
Best Practices Review: Tourism Ground Transportation Programs

Report Prepared By:

Jeff Zukiwsky
Zumundo Community and Environmental Planning

Zumundo
Community & Environmental Planning

&
John Calimente and Bill Lambert
Stantec Transportation Planning Group



Stantec

Prepared For:

Tourism Fernie
542b 2nd Ave.
Fernie, BC
V0B 1M0
Tel: 250-423-2037

&
Golden Area Initiatives
PO Box 20190. 111 Golden Donald Upper Rd.
Golden, BC
V0A 1H0
Tel: 250-344-2420

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1.0 Introduction

The intent of this report is to compile an inventory of existing ground transportation programs from tourism areas across the globe, and identify best practices to serve as recommendations for Tourism Fernie and Golden Area Initiatives (GAI) in implementing effective ground transportation programs.

The communities of Fernie and Golden are amongst the top mountain tourism destinations in Canada. Both communities are recognized internationally for their high quality skiing and snowboarding, and increasingly for their summer activities, lifestyle and natural beauty. Tourist visitation, as with most tourism destinations, is highly variable through the year. Influxes of tourists, including vacation property owners, peak during key seasons and times, primarily in the winter ski season, summer months of July and August, and on weekends.

Reliable, frequent, easily accessible and well-marketed transportation is a key facet of the tourism industry in many resort destinations and ensures seamless movement of tourists between amenities, services, and arrival points. A common challenge in both Fernie and Golden is to provide transportation service in a reliable, timely and affordable means from the community to the ski resort, which is difficult for several reasons:

1. The rural nature of Fernie and Golden is such that since the majority of resort users own a personal vehicle, they drive it to the Resort rather than considering the use of shuttle transit services, leading to low ridership levels;
2. The weather in Fernie and Golden is such that the provision of frequent, year-round transportation service is not viable, and demand is very weather dependent;
3. The majority of tourists are day-trippers when visiting tourism destinations¹. These tourists are difficult to 'collect' with shuttle services;
4. The dispersed nature of tourists mean that obtaining the critical mass needed to adequately support transportation service through fare revenue is difficult;
5. The dispersed nature of tourists and communities are not densely concentrated around a downtown core, making it time-consuming to pick-up tourists from various locations;
6. Both Fernie and Golden are rural resort communities (i.e. Calgary). This poses challenges for increasing ridership numbers and service levels due to lack of access to mass population;
7. The rural nature of Fernie and Golden is such that there is no existing transit service available for a potential service to link into;
8. There are no existing transit operators, including tourism operators and local residents and there is therefore a need for collaboration amongst multiple agencies (e.g. Destination Marketing Organizations (DMO's), Municipalities, Regional Districts, Provincial Government, local tourism businesses, residents, etc.) all of whom obtain benefit from the service. There is often disagreement over who should fund and operate the service; and
9. The dispersed nature of tourists. To do so would mean that fares would need to be extraordinarily high per person, and the service would not be affordable. The service must be subsidized.

¹ About one-third in Fernie. Source: Tourism Fernie Society (2011) 2010-2011 Annual Report. Visitor Survey Highlights from Late Feb-March 2011. Available from: http://www.tourismfernie.org/files/Annual_Report_10-11_FINAL.pdf

Despite the above challenges, a shuttle service between resort areas and nearby communities is essential for tourism destination development. Without the service:

Visitors staying in town, who expect such a service, will be unable to affordably and effectively get to and from the resort. This means many potential visitors may choose another resort destination that offers a quality shuttle service;

Visitors staying on-mountain are unable to affordably and effectively get to and from the town for dining, shopping and other recreational activities. This also means many potential visitors may choose another resort destination that offers a quality shuttle service;

Staff, locals and season pass holders are unable to affordably and effectively get to and from the resort or on-mountain businesses. Due to the current challenges in finding quality employees, not having a quality shuttle option may deter potential employees from applying for or accepting positions. A lack of service may decrease season pass sales as well. Riders may resort to hitch-hiking which can pose serious safety issues;

Excessive private vehicle use is required, generating increased emissions, accidents and property damage, and creating overcrowded parking lots; and

Larger tourism wholesaler visitors and international/long-haul visitors are less likely to choose the destination, as they tend not to have a vehicle for transportation from the community to the resort.

Due to all of the above reasons, funding the costs of a consistent and reliable service is essential. The challenge however, is:

Who should fund the shuttle service? And

Who should take the lead in administering and operating the service?

Existing visitor shuttle and bus service programs that can effectively move tourists between the resort and community in Fernie and Golden are either inadequate and/or are facing funding challenges. Changes to available transportation services are needed to ensure tourists can easily access the world-class services and amenities that these destinations offer. This research endeavours to identify funding and service models for tourism-based transportation programs which could be implemented in the communities of Fernie and Golden.

2.1

Shuttle services between FAR and the City of Fernie have been in operation since the early 1990s. Until 2004, the service was provided by Kootenay Taxi, which had an agreement with the City of Fernie to charge a set price per trip. Fares were \$1.50 one-way, \$3 return, or \$5 for a book of 10. Kootenay Taxi collected the fares and was reimbursed for losses.

Between about 2004 and 2010, Smokey Mountain Charters, a private company, provided a somewhat frequent daytime winter ski shuttle service between the City of Fernie and FAR. Although FAR, various accommodation providers and the City of Fernie gave sporadic financial support for this service, it has never been economically viable to operate for a private operator. The previous service was provided primarily in the daytime; however, evening winter shuttles have also been offered and were supported by the Chamber of Commerce and City of Fernie at a cost of approximately \$20,000 per year. In 2008, the Chamber of Commerce ceased its funding for the evening shuttle and in 2009/10 and 2010/11 the City of Fernie subsidized the evening shuttle in the amount of \$60,000 per year through the Resort Municipality Initiatives program via contract with DSR Holdings, a regional transportation provider. The cost to ride was \$3 each way and in the first year 5,710 riders used the shuttle, in the second year that number decreased to 5,378. The operator retained rider revenues to offset expenses.

In the fall of 2011, Smokey Mountain Charters ceased operation of the daytime winter shuttle service due to the constant loss of money and other reasons. Community tourism stakeholders quickly congregated to confirm the need for the service and how to ensure another daytime service would be in place for the start of the ski season. Lead by Tourism Fernie, it was identified that a subsidy of at least \$30,000 would be required. The service needed to begin within two months so emergency funding was sourced from the City of Fernie (RMI funding), Tourism Fernie, Fernie Alpine Resort, Fernie Chamber of Commerce, the Regional District of East Kootenay and Columbia Basin Trust. Although the funding and an operator were found and the service was ready for season start, the emergency funding was only for one year and stakeholders needed to identify a more sustainable funding model for future years.

During the 2011/12 winter season Mountain High Shuttle, a private company, was awarded the City of Fernie contract for the evening winter shuttle with a subsidy of \$40,000. Mountain High was then automatically awarded the daytime service to ensure a consistent operator for both services. At the end of the 2011/12 ski season ridership was 14,971 for daytime and 6,161 during the evening. As a result of a coordinated effort by stakeholders that season the service was the best it had ever been, rider statistics were collected and a detailed Rider Survey was conducted by Tourism Fernie². Statistics provided Tourism Fernie with important information regarding the demographic of shuttle users:

- many shuttle users (49%) were visitors, while 39% were seasonal residents, and 10% local residents;

- the majority of users (58%) were under the age of 31;

- most users (52%) used the shuttle to ski or snowboard at the resort. 26% were residents using the shuttle to return to their accommodations, 11% used the shuttle to go to work on the mountain and another 11% were accessing dining, shopping and bars in the City of Fernie;

- the majority of shuttle users do not own a personal vehicle – 77%; and

² Fernie - Local Mountain Shuttle Rider Survey Feb-Mar 2012

many shuttle users (67%) were from outside Canada, with 29% from England and 14% from Australia.

Fernie's challenge for the 2012/13 is to identify a sustainable funding solution for both the daytime and evening service.

to Friday. The fare is \$2. There is also a South Country Loop which operates on Thursdays only and provides service to Sparwood, Fernie, Grassmere, Baynes Lake, Elko, and Jaffray for a fare of \$2.50. Elk Valley Transit also offers a Health Connection between the Elk Valley and Cranbrook. The Health Connection operates on Wednesday and Friday only, picking up in Elkford, Sparwood and Fernie in the Morning, and returning in the afternoon. The fare is \$2.50. Funding for the Elk Valley Transit is cost shared between the Regional District of the East Kootenay and BC Transit, and operated by Sun City Coachlines.

Kootenay Taxi, the previous winter shuttle provider, is available to provide taxi service between FAR and the City of Fernie, at a cost of approximately \$25 one way. Greyhound Buslines also services Fernie once a day but arrives and departs in the middle of the night.

It should be noted that there are private companies that provide transportation to their clients only. For example, NON-Stop Adventures and Red Tree Lodge in Fernie sell multi-week ski and snowboard learning packages to international visitors that includes shuttle between the lodge and Fernie Alpine Resort daily. As a result the company owns buses and represents a potential opportunity for partnership.

Shuttle services have also been provided between Fernie and airports in Cranbrook and Calgary. For several years Smokey Mountain Charters, Journey's West, and Mountain Perks (now The Shuttle by Rent-A-Wreck) offered a charter only airport shuttle service between Fernie and airports in Calgary, Cranbrook and/or Kalispell, MT. In 2010/11 Mountain High Shuttle began to offer a chartered service from Calgary and Cranbrook as well. In 2011/12 a new regularly scheduled and affordable shuttle service between Cranbrook Airport and Fernie was created as a joint partnership with stakeholders. The Fernie Connector, operated by a private company (Backside Tours), won the contract to provide this service.

Kicking Horse Mountain Resort is located 14 km from Golden Town Centre. Various transportation services exist in Golden, many of which have been in operation for several years.

Shuttle services between Kicking Horse Mountain Resort (KHMR) and the community of Golden have been in place since the winter of 2006/07. Until 2011, the service was provided by Mt. 7 Taxi which had a contractual agreement with BC Transit through the Columbia Shuswap Regional District, the Town of Golden and KHMR – who provided significant financial support for the program. Over the 5 years of service under this agreement, fares ranged from free, to \$2 per trip. Three day stamps (\$15), five day stamps (\$25), and seasons passes (\$150) were also available. In

2006/07, the shuttle made 11 trips each way between Golden and KHMR, stopping sporadically at 11 different spots in Golden, and three places on KHMR. Total ridership that year was 25,277.

Overall, the previous shuttle service which operated between 2006 and 2010 was not considered overly successful by many of the partners due in part to the quality of bus (school bus) and resulting high maintenance costs, inconsistent service, high operational costs (upwards of \$58,000 annually), and impractical routing.

In the 2011/12 winter ski season, KHMR developed a new program offering a free shuttle service, the Snow Shuttle, between the Town of Golden and KHMR. The shuttle provided four trips each way daily stopping at eight locations around Golden, and two locations at KHMR.

The KHMR Snow Shuttle was planned and implemented by KHMR and operated by an independent private partner (Alpine Holidays). Alpine Holidays utilized one 17 passenger coach with roof mounted storage for equipment and luggage, and a single driver. Operation of the KHMR Snow Shuttle in the 2011/2012 season has been very successful. Operating costs are quite low, ridership is high (100% capacity on snow days, 50-60% capacity on other days for an overall average of 60-65% ridership capacity), the quality of buses and customer service has been exceptional, and though rather limited, partnerships with local businesses have also been successful. The service is fully funded by KHMR with in-kind support from local businesses in return for having the Snow Shuttle stop at their place of business. Total operating cost for the Snow Shuttle in 2011/12 was approximately \$40,000.

The primary challenges associated with this new program include a lack of frequent and reliable evening shuttle service. Provision of the evening service has proven to be cost prohibitive at the planning phase as an additional driver and additional funding from the local business community would be required. With the recent purchase of KHMR by Resorts of the Canadian Rockies, it is unclear as to whether shuttle services will be provided in the 2012/13 ski season. Given the benefit of the service to the Town of Golden, visitors and local residents, there is likely a need for additional financial partners in future years to maintain this important service.

Since 2007, BC Transit has operated the Kicking Horse Country Transit System (KHCTS) which provides service in the Golden Area, including the rural areas to the South (Nicholson and Parson) and North (Donald). The route is serviced by one bus which makes morning and afternoon loops between various locations in the Golden area. Adult fare is \$1.50 within Golden and \$2 in the rural areas. All fare revenue, approximately \$3,000 per year, is kept by the town to support the system. The KHCTS does not provide service to KHMR.

The KHCTS is operated by Olympus Stage Lines Ltd., through a partnership between the Town of Golden, Columbia Shuswap Regional District (CSRD), Electoral Area 'A' and BC Transit. It is cost shared with BC Transit paying about 50% of the cost, and the Town of Golden and CSRD paying 25% each. Annual operating cost for the service is about \$200,000 per year. BC Transit maintains ownership of the buses, which are leased to the Town of Golden who is the operating authority. On February 14, 2012, the Town of Golden made the decision to end the KHCTS service in the Golden Area. The service was reviewed by BC Transit and found to be considerably underperforming in ridership and cost effectiveness. The service is scheduled for termination on July 27, 2012.

in the afternoon. The fare is \$2.50 one-way.

Private business and accommodation shuttles have and continue to be explored by a variety of local entities. This includes the free weekend shuttle service provided by the Rockwater Bar & Grill, free on-call shuttle service between KHMR and the Cedar House Chalet with dinner reservations, free KHMR to Golden shuttle for hotel guest provided by Bellstar Hotels, and taxi service provided by Mt. 7 Taxi. Greyhound Buslines also services Golden with four buses per day from Calgary.



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<http://www.tac-atc.ca/english/resourcecentre/readingroom/pdf/best-practice.pdf>

4.3

Government of British Columbia (2005) Best Practice Guide: For Resort Development in British Columbia. Volume 2. Best Practices Project.

¹³ Won, D., Bang, H., and Shonk, D. (2008). Relative Importance of Factors Involved in Choosing a Regional Ski Destination: Influence of Consumption Situation and Recreation Specialization, *Journal of Sport Management*, 13:4, 249-271.

¹⁴ Williams, P., and Fidgeon, P. (2000). Addressing Participation Constraint: A Case Study of Potential Skiers. *Journal of Sport Management*, 379-393.

¹⁵ Kelly, J., Haider, W., Williams, P., and Englund, K. (2007). Stated Preferences of Tourists for eco-efficient destination planning options, *Journal of Sport Management*, 377-390.

Government of British Columbia (2005) Best Practice Guide: For Resort Development in British Columbia. Volume 2. Best Practices Project.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Local Government Act. [RSBC 1996] CHAPTER 323. Part 25 – Regional Growth Strategies. Section 849.

²⁰ National Guide to Sustainable Municipal Infrastructure (2003).

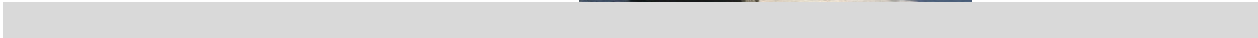
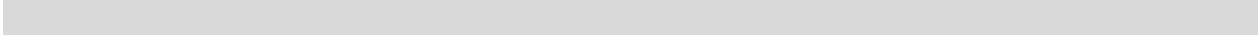
Retrieved July 7, 2012 at

http://fcm.ca/Documents/reports/Infraguide/Transit_best_practices_EN.pdf

²¹ US Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration. (March 2012). Best Planning Practices: Metropolitan Transportation Plans. Retrieved July 9, 2012 at

http://www.planning.dot.gov/documents/BestPlanningPractices_MTP.pdf





0 from the City of Revelstoke through Gas Tax funds, \$20,000 from the DMO (through funds obtained from the Additional Hotel Room Tax), and \$25,000 from RMR. Estimated annual operating costs are \$100,000/year (depending on bus repairs required), and revenues from fares are about \$45,000. Extra revenues are split between the City of Revelstoke (2/3 to cover bus repairs) and operator (1/3 for profit).

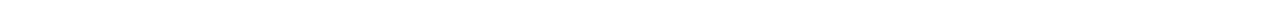
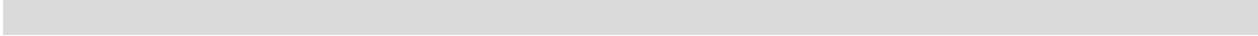
The Revelstoke Resort Shuttle demonstrates the effectiveness of partnerships and collaboration. A successful Resort shuttle service, demonstrating a sustainable funding model with convenient service and successful ridership exists through partnership between the City of Revelstoke, RMR, and the DMO (Revelstoke Accommodation Association).

Meeting peak demand. In 2011/12, extra buses were required to meet peak demand. The buses were rented from the Kelowna School District. Obtaining agreement from all parties as to the relative financial contribution towards the service.

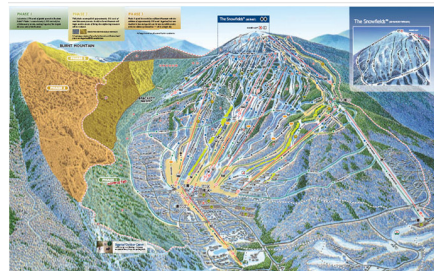
Partnership and collaboration between the City of Revelstoke, RMR, and the DMO (Revelstoke Accommodation Association).

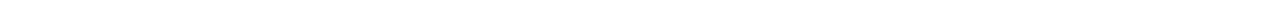
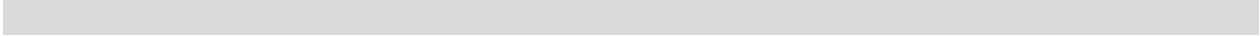
Alan Mason
Director of Community Economic Development, City of Revelstoke
Phone: 250-837-5345
Email: Amason@cityofrevelstoke.com

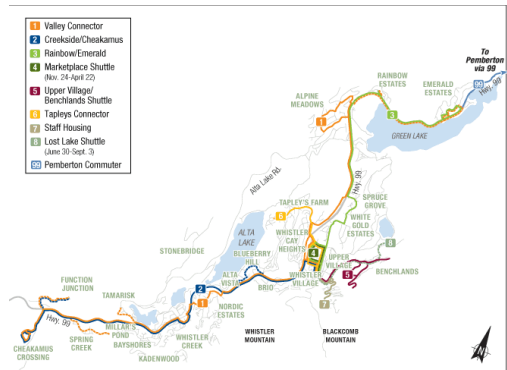
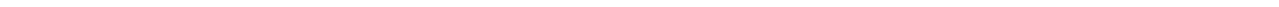
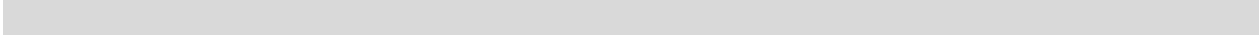














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Gs by 33% below 2007 levels by 2020, and 80% below 2007 levels by 2050²⁸. Provincial support for rural regional transportation systems will help reduce GHGs.

2. The Province has a commitment to double provincial tourism revenues by 2015²⁹. Providing support to local and regional transportation services in tourism areas would increase the competitive advantage of BC's resort destinations and increase provincial tourism revenues.

Such collaboration could be effective in sharing information, fostering innovation and lobbying the Provincial Government with a collective voice for incentives and subsidies to support rural regional transportation systems.

Under section 14.2 of the Local Government Act, a Local Government may establish a local service area for the purpose of providing services that “the council considers provide particular benefit to part of the municipality”³⁰. A local area service is a municipal service that is to be paid

²⁷ Bow Valley Regional Transit Services Commission (2010): Five-Year Business Plan. Fall 2011 to Summer 2016

²⁸ BC Greenhouse Gas Reduction Targets Act – Bill 44 (2007). Part 1 - BC Greenhouse Gas Emissions Targets

²⁹ Province of British Columbia's Tourism Action Plan (2007)

³⁰ Local Government Act. [RSBC 1996] CHAPTER 323. Part 2 - Incorporation of Municipalities.

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