



10/28/2023

The Future of Dawson Creek

(From a Public Transportation
Perspective)



Randy Chau

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By: Randy Chau

Introduction:

When I first moved here in 2016, the options to travel into and out of this “city” were plentiful. There were direct flights from Central Mountain Air to Vancouver from the Dawson Creek airport and the Greyhound coach busses carry passengers to and from this place on a daily basis. Public bus services ran 6 days a week until 7:30pm with most retail businesses open late until 10 or 11pm.

Currently, there is a BC Bus North program and a Cold Shot Albertan company that barely replaced the sophisticated network of the previous Greyhound commuter services. Our Dawson Creek airport has no major airline carrier anymore. In addition, the public bus system is down to two routes on weekdays that end after 4:40pm with a huge service outage gap in the middle of the day!

Dawson Creek Citizens’ Needs:

There are over 50% of our citizens who can be labelled as a vulnerable citizen due to their ages. In addition, two thirds of Dawson Creek’s population are working members of this society. These citizens depend on travelling around to get their basic needs (food, service, etc.)

With our climate’s longer winters and extreme temperatures reaching -50 degrees, the need for

- 1) a **TRUE** on-demand public transit system that carries passengers from their doorstep to wherever they need to go
- 2) a real bus that caters to the two designated school runs in the morning and afternoon
- 3) or a REFORMED public transit system

is something that this city needs as soon as possible.

With an improved on-demand bus system—it increases the reliability of service and instill trust back into public transportation. As more people learn about this, the goal is for more citizens to become environmentally sustainable to reduce carbon emissions caused by driving.

Only then can the public transportation continue to evolve for the betterment of our people and reduce congestion on the streets caused by cars.

Rationale: (5 parts)

1) The Need for Expansion

When a person decides whether or not to move to Dawson Creek, they ask themselves several questions:

- i) What do they have here?
 - ii) How can I get around?
 - iii) What opportunities are there?
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- i) Dawson Creek is very fortunate to have almost all the major retail chains here in this city. (Shoppers Drug Mart, No Frills, Walmart, Save-On-Foods, Safeway Extra, Tim Hortons, Starbucks, McDonald's, Burger King, Wendy's, etc.)
 - ii) Unfortunately, for those people who don't own vehicles or have a driver's license to drive—this becomes a major obstacle that prevents them from making the ultimate decision to move here→Because we have an unreliable public transportation system.
 - iii) When a business company looks for opportunities to expand into this city—they look for potential: Potential for development or redevelopment. Potential to earn lots due to a lot of traffic in and out of the city. Etc. **(I.e. Signs of Growth)**

The City of Dawson Creek was on the right track when they proposed an airport runway expansion project in 2018 to try and attract bigger airplanes to use our airport and to invest in the potential that this city can bring. (Dawson Creek Mirror Staff, 2018) However, that expansion project never went ahead.

When a person drives around the city, they see lots of empty lots and previous businesses that are now abandoned.

I am not sure how many of these sites have contaminated soil issues, asbestos issues, etc. that prevent new businesses from wanting to develop on these sites. However, the city needs to focus on “beautifying” these areas by giving grants to potential businesses who want to develop here to help them not pay as much to tackle contaminated soil issues or the removal of asbestos issues.

But I digress.

2) Population Pyramid

According to World Population Review, the city of Dawson Creek has a population of 13,063 in the year 2023.

For the rest of this section, I would like to focus on the different age ranges who would need to rely on an effective public transit system to better their daily lives in this city.

There are 2940 people who are 55 years of age or older. For the members of this age group who do not drive or are too old to drive, they depend heavily on public transit to get them from place to place. These are members in our community who cannot endure the harsh conditions of winter for a very long time because our public transit system only comes to a bus stop once every 40minutes.

There are 1410 youth (10-19 years old) and 965 people (20-24 years old) who attend school or college 10 months of the year. Low-income families with children and youth that fall within these age groups depend on a reliable public transit system to take them from their homes to school and back—especially during harsh winter conditions where they cannot walk to school.

This means that about half of our population falls into the **vulnerable citizen** category.

3) Canada's Carbon Footprint Reduction Goals & The Global Sustainability Initiative

There are world leaders and speakers who talk about a city's main responsibility—a responsibility to humanity and their own citizens.

Leaders such as Jaime Lerner from 16 years ago have mentioned that cities need to focus on their public transportation no matter the cost because it helps the world become more **sustainable**.

Jaime Lerner:

But we have a very pessimistic approach about the cities. I'm working in cities for almost 40 years, and where every mayor is trying to tell me his city is so big, or the other mayors say, "We don't have financial resources," I would like to say from the experience I had: every city in the world can be improved in less than three years. There's no matter of scale. It's not a question of scale, it's not a question of financial resources. Every problem in a city has to have its own equation of co-responsibility and also a design.

Jaime Lerner:

What I'm trying to say is the major contribution on carbon emissions are from the cars -- more than 50 percent -- so when we depend only on cars, it's ... -- that's why when we're talking about sustainability

And coming back to the car, I always used to say that the car is like your mother-in-law: you have to have good relationship with her, but she cannot command your life. So, when the only woman in your life is your mother-in-law, you have a problem.

More recently, another former mayor, Enrique Peñalosa, ties in the concept of how public transportation reflects democracy at work. –that public transportation focuses on the accessibility for everyone → **especially our most vulnerable population (the very young and the very old).**

Enrique Peñalosa:

The first one is equality of quality of life, especially for children, that all children should have, beyond the obvious health and education, access to green spaces, to sports facilities, to swimming pools, to music lessons

However, it was possible, finally, after very difficult battles, to make a city that would reflect some respect for human dignity, that would show that those who walk are equally important to those who have cars.

He addresses issues that talks about what insufficient democracy looks like:

Enrique Peñalosa:

Here, what you see is a picture that shows insufficient democracy. What this shows is that people who walk are third-class citizens while those who go in cars are first-class citizens. In terms of transport infrastructure, what really makes a difference between advanced and backward cities is not highways or subways but quality sidewalks. Here they made a flyover, probably very useless, and they forgot to make a sidewalk. This is prevailing all over the world. Not even schoolchildren are more important than cars.

And finally, he addresses how a bus's importance should portray what "democratic equality" is:

Enrique Peñalosa:

And the second kind of equality is one which we could call "democratic equality." The first article in every constitution states that all citizens are equal before the law. That is not just poetry. It's a very powerful principle. For example, if that is true, a bus with 80 passengers has a right to 80 times more road space than a car with one.

Canada is one of many leading countries who have committed a promise to be net-zero by a certain date. (Government of Canada, 2023)

The city of Dawson Creek used to have a sustainability department who would engage the public by doing outreach such as Free Transit Week to promote ridership on our city busses.

4) The Rise of On-Demand Transit: A Solution and Stepping Stone for Dawson Creek's Public Transportation System

On-Demand Transit is a new initiative that was adapted since the birth of ride share companies such as Uber or Lyft.

It is a perfect stepping stone for the city of Dawson Creek to do their part in making this city "sustainable" to live in.

Cities such as Edmonton (<https://www.edmonton.ca/ets/on-demand-transit?fbclid=IwAR0tgW2D9mANGLownnUPvyMrX5cplkiisLS1sjsB1K4PzICQ8TVVxAPDdOQ>) and Kelowna (<https://globalnews.ca/news/9682926/what-is-on-demand-transit-in-kelowna/>) are already implementing these systems to provide equity to their citizens for easy accessibility around the city.

By providing education to the senior population who don't use technology as much as the younger generation, senior citizens can access on demand transit by phoning in.

5) Current State of Dawson Creek's Public Transit Internal Structure

Currently, the city employs only two main bus drivers who drive the routes of Northside and Southside during the weekdays. These bus drivers are managed and maintained by one bus cleaner and one on-site mechanic who also doubles up as a zone supervisor. The Dawson Creek vicinity is then overseen by an area manager in Fort St. John.

Should one of these core members of the team fall ill, there is one retired bus driver who is on call or else the mechanic-supervisor will have to fill in the duties of the ill-stricken bus driver until they return. Otherwise, the area manager in Fort St. John will have to send one of

their team members down to Dawson Creek to try and fill their shifts (assuming there's a member on the Fort St. John staff who knows how to drive the routes in Dawson Creek).

This is a terrible system with no geographically sensible kind of personnel structure. When a system's only option is to depend on a retired bus driver to fill in shifts, it has a negative image on the city because it is sending a message to the rest of its citizens that they cannot create an attractive enough job position for this public transit system to get qualified, labour aged workers to apply.

This also puts strain on the area supervisor's workload because now, on top of their mechanic and supervisory duties, they must put those responsibilities aside to cover a sick driver's shift.

[My Recommendation to City Council](#)

As a consistent bus rider in this community, I would like to see sustainability initiatives, improvements to our public transit service, and other signs of city growth to attract companies such as major airlines to reinvest in our city once again.

Signed by a concerned citizen,

Randy Chau.

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