

# **Needs Assessment: Transportation Access of Homeless and Underhoused in York Region**

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## **Needs Assessment: Transportation Access of Homeless and Underhoused in York Region**

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*The York Region Alliance to End Homelessness extends special gratitude to all focus group participants and those with lived experience. This report and resulting improvements to transportation support would not be possible without your participation and insight.*

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This needs assessment was conducted by the York Region Alliance to End Homelessness in partnership with several community agencies and local organizations throughout York Region.

### **About the York Region Alliance to End Homelessness**

The Alliance is a coalition of social service agencies and other stakeholders that work collaboratively to understand, plan and implement a strategic response to homelessness in York Region.

### **York Region Alliance to End Homelessness**

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## **Executive Summary**

In March 2008, the 2<sup>nd</sup> update of York Region's Community Plan to Address Homelessness was completed (The Regional Municipality of York et al., 2008). The report was prepared for the purpose of updating the community's priorities in addressing homelessness and giving community service organizations a framework within which to work together to achieve common goals, avoid duplication and improve services.

Priority #3 in the plan highlighted the fact that supports and services for homeless individuals and families, and those at risk of becoming homeless are limited and do not meet the needs of York Region residents. The need for improved transportation to and from various facilities across York Region for homeless and at risk individuals was identified as a priority for action through funding allocated to York Region between 2008-2009 under the federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy.

Community agencies affiliated with the York Region Alliance to End Homelessness agreed that a collaborative approach to addressing this issue would make sense. In June 2008, the Alliance was awarded \$65,000 to develop long term sustainable approaches to transportation for homeless and at risk persons in York Region. \$38,550 of this funding would be allocated to provide a coordinated community approach that would increase access of 500 people to services and supports in York Region.

A snapshot needs assessment conducted by the York Region Alliance to End Homelessness is reported through this document to inform the strategy. Data was collected through agency and community organization questionnaires, as well as a series of focus groups at one emergency shelter for men, two women's shelters for female victims of violence and their children, two youth shelters and one youth drop-in.

A total of 14 local agency questionnaires and nine community group questionnaires were returned by the cut off date of August 7, 2008. Additionally, a total of 27 men and 26 women participated in this needs assessment through focus groups.

All respondent agencies serve homeless and at risk individuals in York Region, However, agencies had a specific focus on target demographics, such as youth and their families (50%), general population or mostly adult men and women (43%), and women who were either teenage mothers, pregnant and under 25 years , or subject to a violent situation (14%). Bus tickets (71%), followed by emergency taxis and staff driving clients in their own vehicles (each 50%), were the main forms of transportation support that agencies offered. Most agencies (64%) said that they had no data on transportation needs or services provided to their clients. Eighty-six percent said their clients needed support to get to appointments. Moving assistance, emergency/unsafe situation assistance, and getting to grocery stores or food banks (each 79%) were all identified as major needs. The most common agency-identified barrier to accessing adequate transportation was the cost and a related lack of resources to meet the cost of transportation (71%), followed by infrequent, inadequate, or inconsistent transit service schedules (57%). Half (50%) of agencies that responded did not identify any existing partnerships around transportation.

All eight community group respondents said that they served the homeless or at-risk in some capacity. The main types of support provided were assistance with paying rent or utilities (50%) and providing supplies such as food, food vouchers, or clothing (38%). Six community groups (75%) responded that transportation is a definite concern to the homeless and at-risk people they interact with. Community groups that identified transportation as an unmet need said that they were asked for bus tickets or passes, rides,

## **Needs Assessment: Transportation Access of Homeless and Underhoused in York Region**

and taxi fare to get to a variety of destinations, such as food banks, emergency winter shelters, agencies, parole appointments, court, job interviews, legal aid, and to seek medical attention. Several community groups indicated that homeless and at-risk people tend to struggle with transportation due to a range of barriers including timing/frequency of buses (50%), and affordability of bus tickets/passes and taxi fare (38%). Some organizations were able to hand out YRT tickets or TTC tokens based on available funding, manager approval and individual situations. In some cases, staff and volunteers may offer to drive people who are unable to afford or access the bus.

Priority concern areas that emerged from the eight focus groups of homeless and at risk individuals included transportation access to find housing, maintain involvement in education, secure and maintain employment, and access health services. Although men identified challenges relating to transportation and housing, education, employment, and health, the main priority areas for these men were related to employment and health.

Women who participated in these focus groups were living in Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters, and many had young children. Primary concerns of these women tended to be related to the need to generate a new source of income, find a new home, and re-establish themselves and their children. In light of this, women strongly emphasized that transportation relating to employment and housing searches is a major concern. Some women also commented on their need to get to educational opportunities, such as support meetings to deal with life transitions, or formal education to gain skills for work.

Youth participants expressed concerns in all four priority areas – housing, education, employment, and health. However, unlike other groups, youth shared about a greater need for access to education as many youth were still working towards completion of secondary or post-secondary school. In addition to educational opportunities, many youth struggled to find transit-accessible jobs, and they needed to commute to work so that they could afford to live independently with their own housing. Transportation challenges were far more pronounced in northern York Region due to a greater shortage of resources and service availability.

Some limitations of this needs assessment included time constraints and pressure to gather and analyze data in only three weeks, as well as the challenge of capturing input from single homeless women ages 27 and older who have not fled an abusive situation. There are no emergency shelter beds for single women in a housing crisis in York Region.

Based on the data collected, the lack of affordable, accessible, and safe transportation is a major barrier to homeless and at-risk men, women, and youth being able to access resources, such as housing, education, employment, and health care. The severity of impact of the transportation limitations within a region as widespread as York demands a response that is timely and effective to enhance the ability of individuals to obtain the necessary tools for building or rebuilding a healthy, sustainable existence.

Based on these findings, specific recommendations have been made to the York Region Alliance to End Homelessness, community agencies, provincial and regional/municipal governments, and local transit systems. A detailed outline of these recommendations may be found at the end of this report.



That's another reason why most people here are homeless right now, because you need a job to get first and last [rent payments]...but you can't have a job unless you're in a certain area, or if you can get to an area by a certain time.

Or as soon as somebody finds, like some jobs, as soon as they find out you're in a shelter, they're like, oh my god, I don't want them here...

Yup, bye-bye.

- Youth Shelter Resident



I just wish that there was somewhere that you could, like, I know where I'm from in London, there's this big thing downtown that you can go get any bus schedule for anything, and everyone knows about it, knows how to get there and it tells you, like there's all these little stops along the way that you can find routes, and there's every bus stop has a map of where each route goes. Like, I don't want to hop on a bus and it sends me to like Richmond Hill and I don't know where I am and I think I'm still in Newmarket. Like, I have, like 'cause there's nothing. I don't even know what a bus stop looks like, other than the Viva ones.

They had those little maps in Montreal too, it shows where you, like the nearest streets, if there is a subway station close, like you know like you go out and you can have an idea where are you. And here you just check okay...

I've seen them but I don't know where they go at all. And I'm scared I'll get on one and it'll send me somewhere, and I can't afford to be paying another route fare if I get lost and then...

- Family Shelter Resident



## **Background**

Mobility is essential for living. People commonly require adequate transportation to get to and from places like employment resource centres, workplaces, schools, job skills training, food banks, grocery stores, medical offices, hospitals, social services offices, shelters, and new homes. Access to these necessities depends heavily on people's ability to commute around York Region and surrounding municipalities, and their ability to transport themselves in a reasonably timely manner.

*A lot of people are really dependent on the bus...If I can't get the bus, I can't get home. It would be a 6-7 hour walk or something like that.*  
- Youth at a Drop-In

In March 2008, the 2<sup>nd</sup> update of York Region's Community Plan to Address Homelessness was completed (The Regional Municipality of York et al., 2008). The report was prepared for the purpose of updating the community's priorities in addressing homelessness and giving community service organizations a framework within which to work together to achieve common goals, avoid duplication and improve services.

Priority #3 in the plan highlighted the fact that supports and services for homeless individuals and families, and those at risk of becoming homeless are limited and do not meet the needs of York Region residents. The need for improved transportation to and from various facilities across York Region for homeless and at risk individuals was identified as a priority for action through funding allocated to York Region between 2008-2009 under the federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy.

Community agencies affiliated with the York Region Alliance to End Homelessness agreed that a collaborative approach to addressing this issue would make sense. In June 2008, the Alliance was awarded \$65,000 to develop long term sustainable approaches to transportation for homeless and at risk persons in York Region. \$38,550 of this funding would be allocated to provide a coordinated community approach that would increase access of 500 people to services and supports in York Region.

A recent needs assessment targeting homeless single women in York Region highlighted their frustration and a strong need for improved transportation support (Cakebread Consulting, 2007). Some quotes from this needs assessment identify that lack of adequate transportation forces homeless people to walk excessively: "I walk 10-12 hours a day." Another woman's response was:

*You only get one bus ticket a day, in the morning when you leave. How are you supposed to get from here [seasonal program], to an appointment or whatever you are doing to get a place or whatever, and then get back to someplace to eat or sleep?*

One woman who participated in this needs assessment explained that she lived in her car and found it frustrating that individuals can get a \$2.75 bus ticket each day but that there is no support for gas money. Another form of support that was suggested is a bus pass rather than individual tickets.

In response to these needs and barriers to transportation, the York Region Alliance to End Homelessness (Alliance) has been given Homelessness Partnering Initiatives funding for one year to create an inventory of transportation services and supports for homeless and at-risk people in York Region, and to improve transportation access for 500 homeless and underhoused individuals in York Region. Specifically, \$38,550 has been allocated to assist a

target of 500 individuals with transportation needs. To strategically improve transportation access for homeless and underhoused people, a Transportation Working Group has been formed under the umbrella of the Alliance. A snapshot environmental scan and needs assessment has been conducted by the Transportation Working Group to inform this strategy.

## **Methods**

In order to gather a quick snapshot of data to assess the needs and barriers relating to transportation in York Region, the Transportation Working Group decided to combine the use of survey questionnaires and focus groups. One survey questionnaire was designed for local agencies that aim to work with homeless and at-risk people, and a second questionnaire targeted community groups that may interact with homeless and at-risk groups, but not necessarily tailor their services to them specifically. The questionnaires were distributed by email and fax to all York Region agencies and community organizations on the Alliance distribution list, as well as to targeted community directories, such as local ministerial groups, employment support services, and police services. Respondents were given the option of returning their completed questionnaires by email, fax, or online submission through the Survey Monkey online questionnaire tool.

In addition to these questionnaires, the Transportation Working Group held a series of eight one-hour focus groups at various locations around York Region to engage members of the community who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. In an attempt to capture a variety of perspectives, these focus groups took place at two women's shelters and a family shelter (Yellow Brick House, Sandgate Women's Shelter, and Leeder Place), two youth shelters and a youth drop-in (York Region Youth Shelter, Sutton Youth Shelter, and Home Base), and a men's shelter (Porter Place). Two focus groups were held at Home Base due to poor attendance at the first attempt. A maximum of 10 participants were allowed at each focus group and each participant was given \$12 for their participation.

*In order to get anything these days, you have to give to receive. Because anything you do these days is "Oh you gotta go to this parenting program and we give you bus tickets just to get home and come back for the next one." Do you know what I mean? You get a \$10 voucher if you go to the parenting program with your children to go shopping with. It's little things you have to give to receive. And it's almost like if you're in the shelter ...*

*And if you don't really want to sit there, then you won't get nothing.*

*And sometimes we don't want to go look for a job or an apartment, we just want to go out. And you can't.*

- *Women's Shelter Resident*

**Results**

A total of 14 local agency questionnaires and nine community group questionnaires (two from the same organization and department, which were combined as one response to a total of eight community responses) were returned by the cut off date of August 7, 2008 (Table 1). Additionally, a total of 27 men and 26 women participated in this needs assessment through focus groups.

**Table 1: Agency and Community Questionnaire Respondents**

<b>Agency Respondents</b> <i>(With Department/Program)</i>	<b>Community Respondents</b> <i>(With Department/Program)</i>
<p><b>Citizens for Affordable Housing</b> <i>Housing Help Centre</i></p> <p><b>Community Legal Clinic of York Region</b> <i>Jewish Family and Child Services</i> <i>York Region Services</i></p> <p><b>LOFT/Crosslinks Housing and Support Services</b> <i>Community Support Program</i></p> <p><b>Mosaic Interfaith Out of the Cold</b></p> <p><b>Pathways for Children, Youth &amp; Families of York Region</b> <i>Family Resource Centre</i> <i>Residential Housing Program; Aftercare Program</i> <i>Home Base</i> <i>Base 4 Success Employment Program</i> <i>Housing/Intake/Outreach</i></p> <p><b>Rose of Sharon – Services for Young Mothers</b> <b>Salvation Army</b> <i>Homelessness Prevention</i></p> <p><b>York Region Food Network</b> <i>Gleaning</i></p> <p><b>Sandgate Women’s Shelter</b></p>	<p><b>Georgina Community Food Pantry</b></p> <p><b>Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services</b> <i>Probation and Parole</i></p> <p><b>Newmarket Youth &amp; Recreation Centre and Kinsmen Skatepark</b> <i>Town of Newmarket Recreation Department – Recreation Programs and Support</i></p> <p><b>Rouge Valley Mennonite Church</b> <b>Salvation Army</b> <i>Community &amp; Family Services</i></p> <p><b>St. Luke’s Catholic Parish</b></p> <p><i>MOSAIC Interfaith Out of the Cold</i></p> <p><b>St. Vincent de Paul</b> <i>St. Justin Martyr Conference</i></p> <p><b>YMCA of York Region</b> <i>Employment Services</i></p>

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Like last time I was here, there was a job waiting for me up in Virginia Beach. I walked two hours to that interview. I got that job. The next day I couldn’t go to that job because I had heat stroke from walking in the sun.

- Youth Shelter Resident

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## Agency Questionnaires

### Populations Reached

All respondent agencies aim to serve homeless and at risk individuals in York Region. However, each agency also has a specific focus on target demographics within the broader community. Seven agency respondents (50%) said their focus was on youth and their families, six agency respondents (43%) appeared to focus on the general population or mostly adult men and women, and two agency respondents (14%) targeted women who were either teenage mothers, pregnant and under 25 years, or subject to a violent situation (total does not add up to 100% because some agencies overlapped target demographics). In particular, targeted demographics reported include:

- Working poor at risk of homelessness
- Adults (male and female)
- Those with addictions and/or mental illness
- People with cognitive disabilities
- Co-op housing tenants
- Social assistance recipients
- Low income individuals
- Those seeking rental accommodation in York Region and Bradford
- Landlords attempting to rent various accommodations
- Children from birth to six years and their families
- Youth who are homeless or living in residential group homes
- Youth who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless
- At risk/"Barriered" youth ages 13-24 and 15-30
- Young teen mothers and pregnant women under 25 in York Region
- Women facing abuse
- Women and children who have experienced violence

### Support and Resources

Bus tickets (71%), followed by emergency taxis and staff driving clients in their own vehicles (each 50%), were the main forms of transportation support that agencies offered. However, bus tickets were reported to be in limited supply and often only given if available for specific types of trips. Three agencies (21%) said they had no or very limited resources with which to provide transportation support, so they were often unable to provide any support and could only refer to other agencies. Six agencies (43%) said they provided clients with some moving support, although most said moving support was only occasional and through the use of staff or volunteer members' personal vehicles because funds were not available to provide this as an official resource to clients. Only one agency said they were able to cover the cost of moving through the Homelessness Prevention Program. Other support resources that are each offered by one agency were a van, special visit arrangements, and a chartered bus to farms.

*I guess knowing if...knowing that your transportation is looked after, it makes the job easier to focus on because I think what I see is that everybody's worried how do I get there, how do I get back, and when you play that into your mind every day, your effort into your work is like I don't want to go there...go all the way down there and I'm fighting to get transportation to get there and beg to get a ride back and it, it just wears you out mentally...*

- Men's Shelter Resident

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### Data

Based on the responses received, it appears that there is no universal system for collecting data on transportation needs or services provided to homeless and at risk individuals in York Region by any organization, transportation provider or level of government. Most agencies (64%) said that they had no transportation-related data.

### Needs

Agencies were asked to identify the types of transportation needs that were faced by their homeless and at risk clients. Eighty-six percent of respondents said that their clients needed transportation support to get to appointments, such as to see doctors or specialists. In addition to this response, agencies commented that support was also needed to transport individuals between offices for workshops or programs. Moving assistance, emergency/unsafe situation assistance, and getting to grocery stores or food banks (each 79%) were all identified as being a major need recognized by agency staff. Other needs and their ranking may be seen in Figure 1 below.

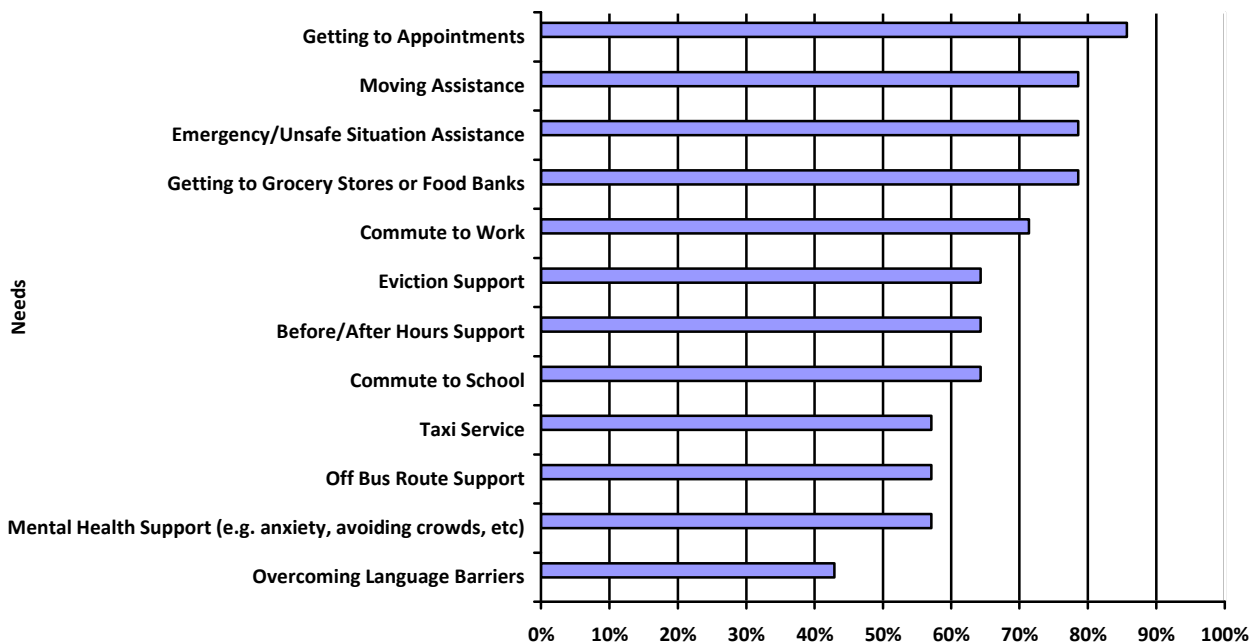


Figure 1: Proportion of Agencies Who Identified Specific Needs

### Barriers

The most common agency-identified barrier to accessing adequate transportation was the cost and a related lack of resources to meet the cost of transportation (71%). This was followed by infrequent, inadequate, or inconsistent transit service schedules (57%), which would not be useful for emergency travel or earlier and later bus trips. Examples of emergency travel may be the need to flee a violent situation, while earlier and later bus trips may be required for shift work hours. Other identified barriers to transportation may be seen in Figure 2 below.

## Needs Assessment: Transportation Access of Homeless and Underhoused in York Region

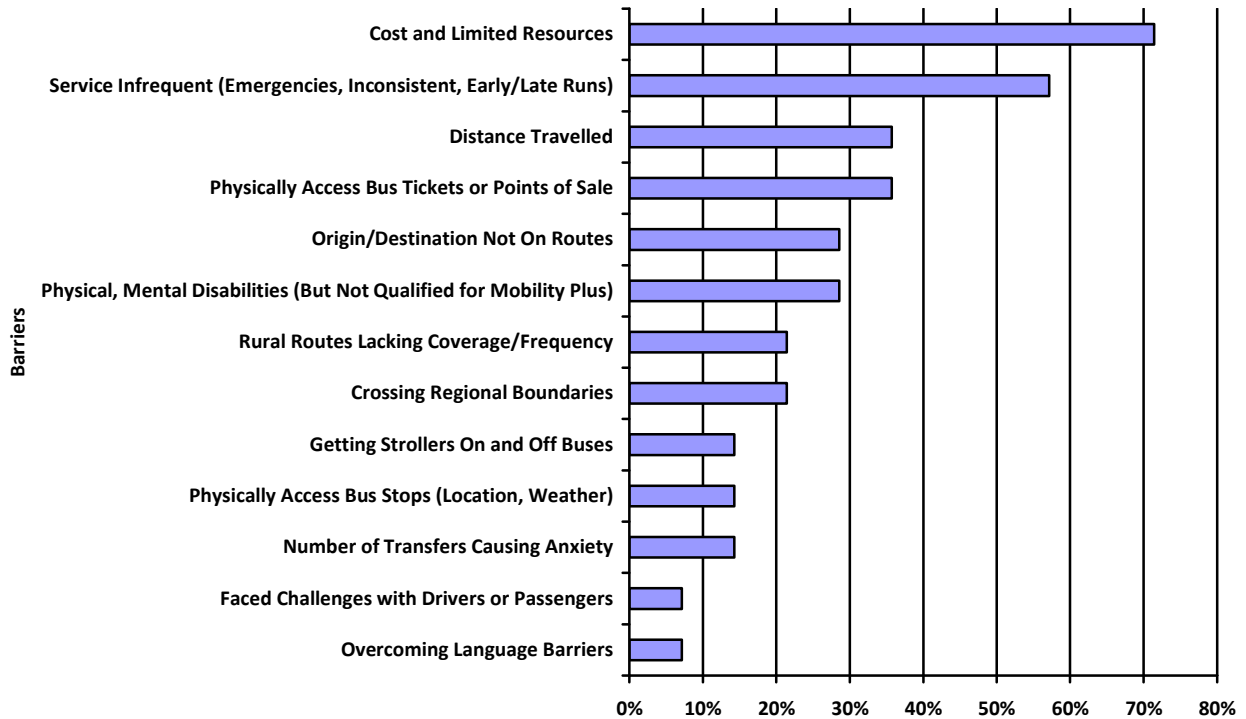


Figure 2: Proportion of Agencies Who Identified Specific Barriers

### Partnerships

Half (50%) of agencies that responded did not identify any existing partnerships around transportation. Two agencies stated that they worked in partnership with York Region for transportation support. Other unique partnerships that were identified include partnering with other agencies, a taxi company, Ontario Early Years Centres to cover partial costs for clients to get to programs, Ontario Works for bus tickets to employment services, and the Boards of Education or individual schools for raising support for homeless youth.

### Community Questionnaires

#### Serving Homeless and At-Risk Individuals

All eight of the community groups who responded said that they served the homeless or those at risk of becoming homeless in some capacity. The main types of support provided to the homeless and at-risk population were assistance with paying rent or utilities (50%) and providing food, food vouchers, or clothing (38%). In addition to these responses, two respondents had either current or past involvement with running Out of the Cold emergency winter shelters, and two had some involvement with housing advocacy, such as through the Markham Interchurch Committee for Affordable Housing (MICAH). Other forms of support offered to homeless and at-risk individuals in the community were offered through probation and parole supervision, employment support services, youth-specific programs, direct assistance with housing searches, counselling, and the financial support of a pastor through Sanctuary in Toronto.

## Needs

Six community groups (75%) responded that transportation is a definite concern to the homeless and at-risk people they interact with. One community group said it was “possible” because it is rare that they receive requests to assist homeless people at all, and specific requests about transportation are impacted by that, and another community group said “no” because the issue has never been raised. Requests for transportation support ranged from very rarely, such as once or twice a year or every few months, to every few weeks or “constantly”. Generally, community groups that have offered some transportation support in the past have been receiving more frequent requests, indicating a potentially growing need. Requests appear to be more frequent in winter than summer.

Community groups that identified transportation as an unmet need said that they were asked for bus tickets or passes, rides, and taxi fare to get to a variety of destinations, such as food banks, emergency winter shelters, agencies, parole appointments, court, job interviews, legal aid, and to seek medical attention. Food banks were a particular concern since these community groups commented that food banks could be difficult to get to. One community group said that homeless and at-risk youth were forced to find ways to commute across a very widespread geographic area because of the way services are spread out. Respondents said that they sometimes tried to provide rides and taxis because the homeless and at-risk people they interact with tend to not have enough money to pay for public transportation or their own taxi fare. In particular, one church that operates an Out of the Cold shelter expressed the need to use taxis since the church is inaccessible by public transit.

*I had a bad back last year for instance, and they said they can only give you a bus ticket. You'd have to walk your way to a bus to get...I couldn't even walk up and down stairs, let alone all the way up a hill. So what did I do? Sat in pain for about a week and a half.*

- Men's Shelter Resident

A point of interest is that there appears to be inconsistency with the perceived transportation need among community groups. While one food bank respondent expressed that the issue of transportation does not seem to come up at their location, another respondent expressed that they constantly receive requests for transportation support (such as bus tickets) to gain access to appointments, interviews, and other meetings. This may indicate a potential pattern for where homeless and at-risk individuals may go for support.

## Barriers

A predominant barrier to transportation support is inadequate funding. Some groups said that they had made unsuccessful attempts to receive funding for assistance with transportation, such as to food banks and transportation not directly related to Out of the Cold. Several community groups indicated that homeless and at-risk people tend to struggle with transportation due to a range of barriers including:

- Timing/frequency of buses (50%)
- Affordability of bus tickets/passes and taxi fare (38%)
- Ability to access bus tickets/passes (38%)
- Origins/Destinations are off bus routes (38%)
- Mental/physical health limitations (38%)
- Crossing regional boundaries requiring two fares (25%)

## Resources

Generally, community groups attempted to respond to identified transportation needs with whatever means they could afford. Some organizations were able to hand out YRT tickets or TTC tokens based on funding, manager approval and individual situations. One organization said they were able to get bus tickets through Pathways. Other organizations said their ability to provide bus tickets and other forms of support were dependent entirely on donations. In some cases, staff and volunteers may offer to drive people who are unable to afford or access the bus.

Referrals are also a key resource to community groups, such as to the Women's Support Network, OW/ODSP Caseworkers, the York Regional Police mental health unit, and other agencies.

Community groups involved with Out of the Cold expressed that some government support may be available for requests relating to Out of the Cold, although it was a challenge to receive funding for other unrelated requests. A suggestion was made to have greater coordination between decision makers, service providers and government to minimize the silo approach to funding, community planning, and programs throughout the Region.

## **Focus Groups**

Results from the eight focus groups will be reported according to men, women, and youth based on themes that emerged from participant responses. In particular, priority concern areas emerged relating to housing, education, employment, and health. A complete list of recommendations drawn directly from focus group participants may be found in Appendix 1.

*It's almost as if there's just enough out there to say they're doing something, but not enough to make it work, y'know...and they segregate all the different agencies so there's really no comprehensive, you know, situation where it's across the board. It's...you might qualify for these guys for so long, but then you're done so now it's these guys, and then you've gotta go through the process again, which...that's where you lose all you...what you built up...you know.*

- Men's Shelter Resident

## **Transportation Needs**

### Men

Although men expressed facing challenges relating to transportation and housing, education, employment, and health, the main priority areas identified among men were employment and health.

### *Employment*

A major need identified by men was to be able to get to and from work. Work was a large stressor for men since their ability to sustain themselves and attain adequate housing was dependent on them being able to secure employment and income. Transportation in relation to work also poorly impacted mental health and ability to function as men were often unable to fully focus on tasks because of worrying about how they were to get between the shelter and their work place. Sometimes the positive aspect of being called for a job was quickly overshadowed by worrying about how to get there. In the winter, men would often stress over how they were to get to work if weather was bad. In some cases, they would want to call in sick because they were snowed in at the shelter and unable to get to work, although this created additional stress because it risked them losing their job and

having to start over with finding a new job again. Men said that they were strongly affected mentally by the stress of transportation challenges and that it wore down their will to go out and seek employment and housing.

Men struggled to get and maintain jobs because of difficulties in getting to and from work consistently for a few weeks before receiving their first pay cheque. Cost of transportation before receiving pay combined with long shifts and long commutes made it very challenging to commute to and from work. In some cases, men were required to commute out of York Region, such as to Toronto, which incurs double fares. Participants explained that to avoid potential discrimination, they do not tend to reveal their housing status to employers. As a result, employers that do not know the worker's situation may demand inflexible and sometimes long work hours, which can create transportation challenges such as catching buses or getting a ride on time.

Bus accessibility has been a challenge for men at Porter Place because there are no bus stops directly outside the shelter, which means men need to walk down a dangerous road with high speed traffic on a gravel shoulder to the nearest bus stop. A resource that men at Porter Place have is that there is a work shuttle van, which runs at 8:30am and 3:30pm between the shelter and transit stations. This van has been a great help to the men because it enables them to get safely to the nearest bus stop or GO station, although timing does not always work depending on shift hours. Some men said that employers would sometimes offer to pick men up because it would save the employer from needing to go through a temp agency and they may be able to get away with paying less in exchange for the ride.

### *Health*

A main health-related issue raised by the men was their ability to get to support meetings like Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and Cocaine Anonymous. In order for men to get a subsidized taxi ride to support meetings, they would have to be able to fill the taxi (e.g. minimum five people to fill a van taxi). This posed as a challenge to shelter residents because if men were unable to find the minimum number, they would be unable to get access to the support that could help them recover from addictions and gain stability in life. As a result, men may be unable to take advantage of the support offered through these self-help groups.

Another health impact of inadequate transportation included the mental health impact of stress and anxiety caused by constantly worrying about how they will be able to get to appointments, work opportunities, and other meetings. One participant explained that their first thought when they heard about an opportunity was always about how he was meant to get there. This results in perpetual negativity that continues to discourage men as they seek to rebuild their lives.

*I think there's more effort in worrying about your transportation...than actually the job...because you know, it's one thing when the guy says, "Hey I need you, and I want you to meet me tomorrow down at Yonge and Davis", and you find out it's gonna be 12cm of snow tonight, it's like, first thing, negativity. And once that negativity sets, "I can't drive you, we can't drive you, I can't get there"...then it's like, I'm not going. It's the biggest thing, it's the first thing that you think of, is how am I going to get there. It's the first!*

*- Men's Shelter Resident*

*If you start a job, there's the first two weeks when you're not getting paid. So say you're staying here, you gotta go to whatever, Richmond Hill to work, you know, until you can move out. That two weeks there without any money for transportation ...it really kills you, it's really hard, it's really hard to uh...start a job without any kind of funds for transportation for a few weeks before you get paid.*

*- Men's Shelter Resident*

*There's no bus even to Porter Place, like a YRT bus. You have to walk...at least...maybe like a couple minutes...at least, going down a big hill...*

*Down a highway...*

*Yeah...and very dangerous, 'cause somebody, a few people actually, have been hit by a car living at Porter Place...just walking there.*

*- Youth Shelter Resident*

Several men also expressed negative physical health impacts of inadequate transportation. For example, there is the physical risk involved in walking down a busy road with a soft shoulder to get to the nearest bus stop. Men also expressed that often they would choose to walk rather than wait for a bus or spend the money on a bus trip, which results in excessive walking, at times in extreme weather conditions. Sometimes physical health and disabilities will also perpetuate the inability of men to commute because they cannot physically walk to a bus stop or walk from a bus stop to an off-route destination.

Availability of social support is also impacted by transportation cost and access as funds are not available to support men that would like to travel to visit family and friends. The cost of trip, especially a further trip out

of the Region, may also be too expensive for men to afford from their own savings or earnings. This lack of social support may lead to increased isolation, which further reinforces poor mental health and reduced motivation.

## Women

Women who participated in these focus groups were living in a family shelter or Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters, and many had young children. Primary concerns of these women were to generate a new source of income, to find a new home, and re-establish themselves and their children. In light of this, women strongly emphasized that a major concern was transportation relating to employment and housing searches. Some women also shared about their need to get to educational opportunities, such as support meetings to deal with life transitions, or formal education to gain skills for work.

## *Housing*

Women explained that a lack of timely transportation was a major barrier to their ability to search for and secure housing opportunities. Particularly, women struggled with having to navigate complex and expensive bus trips with multiple transfers and zone-crossing, while also bringing young children and sometimes strollers on board. Women explained that support for transportation is limited in that only adult tickets and not children's tickets are sometimes available through the shelter, which means that the women are left to still pay a considerable amount to bring their children with them because child care is not available. One woman quoted a \$15 one-way trip to bring her children with her on the bus. Childcare is often not a viable alternative to bringing children on their trips either.

Women also shared that it was frustrating and discouraging to travel long distances from remote shelters to only be able to make one housing appointment in a day. Often it would take a large part of the day to travel south from the shelter in Georgina to see a place and then back up to the shelter again since a

*I think that they should give everyone on Ontario Works or whatever it is \$100 for that bus pass every single month. The reason why is you shouldn't have to go to a doctor and say I need a bus pass to travel and get a form and submit it. No. They need to give it to you because some people have children and just need to travel period.*

*- Women's Shelter Resident*

one-way trip can take a few hours to travel. Also, some women commented that they may receive an invitation on the same day to view or sign for a place, but the lack of timely travel may result in the place no longer being available by the time the woman is able to get to their destination.

As part of the housing transition process, a common barrier is the ability to transport household items. While much more emphasis is placed on moving people, women reported that they struggled with the ability to move their possessions into storage while they searched for a new home. They expressed that they had little available support for the cost of moving and storage, which may force women to either lose their possessions only to start from nothing again, or risk transporting items in personal, potentially uninsured vehicles. In addition to struggling to move these personal items, women often have difficulty locating affordable, accessible storage facilities.

### *Education*

The VAW organizations in York Region operate support group meetings and training opportunities at various sites throughout York Region. Some of these opportunities may include job readiness or support to move beyond past negative experiences as they plan for the future. Women in the shelters often wish to participate in these programs to take advantage of the opportunity, but they may not have the available financial resources or knowledge of the system to be able to travel there. Other women also expressed that they were currently attending courses at college or university to continue working towards finishing their formal education. These women struggled in particular with the additional cost of crossing regional transit boundaries and needing to pay multiple fares.

### *Employment*

Women struggled with commuting to available work opportunities or interviews for various reasons. For example, one woman described her personal stress and challenge of commuting from Holland Landing to Newmarket to arrive at the start of her 7:00am shift. Since the earliest buses start at 6:30am, she is heavily reliant on the bus system to be consistent and punctual because every day she risks being late and facing due consequences. This was particularly stressful for her in the winter months when weather is a greater threat. In her own words she said, "If you're working you're limited, 'cause you're going to get fired eventually." Other women described that they were often vulnerable to weather conditions because of the need to walk to off-route locations, or because they could not afford transportation, to get to meetings and interviews. One woman described how she was forced to walk

*Work and housing and it's impossible. It's absolutely impossible. Then I waste my time going there and nothing pans out. So every day you're going out looking for this stuff and it's not working out. You're not finding it. It's not what you like or they don't want you. You're just wasting your time. I go through about \$20/day usually on gas. And that's pathetic. And I can't go on the buses because I'm claustrophobic and I suffer with anxiety. They're too crowded and I can't stand that.*

*- Women's Shelter Resident*

*The first bus in the morning is 6:30. I had to get to the terminal, get a Finch bus to work. It was just a mad rush every morning. Every morning.*

*...*

*Which means you have to leave by 6 at least.*

*And the other buses is 5:00 so I can't see why? If you working you're limited. Cause you're going to get fired eventually.*

*- Women's Shelter Resident*



through a rain storm and looked entirely unprofessional by the time she arrived at her destination, causing mental stress and lack of confidence that affected her ability to perform her best.

### *Health*

Several physical and mental health-related concerns were raised by women at the VAW shelters. Some women reported negative mental health impacts of past experiences with public transit, such as stigma or discrimination by other passengers or bus drivers, being overwhelmed by claustrophobia and anxiety on crowded buses, intensified by stuffiness and smells on crowded buses with no air conditioning, and facing rude or intimidating passengers. One black woman described a particular experience where she felt that she was racially discriminated against by a bus driver's response when she went forward to tell the driver that he had missed her stop.

Women also expressed major stress from the pressure of condensing all their appointments into one day so that they would not need to pay for transportation to make a return trip from the shelter more times than necessary. Often women would take public transit or a taxi to the first appointment destination and walk between all other appointments until the last one where they would again take public transit or a taxi back to the shelter. One woman who had a pedometer on her cell phone said that she tracked an average of 11km of walking daily. Excessive walking makes women, and often their children, particularly vulnerable to weather conditions as a health risk.

A unique situation illustrated the lack of resources available to women who may need to travel out of the Region for appointments. One woman explained her need to travel to Ottawa regularly for medical appointments. This woman described her journeys as taking about 6 hours in each direction. She travelled by car or carpooling if it was an available and affordable option, or by hitchhiking, which puts her safety at risk. In addition to paying for transportation, this woman also struggled to pay for overnight accommodation since she would not be able to make it to Ottawa and back in a day trip.

### Youth

Similar to the other focus groups, youth participants expressed concerns in all four priority areas – housing, education, employment, and health. However, unlike other groups, youth shared about a greater need for access to education as many youth were still working towards completion of secondary or post-secondary school. In addition to educational opportunities, many youth struggled to find transit-accessible jobs and commute to work so that they could afford to live independently with their own housing. Transportation challenges were far more pronounced in northern York Region due to a greater shortage of resources and service availability.

*And actually, the... 'cause I went to stay at the shelter for a little bit when I was younger, and it's not even at Newmarket, like...okay, so I could take the Viva, let's say I had no money, I could take, I could hop on a Viva for free, but then it was actually on a street called Mulock, so like for somebody that had no money at the time, I would have to walk for like an hour and a half to get to that shelter, and like I had blisters always on my feet, it was like crazy, y'know?*

- Youth Shelter Resident

### Housing

Youth were keen on looking for housing opportunities in the south of the Region because they recognized that many of the resources are concentrated in the south. However, they struggled with the ability to get to the southern municipalities, especially if they were commuting from Sutton. Transportation cost and availability of transit services were identified as obstacles youth faced in their attempt to search for housing in the south. Youth also said that limited transportation services made it difficult to get to group homes or to go to housing appointments. Youth identified that poor accessibility limits the areas where individuals are able to look for housing.

### Education

In the same way that available transportation affects the ability of youth to look for housing, it also affects the choice of schools and educational opportunities. Youth explained that especially in the north, buses run very infrequently, which means that if a youth misses a bus on a particular route, they could miss two classes before they are able to catch the next bus to get to school. Sometimes this can result in the youth becoming unmotivated and choose not to attend school that day at all. The infrequency of buses in certain areas may also promote excessive walking rather than waiting for buses, or hitchhiking as an alternative.

### Employment

Youth in Sutton explained that they often needed to get to the Keswick YMCA Employment Resource Centre for the Job Connect program, which provides assistance to youth in searching for local job opportunities. While there is a bus that runs between Sutton and Keswick, it operates infrequently, which makes it difficult for youth to get to the Resource Centre. Additionally, because of transportation challenges, youth in Sutton will often limit the scope of their job search to within walking distance from the shelter. Despite there being multiple rural opportunities available in Georgina, youth will not apply because they know they will not be able to get to and from these jobs. In many cases, the only other alternatives available to these youth are to walk long distances, get a ride from somebody, or hitchhike. Youth expressed that they found it difficult to find work, and that there have been multiple times where they have either had to refuse jobs or lose work opportunities because of the transportation challenge of getting to work sites on time. Some youth in Sutton also expressed that it reflected poorly on them if they were not able to get to work early enough for opening shifts or help stay after retail store closing hours because of bus scheduling. The earliest bus departing Sutton leaves at 6:05am and the last bus returning picks up from Newmarket at 10:15pm.

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*Some jobs you just don't have access to.*

*For example if you have no money, like, to get a job, how are you going to go look for one without any cash? So you tend to look for what's exactly close in the area...in walking distance basically.*

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*Here's another prime example. Umm, right now I'm registered with a temp agency, right? I've had to turn down three contracts because they're rotating shifts, right? It starts at 6 in the morning and it ends for one week, another week it'll end at 2 in the morning, right? I can't do that because I won't get to Newmarket until 7 in the morning at the earliest, and the last bus that leaves Newmarket is 10:15. So...it would be helpful if one bus leaves a bit earlier or later. Like, that, that would be a really big help.*

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*There's no public transportation in between Sutton, Dalton Road, and...Queensway. So there's like all those other ones, like Mccowan, Kennedy, Warden, like there's so many farms out there and all that kind of stuff...*

*And that's the thing, a lot of the jobs up here are rural jobs, you've got sod farms, you've got farms, you've got LaRue's, and even now, Woodbine is built up, but kids are having a hard time cuz they're getting dropped off at the Queensway, and then it's like a 20 to a half an hour walk for them to get across to Norval or along it to get somewhere...*

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*Even in emergency, last year I was [in Sutton] I ended up wrecking my knuckle, right. I had to go to emerge, I didn't get out of there until 11:00 at night, so I was walking around 'til 7:00 in the morning before I could finally come back up here.*

*In Richmond Hill?*

*In Newmarket...right, like I went there at 8:00 at night. I got out at midnight. I was up for another 7 or 8 hours waiting for the damn bus, the first bus that goes back up here.*

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- Youth Shelter Residents

## Health

Accessing health care was of particular concern to youth in Sutton, due to a lack of available resources near the shelter. Youth explained that there were no local walk-in clinics or hospitals in Sutton, so the nearest available medical care is in Keswick or Newmarket. This means that youth are required to walk a long distance or spend the money on bus fare in order to see a doctor. In addition, if a youth needs to go the hospital, they may not be discharged early enough in the evening to be able to catch a bus back to Sutton, since the latest bus leaves Newmarket for Sutton at 10:15pm. For example, one youth described being discharged from the Emergency Department at midnight and then spent the rest of the night walking around until 7:00am, which is when they were able to catch a returning bus back up to Sutton.

*It feels weird though, taking, like, the GO Transit say if you don't wanna walk all the way down there, like K or my situation, being pregnant and on a hot day. You're just like, I definitely don't want to walk, right, so you're just like...you grab your ticket and you're like, okay, i wanna just...and you press the button and in 5 minutes you're there. You're just like, why did you take like, a \$6 trip.*

*Yeah, and it's too much money and it's not even worth it, so most people just walk anyway..and that's bad for some people.*

*- Youth Shelter Resident*

## Transportation Barriers

Participants from all focus groups identified that affordability, safety, and access were the main barriers that they faced in relation to adequate transportation resources. Particularly in York Region, affordable, accessible, and safe transportation is essential to enable individuals to be able to get to and from places of shelter, education, and work, as well as to get to legal support, medical services, social support, and recreational opportunities.

### Affordability

Participants' ability to pay for transportation was a major barrier to accessing essential resources necessary to enable them to stabilize their lives with housing, a source of income, and other health and social supports. Individuals from each of the focus groups expressed that transportation was often too expensive for them to afford. Some explained further that they were only receiving \$28 per week as a Personal Needs Allowance through Ontario Works, compared to the cost of a one-zone trip being \$3 and a two-zone trip being \$4. This amount would cover nine one-zone trips or seven two-zone trips, although it does not account for adding on children's bus fares, as well as expenses like food, clothing, or shelter-related costs<sup>1</sup>. Even if a person is able to secure a local job opportunity, this small amount of support is insufficient to afford the cost of transportation to and from a workplace before receiving initial pay.

With more frequent travel, a bus pass may be the more affordable option in the long run. However, it can be a struggle for adults with unstable, inadequate income to save up \$95 or \$140 before purchasing a pass. Even if they are able to do it, it would not be worth the money unless they purchase the pass at the beginning of the following month, which would mean they would have to balance saving for an expensive bus pass while also affording the cost of bus tickets until a pass can be purchased. Again, this does not include the cost of supporting dependents or expenses relating to food, clothing, or shelter-related costs. Bus passes also do not work for children, so there is still a need to purchase tickets for children or pay full adult cash fare for each child's trip.

<sup>1</sup> Shelter-related costs may include the cost of rent, savings for future housing, rent of storage space, etc.

## Needs Assessment: Transportation Access of Homeless and Underhoused in York Region



I think it's a municipal prob-, it's a municipal I issue, not really provincial, right? 'Cause in Toronto, um, all the shelters that I know of, they get money through the government to do transportation.

They use to have tickets here...bus tickets...

Yeah, they have.

Years ago they had them here...

Talk to York Region, yeah, talk to York Region and find out why exactly they're not giving us money.

Cuz i'm pretty sure they can afford it, it's not really just the shelter.

Like Ontario, like the PNA is what? I dunno, how much is the PNA now? \$28 a week. That can't afford...that can't even afford anything for bus fare. Yeah. Well, it's 20, it's 10 tickets for 24 bucks, so there goes your PNA, right? And 10 tickets won't get you that far 'cause if you use 2 tickets a day, that's...after 5 days you're done. So how's that supposed to last you two weeks? Or a week? I don't know how much it is.

- Youth Shelter Resident



Some financial assistance is available for medically-related trips for individuals on Ontario Works or the Ontario Disability Support Program, but only for specific circumstances and up to \$15 per month. This amount is not sufficient to afford a roundtrip taxi from Sutton to Newmarket outside of regular bus times, nor is it sufficient for a roundtrip to a specialist in Toronto or anywhere else outside of York Region boundaries. Several participants expressed concern over not being able to afford travelling to neighbouring regions like Toronto or Peel, despite needing to go to work, specialist appointments, or to see friends or family.

Some participants had access to a vehicle, but were unable to drive it because of the cost of gas and unavailability of subsidy. Access to a vehicle strongly improves the ability to see more potential housing opportunities, as well as improves access to medical, legal, and social support, but the cost of gas and maintaining a vehicle quickly becomes unaffordable. Even though shelter residents would often be willing to carpool and assist each other with housing searches and other appointments, the cost is often difficult to manage since support for gas mileage is very limited.

Challenges with affordability can significantly affect individual choices and lifestyles. Participants reported that they may often choose to walk rather than take public transit because it was cheaper to do so. Despite many agreeing that GO service routes were better than YRT, participants used YRT and walked further because it was more affordable. Alternatively, some may choose to take their chances with the Viva honours system because they simply cannot afford to pay

*I think the whole, the whole being stuck out here is a big one. Like, I think that...'cause I've seen people just not go because 1) you don't want to spend that \$20 on a cab to go wherever you're gonna go, and 2) you're just, you're not gonna walk down the street, like, I normally, if...if I was in the city, I would walk anywhere, but I'm not gonna walk down that highway, you know what I mean? If it was just ...or if it had a sidewalk way off to the side I'd maybe do it, but because it's not...I don't think it's meant for walking so to speak.*

- Family Shelter Resident

the bus fare. Participants agreed that they would much prefer to pay the fare, but at the current price, they were not able to afford it. Being fined made things even more challenging since they could not afford to pay the bus fare, so a penalty fine was far out of reach. In order to afford transportation costs, some participants explained that they needed to take money out of savings for clothing, food, or housing. Some individuals who had access to a car said that they risked driving uninsured because they were unable to pay for insurance or registration.

### Access

While transportation and mobility opens up multiple doors to housing, education, employment, medical, and other essential resources, the accessibility of transportation itself can often be a major barrier to securing these elements for oneself. Participants in this needs assessment expressed often being frustrated with the difficulty of getting to bus stops, off-route destinations, and services and jobs outside of York Region. For example, men at Porter Place and women at the Leeder Place shelter expressed the difficulty of even getting to the nearest bus stop because there is no bus stop installed on Highway 11 at the driveway to the shelters. Despite a GO bus passing by several times a day, the bus will not pick up passengers because no bus stop is in place. Similarly, YRT buses are diverted from Green Lane to Holland Landing, so these buses would not service the shelter. As a result, residents are left to make their own way down a soft-shouldered, busy, 80 km/h posted road for almost two kilometres before they can reach the nearest bus stop.

*So the two problems we have here, is the accessibility to a bus, which is the closest one is a mile, on a dirt...um...gravel all the way up, and the cost of using it, we don't have it, we don't have the money. That's the bottom line.*

*- Men's Shelter Resident*

In some cases, families with small children may need to walk a stroller down these types of roads as well. Several women described their challenges faced in manoeuvring a stroller along poorly maintained sidewalks or soft shoulders, particularly in snowy conditions. At times, individuals may be forced to walk on the street if they are to get to the bus stop when the sidewalks are not ploughed. Several women in a VAW shelter in the northern part of York Region said that they often would choose not to go anywhere because of the difficulty in commuting to different parts of the region. This is clearly a barrier for these women to be able to independently go out and seek new housing and employment opportunities to support their families.

Participants agreed that transportation services are very good along the main arteries, given that origins and destinations are on the bus routes. However, several participants described challenges they faced with less frequent bus routes, particularly with getting to and from Sutton, as well as in and out of York Region. Since services are widespread, it takes a long time to get between shelters and community programs. Individuals are heavily dependent on bus services operating reliably so that they can get to scheduled events on time, although this can be a major challenge while travelling across a large region in compromising weather conditions. Some women with children explained that they would rather try to carpool with a taxi if the service is available, but that they have struggled with taxis not wanting to drive children because they do not have a child seat.

### Safety

Many of the participants' safety concerns have been accounted for in other sections of this report, such as the need to walk on streets or soft shoulders in snowy conditions. Although

most of the safety concerns were raised by women, men and youth raised physical safety as a concern and potential barrier to transportation because of the physical danger of being struck by a moving vehicle while walking to the nearest bus stop. Safety is of particular concern if individuals are required to walk longer distances through rural areas to get to transit routes. Youth expressed some fear of the potential for road accidents to happen. Some youth also expressed concern with being inappropriately searched by security personnel or police officers on buses.

Women expressed that they sometimes would choose not to travel or take public transit because they felt unsafe walking in the dark or waiting at a bus stop. One woman shared that she felt unsafe at bus stops because she had witnessed a fight that erupted while she was waiting for a bus. Participants expressed that they felt especially unsafe while waiting at unsheltered or poorly lit bus stops. Some women also felt unsafe driving at night. This anxiety was a particular reality for women at risk of being found by an abuser. Some also expressed fear of younger women being approached by older men while travelling by public transit or walking. Both women and youth expressed some anxiety about other passengers. Women felt anxious, particularly around students and younger travellers who may be rude or behave ignorantly. Youth felt some anxiety towards fellow passengers, but said they generally felt safe on the bus.

*I remember that one of the bus drivers told me there's two undercover Viva cops and there's two undercover actual cops that's on the Viva. And then, they, they're not supposed to search you or stuff, but they do, man.*

*They do that? They search you? They search you for what?*

*Anything, everything, man.*

*I remember this one time they started reading me my rights and stuff and I was just like what's going on, man?*

*Now that's BS, they're not allowed to search you, and they do do that.*

*Multiple kids have told me about that.*

*- Youth at a Drop-In*

## **Limitations**

There are some limitations that were encountered throughout the process of conducting this needs assessment. Time constraints and pressure to gather data in a very short period of time was one main limitation. Since this needs assessment was intended to inform strategic allocation of the budgeted \$38,550 to improve transportation access, data needed to be collected and analyzed for discussion among the Transportation Working Group within only three weeks. This short amount of time limited the number of responses that were collected from local agencies and community groups. To keep to the time frame, it was decided that focus groups would mainly be held at emergency shelters, which would capture some representation of homeless individuals in York Region. Two focus groups were also held at a youth drop-in to attempt to capture those who may be at risk of becoming homeless.

A limitation of only concentrating on shelters and a youth drop-in is that there are no shelters or drop-ins that cater specifically to single homeless women who are ages 27 and above, and have not fled an abusive situation. This portion of the population was challenging to access, so the results of this needs assessment do not include details about these women.

## **Summary and Recommendations**

Based on the data collected through Agency Questionnaires, Community Questionnaires, and Focus Groups, the lack of affordable, accessible, and safe transportation is a major barrier to homeless and at-risk men, women, and youth being able to access resources, such as housing, education, employment, and health care. The severity of impact of the transportation limitations within a region as widespread as York demands a response that is timely and effective to enhance the ability of individuals to obtain the necessary tools for building or rebuilding a healthy, sustainable existence.

## **Priority Recommendations**

### York Region Alliance to End Homelessness

1. Communicate findings of this needs assessment to raise awareness of the transportation challenges and their impact on the lives of homeless and at-risk individuals in York Region.
  - a. Including the advocacy for greater government support for transportation needs, including access to housing, education, employment, and health-related opportunities.
2. Communicate the complete list of recommendations drawn from survey respondents and focus group participants (Appendix 1) to York Region Transit.
3. Allocate the \$38,550 Homelessness Partnership Initiative funds via local shelters and drop-ins to assist homeless and at-risk individuals with gaining access to housing, education, and employment opportunities.
  - a. This recommendation does not include health-related opportunities because some assistance for medically-related transportation is already available through Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program.
4. Coordinate a collaborative approach to developing sustainable options for improved transportation in York Region.
5. In partnership with local agencies, investigate where services and support groups may be brought to shelters and/or easily accessible locations to minimize the need for individuals to travel long distances to access resources.

### Community Agencies

1. Participate in a collaborative Homelessness Partnership Initiative project involving the allocation of \$38,550 through the York Region Alliance to End Homelessness, focusing on improving transportation and access to housing, education, and employment opportunities.
2. Participate in a collaborative approach to developing sustainable options for improved transportation in York Region.
3. Investigate where services and support groups may be brought to shelters and/or easily accessible locations to minimize the need for individuals to travel long distances to access resources.
4. Ensure that local transit maps are clearly posted in agency locations and that frontline staff are trained on how to assist clients with navigating the system.

## Needs Assessment: Transportation Access of Homeless and Underhoused in York Region

### Government

#### *Provincial*

1. Expand available transportation support through Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program to include nonmedical transportation needs.
2. Raise amount of transportation support to better meet the needs of transportation costs across York Region.

#### *Regional/Municipal*

1. Support a 50% reduced York Region Transit fare rate in line with best practices from other regions (Appendix 2) for individuals who are homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless.

### Local Transit Systems

1. Ensure all shelter residents can safely access local transit services:
  - a. Install a sheltered bus stop at each shelter location in York Region if the shelter is already on an existing bus route, or
  - b. Arrange to provide a safe, alternative method to transport off-route shelter residents to the nearest on-route York Region Transit bus stop.
2. Provide transit maps to be posted clearly at each shelter location.
3. Provide training and orientation to agency frontline staff so that they are able to assist clients with navigating routes across York Region.



It's long term services, it's getting situations with whatever, YRT or whatever, or with the government through Ontario Works or whatever the case may be, to say, "Okay, here's a comprehensive package." Instead of doling out a little piece here, a little piece there, a little piece here and you have to qualify for it, say, "Okay, if you fit this characteristic, here's your pass. Get on the bus, do what you gotta do." If you're in an environment where there's limited bus service, say okay, you already contract with taxi drivers, they get their tax receipts, they get their money back, contract to somebody to say, "Here's 5 cars, allocate it for this region where there's no bus service, or limited bus service, or whatever the case may be. Find, shit, go and get somebody on welfare and say "Here you've got a license, here's a van, drive it around." You know...

Here's a job for you...

- Men's Shelter Resident





## References

Cakebread Consulting (2007). *Hidden from sight: homeless, hidden homeless, and at risk women in York Region*. Wellington: Cakebread Consulting.

The Regional Municipality of York, Human Resources Development Canada, Community Planning Group (2008). *The York Region Community Plan to Address Homelessness: 2<sup>nd</sup> Update*. The Regional Municipality of York: SHS Inc.



Can I tell you something? I ran a Service Department across Canada for 10 years. And I only dealt with temp agencies, just because that was the only thing that I knew as a manager. You phone them, they set the guys up and they meet you here. If I would've known about a shelter or places like this, with guys like this, then...I'm just telling you that the people that I've hired over the years, which is hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of interviewing and y'know all my job really was for 10 years because of hiring these guys was overseeing and babysitting them. I didn't know the qualifications that these guys had. I'd never even thought of it. If...what I know now, that I didn't know before, I would've come here to hire all my guys, if I would've known, because all these guys are all skilled in their way, you know? They all have skills in working and, and they work hard, and you know, they're standing out there. Do you know how many times I'd have to go pick these guys up at home because they'd been out drinking all night, the young kids, or they're, they're 3 hours late and I've got a job that just started? Every morning when you come here at 6am, everybody's dressed, washed, shaved, standing out in that driveway, hoping...hoping, not knowing, hoping that somebody's gonna come and say we need some guys.

There's no doubt in my mind that a contractor can come up here at 6 o' clock in the morning and say, "We need 4 guys," just like that.

- Men's Shelter Resident



**Appendix 1: YRAEH Transportation Needs Assessment Focus Groups YRT Wish List September 2008**

The following wish list items are generated from agency representatives, as well as focus group participants, who were residents at various York Region shelters and a youth drop-in.

Route Changes

- Earlier/later/hourly service on routes 69, 52
  - Accommodate shift workers, further commuting distance and timing
  - E.g. "even one bus at 3am would help"
- Route 55/55B needs to run on weekends/Sundays
- Social housing transit access – ensure routes service them adequately
  - 18838 Hwy 11, East Gwillimbury, ON
  - 835 Gorham Street, Newmarket, ON
  - 20898 Dalton Road, Sutton, ON
  - Victoria Street and Wellington Street West, Aurora, ON
  - 855 Lake Drive East, Jackson's Point, ON
- Expand service in small towns – more than just one bus

Cost

- Bus tickets and bus passes should be available at a 50% discount to low income individuals
- The Region should be combined into one zone for affordability
- Cheaper universal pass for the GTA
- Affordable declining balance system
- Free/subsidized bus access for shelter residents
- Don't fine people who don't have cash on transit if they are in a shelter or struggling financially
- Cheaper passes rather than bus tickets given to shelters – instead of having to get to drop-ins or OW
- Government should provide subsidy funding for discounted transit
- Give drivers authority to allow riders to ride free at their discretion (not publicized)
- Child fare or free transit for shelter residents and OW recipients
- Women with children should get 10 tickets a week for their children
- Should be entitled to a pass if you have children and are on OW
- Cheaper fare for shelter residents and children
- Greater advertising of services to boost usage and revenue to offset subsidized costs

Accessibility

- Bus routes should have a sheltered bus stop at each shelter
  - 18838 Hwy 11, East Gwillimbury, ON
  - 835 Gorham Street, Newmarket, ON
  - 20898 Dalton Road, Sutton, ON
  - Victoria Street and Wellington Street West, Aurora, ON
  - 855 Lake Drive East, Jackson's Point, ON
- Install bike racks on buses
- Section on bus designated for women with strollers/children

Safety

- Flag down Viva buses
- Bike riders should not be allowed on buses with bikes
- Limit the number of people on a bus
- Buses should be better maintained – repairs, cleaning, ramps, disability, stroller, etc

Service

- Bus drivers should not drive by without picking people up
- Bus drivers should be informed about fares, services, etc and provide accurate instructions to customers if asked
  - “I’m just a driver” is an inappropriate response to asking for help/clarification
- More resources and advertising of resources
- Enforce anti-discrimination policies on buses (drivers and passengers should not be afraid and uncomfortable about homeless customers)
- Leniency with drunk passengers – they just want to get home
- Shuttle buses/cabs to provide rides to bus stops for the same price as YRT (e.g. for women with children, off schedule hours, etc)
- Stop doors from closing on people – longer hold time, warning signals
- Educate students/youths about offering disabled, older, pregnant customers or customers with babies a seat
- Post route maps, schedules at all shelters and bus stops
- Open only one door when boarding

Partnerships

- Shuttle service for employees should be arranged in partnership with large employers
  - E.g. farms needing seasonal help, other general labour opportunities
- Shuttle rides for remote shelters (e.g. on call drivers)
  - Especially women’s shelters because of children
- Extend the subway
- Overlap transit systems and coordinate between systems in other municipalities

**Appendix 2: Transportation Support Best Practices Summary**

Program	Hamilton Affordable Transit Pass	Calgary Fair Fares	Niagara Region Inter-municipal Transportation Strategy
Service/Product	50% adult monthly bus pass	50% adult monthly bus pass (\$37.50)	Job Bus bringing workers from surrounding regions to Niagara Falls <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost shared by employer and employees</li> <li>• Shuttle daily at 9:15am and return 5:00pm</li> </ul>
Target	City of Hamilton residents living with low income	Low income Calgarians	Entry-level workers from outside Niagara region and Niagara Falls Hilton Hotel
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Live in City of Hamilton</li> <li>• Currently employed</li> <li>• Between 18 and 64 years (not including those who qualify for student/senior fares)</li> <li>• Not receiving assistance from OW, ODSP, or residential care facility</li> <li>• Able to provide last year's Notice of Assessment from Canada Revenue Agency</li> <li>• Able to provide pay stubs that show 4 weeks in a row (weekly, biweekly, monthly)</li> <li>• Family income below 2006 LICO (Low Income Cut-off) determined by family size</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Live in Calgary for one year or longer and have proof of mailing address</li> <li>• Be 18 years or older</li> <li>• Provide photo identification</li> <li>• Family income lower than Low Income Cut-offs (accepted proof of low income is previous year's Notice of Assessment from Canada Customs and Revenue Agency)</li> <li>• AISH recipients must show "X" classification at start of recipient card number</li> <li>• AISH recipients not qualified for Health Benefits must provide a current copy of a letter from the Alberta Government, Seniors and Community Supports, stating the applicant is a qualified recipient of AISH benefits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local job seekers with relevant skills (from Port Colborne and Welland in 2005, and Fort Erie in 2006)</li> <li>• In original pilot (2005), nearly half transported received some form of public assistance (e.g. Ontario Disability Pension, Canada Pension Plan disability benefit, or Ontario Works)</li> </ul>
Application Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete Affordable Transit Pass application form</li> <li>• Submit application form with Notice of Assessment and four weeks' pay stubs for each applicant on the form</li> <li>• Once application is reviewed, letter will be mailed stating approval status and reasons why (5 business days after receipt)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete application form</li> <li>• Submit previous year's Notice of Assessment for each adult in the home with photo ID to Calgary Housing Company</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job application through job fair in Fort Erie (involved collaboration between employment agencies in Fort Erie to help Hilton Hotel recruit workers)</li> </ul>

Notes about Calgary Fair Fares:

- Fair Fares advocated for \$2.25 per person, province-wide, to urban and rural communities (provincial investment of \$8 million)
- Municipalities with a transit system would use grants to fund low income transit programs
- Municipalities without a transit system would fund alternatives, such as purchasing specialized vans or subsidized taxi fares.