

Rocky View Regional Handibus Society

Transportation for Community Needs

P.O Box 3235, Airdrie, AB T4B 2B5
Tel: (403) 948-2887 Fax: (403) 948-2802
www.rockyviewbus.ca

December 7, 2004

Honourable Rob Renner
#227 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB
T5K 2B6

COPY

Dear Minister Renner,

Thank-you for the opportunity to chat with you at the Calgary Regional Partnership General Assembly. I promised you a follow-up letter to explain my points.

Almost 10 years ago, four provincial funding programs were combined to create the Unconditional Municipal Grant Program (UMGP). This program gave \$3.19 per capita based on 1993 census figures. Municipalities can spend to local priorities. This program has not been reviewed since inception. In 2001, I received correspondence indicating that tri-ministerial review was underway. In October 2004, I received correspondence the ministerial review was still underway. Post-election, I have no news on the status of this review.

Several documents already exist offering recommendations and insight into the situation:

The 1995 Alberta Transportation survey "Transportation For Seniors And Persons With Disabilities In Alberta," indicated that special transportation providers will have difficulty surviving with the new UMGP level of funding which was introduced just after the industry was surveyed and before the report was compiled (see attached).

A 2001 study by the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities discovered that many municipalities had little knowledge that the UCMP was also supposed to cover special transportation. The report also discovered that no one knows much of these provincial funds actually go toward local special transportation efforts (see attached).

In January 2001, Human Services Consulting Group was contracted to study the impact of changes in health and social service delivery on the provision of transportation services to persons with a transportation disability. 13 recommendations range from increased funding to a suggestion that regional service providers become familiar with existing Alberta transportation policies (see attached).

In 2002 and 2003 the Alberta Urban Municipality Association (AUMA) presented resolutions to increase the UMGP for purposes of improving the availability of specialized (see attached) The AAMD&C also submitted a similar resolution. The 2003 resolutions were apparently withdrawn at the last minute as discussion was promised between your department and municipalities with respect to division of responsibilities.

Alberta Transportation's Barrier Free Advisory Committee has had a draft discussion paper pending review by the advisory committee since October 2003. As of October 2004, it remains in draft form.

In 2004, Alberta Transportation surveyed six rural/small town providers. Among the findings: organizations are concerned about long-term sustainability in the face of rising costs.

In 2003, our organization circulated a quick survey of some 35 organizations across Alberta. 30% of respondents indicated that their youngest vehicle was a decade-old. Sustainability was also a concern.

Since 2001, our cost to provide services has doubled (fuel, maintenance, etc) and public demand for service has grown. We are faced with many challenges for transportation that few had foreseen a decade ago. For example, Human Resources and Employment has an office in Calgary to deal with the region. We encounter rural folks hit by BSE who do not have a working vehicle and are unable to travel 35 km to the Calgary regional office to apply in person for the Supports For Independence (SFI) program (...thus you now need a car in order to apply for welfare). The move to short hospital stays has saved hundreds of millions over the past decade but regionalization has increased the demand to provide special transportation across municipal boundaries for post-hospital follow-up care.

I agree with your point that municipalities bear some responsibility to provide special transportation. However, I will suggest that your Executive Council colleagues have developed numerous cost saving strategies that depend on the availability of specialized transportation. If each municipality sets their own priorities for wheelchair accessible transportation, your colleagues (who depend on availability of transportation for their programs) cannot assure Albertans they have equitable access to provincial-wide programs /offices. The question arises if municipalities actually know about or understand this responsibility.

I suggest the province also has a role to ensure that the municipalities fulfill those responsibilities. In my experience, it seems that some municipalities prefer to avoid these transportation responsibilities. Certain neighbouring towns of Calgary will not support a handibus service ("let 'em move to Calgary," said one elected official). Although I work in rural Calgary, I live in downtown Calgary, where I meet folks who have moved in from neighbouring municipalities due to lack of transportation in their rural communities. This is an additional burden on Calgary's stressed para-transit system (and taxpayers). This practice is possible because Municipal Affairs does not assess the impact of it's own programs funding special transportation.

I hope your cabinet colleagues will have time to determine who is responsible to facilitate the transportation resources required by the nine departments that depend such transportation. In the meantime, transportation providers in rural and small-town Alberta ask, "What will be done to educate Alberta municipalities of their responsibilities to provide special transportation in support your government's policies?" Indeed, what will be done to improve specialized transportation in rural/ small town Alberta?

Sincerely,

COPY

Paul Siller
Transportation Manager