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An abstract graphic consisting of several thick, dark blue lines that overlap and curve to form a stylized, rounded letter 'R'. The lines are layered, with some appearing in front of others, creating a sense of depth and movement. The background is white.

PUBLIC TRANSIT AND EQUITY-DESERVING GROUPS

UNDERSTANDING LIVED EXPERIENCES

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Public Transit and Equity-Deserving Groups: Understanding Lived Experiences

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DATABASE OF WORKS CONSULTED

All works consulted are available in a public database. The database includes more detail about the geographic location, research method, and focus area of each work consulted.

Database is available [here](#).



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Investments in public transit have the potential to increase accessibility, support and connect communities, and improve employment, health, and social outcomes. However, a lack of attention to the equity impacts of transportation policies and investments results in the continued marginalization of equity-deserving groups, and exacerbates structural barriers to full participation in society. There has been significant work on transportation equity over the past 40 years, often prioritizing quantitative and modelling approaches. In contrast, this study draws on research on *lived experiences*, which incorporates analysis of how aspects of a person's social and economic position structures experiences of discrimination or privilege.

Objectives

The objective of this project was to examine existing academic and community-based research on the transportation barriers that limit full participation in society for equity-deserving groups in Canada and understand strategies to reduce these barriers. Focusing on lived experiences, this project was guided by the following research questions:

- (1) How does access to public transit impact equity-deserving groups in Canada? How do experiences vary between equity-deserving groups?
- (2) What are the leading practices, policies and strategies for supporting the needs of equity-deserving groups?
- (3) How can public transit investments better support equity-deserving groups?

Results

The lived experiences of equity-deserving groups are well documented, in both the academic literature, and in work by community-based organizations, non-profits and advocacy groups. Transportation was not the primary focus of much of the research surveyed but identified as a barrier in diverse fields. Overwhelmingly, the evidence points to significant disadvantages for people dependent on public transit or without access to a private vehicle.

We identified four cross-cutting themes that were observed across equity-deserving groups: poor or absent transit service; unaffordability of transit fares; policing and enforcement; and safety. The impact of these issues – as well as others specific to different groups – is wide-ranging and significant. The research demonstrated that poor and unaffordable transit impacts equity-deserving groups in many ways, such as restricting access to healthcare, education and employment; limiting support for people experiencing domestic violence; and, reducing the ability of people to access social services, visit with family and friends, and participate in cultural activities.

Fundamentally, the ability to access public transit with dignity remains out of reach for many. Many members of equity-deserving groups still cannot easily access transit services in ways that fully meets

their needs without fear of harassment or harm. In this way, members of these groups are excluded from the social, economic, and health benefits that are available to those not dependent on public transit. We found a gap in that much of the literature is characterized by its focus on documenting the challenges faced by equity-deserving groups, with less focus on identifying the “desires” of communities or the strength-based approaches that communities may be engaging in to solve problems. Notably, we found little research on the evaluation of *implemented policy* programs aimed at reducing disparities and barriers for equity-deserving groups.

Key Messages

Systemic discrimination against equity-deserving groups – evidenced by the experiences of those that are reliant on public transit – points to an urgent need to address these issues. There are several implications for policy-makers:

1. Address the misalignment between funding programs and community needs
2. Require an assessment of equity impacts in infrastructure funding
3. Explore programs to reduce or eliminate transit fares
4. Create a dedicated funding stream to redress systemic inequities
5. Provide guidance for transit service providers on integrating equity-based demographic data
6. Identify areas that require co-ordination with other agencies

Methodology

This research used a qualitative research synthesis approach to systematically analyze the lived experiences of equity-deserving groups in using public transit. We drew on four types of sources: academic, peer-reviewed literature; research from community-based organizations; policy or technical reports; and media reports. The inclusion criteria resulted in sources that focused on the lived experiences of equity-deserving groups; was completed between 2010 – present; and prioritized research from Canada.

Of 293 sources initially identified, 175 (60%) met the inclusion criteria and were coded and analyzed. About 80% of the literature focused on Canadian communities, and was fairly evenly distributed between equity-deserving groups. Where there were significant gaps in the Canadian literature, we drew on international sources. All articles were coded using qualitative research software, based upon pre-existing themes derived from the literature on transportation equity. Analysis focused on (1) barriers in accessing transit, and (2) the impacts of poor transit access.

PUBLIC TRANSIT AND EQUITY-DESERVING GROUPS

FULL REPORT

Background

Investments in public transit have the potential to increase accessibility, support and connect communities, and improve employment, health and social outcomes (e.g. Markovich and Lucas 2011). However, a lack of attention to the equity impacts of transportation policies and investments results in the continued marginalization of equity-deserving groups, and exacerbates structural barriers to full participation in society. Given the importance of addressing social equity objectives, this knowledge synthesis project examined the lived experiences of equity-deserving groups in Canada to better understand how transportation policies, funding and implementation can be more equitable.

There has been significant work on transportation equity over the past 40 years, often prioritizing quantitative and modelling approaches. While these types of assessments are important, they are often projections of potential barriers (such as the number of jobs accessible within a certain time frame), rather than actual experiences (Jones and Lucas 2012). In contrast, scholars have noted that it is critical to integrate different types of knowledge and privilege expertise from different sectors and communities to move towards more equitable outcomes (Lowe 2020; Schwanen 2018). This study is framed through the lens of lived experiences, which incorporates an analysis of how aspects of a person's social and economic position structures experiences of discrimination or privilege. Critically, an approach that emphasizes lived experience also highlights how structural racism and discrimination influence opportunities and barriers to public transit, and shapes the extent to which members of different communities can access public transit with dignity.

Objectives

The objective of this project was to examine existing academic and community-based research on the transportation barriers that limit full participation in society for equity-deserving groups in Canada and understand strategies to reduce these barriers. Equity-deserving groups are communities that face structural challenges towards equal access, opportunities and resources. Our analysis has focused on racialized people, Indigenous peoples, LGBTQ2S+ (lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer, two-spirit) people, people with disabilities, people living in poverty or experiencing homelessness, newcomers and immigrants, women and people with diverse gender identities, children and youth, and seniors and Elders, though this is not exhaustive. Focusing on lived experiences, this project was guided by the following research questions:

- (1) How does access to public transit impact equity-deserving groups in Canada? How do experiences vary between equity-deserving groups?
- (2) What are the leading practices, policies and strategies for supporting the needs of equity-deserving groups?
- (3) How can public transit investments better support equity-deserving groups?

Fundamentally, this research is oriented towards examining how public transit policies and programs can work towards achieving a more just society.

Methods

This research used a qualitative research synthesis approach (Drisko 2020) to systematically analyze the lived experiences of equity-seeking groups in using public transit. We drew on four types of sources: academic, peer-reviewed literature; research from community-based organizations; policy or technical reports; and media reports. The inclusion criteria resulted in sources:

- Focused on experiences of an equity-seeking group
- Based on lived experiences
- Completed between 2010 – present
- Prioritized research from Canada

Search Strategy

Peer-reviewed literature was identified through academic databases (e.g. Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, Transport Research International Documentation), using relevant keywords (e.g. “transportation equity”; “transportation justice”; “transportation barrier”; “public transit safety”; “equity measures”) in combination with equity-seeking group descriptors (e.g. race, gender identity, disability). To identify community-based research and grey literature, we undertook a targeted search of organizations serving equity-seeking groups (e.g. Native Women’s Association of Canada, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, provincial Human Rights Commissions). For community-based research, we aimed to ensure geographic representation and did additional searches in areas that were under-represented. Of 293 sources initially identified, 175 (60%) met the inclusion criteria and were coded and analyzed. About 80% of the literature focused on Canadian communities, and was fairly evenly distributed between equity-deserving groups (see Appendix A). Where there were significant gaps in the Canadian literature, we drew on international sources.

Coding and Analysis

All articles were coded using qualitative research software (Dedoose). Prior to coding, we generated a codebook based upon pre-existing themes derived from the literature on transportation equity (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005), broadly in the categories of (1) barriers in accessing transit, and (2) the impacts of poor transit access (see Appendix B). In addition to these two areas, we examined the literature for policy recommendations and best practices. Two separate calibration tests were done with all coders to ensure consistency in coding, and the addition of new codes were reviewed by all team members. Given the high number of sources, each was coded by one coder, but were regularly reviewed in progress by the PIs. Following the coding, we analyzed and synthesized the resulting codes for each equity-seeking group, as well as policy recommendations. In addition to the group-based analysis, we also identified cross-cutting themes that were present across multiple groups. As part of the synthesis process, we conducted roundtables with community-based stakeholders to validate the findings (detailed in Knowledge Mobilization section below).

Limitations

There are several limitations to the research approach used. Importantly, analysis by identity-specific groups limits the potential for intersectional understandings of experiences. This is addressed in some of the literature and we sought to address this by identifying cross-cutting themes. It should be noted that the categories are not mutually exclusive, so articles may refer to multiple equity-seeking groups, or people that identify with multiple groups (for example, women living in rural areas or Indigenous people with disabilities). Secondly, we were limited to published research by community-based organizations, which prioritizes organizations with the capacity to produce and publish research studies and reports. The stakeholder roundtables were used to include other organizations that work with equity-deserving groups.

Knowledge Mobilization Activities

We conducted roundtables with community-based stakeholders to ensure that our findings reflected the experiences of organizations that serve equity-deserving groups. We sent invitations to 72 community-based organizations that serve or work with equity-deserving groups across Canada and were able to conduct roundtable sessions with 17 participants. The participant organizations were diverse in their focus (such as providing services for youth experiencing homelessness, refugee settlement, advocacy for people with disabilities, and poverty reduction coalitions) and represented 6 different provinces. At these sessions, we presented our preliminary findings, and asked for feedback on (1) if the findings reflect the experiences of communities they work with, (2) critical areas missing or areas for future research, and (3) suggestions on improving policies, programs or funding to address the needs of equity-seeking groups. To encourage knowledge dissemination to the broader academic and professional community, we created a publicly-accessible and searchable database of all the sources included in this synthesis project (available [here](#)). Further research products from this work, including policy briefs and peer-reviewed articles will be made available at the author's websites.

Results

Access to transit confers important benefits, including access to healthcare, education, and employment, support for people experiencing domestic violence, the ability to participate in cultural activities, and settlement services for newcomers and refugees. Although most of the literature we reviewed did not focus exclusively on barriers to transit, several important barriers emerged in our analysis. We identified four areas that were common across the literature—including service issues, affordability, safety, and policy—and detailed in the cross-cutting themes below. These themes address the barriers that many equity-deserving groups face when it comes to accessing transit and while using transit. We expand on the specific ways these barriers affect different equity-deserving groups in our group-specific analysis.

Cross-Cutting Themes

Cross-Cutting Theme 1: Poor Transit Service

Problems with transit service were noted across all equity-deserving groups, with transit services being unavailable (35% of all articles), long travel times to take transit (25%), and unreliable service (17%). Unavailable service was particularly concerning for people living in rural areas, Indigenous people, and immigrants and newcomers. Lack of affordable housing was seen as a related aspect of long trip times in some research, as noted: “since [low-income immigrants] were largely unable to work where they lived or live where they worked, all had or were commuting long distances” (Premji 2017, 84).

Service Unavailable

Unavailability of transit service was identified across equity-seeking groups in urban (e.g. Amar and Teelucksingh 2015; Chandran 2017; Hanley et al. 2018), rural (e.g. Birrell 2020; Rural Development Institute 2016), on reserve (Bhawra et al. 2015) and remote (e.g. McIvor and Day 2011) contexts. Lack of transit not only impacts access to critical services like health care (Woodgate et al. 2017), but also safety and freedom from violence, particularly for women and LGBTQ2S+ people (Bonnycastle et al. 2019; McIvor and Day 2011; Canadian Press 2017; Umereweneza et al. 2020).

Lack of transit is a significant barrier both generally for equity-seeking groups (e.g. Amar and Teelucksingh 2015; Marzoughi 2011) as well as to specific destinations like employment (Hanley et al. 2018; Premji 2017), health care (Ballantyne et al. 2019; Haworth-Brockman, Bent, and Havelock 2009; Nicholas et al. 2017; Woodgate et al. 2017), food (Bhawra et al. 2015; Vahabi and Damba 2013), and cultural services (Croxall, Gifford, and Jutai 2020). In some locations, the unavailability of transit is exacerbated by limited housing

“Without a car, her daily journey takes two hours of commuting using separate routes to access childcare, then work, and another two hours on the way back. (She) wants to work. There is no other way to explain why she commutes four hours on little more than minimum wage.”

**(New Brunswick Rural and Urban Transportation
Advisory Committee 2017, 4)**

options and low salaries, resulted in participants turning down employment opportunities and having more limited job options (Amar and Teelucksingh 2015; Hanley et al. 2018). Research notes lack of transit particularly in suburban communities impacting the mobility of teenagers (Marzoughi 2011), immigrants and elderly immigrants, leading to social isolation (Syed et al. 2017). For those living in rural communities, lack of transit impacts access to employment and services for refugees (Rural Development Institute 2016) and seniors (Hansen et al. 2020; Menec et al. 2015; Nova Scotia Department of Seniors 2017), and to cultural services for Indigenous elders (Croxall, Gifford, and Jutai 2020).

Lack of public transit is a significant factor in the safety of Indigenous women and girls (Bonnycastle et al. 2019; McIvor and Day 2011; Morton 2016). As noted in the wake of the shutdown of the Saskatchewan Transportation Company, the lack of transportation options in many communities contributes to hitchhiking: “If you’re poor, you don’t have access to a vehicle, a lot of our people don’t, the only option is to hitchhike and that’s already happening. You’ll see people hitchhiking on the road now where they probably would have been taking (the bus)” (Canadian Press 2017).

Long Times to Take Transit

The time required to take transit (including both trip length and transfer times) was a major concern across all equity-seeking groups. Notably, lengthy trip times were considered a major barrier for teenagers (Li and Que 2016; Marzoughi 2011), parents with children (Maguire and Winton 2014; McLaren 2015; New Brunswick Rural and Urban Transportation Advisory Committee 2017), immigrants (Amar and Teelucksingh 2015; Hanley et al. 2018; Kadowaki et al. n.d.), seniors (Kadowaki et al. n.d.; Mah and Mitra 2017) and racialized people (Amar and Teelucksingh 2015; Government of British Columbia 2018; Hanley et al. 2018). In several studies, the majority of participants had daily commutes of 3 – 6 hours a day (Hertel, Keil, and Collens 2016; Premji 2017; Rahder and McLean 2013), with additional time spent travelling between job locations for itinerant positions such as house cleaners (Premji 2017, 84).

The impacts of long trip times has an impact on access to employment (Hanley et al. 2018; Rahder and McLean 2013), healthcare (Ballantyne et al. 2019; Turin et al. 2020), education (Li, Que, and Power 2017), shopping and groceries (McLaren 2015; Vahabi and Damba 2013), and other services, leisure activities and visiting friends and family (Hertel, Keil, and Collens 2016; Kadowaki et al. n.d.; Maguire and Winton 2014). For example, the time required for transit trips results in unmet healthcare needs (City of Vancouver 2019), such as in this description by a recent immigrant woman: “Would you go by bus traveling all around the city or standing long at the bus stop while sick?” (Turin et al. 2020, 7). Similarly for employment, as in this description of travel for a single mother: **“Without a car, her daily journey takes two hours of commuting using separate routes to access childcare, then work, and another two hours on the way back. [She] wants to work. There is no other way to explain why she commutes four hours on little more than minimum wage”** (New Brunswick Rural and Urban Transportation Advisory Committee 2017, 4). The impact of long commute times is worsened for those with precarious work situations and variable hours, where employees may have 2 – 3 hour commutes for few hours of work (Premji 2017). Transportation is also a barrier to attending interviews (Harris 2020; Premji 2017) and job training programs (Rahder and McLean 2013), even when transportation is provided by employers because of the long times to get to the pick-up points by transit (Hanley et al. 2018).

Wait times for paratransit trips were a significant challenge for people experiencing mobility limitations (Ballantyne et al. 2019; Darrah, Magill-Evans, and Galambos 2010; Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants 2012). For example, in research addressing barriers to attending health care appointments for children with complex health needs, one mother states: **“When I am supposed to come back home, if I’m supposed to leave at 3 o’clock and they [paratransit] will tell you, ‘No, we don’t have a ride available until 5:00, 5:30 or 6 o’clock’. So during that time, I have to wait 3 or 4 hours there [hospital] to come back home”** (Ballantyne et al. 2019, 5). The inability to schedule paratransit trips near the start and end of activities results

in very long trips, in addition to the length of the time in vehicle.

The stark difference in travel time between transit and other travel modes, mainly driving, is noted in much of the research (Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants 2012; Hertel, Keil, and Collens 2016; Li and Que 2016; McLaren 2015; Tomlinson 2017). As one article points out: **“A bus trip across town can easily take more than an hour and require several transfers, in a place where virtually nothing is more than a 15-minute drive away”** (Andrew-Gee 2019). In one instance a participant noted that walking is faster than transit because of winding routes, which “makes no sense... I think this is a big disadvantage” (Li and Que 2016, 52).

Service is Unreliable

A major concern is the unreliability of transit, including transit not arriving at scheduled times, missed connections, overcrowded services and infrequent service¹ (City of Vancouver 2019; Hertel, Keil, and Collens 2016; Lambert 2018; Li and Que 2016; McLaren 2015; Norgaard 2020; Smirl 2018; Syed et al. 2017). The unreliability of transit services impacts access to employment, education, childcare and healthcare (Ballantyne et al. 2019; Hanley et al. 2018; Li, Que, and Power 2017; McLaren 2015; Norgaard 2020). In some areas, unreliable service was tied to overcrowding, as passengers have to wait for less crowded buses (City of Vancouver 2019), or busses with room for a wheelchair or stroller (Chandran 2017). Unreliability was noted as a particular issue for women taking their children to daycare before work (Chandran 2017) or other care-related trips (Ollier 2018), teenagers (Marzoughi 2011) and those working multiple jobs (Premji 2017). Unreliability was also a significant barrier for those using paratransit services (Brooks-Cleator, Giles, and Flaherty 2019), such as last minute cancellations or unexpected unavailability of rides (Darrah, Magill-Evans, and Galambos 2010). Research notes that services are also poorly timed for daily or nightly routines (McLaren 2015) or too infrequent to be feasible (Marzoughi 2011).

As one recent immigrant explained, unreliable service combined with very long trips make it difficult to time trips and get to work on time: **“with all the waiting time, sometimes the streetcars are off the schedule, and after that I have to go all the way to Kennedy Station, and then take a bus for 50 stops and the bus comes three times every hour. So, it’s very hard for me to measure all this time... and whether the bus is there, so that’s why I’m always late for work. Probably I’m going to quit this job, because of that...”** (Norgaard 2020). Similarly, for a recent migrant: “It takes one hour and a half to arrive to my work area. I have to take three buses, and one time the metro, and the bus arrives a little late, and then it is far, and sometimes I arrive late...” (Hanley et al. 2018, 516). There were similar concerns in access to education, as in this report on recent immigrant youth: “Going to school was a struggle for more reasons. He had few clothes to keep warm and there was no direct bus route to school. He usually woke up at 6:00 in the morning in order to catch the bus at 7:00 so he could be at school before 8:50. The worst times were when the bus passed earlier than scheduled and he had to wait an extra hour for the next one or when he missed the transfer bus” (Li and Que 2016, 51).

These service issues – unreliability, long time for transfers, frequent missed connections – are accompanied by poor amenities at stops and stations, such as lack of bus shelters or heated shelters (Li and Que 2016; Premji 2017). An issue raised by multiple roundtable participants was the lack of accessible, gender-neutral washrooms in transit facilities. For many people, including the elderly or those with health issues, the lack of washrooms makes using transit very challenging if not impossible.

¹ *Infrequent service is not necessarily associated with unreliability, however the consequences of unreliability – such as missed connections – are more significant with infrequent service.*

“If we don’t have any bus fare, we just don’t go at all to the food bank.”

(McLaren 2015, 27)

Cross-Cutting Theme 2: Unaffordability of Transit Fares

The most common theme identified across the research was the unaffordability of transit fares, which was noted in 34% of all the articles. While some aspect of unaffordability was identified as an issue for every equity-seeking group studied here, it was identified in 60% of all research focusing on newcomers/immigrants, and people living in poverty or experiencing homelessness. Although some research identified specific issues related to affordability, such as the high cost of monthly passes or single fares, or not knowing about reduced fare programs, the most common codes were related to general unaffordability. Issues with accessing digital fare programs was not cited highly in the literature we studied but was a major theme in the stakeholder roundtables.

While transit agencies may offer reduced fare monthly passes, these require significant upfront investment, which is often not possible for people living in poverty (Chandran 2017; Eaton and Enoch 2020; Smirl 2018; Tomlinson 2017). Reduced fare passes may also be inaccessible due to the documentation required for some reduced price passes (Lambert 2018), difficulty getting to locations for purchasing passes (Harris 2020), lack of knowledge about different pass options (Ross and Ho 2016), or fear of losing expensive passes (Chandran 2017). Social service agencies may provide free fares or passes, but it may be difficult to access those locations, require multiple trips to get free tickets, or be intended for only specific trips such as searching for employment (Scott, Bryant, and Aquanno 2020). Participants in the stakeholder roundtables noted that service agencies may be limited by their funders in the number or types of transit fares they are able to provide to clients.

To deal with the high-cost of transit, people living in poverty or on fixed-incomes often walk long distances to avoid paying fares, or do not make trips that they otherwise would have if they could afford the cost (City of Vancouver 2019; Dorman 2016). In areas with multi-zone fares, people on fixed-incomes report forgoing two-zone passes and walking long distances to zone boundaries to afford transit fares (Ross and Ho 2016). The restrictive nature of transfers, either as time limited or only on certain routes, places unnecessary burdens on people with fixed incomes (Scott, Bryant, and Aquanno 2020), including women with caregiving responsibilities who may need to make multiple stops to pick up children, shop for groceries, and so on (Rahder and McLean 2013), which was also noted in stakeholder roundtables.

Rural residents described similar affordability concerns to urban residents, including the cost of passes (BC 2018; Hanley et al 2018), and trying to balance between the cost of transportation and other rising costs including housing and food (Nicholas et al 2017; Lambert 2018). Additionally, transportation costs are often not included in social assistance programs (PEI 2018).

Cross-Cutting Theme 3: Safety

Issues of safety were identified in research addressing a number of equity-seeking groups. While some aspect of safety was identified as an issue for every equity-seeking group studied here, it was identified in 50% of all research focusing on LGBTQ2S+ people, and in 25 – 35% of articles focusing on Indigenous people, people with disabilities, and women and gender diverse people. The areas of safety can be classified into three main areas: safety while on transit, safety while getting to transit, and safety impacted by a lack of transit, as well as unspecified concerns about safety and violence.

Safety on Transit

Research participants described safety issues on transit, including harassment from other passengers or transit staff, feelings of being threatened, and witnessing violence or being subjected to it. Safety issues on transit were identified by 50% of all articles addressing LGBTQ2S+ people, and over 30% of articles focusing on people with disabilities, women or other gender identities. As noted by Schwan et al. (2020, 234) the harassment and assault that women, girls, and gender diverse peoples are more likely to encounter while using public transit

“They began to make a bunch of antagonizing, racist comments about people being let in, people who don’t have manners or priorities of people in Canada. They shouted threats at me and the stroller and the baby, ‘wait until we get you guys off the bus’”

(Munro 2018)

result in “valid fear that can limit women’s freedom of movement”. Female transit users frequently report verbal, non-verbal and physical sexual harassment (Burns-Pieper 2019; Lenton et al. 1999; Norgaard 2020), feeling unsafe using transit at night (Whitzman and Perkovic 2010) and at off-peak hours (Yusuf and Shingoose 2013). Transit facilities were identified as contributing to lack of safety, such as poor lighting (Marzoughi 2011) and overcrowding (Norgaard 2020). Racialized passengers describe how systemic racism impacts safety on transit, including racist attacks and graffiti (CBC News, November 19, and 2015 2015; Khan 2021; Munro 2018). As one passenger describes: **“They began to make a bunch of antagonizing, racist comments about people being let in, people who don’t have manners or priorities of people in Canada. They shouted threats at me and the stroller and the baby, ‘wait until we get you guys off the bus’”** (Munro 2018). This is exacerbated by a lack of intervention from passengers or operators when witnessing racist incidents (Bhuyan and Schmidt 2019) or targeting transgender or gender non-conforming people (Benner 2016).

Women frequently use avoidance behaviours, such as travelling only during the daytime, avoiding specific stations or buses, dressing a certain way (Norgaard 2020), travelling to further stops that feel safer (Chandran 2017) or avoiding transit altogether (Ross and Ho 2016). Programs that may aid in safety, such as allowing people to get off the bus between stops, are often not well-known (Yusuf and Shingoose 2013). Due to the significant safety issues on transit, some service organizations attempt to fill the gaps: **“Often times the queer/trans communities can be discriminated against in public spaces, on public transportation, that sort of thing. So in order to safely get someone from point A to point B, we’ll offer them a ride.”** (Eaton and Enoch 2020, 7). This was also raised by stakeholder participants, with youth caseworkers noting that they often drive youth to appointments because of their fear of harassment or violence on transit.

Safety Getting to Transit

Safety concerns also include walking to transit stations or stops (Norgaard 2020; Yusuf and Shingoose 2013). Immigrant women discuss being fearful walking alone to transit stops at night, especially in more isolated areas, and in winter when it is darker earlier (Premji 2017). Bus and transit stops are identified as a frequent place for harassment (Burns-Pieper 2019) and violence (Chandran 2017). Indigenous youth note discomfort and anxiety walking down streets and waiting at bus stops (Skinner and Masuda 2013). This was also a concern for youth with intellectual disabilities, as one participant noted that “he would not walk or use transit alone after dark ‘because it’s not safe waiting for the bus at night around here. Someone could open the door and do something bad’” (Wilton and Schormans 2019, 445). Safety concerns are also related to poor sidewalk quality (fall hazards) and lack of snow clearance (Eaton and Enoch 2020; Harris 2020).

Safety Impacted by a Lack of Transit

A key theme, particularly for children and youth, and Indigenous people was that their safety was impacted by a lack of public transit. This was also the primary safety issue identified by people living in rural communities. For this theme, we identified three sub-areas: staying in an unsafe place because transit is not available, using unsafe travel because no transit is available (such as hitchhiking), as well as lack of transit options specifically related to domestic violence.

Lack of transit service has a disproportionate impact on safety for women, particularly for Indigenous women, and women living in rural or remote communities (Murray, Ferguson, and Letemendia 2010). Indigenous women report being forced to use taxis because of a lack of transit options, where they were sexually harassed by drivers (Smirl 2018). Without transit service, women are forced to hitchhike to attend work, school, and health appointments or to visit their children (Schwan et al. 2020), exposing them to sexual assault, harassment, and violence (Birrell 2020).

Women and service providers describe the difficulties for those facing domestic violence to get to shelters or other support services (Birrell 2020). Both the availability and cost of transportation is a major barrier for those

escaping domestic violence in Northern and isolated communities, with the inability to access crisis centres (Bonnycastle et al. 2019) resulting in women being less able to leave abusive relationships (Schwan et al. 2020). The closure of regional bus services, such as the Saskatchewan Transportation Company, has compounded these issues for women in rural communities: “[Shelter] staff told us that they would have women call and that they were going to try and make it to the city, and they’d just not show up... So then the staff are wondering if the woman decided not to leave or if she set out and something bad happened” (Birrell 2020, 4).

Transit Agency Responses to Safety Concerns

While safety is identified as a major concern, transit agencies do not adequately collect or track the most common types of sexual harassment complaints (inappropriate comments, leering, propositioning) despite the severity of these incidents and the impact on transit users (Burns-Pieper 2019) or respond appropriately to racist incidents (Kovac 2021). For example, a woman who was verbally threatened with rape and chased by two men reported the incident, which was not included in either transit agency or police statistics. As she stated: “What would have had to happen for this to be taken seriously? Would I have had to have been beaten up or raped or taken?” (Burns-Pieper 2019). Another transit user felt unsafe at a station and wondered, “Why do security staff focus on checking tickets instead of making people feel safe?” (Ross and Ho 2016).

Cross-Cutting Theme 4: Policing and Enforcement

The most frequent codes related to the impact of enforcement on transportation were over-ticketing/over-policing (9% of all articles), followed by fear of police or enforcement officers (5% of all articles). While the overall number of articles that address these issues is relatively small, the impacts are disproportionate for racialized people, those experiencing homelessness or poverty, and youth. Issues with policing, enforcement or ticketing was identified in 20% of all research focusing on racialized people, and in 12 - 17% of the articles focusing on people living in poverty or experiencing homelessness, Indigenous people, and children/youth. The majority of research we found that related to enforcement were news or media reports, rather than academic sources. These findings were reinforced by several participants in the stakeholder roundtables, who noted that ticketing and incarceration (related to inability to pay transit-related fines) are significant issues with the communities they work with.

Over-Ticketing, Over-Policing and Fear of Getting Ticketed

There are numerous accounts of repeated harassment and violent confrontations by transit officers (Carter and Johnson 2021; Howells 2019; Wyton 2019). Racial bias, particularly for Black and Indigenous riders, figures heavily in accounts of problematic transit enforcement (Aguilar 2020; Andrew-Gee 2019; Howells 2019; Munro 2018; Spurr 2021; Wyton 2019). As one passenger describes, when he and his girlfriend, who is white, forgot their transit passes and were stopped by a peace officer, only he was issued a ticket, while his girlfriend got a warning: “It’s something that a lot of people who come from the same background, we can laugh it off, but I think it represents something that’s a bit problematic about how transit enforcement occurs in the city” (Wyton 2019). Encounters with transit enforcement can be violent, with long-lasting impacts (Aguilar 2020; Howells 2019). Harassment may be compounded when using certain fare types. Indigenous youth report the need to regularly prove that they are eligible for a discount pass because they don’t have a visible disability (St. Denis 2019). In response to racial bias in transit enforcement, one social service provider notes: “It’s very, very commonly known within Indigenous people... Many of us have stories of negative experiences with (transit) enforcement” (Wyton 2019).

Impacts of Transit Enforcement

As the Ontario Human Rights Commission notes: “It is the Commission’s position that people should not have to go to unusual extremes to prove their legitimate right to use public services such as public transit.” (Ontario Human Rights Commission n.d.). Yet, the repeated targeting of racialized and Indigenous people

“When they can’t pay the ticket, then we’ve got kids going into court systems dealing with tickets, so then it creates another problem in another system... It’s a snowballing effect of the systems.”

(Wyton 2019)

leads to changes in behaviour and extra-vigilance in an attempt to avoid harassment from transit enforcement in the future (Howells 2019; Spurr 2021). As noted in a report on racial profiling, after being refused entry to the subway because of a smudged date on his pass, an Aboriginal businessman describes: “Now, as a result of that I stapled the receipt - or I carry it with me in my wallet until the end of the day. If I am buying a metro pass, I carry the receipt with me all month, just so that I can pull it out, but I shouldn’t have to do that. And just the thought of it, just remembering it has made me very angry again, and you know, we are not supposed to carry our anger like that” (Ontario Human Rights Commission n.d.). Indigenous youth co-researchers “spoke of key authority figures including police officers, security and neighbourhood watch personnel, store managers and owners, and public transportation officials as psychological constraints on their freedom of movement” (Skinner and Masuda 2013, 214, emphasis added). The role of transit enforcement in limiting mobility, particularly for youth that have few alternatives, was noted elsewhere: **“For a lot of these young people, it’s very hard to get to the places they need to be... and [getting a ticket] really limits their mobility.”** (Wyton 2019).

In addition to avoidance behaviours, interactions with enforcement create “intense humiliation” when people are treated negatively by transit employees because of their race or appearance (Ontario Human Rights Commission n.d.) and fear from interactions with transit operators in a position of power (Schwan et al. 2020). Transgender and gender non-conforming people also describe fear from interactions with transit enforcement officers (Benner 2016). As described in a report from the U.S.: “Just seeing the police in a Metro station is like a psychological attack for a lot of people. It can even be a deterrent from riding” (Bliss 2020). As a result of these interactions with enforcement officers, racialized and Indigenous people report avoiding transit, such as by walking or using other travel modes (Howells 2019).

Financial Impacts and Criminalization

The impact of transit enforcement can be significant, and transit enforcement can be seen as the criminalization of poverty (Douglas 2011). Beyond the financial burden of fines, interactions with the justice system can have lasting negative impacts. Homeless youth and others that received transit tickets report not being able to obtain a driver’s license until fines are paid, resulting in further transportation barriers and debt (McParland 2020; St. Denis 2019). Transit enforcement can also lead to criminalization (Schwan et al. 2020), as one service agency representative notes: **“When they can’t pay the ticket, then ... we’ve got kids going into court systems dealing with tickets, so then it creates another problem in another system... It’s a snowballing effect of the systems”** (Wyton 2019).

While we found little discussion on fare evasion in the Canadian context, research in other countries points out that fare evasion is often due to poverty (Perrotta 2015), transit service issues (i.e. malfunctioning ticket machines) (Delbosc and Currie 2016), or not understanding the system (Lubitow, Rainer, and Bassett 2017). For example, one interview participant described the reason for not paying a transit fare: “There’s been times that I’ve had to ask him [her child’s father from whom she fled to a domestic violence shelter] for like a \$5 or \$10 little advance or whatever... so I can get my child to school. Or sometimes I’ve risked jumping on the back of the bus... gosh I dread the day I would get caught for that cause it’s so silly, but... I’ve only done it if I’m trying to get my daughter to school. It’s not like I was just jumping on there for the fun of it.” (Perrotta 2015, 74). Research in some Canadian cities, such as Edmonton, found the vast majority of enforcement tickets are given for fare evasion rather than other offences such as smoking or harassment (Wyton 2019).

Lack of Agency Response

Similar to reports of safety concerns, there is criticism of how transit agencies respond to charges of over-policing and racist behaviour by enforcement officers. As one report notes, even when an officer was found to be in violation of the Ontario Human Rights Code, they retained their job, leading the victim to avoid them by walking to work: “I actually kind of stopped taking the TTC” (Spurr 2021). A further issue is the relationship

between enforcement and safety. For example, when a city representative was made aware of disproportionate ticketing for Indigenous and racialized peoples, he tied it to an increasing priority on system safety: “we’ve really put in a priority on improving our security on the system... the goal is to get as many people riding transit as possible” (Wyton 2019), without acknowledging the disproportionate harms associated with enforcement.

Group-Specific Analyses

Children and Youth

The most common codes identified in research about children or youth was lack of fare affordability (42%), transit service unavailable (42%), stress or anxiety associated with transit (31%), and unreliable service (27%). Transit service issues figured prominently, including long time to take transit (23%), transit unavailable at time/day needed (23%), and long wait times for transfers (19%). Some of this literature addresses children or youth independently (e.g. Li and Que 2016; McParland 2020; Skinner and Masuda 2013) while others include the impact on caregivers (e.g. Ballantyne et al. 2019; McLaren 2015; 2015).

Affordability

A major concern related to the high cost of public transit (Lambert 2018; Marzoughi 2011), particularly for low-income families (McLaren 2015), Indigenous youth and mothers (Sakamoto et al. 2008; Skinner and Masuda 2013; Wyton 2019), youth experiencing homelessness (McParland 2020) and new immigrant families and youth (Li, Que, and Power 2017; Li and Que 2016; Nicholas et al. 2017). For low income families unable to afford transit fares, the only alternative is to walk long distances or not having access to vital services including food (Kerpan, Humbert, and Henry 2015). As a mother of two described: **“if we don’t have any bus fare, we just don’t go at all to the food bank”** (McLaren 2015, 27). Access to health care for children was impacted by families not being able to afford the cost of transit (Lubitow, Rainer, and Bassett 2017; McLaren 2015; Nicholas et al. 2017). This was echoed by health care providers for pediatric patients in newly immigrated families: “Just this morning, I saw somebody who was asking for bus tickets because they were on social assistance; it’s really hard to pay the cost of getting here” (Nicholas et al. 2017, 340). In other areas, the cost of transportation is a major barrier to school attendance, as described by a teacher in an academic bridging program in Newfoundland: **“[Cost of transit] has been an issue since the beginning of the program. A Metrobus pass is \$45 per month. If a family is not living in our catchment area where they can access the school bus, then they have to pay \$5 per child... Some of these are big families, two or three students... and the burden of that cost is falling on the families instead of being provided for them”** (Li, Que, and Power 2017, 1115).

Transit Service Issues

Poor transit service is a major barrier in access for children, youth and families. Parents noted the difficulties in travelling with children on buses, including the irregularity of service, lack of space for strollers or need to collapse strollers, and poor connections between buses (City of Vancouver 2019, 1; Lambert 2018; Lubitow, Rainer, and Bassett 2017; McLaren 2015). The difficulty of using transit to make multiple stops such as for errands and family care is a particular concern for women and girls (Lambert 2018). Access to medical care was identified as a major concern, such as for new immigrants with children requiring medical care (Nicholas et al. 2017) and for post-partum care for First Nations women and children who must leave their home communities (Lawford, Bourgeault, and Giles 2019). In certain locations, the costs and inconvenience of transit (irregular service, very long wait times), combined with limited housing choice and centralized programs, resulted in new immigrant students missing school and not having access to academic bridging programs (Li, Que, and Power 2017; Li and Que 2016). In other locations, youth identify infrequent service, poor service outside of the downtown core, long travel times, and long wait times as a barrier to their mobility (Marzoughi 2011).

“Going to school was a struggle for more reasons. He had few clothes to keep warm and there was no direct bus route to school. He usually woke up at 6:00 in the morning in order to catch the bus at 7:00 so he could be at school before 8:50. The worst times were when the bus passed earlier than scheduled and he had to wait an extra hour for the next one or when he missed the transfer bus.”

(Li & Que, 2016, p. 51)

Off-peak service issues were noted by teenagers who may be more likely to travel outside of peak service times (Marzoughi 2011).

Stress and Anxiety Associated with Transit

Stress was associated with taking children with disabilities on transit (City of Vancouver 2019). Youth with disabilities describe the impact of harassment and discrimination on transit impacting their mental health and leading to anxiety and fatigue (Wayland et al. 2020). For people travelling with strollers, stressed is by not being able to get on buses that are too full to accommodate a stroller (Lambert 2018), limited stations with stroller access (Sakamoto et al. 2008), as well as the response from other passengers, as noted by this low-income mother: “You get bus rage, you know, when the people are not happy because you’re getting on, like I have this jogger buggy” (McLaren 2015, 27). Racialized and Indigenous youth describe anxiety and discomfort walking down streets and standing at bus stops because of the surveillance and policing in their neighbourhoods (Skinner and Masuda 2013) and being subject to racism, harassment and over-enforcement (McParland 2020; Wyton 2019). This was reinforced by roundtable participants, who noted that youth are often harassed by transit officers, causing them to avoid taking transit.

Indigenous People

Over-ticketing is a Barrier for Indigenous Youth

The barriers of poverty and racialization often work in tandem to decrease access to transportation. For instance, Indigenous people are targeted for fare inspection and tickets at significantly higher rates than other passengers several cities (Spurr 2021). For Indigenous youth, receiving a ticket for fare evasion can often be their first introduction to the justice system, ultimately compounding the challenges associated with poverty (Goodman, Snyder, and Wilson 2018). These issues are widely known by community-members, as noted by one transit rider: “**Indigenous people don’t necessarily need another indication or another set of data to show that they’re being discriminated**” (Spurr 2021).

Lack of Regional Transit is a Critical Barrier for Indigenous women

Much of the literature focuses on the experiences of Indigenous peoples on-reserve or in off-reserve or urban locations. However, many Indigenous peoples maintain kin and social connections across large territories, travelling back and forth between reserve and urban communities. Travel from the reserve to urban communities is also often necessary for accessing health services, educational, or employment opportunities. The lack of transit between the reserve and urban communities was identified as a barrier that contributed to difficulties in accessing medical care (Lawford, Bourgeault, and Giles 2019); culturally appropriate food options (Cidro et al. 2015; Sinclair 1997), and cultural activities (Croxall, Gifford, and Jutai 2020). Further, the lack of transit also made it difficult for women to escape domestic violence (Bonnycastle et al. 2019; Murray, Ferguson, and Letemendia 2010).

The lack of regional transit service forces many people to hitchhike because no other transit options exist. Indigenous women are particularly vulnerable to violence while hitchhiking and this vulnerability is increased in sparsely populated areas, particularly where cell service may be unavailable. Providing adequate and affordable transit service is vital matter of safety for Indigenous women (Andrew-Gee 2019; Morton 2016; Palmater 2018; Quinlan 2018).

Indigenous Elders Face Specific Barriers

One study (Croxall et al 2020) discussed the specific challenges faced by Elders requiring accessible transportation. Accessible transportation was often a barrier to participating in social and cultural activities for elders. While paratransit is available for medical appointments, it is not always available for trips not

deemed urgent. Yet, participation in social and cultural activities is understood as an important factor when it comes the ability of elders to age well in place (Tonkin et al. 2018).

LGBTQ2S+ People

Only a very small number of articles and reports (7% of total articles) contained information on the experiences of LGBTQ2S+ people, and an even smaller number focused specifically on the experiences of LGBTQ2S+ people while using transit.

Transit is Essential

As highlighted in the discussion of cross-cutting themes, transit is important in the daily lives of many people, including LGBTQ2S+ people. Access to transit is necessary to attend school, work, medical appointments, to complete shopping and other errands, and to participate in social, recreational, and cultural activities (Benner 2016; Government of British Columbia 2018). Lack of access to transit, whether due to service issues or affordability, can have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of LGBTQ2S+ people. For instance, mental health problems are aggravated when people can't afford transit to travel to social, cultural, and health services (Lambert 2018). It was noted that while some social service agencies and government organizations offer transit fare to attend events such as community consultations, the need for transit fare could be eliminated by offering more services in the places where people live (Lambert 2018).

Harassment Limits Access to Transit

LGBTQ2S+ frequently experience harassment while using transit, both from other riders and from drivers (Benner 2016; Carathers et al. 2019; Lubitow et al. 2017; Lubitow, Abelson, and Carpenter 2020; Umereweneza et al. 2020). As one transit user recounted: ***“A white male was being extremely rude and saying very, very transphobic things straight to my face and I immediately reported him to the bus driver, and the bus driver looked like, ‘Did he say something wrong?’ ... the specific term [the other passenger] used was ‘Why don’t you tuck it in, there?’ for the record. I’m like, ‘Great, thanks.’ Looked to the bus driver; and the bus driver ... just didn’t understand why that would be so offensive”*** (Lubitow et al. 2017, 15).

Discrimination reduces the ability of LGBTQ2S+ to use transit without physical and/or emotional harm (Benner 2016; Gower et al. 2021). Because of the harassment faced by many LGBTQ2S+ people while using transit, private transportation is often preferred. For this reason, some organizations serving LGBTQ2S+ clients offer taxi fares or operate vehicle fleets to better serve their clients (Eaton and Enoch 2020). Financial support for vehicle fleets, for instance to transition to electric vehicles, was suggested as one way that organizations might be supported (Eaton & Enoch, 2020). LGBTQ2S+ transit users have offered suggestions for ways that harassment might be addressed by transit operators. For instance, increasing the visibility of LGBTQ2S+ in transit ads and communications, offering LGBT sensitivity training for transit staff, and instructing transit operators in the use of general neutral pronouns for all passengers would be a few simple ways to create a more hospital environment for LGBTQ2S+ transit users (Benner, 2016). However, the creation and enforcement of policies that prohibit discrimination has also been identified as an important measure for increasing the safety of LGBTQ2S+ transit users (Lubitow et al. 2017).

Newcomer and Immigrant Residents

The experiences of newcomers and immigrant residents were included in 75 of the references examined (42%). A plurality of the cases were in the context of Toronto and just 16 focused in rural contexts. Transit was a theme that emerged in research around various aspects of immigration and settlement because of a high level of transit dependence (Ng, Northcott, and Abu-laban 2007; Amar and Teelucksingh 2015; Ray and Preston 2015; Arora 2017; Brotman, Koehn, and Ferrer 2017; Syed et al. 2017). The three strongest transit barriers were: (1) Services being unreliable, including not going where people needed to travel (Silver, Blustein, and Weitzman 2012; Rahder and McLean 2013; Hertel, Keil, and Collens 2016; Rural Development Institute 2016; Arora 2017; Syed et al. 2017; Hanley et al. 2018); (2) The long travel time for transit trips (Kaur 2013; Li and Que 2016; Ray and Preston 2015; Brotman, Koehn, and Ferrer 2017) (3) Unaffordability of transit (Smirl 2018; Li and Que 2016), including trade-offs between transit and other expenses (Amar and Teelucksingh 2015).

Transit barriers for immigrant residents included difficulties related to language skills (Hertel et al. 2016; Brotman et al. 2017; Syed et al. 2017), and the need for programs to orient new transit riders (Makwarimba et al. 2013), as well as training to reduce bias and prejudice experienced by immigrant residents, and particularly those racialized as other than white (Smirl 2018; Bhuyan and Schmidt 2019). Some of the disproportionate impacts of transit barriers for immigrant residents include concerns around access to groceries, specialty grocery stores, and getting groceries home (Amar and Teelucksingh 2015; Smirl 2018), particularly in winter weather (Vahabi and Damba 2013), access to employment (Rahder and McLean 2013; Hanley et al. 2018), and trade-offs between transit and housing access (Kaur 2013).

Transit Dependency

Across a range of studies residents readily described themselves as transit dependent (Amar and Teelucksingh 2015; Ray and Preston 2015). For some residents this dependency was related to not having a drivers' license, including residents who had arrived as adults and missed the standard window for learning how to drive (Amar and Teelucksingh 2015), and older residents who were unable to drive, or uncomfortable with driving (Brotman et al. 2017; Syed et al. 2017). Residents also described themselves as transit dependent because the cost of alternatives was prohibitive, including taxis (Smirl 2018), or personal cars (Arora 2017; Woodgate et al. 2017). Immigrant residents also employed alternatives such as walking and biking, which were more difficult in the winter (Li and Que 2015; Rural Development Institute 2016; Woodgate et al. 2017), or over the long distances in rural and suburban areas (Rural Development Institute 2016; Syed et al. 2017).

Unreliable Service and Long Trip Times

Related to transit dependence was a recurring theme of unreliable service, the length of trips and the ways in which transit cuts have impacted services (Rahder and McLean 2013; Hanley et al. 2018). Residents described services that were less frequent outside of city centres, and not available in rural communities (Ray and Preston 2015). Residents also described the lack of service early in the morning or late at night (Hanley et al. 2018). These limitations were also related to safety concerns. For example, as one resident described, while the night bus runs twenty-four hours a day the stop was long walk from home not something she would feel comfortable walking in the early morning hours (Hertel et al. 2016; see also Li and Que 2015). Residents also noted the length of trips as compared to driving, for example. In one case, a participant noted that, compared to their drive home, their co-worker's trip home by transit would be six times as long, including wait and travel times (Hertel, Keil, and Collens 2016; see also, Ng, Northcott, and Abu-laban 2007). Residents described various strategies they used to adapt to scheduling issues, such as staying late at work, or arriving early to stops because of infrequent service (Hertel et al. 2016). Residents in rural areas also highlighted the lack of transit altogether (Arora 2017).

Unaffordability of Transit

The cost of transit was a recurring theme across the literature, particularly for new immigrant residents and the lowest income residents (Amar and Teelucksingh 2015). This included concerns around fare structures that limited the ability to transfer, adding to the cost of trips with multiple destinations, which are also more common for women, and a lack of harmonization between systems (Rahder and McLean 2013; Amar and Teelucksingh 2015). Immigrant residents also made various trade-offs between the cost of transit and the cost of housing (Amar and Teelucksingh 2015), balancing between housing that might be further away from community and cultural amenities but allows for access to transit, and ultimately to work (Kaur 2013). No cost transit passes were a policy suggestion for various specific groups including immigrant residents who were seniors (Rahder and McLean 2013; Brotman et al. 2017), families (McLaren 2015), and low income earners (Hertel et al. 2016; Government of BC 2018).

Disproportionate Impacts

While barriers to transit impact immigrant residents in similar ways to other equity seeking groups, access to food, community, and health and social services were disproportionate impacts in immigrant communities. Multiple studies specifically examined access to food for newcomers, and found that mobility was a barrier to accessing food, such as due to a lack of transit access to stores with culturally specific foods or to discount food stores (Vahabi and Damba 2013; Amar and Teelucksingh 2015). Additionally, residents reported that barriers to transit impacted their ability to engage with culture and community (Amar and Teelucksingh 2015), including difficulties accessing events, shopping or visiting family (Rahder and McLean 2013) or gaining access to “diasporic amenities” (Kaur 2013). In rural areas without public transit, residents described both the challenge of building community without a car, and the ways in which a lack of community meant weaker networks, for example, with fewer people to ask for a ride (Arora 2017).

Limits on access to health and social services, as well as employment, are additional disproportionate impacts of barriers to transit for newcomer and immigrant residents and communities. Studies tracking doctor’s appointments noted that bus riders were more likely than others to miss appointments (Silver et al. 2012; Nicholas et al. 2017). Newcomer residents also described being unable to attend programs (Rahder and McLean 2013), use day care vouchers because of a lack of transportation (Vahabi and Damba 2013; Makwarimba et al. 2013), or missing school (Li et al. 2017). Access to employment outside of cities was difficult or not possible (Ray and Preston 2015; Hanley et al. 2018). This was a particular challenge for residents who were in the lowest paying jobs, include temp workers or other with multiple or moving work sites (Hanley et al. 2018). Residents also generally discussed feelings of exhaustion and being drained, stress and anxiety related to the long commutes, as well as worry about being late to work (Kaur 2013; Rahder and McLean 2013).

People with Disabilities

For people with disabilities, mobility issues can touch on every aspect of their life, limiting access to essential services (including health care, education, employment and food), as well as social, cultural and community events. The impacts of poor transportation are significant for social inclusion and mental well-being. As one person with disabilities reported: **“Every day I cannot get out. Every day I cannot go to community meetings that I wish to attend. Every day I may not be able to get groceries or go to medical appointments. Every day I cannot get services available to everyone else in this city. Every day my quality of life is diminished because the basics of mobility are refused to me and others in this city.”** (Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission 2013, 6). The themes that emerged from the literature include difficulty accessing destinations by transit, poor paratransit service, the cost of transit, and transit operators’ treatment of people with disabilities.

Access to Destinations

For people living with a disability, transportation is a critical barrier to multiple types of destinations, including

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(Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission 2013, 6)

employment, health care and social activities, both for those that use paratransit and regular transit services (Bezyak et al. 2019; Darrah, Magill-Evans, and Galambos 2010; Matin et al. 2021; Shier, Graham, and Jones 2009; St. Denis 2019). Transportation is seen as a major barrier to employment for people with disabilities (Shier, Graham, and Jones 2009), especially for employment which requires on-call or flexible scheduling (BC Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation 2014). For people with disabilities living in rural areas, there are few transportation options (Acker-Verney 2020; Croxall, Gifford, and Jutai 2020; Shirgaokar et al. 2020), as well as fewer accessible locations such as meeting places (Levasseur et al. 2020). For Indigenous elders who use mobility devices, transportation was seen as the largest barrier to participation in cultural events (Croxall, Gifford, and Jutai 2020). Access to healthcare for children with special needs was seen as particularly difficult by public transit (Ballantyne et al. 2019), even in cases where it may be faster than driving (Ballantyne et al. 2019).

Issues with Conventional Transit Service

For those with mobility issues that used regular transit service, the long distance to stops posed a significant barrier (Rowe and Malhotra 2013). This is exacerbated by winter conditions, when snow and ice can make it impossible to travel to bus stops, or access buses (Wilton & Schormans 2019; Hammel et al. 2015; Hansen, Wilton, and Newbold 2017; Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission 2013), as well as generally poor sidewalk conditions that can result in falls (McGrath et al. 2017). Distance to transit stops were also a concern for people with developmental disabilities, who desired to use public transit to increase their independence, but did not have good transit service near their home or destinations (Wasfi, Steinmetz-Wood, and Levinson 2017).

Those that rely on regular transit and use mobility devices must often wait long times for buses that can accommodate wheelchairs (Chandran 2017) or have accessible seats free (Lindqvist and Lundälv 2012), making it difficult to reach appointments or other destinations on time. Long travel times impact the ability to attend healthcare appointments for mothers with children with disabilities (Ballantyne et al. 2019). Accessible or low-floor buses may not be scheduled consistently on routes, leading to long wait times and limiting accessibility (Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission 2013). Concerns about accommodating wheelchairs or other mobility devices is a major barrier to accessing transit services (Maratos et al. 2016). Other barriers include the gap between transit vehicles and platform/stop, drivers not stopping at correct locations (especially for those with visual impairments), automatization or inaccessible ticketing (Øksenholt and Aarhaug 2018; Rowe and Malhotra 2013), and riders not being able to see the arrival of buses (McGrath et al. 2017).

Poor Paratransit Service

While paratransit services provide door-to-door trips, there are disadvantages in limited service hours, requirements for advance booking, delays, limits on companions, higher fares, cancellation fees, and prioritizing rides by trip purpose (Rowe and Malhotra 2013). Scholars have noted the paradox that transportation services for people with disabilities are intended to improve community accessibility and independence, yet the structuring of these services often creates additional barriers (Darrah, Magill-Evans, and Galambos 2010).

The long window for paratransit trips could mean that appointments or classes are missed or passengers spend hours waiting for rides (Ballantyne et al. 2019; Rowe and Malhotra 2013). The requirement to book trips far in advance also limits social activities or other types of community participation (Darrah, Magill-Evans, and Galambos 2010). The inflexibility of scheduling for paratransit is a barrier for some types of employment, such as in this example: **“... if an employer expects me to work overtime, it'd be hard for me to schedule my [paratransit] bus around that because it's already there, right? I would basically have to find my own way home. And the only alternative would be to, to call up one of those taxi vans... I've often used those, and those cost me anywhere from \$20 to even \$30 per trip [up to half a day's wages]”** (Shier, Graham, and Jones 2009, 69). Where paratransit prioritizing rides by type, people are often unable to make trips to see friends or socialize (Rowe and Malhotra 2013; Smirl 2018).

Limited hours for paratransit also limit social and community activities for many (Korotchenko and Clarke 2014; Rowe and Malhotra 2013). Paratransit was also seen as unable to fulfill the needs of new parents with disabilities, such as the difficulty of installing car seats for paratransit trips, restrictions on how many children could accompany a parent, and inflexibility in scheduling trips (Mercerat and Saias 2020). Critically, in addition to these issues with paratransit service, demand often exceeds supply so rides may not be available at the time needed, for specific types of trips (as trips may be prioritized based on purpose) (Rowe and Malhotra 2013), or simply not available (Jacobs 2018).

Cost of Transit

As noted in the section on poverty, affordability is a key concern, including for people with disabilities on income assistance or with limited incomes. For example, one disability advocate who worked to ensure transit accessibility, **“never, ever takes the bus, because it would mean the difference between eating and transit. She chooses to take the \$52 transit portion of her disability benefit as cash to pay for groceries”** (St. Denis 2019). Women with disabilities report having to spend more on transportation if unable to use public transit (Hansen, Wilton, and Newbold 2017), as well as being charged higher rates for taxi services (Olkin et al. 2019), creating a barrier to accessing healthcare (Matin et al. 2021). The cost of travel for people with disabilities in remote and isolated communities are significantly higher, leading to unsafe conditions for Indigenous women in accessing basic services (Quinlan 2018). This was also noted in the stakeholder roundtables, which emphasized that when direct routes are not available to people with disabilities, more expensive and time-consuming alternatives are required. Affordability issues are also a concern when attendants are required to pay full fares to accompany a person with a disability, creating an unfair financial burden (BC Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation 2014). Lack of affordable transportation for people with disability has impacts on mental health, including contributing to the feeling that “they were trapped at home due to the high cost of transportation” (Rowe and Malhotra 2013, 137). Taking public transport was also seen as very stressful for parents of children with disabilities (City of Vancouver 2019, 1).

Treatment of People with Disabilities and Harassment

The treatment of disabled people by transit operators is often problematic. Riders report problems such as drivers not assisting with mobility devices or ensuring seats are available (Jacobs 2018; Korotchenko and Clarke 2014; Olkin et al. 2019), or not helping those that may have difficulty understanding schedules (Harrold 2012). For example, “participants faced barriers because bus drivers refused to pull the switch to allow for low floor access or parked too far from the curb, underscoring the reality that physical accommodations alone are inadequate but need to be followed with appropriate training” (Rowe and Malhotra 2013, 135). Transit riders also report drivers refusing to secure wheelchairs, resulting in injuries, unsafe conditions, and damage to wheelchairs (Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission 2013; 2016), as well as driving before riders are seated, creating safety concerns for those with vision impairments (McGrath et al. 2017). Riders report being passed by drivers or treated as “bothersome” for requiring accommodations on transit (Olkin et al. 2019).

Harassment from other passengers was also noted as an issue, such as in refusal to accommodate those with a disability, especially for non-visible conditions (Maratos et al. 2016; Vick 2013; Wayland et al. 2020). Those with non-visible disabilities report being stopped by transit operators for using disability passes with the implication that they were obtained dishonestly (St. Denis 2019). People with intellectual disabilities note the potential for public transit to increase independence but were limited by safety concerns, including harassment (Wilton and Schormans 2019).

People Living in Poverty or Experiencing Homelessness

The most common barrier for people experiencing poverty noted in the literature is the cost of transit services, including individual fares and reduced monthly passes. For those with low incomes: **“Minor financial decisions, such as paying a single bus fare, must be weighed against eating, taking medicines,**

“Minor financial decisions, such as paying a single bus fare, must be weighed against eating, taking medicines, and other very basic necessities.”

(Scott, Bryant, and Aquanno 2020)

and other very basic necessities” (Scott, Bryant, and Aquanno 2020, 604). Relative to the income for minimum wage workers, the cost of transit could be as high as 20% of daily earnings (Ross and Ho 2016)² and unaffordable for families (McLaren 2015), seniors (Brotman, Koehn, and Ferrer 2017) and those on income assistance (Smirl 2018). Others note that the high cost of housing makes transit unaffordable (Lambert 2018; Ross and Ho 2016).

Poor Transit Service

The literature identifies several issues related to transit service for people living in poverty, including lack of public transit, and particularly poor service at off-peak times (Chandran 2017; Government of British Columbia 2018; McLaren 2015; Ross and Ho 2016). Lack of off-peak service, including early morning and late night, limits employment options, such as for those doing shift work or requiring travel to different job sites (Smirl 2018). Unreliable transit service also causes issues in maintaining employment (City of Vancouver 2019) and missing appointments (Silver, Blustein, and Weitzman 2012). In some areas with concentrated poverty, residents must travel further for employment and services, limiting their access (Chandran 2017). In some cases, while transit service is available, it results in excessively long commute times (2+ hours each way), especially when combined with other care duties such as taking children to childcare (New Brunswick Rural and Urban Transportation Advisory Committee 2017). Lack of transit also limits the housing options for formerly homeless people, especially when combined with job locations that are far from affordable housing, making the cost of travel unsustainable (Scott, Bryant, and Aquanno 2020). People experiencing homelessness have also been physically excluded from transit services (Sakamoto et al. 2008).

Access to Employment

Poor transit service is a barrier to employment with job locations inaccessible by transit (Harris 2020; Scott, Bryant, and Aquanno 2020), transit service not aligned with shift work times (Chandran 2017; McLaren 2015), unpredictability of transit service (City of Vancouver 2019) or the need to access different job site locations such as for construction work (Smirl 2018). Unpredictable and infrequent transit service was particularly problematic as it made it difficult to arrive on work on time. Searching for employment was also made more difficult as job locations may not be in employment listings so job-seekers do not know if it is accessible by transit (Harris 2020).

Health, Services and Access to Food

Lack of transit service has wide-ranging impacts, including reduced access to medical appointments, grocery stores, and government services (such as applying for benefits), and community services (Government of British Columbia 2018; Chandran 2017). Travel for medical appointments is particularly difficult for people living in poverty, who are much more likely to miss or re-schedule medical appointments due to transportation problems (Silver, Blustein, and Weitzman 2012) or be unable to access healthcare (Loignon et al. 2015). People living in poverty must often choose between spending limited income on transit fares for medical appointments or food (Dorman 2016). Lack of transportation is a significant barrier to accessing health care for people experiencing homelessness (Ramsay et al. 2019). For youth experiencing homelessness, lack of transit prevents access to critical services such as substance abuse support, and medical and mental health services (McParland 2020). As noted in stakeholder roundtables, unhoused individuals might have to choose between being with their belongings and transportation since oftentimes they cannot take them on transit vehicles.

Access to lower-priced grocery stores by transit is an added expense for low-income people which can lead to food insecurity (Vahabi and Damba 2013), especially in areas without transit service (Activating Change Together for Community Food Security 2014). The cost of transportation creates additional stress in accessing food, including to foodbanks which may require long waits beyond the length of transit transfers (Scott,

² For example, a 2-zone round trip fare on Translink (Vancouver, B.C.) is \$8, making up 20% of a \$40 daily income (Ross and Ho 2016).

Bryant, and Aquanno 2020) and the difficulties of taking groceries home by public transit (Smirl 2018).

Transportation, Well-being and Social Inclusion

While community service organizations may provide free transit fares, these are often only for specific trips such as looking for employment. People living in poverty identify transportation as a major barrier to full participation in society. The inability to access transit contributes to social exclusion, with impacts on mental health, isolation, and overall well-being. For example, the high cost of transportation means that those living in poverty are often unable to visit friends and family or other activities to contribute to wellness such as recreation (Scott, Bryant, and Aquanno 2020). Women living in poverty note social isolation due to either unaffordable or unavailable transit service, which is compounded by other factors such as the need to care for young children, illness or violence (Murray, Ferguson, and Letemendia 2010).

Travel to what may be seen as “non-essential” services can be particularly problematic for people living in poverty, and exacerbated by other concerns such as recovering from substance abuse. As one participant quoted, while there are mental health and recovery benefits from recreation, transit was a primary barrier in getting those services: **“Getting out of the house and into ‘the world’ is hard enough when you are recovering from addiction. Then you have to deal with transit, stigma of drivers who won’t let you ride for free or the thought you have to ask for a free ride because you only have \$95/month for basic human needs. Once you make it there, you feel like everyone is staring at you. It’s intimidating. I know going to the gym, swimming and going in the sauna is going to make the world of difference, but it’s just too hard”** (City of Vancouver 2019, 15).

Lack of reliable transportation also contributes to mental health impacts, such as isolation (Lambert 2018; Scott, Bryant, and Aquanno 2020; Smirl 2018)(Government of British Columbia 2018; Smirl 2018), stress related to unreliable transit (Government of British Columbia 2018), and social stressors from the need to ask friends and family for rides (Palm et al. 2021). The inflexibility of those living in poverty makes reliance on transit very stressful, such as meeting transfer times to avoid paying extra fares, carefully planning routes to maximize fare efficiency, or walking long distances, in addition to concerns about being on time for work, school and appointments. Harassment and stigma from transit staff was noted as an issue by many, such as drivers refusing to stop buses for those that appear homeless (Chandran 2017), have mental health issues, or collect recycling for income (City of Vancouver 2019). For people living in poverty, these mental health impacts are also attributed to being forced to make difficult choices between transportation and other necessities: “lack of access to steady modes of transportation was a great source of stress, by forcing very difficult choices to be made surrounding food, healthcare, and social contact” (Scott, Bryant, and Aquanno 2020, 605).

People Living in Rural Areas

The literature on rural transportation is small, but adds important insights in to the impacts of a lack of transit in rural communities. Twenty-eight of the 175 references related to issues in rural communities. Just sixteen were focused exclusively on rural locations. The most common barriers identified in the rural literature were lack of service and affordability. Common outcomes related to these barriers included people unable to participate in social activities, or visit with friends. Safety was another important concern related to lack of service, alongside limitations in terms of employment.

The literature highlights the relationships between a lack of transit and barriers to accessing critical services such as health care, limits in employment and education options, and the push towards potentially unsafe travel such as hitchhiking. The literature also draws attention to the lack of essential services such as health care in many rural communities, which increases the importance regional transit. The literature also provides reminders about the regional character of rural life in Canada where people regularly move between

communities for work, to meet with friends and family and for recreation alongside service access.

A Lack of Service at Multiple Scales

A recurring theme across the literature was the lack of rural transit at various scales. This was a concern in communities close to metropolitan centres and in remote communities. The low density in rural communities with low populations and large distances was one key barrier to establishing transit in smaller communities. For example, a study on ageing in place (Menec et al. 2015) found that while respondents had more opportunities for participation in larger rural communities, the trade-off was less satisfaction in terms of transportation options. Even in larger centres service is often limited, for example with no evening or Sunday service in Whitehorse (Westfall 2010).

The termination of regional bus services was another important theme, particularly in Prairie provinces. The impacts of missing bus service reverberated across residents' lives impacting mobility alongside safety, service access and employment, and the lives of friends and family who have taken on additional responsibilities for transporting bus users (Birrell 2020; Hansen et al. 2020).

Limits on Mobility and Participation: Employment, Health and Safety

The lack of transit service creates barriers that limit community members' ability to move around their communities, and to participate in social and economic activities. Limitations on employment were a key theme that emerged both in terms of location and time. For example, in a study of temp workers (Hanley et al. 2018) participants reported not being able to accept work because of no public transit access. There were also a range of health and safety concerns related to limited transit access. Studies of perinatal care in both Indigenous (Cidro, Bach, and Frohlick 2020; Lawford, Bourgeault, and Giles 2019) and immigrant (Nicholas et al. 2017) communities illustrate the complications of care related to limited transportation including difficulty getting to appointments.

For residents with disability, including older residents, social participation was limited by a lack of access to disability-specific transit. Where it exists, services are limited, and there were also specific barriers noted such as having to book trips in advance (Hansen et al. 2020). In research with First Nations Elders who live on reserve and use wheelchairs, informants identify transportation as the largest barrier to participating in community events, since travel for medical appointments might be available but not for community events of ceremony (Croxall et al. 2020). Looking specifically at the closure of bus routes in rural Canada, residents also note that private companies that are filling in the service gaps are not always accessible, such as for wheelchair users (Birrell 2020).

Limitations on mobility and participation are also connected to broader concerns including mental health and domestic violence. Participants in a study on driving for elderly residents note that isolation was one of the greatest concerns people have with regards to having to stop driving (Hansen et al. 2020; Levasseur et al. 2020). Social isolation related to lack of mobility is known to decrease mental health (Lambert 2018). Women experiencing domestic and sexual violence were found to be made more vulnerable because of a lack of transportation. As one informant in a study of leaving domestic violence notes **“Even if a safe house [or] shelter... has space, there isn't always a way to get there”** (McParland 2020).

Lack of service is also related to broader safety concerns. This includes people having to make unsafe choices such as hitchhiking (Morton 2016), or walking in areas with limited pedestrian infrastructure. One informant in a study about car dependency describes her commute from a night class “I had to wait there for my parents to come and get me or walk home, [...] in the middle of the countryside, [...] 45 minutes.” Additionally, the ongoing impact of colonialism, including dis-investment in services along the highways ranging from shelter to cell service (Morton 2016, see also Lambert 2018), and the lack of will to act to ensure safety. Roundtable

participants noted the lack of operational funding to support community transit in rural areas.

Private Vehicle Dependency

Limited transit means that many rural residents report dependency on private vehicles. As one resident in a study about elderly residents and driving put it succinctly “There is no bus here. Nothing. If you live here, you have to have a car, you have to be able to drive” (Hansen et al. 2020). Private vehicle dependency leads to fear for elderly residents around the prospect of having to stop driving. From another perspective, immigrant residents in rural communities describe the change in quality of life after being able to afford a car, for example being able to build community (Arora 2017).

There are also time costs related to a lack of transit for the friends and family members of non-drivers. In an interview about his research on the impacts of the closure of the Saskatchewan Transportation Company rural bus service Jacob Alhassan describes **“Middle-aged women in particular seemed to be those bearing the heavy brunt of time poverty [...] They complained bitterly about no longer having time for themselves because they have to spend so much time driving. [...] when your mother or uncle or whoever cannot ride the bus, you don’t just fold your arms and do nothing. You step in to help”** (Birrell, 2020). Non-drivers describe the difficulty of being dependent on friends and family, for example scheduling hospital visits around the family work schedules (Hansen et al. 2020).

Affordability

Rural residents also identified the cost of long distance travel, buses and ferries as unique barriers. Cost was tied into the limits to mobility and participation described above. For example, in a study conducted by the Native Women’s Association of Canada (2018) a participant in BC described that while feeling unsafe she hitchhikes to regular medical appointments because of a lack of transit. This brings together a number of different rural challenges, the lack of both transportation and health services in rural communities and the health and safety risks limited services create. Finally, the cost of owning a car was a barrier in areas where residents were predominantly dependent on private vehicles (Belton et al. 2017).

Racialized People

Racism is a Barrier to Transit Use

Racialized people experience multiple forms of racism when using public transit, including from operators, passengers, fare collectors, and transit police. Racism can also be experienced in the form of graffiti on trains and transit restrooms and verbal harassment from fellow passengers (Howells 2019; Munro 2018). The various forms of racism experienced by transit riders are well documented and can discourage racialized people from using transit (Eaton and Enoch 2020; Government of British Columbia 2018; Harrold 2012; Khan 2021; Makwarimba et al. 2013). Participants in the stakeholder sessions noted how systemic anti-racism prevents people from accessing services more broadly, and this can be exacerbated by transit issues. For example, participants discussed racialized youth missing appointments for income assistance because of busses being late and as a result being cut off from services.

Racialized riders are over-ticketed and issued tickets at a rate more than seven times their share of the population; fare collectors and transit police engage in racial profiling, often assuming racialized people have not paid. For example, as one transit rider states: **“You assumed I didn’t tap because I was Black. The white person in front of me here didn’t tap, and you didn’t ask them”** (Spurr, 2021). Transit enforcement officers are more likely to issue tickets than warnings for racialized people. Ticketing reduces mobility. For instance, racialized youth tend to rely very heavily on public transit; when youth receive tickets, they are less likely to take transit (Bliss 2020). Overall, these experiences of inter-personal and structural racism impede access to transit for racialized people.

“You assumed I didn’t tap because I was Black. The white person in front of me here didn’t tap, and you didn’t ask them.”

(Spurr, 2021)

Seniors and Elders

The experiences of seniors and Elders were included in 36 of the sources (21% of all articles). The most common barriers identified in the literature were the cost of fares, followed by services barriers including the length of travel, and barriers related to disabilities. Impacts of these barriers that disproportionately impacted seniors included limited access to a range of activities such as visiting friends and family, social and recreational events and cultural ceremonies. The research also finds negative health impacts including depression.

Costs

For seniors on fixed income the cost of fares is an important barrier (Sengupta et al. 2013; Ross and Ho 2016). For residents who could not afford the cost of a pass upfront they also faced the additional cost of paying individual fares (City of Vancouver 2019). For residents who do not receive benefits, for example senior new immigrant residents, there is an even greater reliance on rides from family and community members (Kadowaki et al. n.d.). The cost of transit is especially important for seniors as they become more transit dependent, as other mobility options such as driving, walking and taxis can be stressful, too difficult or expensive to use (Hansen et al. 2020; Syed et al. 2017). Free fares for seniors and others was one important policy recommendation (City of Vancouver 2019; Kadowaki et al. n.d.). Mah and Mitra (2017) assess a free transit pilot program in Oakville Ontario where seniors were able to ride transit for free one day a week. The program was a relatively low investment for the city, and yielded increased senior ridership. Those that used the program, reported a range of benefits from financial saving to more flexible schedules than dedicated disability and senior transport, though non-users noted that it was inconvenient. There were also benefits such as the opportunity for spontaneous social interactions with the drivers and other riders. As the authors describe this free transit program was just one part of need for transportation with “dignity and comfort” (Mah and Mitra 2017).

Service Barriers Including Barriers Related to Disability

Senior residents and Elders shared concerns around the length of trips and the unreliable or unpredictable nature of service (Ng, Northcott, and Abu-laban 2007; Syed et al. 2017; City of Vancouver 2019). There were additional concerns specific to this community. Senior residents and Elders discussed lowered mobility related to age-related sight loss, increased difficulty walking, driving, and balance.

Residents also reported concerns about transit environments and services, such as finding stops when signage and wayfinding did not support those with reduced sight (Ng et al. 2007; McGrath et al. 2017); maintenance near stops, such as worries about falling due to cracks in the sidewalk (Ng et al. 2007) and snow removal at stops. Other issues related to driver behaviour, such as starting buses before riders with mobility and balance challenges had sat down or not strapping in wheelchair users (Maratos et al. 2016; Saskatchewan Human Rights 2016), or complicated by maintenance issues, not kneeling buses when there was snow (Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission 2016, see also Korotchenko and Clarke 2014).

Senior residents and Elders also described barriers to transit services specifically designed for people with a disability, including cuts to service (City of Vancouver 2019), and not providing the same level of mobility as the broader transit system, with more limited service areas (Smirl 2018; Hanson et al. 2020). Lack of flexibility and wait times were a common barrier for dedicated disability and senior transportation. This included systems that lacked capacity for the volume of requests (Nelson and Rosenberg 2021), having to book far in advance, or having to schedule travel in a way that left people waiting sometimes hours to be picked up for return trips (Saskatchewan Human Rights 2016). Residents also reported simply not knowing

how the system worked (Hanson et al. 2020), an important barrier for residents of suburban municipalities without past experience with transit (Mah and Mitra 2017), for immigrant senior residents (Kadowaki et al. n.d.), and for those with general negative perceptions of transit (Hanson et al. 2020). As First Nations and Inuit participants in an Ottawa-based study described, while they were thankful for the service, they also found the system unreliable and difficult to navigate (Brooks-Cleator, Giles, and Flaherty 2019).

Impacts on Senior Residents and Elders

One of the disproportionate impacts of transit barriers for senior residents and Elders were concerns around isolation (Brotman, Koehn, and Ferrer 2017; Smirl 2018). These included a lack of access to a range of everyday resources including health care, shopping and groceries, but also places of worship (Kadowaki et al. n.d.), Indigenous ceremony, cultural and community centres (Brooks-Cleator, Giles, and Flaherty 2019; Nelson and Rosenberg 2021), meeting friends and family (Smirl 2018), and volunteering or engaging in social and civic participation (Brotman, Koehn, and Ferrer 2017; Smirl 2018; Kadowaki et al. n.d.; Levasseur et al. 2020). While trips deemed “non-essential” by paratransit were not prioritized, these types of trips were an important part of limiting feelings of isolation (Smirl 2018), claustrophobia from not being able to leave their own areas (City of Vancouver 2019), worries over fears of depression (Hansen et al. 2020), and reduced sense of community (Birrell 2020; Kadowaki et al. n.d.).

Community Transit Providing Access

In addition to free passes and fares for seniors (Mah and Mitra 2017; Kadowaki et al. n.d.), the literature also suggests and highlights examples of community transit as a solution to mobility barriers. These are smaller bus systems that run two or three times a week to meet the needs of seniors (Cox et al. 2020). Tonkin (2018) gives the example of Nak’azdli Whut’en First Nation, which has hired a community member to train to become a driver for Elders. The approach of community transit also follows the guide of developing transit in consultation with senior riders (Kadowaki et al. 2020). This includes thinking about routes, signage including the need for multi-lingual signage, and accessibility in all parts of the system. This also relates more generally to the important role that transportation plays in ageing with dignity and health.

Women and Transgender People

Sexual Harassment is a Barrier

Sexual harassment is a concern for many women and transgender people. For many, sexual harassment is expected when using public transit. Sexual harassment from transit operators, transit police, and from other transit users, are regularly reported by women and transgender people (Schwan et al. 2020; Turn et al. 2020). Sexual harassment occurs during the walk to transit stations (Lenton et al. 1999), while waiting for transit, and on-board transit vehicles (Yusuf and Shingoose 2013). Women and transgender people report feeling particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment when using transit after dark (Yusuf and Shingoose 2013). Sexual harassment affects mode choice; women often feel more comfortable using ride-sharing and private vehicles to avoid feeling unsafe on public transit (Scheim, Bauer, and Pyne 2014).

Barriers to transit impede the ability of women and transgender people to access vital health and social services (Ballantyne, et al 2019), education and employment opportunities (Smirl 2018), as well as community and cultural institutions that contribute to health and well-being (Ballantyne et al. 2019; Government of British Columbia 2018; Ramsay et al. 2019). Responses to sexual harassment often focus on individual behaviour rather than making transit safer for all users. For instance, women are advised to not go out at night and not to travel alone, or to call for help when experiencing harassment (WPS 2021).

Transgender People Face Specific Forms of Harassment

Transgender people face specific forms of harassment and face discrimination from transit operators, other passengers, and transit police. The misuse of pronouns, comments regarding physical appearance, or failure

to receive help from other passengers, operators, or police during experiences of harassment are common experiences for transgender people (Schein et al. 2014).

Feedback from Stakeholder Roundtables

We presented our preliminary findings to stakeholder organizations that work with equity-deserving groups (see Knowledge Mobilization, above). The participants in the roundtables largely felt that our findings reflected their experiences. A limitation of our research is that while it addresses conditions across Canada, the process of synthesizing flattens differences between communities and contexts. This was raised by stakeholders who spoke about local conditions that impact transit services for equity-seeking groups, such as provincial support for subsidized passes, or integration between paratransit and conventional transit. These contexts are important for understanding the experiences of equity-deserving groups, but not addressed in depth here.

A major theme raised by stakeholders was dignity as a framework for understanding policies and practices related to public transit. Although dignity was not a concept that appeared in the literature, for stakeholders, “dignity” describes the desire to easily access transit services that fully meets their needs without fear of harassment or harm, and to fully reap the social, economic, and health benefits that access to transit normally confers. The lens of dignity was applied to a variety of lived experiences with public transit, such as the lack of value placed on people’s time (with the expectation that transit trips would be much longer and more inconvenient than other trips), lack of basic services for transit users (such as bus shelters and washrooms), and support only for certain types of trips (such as for paratransit users or transit fares provided by agencies). This was also noted in a lack of respect for the lives of people from equity-deserving groups, such as policies that require people with disabilities to be evacuated last in emergencies and racist enforcement of transit policies. This also translates into more specific issues that were not reflected in the literature, such as the availability of gender-neutral washrooms, and need for trauma-informed and cultural-sensitivity training for transit employees. Participants also commented about a lack of consultation with impacted groups about policies that affect them, such as how people with disabilities are accommodated on transit, or when routes are changed. Importantly, one participant noted their frustration with the lack of follow-through by government agencies after many committees and consultation about these issues.

Stakeholders also noted how funding constraints impact a wide variety of areas, such as (1) lack of operational funding to support community transit in rural and other areas, (2) limitations in how transit fares can be distributed by caseworkers, and (3) limitations in funding to support travel from remote or isolated communities. Stakeholders noted limitations in the funding models for transit more broadly, such as for operations, as a barrier to improving equitable outcomes. Relatedly, while legislation such as the Accessible Canada Act requires compliance for new investments, there is little funding to address existing barriers, particularly in the built environment.

Stakeholders also reinforced that the move to digital fares is problematic for those without credit cards, reliable internet access or recent immigrants, as well as for agencies and caseworkers that provide transit fares, and exacerbated by reduction or elimination of in-person services during the pandemic. Similarly, the barriers associated with low-income bus passes (such as proof of income or tax filings, home addresses) limits their potential effectiveness.

Future research suggested by participants included: (1) understanding the “true cost” of free transit,

accounting for better health, employment and social outcomes (and the cost of enforcement), as well as the potential climate impact (2) research on the links between public transit and food security. Policy and program recommendations from the stakeholder groups include:

- Mandatory reporting requirements such as for para-transit wait times
- Community-based shuttles or alternatives, including operational support
- Requirement for a mechanism for people to report on service or systemic problems
- Education programs for transit operators, including cultural sensitivity and trauma-informed practices
- Alternative way-finding and communication, such as icons or colours to represent bus routes/stops
- Programs to increase accessibility for Indigenous peoples (especially for youth and elders) on reserve, and to and from reserves

Research Strengths and Gaps

Overall, we found that the ***lived experiences of equity-deserving groups and public transit have been well documented***, in both the academic literature, and in work by community-based organizations, non-profits and advocacy groups. While transportation was largely not the primary focus of much of the research, it was consistently identified in diverse fields such as healthcare, education, labour and employment, immigration and refugee settlement, social work, and domestic violence prevention. However, we found gaps in (1) the focus on “damage” rather than a strengths-based approach, (2) research on issues impacting Indigenous and LGBTQ2S+ people, and those living in rural areas.

Much of the literature documenting the challenges faced by Indigenous peoples and other equity-deserving groups is characterized by its focus on “damage”. In other words, while it documents the challenges such as poverty, discrimination, and violence, faced by Indigenous people when accessing transit, and the ways these problems are often compounded by a lack of transit, the literature does not always succeed in identifying the “desires” of communities or the strength-based approaches that communities may be engaging in to solve problems. Tuck (2009) notes, while focusing on damage can be an important aspect of problem solving, it can also have the effect of pathologizing these problems and making problems such as poverty and violence appear endemic or natural for a community to experience. While Tuck’s observations were made in relation to research focusing on Indigenous communities, the same could also be said for other equity-deserving groups. Many communities experience challenges when accessing transit. These challenges are well known and well understood. However, communities also have concrete ideas about how these problems might be solved.

The literature contains specific gaps that should be the focus of future research.. The scholarly and grey literature documenting the experiences of Indigenous people is relatively small. The lack of scholarly literature suggests several avenues for research in the future, particularly when it comes to the experiences of Indigenous peoples moving between the reserve and urban communities, and the ways that lack of regional transportation systems impacts access to health, social, and educational resources, and forces people to rely on unsafe modes of transit such as hitchhiking. There is also generally a need for greater research into the transportation and mobility needs of rural communities, alongside efforts to align policy making with the rich complexity of rural life. For example, we found no studies directly addressing the lived experience of rural youth, and no comprehensive research around adaptation to the lack of bus service, or to the general transit needs of communities with no or limited road access. Similarly, the experiences of LGBTQ2S+ people were largely under-addressed in the Canadian context.

Although the barriers and impacts created by poor transit service are well documented, there is a gap in how this translates into broader implications for transit policy, as well as the relationship with housing and built form. While

transportation projects are often assessed in terms of their potential to reduce GHG emissions, there should be similar accounting for the impacts on health, employment, education, and social inclusion for equity-deserving groups. As a participant in the roundtables noted, future research should include a full cost accounting of free transit, namely the impact of better accessibility to critical services, rather than just the loss of farebox revenue. Similarly, we found little evaluation of policy programs designed to address transportation barriers, such as free fare pilots, with some exceptions (Mah and Mitra 2017).

Implications for Policy and Practice

These findings have significant implications for policy and practice. Given the overwhelming evidence of systemic discrimination against equity-deserving groups – evidenced by the experiences of those that are reliant on public transit – there is an urgent need to address these issues. Our recommendations are framed in the context of the recent mandate letter that requires using an “intersectional lens in order to address systemic inequities including: systemic racism; unconscious bias; gender-based discrimination; barriers for persons with disabilities; discrimination against LGBTQ2S+ communities; and inequities faced by all vulnerable populations”(Prime Minister of Canada 2021)³. We also stress that an equity lens should be applied to all funding and programs, with priorities placed on addressing community-identified needs and identifying opportunities for collaboration between agencies.

1. Address the misalignment between funding programs and community needs

While the experiences of equity-deserving groups are well-documented, there are few funding programs to address the specific challenges faced by these groups. A true commitment to equity requires re-alignment of funding opportunities, including to address the unaffordability of transit fares, programs to support transit operations, and community-based alternatives.

2. Funding for infrastructure should require an assessment of equity impacts

Applications for funding should be assessed for their potential to improve services for equity-deserving groups. Although the focus and methods for assessing equity impacts will differ between communities, an assessment of equity impacts should be required for all future funding programs.

3. Explore programs to reduce or eliminate transit fares

The unaffordability of transit as the most common barrier – combined with the negative impacts of fare enforcement – requires serious evaluation of the potential of free transit. As noted above, the costs of free transit should be evaluated not just in terms of fare box revenue, but in the impacts on access to health, education, employment, and social inclusion.

4. Create a dedicated funding stream to redress systemic inequities

There has been significant research and consultation on transportation and its impact on equity-deserving groups. As noted by stakeholder participants, this attention has not been accompanied by programs or funding to address identified needs. A dedicated funding stream is required to respond to community-identified priorities, including through support for non-traditional transit providers and programs.

³ At the time of writing (Dec 2021) current mandate letters were not available.

5. Provide guidance on addressing knowledge gaps for transit service providers

The ability to address systemic inequities is limited by data that does not include race or other demographic information (Owusu-Bempah and Thomas Bernard 2021). However, the collection of this data needs to be balanced against the potential to create and replicate harms for equity-deserving groups. Guidance should be provided to transit providers on the collection of equity-based data, including models for partnering with community-based organizations, meaningful ways to include qualitative data, and the development of indicators that respond to community needs.

6. Identify areas that require co-ordination with other agencies

Transportation barriers impact access to numerous types of services – and government responsibilities at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels – requiring significant co-ordination. Collaboration is particularly required in the areas of housing, healthcare, education and childcare, justice, regional travel service, and travel for Indigenous peoples receiving health care services off-reserve. Given the dominance of affordability as a theme, collaboration is required in the area of income supports, and operating grants to support transit agencies.

Conclusion

Overall, we found that the lived experiences of equity-seeking groups in Canada have been well documented in the academic literature and by community-based research. Overwhelmingly, the evidence points to significant disadvantages for those that are dependent on public transit or without access to a private vehicle. Notably, while many attempts have been made to improve access to transit for equity deserving groups, the ability to access public transit with dignity remains out of reach for many. Thus, many members of equity-deserving groups still cannot easily access transit services in ways that fully meets their needs without fear of harassment or harm. In this way, members of these groups are excluded from the social, economic, and health benefits that access to transit normally confers. While there are areas that could be addressed in future research as noted above – including re-framing research away from damage-focused approaches –there is a clear need to address these issues through a re-alignment of funding programs and priorities to focus on the needs of equity-deserving groups. Rather than further research addressing the harms experienced by equity-deserving groups, we find that a critical area for future research should be the evaluation of implemented policy programs aimed at reducing disparities, aimed at understanding their impacts and efficacy.

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APPENDIX A: CLASSIFICATION OF CODED ARTICLES

		Percentage of Articles
CONTEXT	Urban	52%
	Rural	9%
	Multiple	37%
	Not Specified	2%
GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION	Canada	79%
	U.S.	11%
	Other	10%
AUTHOR TYPE	Academic	59%
	Organization	24%
	Media	17%
PRIMARY RESEARCH METHOD	Interviews	53%
	Focus Groups	15%
	Surveys	14%
	Photovoice	1%
	Not lived experience	2%
	Legal cases / police data	2%
	Unknown	6%
	Literature Review	6%
EQUITY-SEEKING GROUP ADDRESSED ¹	People living in poverty, experiencing homelessness	25%
	Indigenous people	26%
	LGBTQ+ people	7%
	Newcomers or immigrants	24%
	Children or youth	15%
	Racialized people	28%
	Rural	16%
	People with disabilities	34%
	Seniors, elders	21%
	Women or other gender identities	45%

¹ Articles could address multiple equity-seeking group so does not sum to 100.

APPENDIX B: CODEBOOK

CODES	SUB-CODES
Barriers in Accessing Transit	
BARRIERS RELATING TO DISABILITY	
COGNITIVE BARRIERS	Fear of getting lost
	Understanding signs and directions
FARES (COST + OTHER)	Can't access digital fares (no credit)
	Can't afford fares (not specific)
	Can't afford reduced monthly fares
	Can't afford single fares
	Don't know about reduced fares
HOUSING ISSUES	
LANGUAGE BARRIERS	Difficulty understanding transit driver
	Understanding signs / directions
PHYSICAL BARRIERS	Barriers for those with children
	Can't access transit vehicles
	Can't get to transit - weather dependent
	Can't get to transit vehicles
	No space for wheelchair/walkers
POLICING	Fear of getting ticketed
	Fear of police / prefer to avoid
	Financial impact of policing / ticketing
	Impact of policing / ticketing on employment, education, or other
	Imprisonment because of ticketing
	Over-ticketing / over-policing

Continued on next page ►

APPENDIX B: CODEBOOK

SERVICE ISSUES	Long distances to transit
	Long times to take transit
	Long time for transfers
	Low density, services far apart
	Only available for part of trip
	Poor quality amenities
	Service is not reliable
	Service unavailable
	Service unavailable at time / day needed
IMPACT OF POOR TRANSIT ACCESS	
DIFFICULTY ACCESSING MEDICAL, DENTAL	Delay, skip appointments
	Negative impact on health
DIFFICULTY ACCESSING CHILDCARE	Can't access regular childcare
	Childcare options limited because of transit
DIFFICULTY ACCESSING EMPLOYMENT	Need to transport equipment
	Need to travel to different sites
	No transit for shift / off-hours work
	No transit to / from job locations
DIFFICULTY ACCESSING FOOD	Can't access food banks
	Can't access general grocery stores
	Can't access specific stores (cultural)
	Difficulty transporting food home
	Negative impact on diet / health
CULTURE, RECREATION + SOCIAL ISOLATION	Can't participate in social activities
	Can't visit friends / family
	Difficulty accessing recreational, leisure
	Lack of access to settlement services (immigrant)
	Lack of sense of community
	Access to religious institutions
Access to cultural groups and institutions	

APPENDIX B: CODEBOOK

LACK OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES	Can't participate in extra-curricular activities
	Lack of access to language training
	No transit to education sites
	Transit timing doesn't work
MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS	Anxiety with finding rides from others
	Depression, isolation
	Stress / anxiety associated with transit
UNABLE TO ACCESS ESSENTIAL GOODS / SERVICES	
LACK OF SAFETY ON TRANSIT	Harassment from other passengers
	Harassment / discrimination from drivers / staff
	Lack of safety getting to transit
	Violence
SAFETY IMPACTED BY LACK OF TRANSIT	Lack of transit options specific to domestic violence
	Staying in unsafe place because no transit
	Using unsafe travel because no transit (i.e. hitchhiking)