored solutions, and culturally appropriate studies developed for Indigenous women and girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ needs. Indigenous education and training programs should be established, and research conducted on the long-term economic effects of new First Nation public transportation projects.

Recommendation #4: Safe, Affordable, and Readily Available Transportation for Indigenous women and girls and the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community

The Native Women's Association of Canada has launched a nationwide campaign funded by Canadian and provincial governments to raise awareness about the root causes of violence against Indigenous women and girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ peoples. The campaign highlights the intergenerational impacts of colonization and emphasizes the intersections of racism, sexism, transphobia, homophobia, and resource extraction.

The Assembly of First Nations collaborates with Transport Canada for an annual symposium on sustainable transportation, aiming to implement best practices that prioritize the safety and well-being of Indigenous women and girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ peoples. This includes ensuring all public transportation projects are inclusive and safe, with easy access for those with mobility challenges, parents with young children, Indigenous women and girls, and the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community.

Conclusion

It is imperative that transportation policies and initiatives moving forward are rooted in self-determination and community-led approaches, ensuring that the voices and needs of First Nation communities are at the forefront of decision-making processes.

Addressing transportation inequities for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ peoples is essential for fostering community resilience and promoting social justice.

By prioritizing sustainable transportation solutions and recognizing the unique needs of First Nation, Inuit, and Métis communities, policymakers can contribute to a more equitable and inclusive society for all Canadians. Through these efforts, we can work towards a future where transportation is a means of empowerment and connectivity for all.

This policy brief is based on a comprehensive policy report collaboratively authored with my colleagues Alexandra Nychuk, André Moreau, Dale Arcand-Morin, and Deanna Starr, during our tenure as fellows of Action Canada.

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