



Local Transportation

Chris Sones

“...being able to move about the [town] determines social and civic participation.”

Adapted from WHO
Global Age-friendly
Cities: A Guide

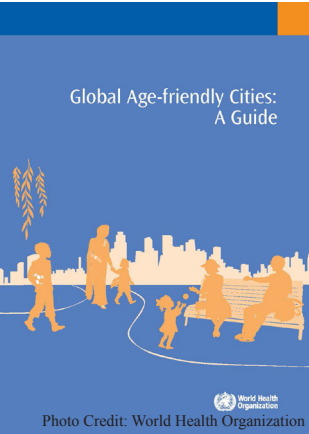


Figure #1: Global Age-friendly
Cities: A Guide (World Health
Organization)

The population of adults in Manitoba age 65 and over is growing (Statistics Canada, 2023) which requires Manitoba’s small towns and rural areas to evaluate how they provide the supports needed to encourage active lifestyles and maintain access to day-to-day needs for this group. A plan for age-friendly local transportation is an important aspect of helping older people stay healthy and connected within their communities (Hodge, 2008).

Transportation Variety

The ways that people move around in small towns in Manitoba is varied, and providing accessible and affordable transportation options is vital to supporting all older people in a community. Some of the modes of transportation commonly seen in Manitoba’s small towns include:

- Driving a personal vehicle
- Getting a ride with family or friends
- Walking
- Cycling
- Handivan
- Taxi

Personal Vehicles

For older adults who have access to personal vehicles, communities should ensure that parking is available close to amenities, including adequate parking for people with mobility issues and disabilities. Communities can also offer driver training programs for older adults to ensure that they continue to drive safely as they age.

Many older adults rely on family members or friends in their communities who can provide them with transportation which is a key support system. These arrangements can become challenging for the family and friends providing this support when scheduling conflicts arise. This is why it important for communities to ensure that alternative transportation options are easily accessible to fill in the gaps.



Figure #2: Summer bicycling in Provincetown, MA, USA.



Figure #3: Bicycle route signage in Provincetown, MA, USA

Affordability & Community Transportation

Transportation for day-to-day needs should be affordable to all older people, including those on fixed or low incomes. Communities should consider how older adults will get around if they cannot afford the cost of owning and maintaining a vehicle, or if they have chosen to or been required to give up their personal vehicles due to losing their drivers license.

Handivans and taxi services play a pivotal role in supplementing travel options in small towns, but there can also be a mismatch between the costs and structure of these services and the older adults who would like to use them.

“Across the board, people ride bikes just because it’s convenient.”

Rik Ahlberg,
Provincetown Bicycle
Committee

Taxi Pass Program - Peace River, AB

The town of Peace River, Alberta, a community northwest of Edmonton, operates a taxi pass program in order to help ensure that all residents have access to transportation (Northern Alberta Development Council). Eligible residents can purchase \$100 worth of taxi rides for \$15, meaning that 85% of the cost is covered. The following criteria are used to determine if an older person can purchase these passes:

Seniors age 65 and over with the following income levels:

- Below \$28,785 annual income for a single individual
- Below \$46,745 combined annual income for a couple or family

This program is operated by the town, which covers the full cost.

Active Transportation

Providing options for active transportation such as walking or cycling is a great way to help older adults maintain health for longer and reduce their overall cost of transportation.

Bicycle Friendly Small Towns

Small towns can position themselves as leaders in active transportation (Herbert, 2021). Provincetown, MA, USA, ranked #1 in the US in the 2023 PeopleForBikes ratings. Some of the important features that make the town so friendly to cycling are:



Figure #4: Sidewalk separated from roadway by raised beds with trees and plants

Figure #5:
Downtown
Batesville, AR
before



Photo Credit: The WALC Institute

Figure #6:
Downtown
Batesville, AR
envisioned
as pedestrian
friendly

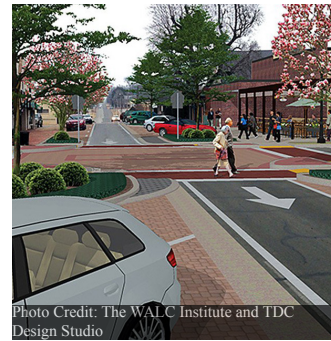


Photo Credit: The WALC Institute and TDC Design Studio

“Residents have consistently indicated that providing Okotoks with transit is a priority...”

Okotoks Mayor Bill Robertson

- Plenty of well-maintained bike racks
- The town is small with about a 7 minute bike ride from one side to the other
- Clearly marked signs including travel time and distance (Figure #3)

Extending cycling years for older adults

There are a number of alternatives to traditional bicycles which can allow older adults to continue cycling later in life. These can include options like electric bikes (e-bikes), three wheeled bikes, and fat bikes.

Pedestrian Friendly Infrastructure

Investments in infrastructure for pedestrians provide older adults with the opportunity to move around their community more easily. Rural communities that have many competing priorities must make smart decisions on where to invest those resources. While sidewalks on every street may be unaffordable for some towns, alternatives such as roadside pedestrian pathways (Figure #7) can provide an alternative that is less expensive and easy to implement.

Building up to Public Transit

Many small towns will not have the capacity to build and launch a full-scale public transit system, but ride-sharing technology has created interesting opportunities to help communities move towards that goal sooner than they might have been able to before.

Okotoks Transit - Okotoks, AB

Okotoks is a town south of Calgary which launched its own on-demand transit system in December 2019. Users book rides through an app on their phone, the transit website, or by calling a phone number, and the transit van comes to the curb at the location the rider has indicated. The vans are all wheelchair accessible and the drivers are trained to assist in loading and unloading riders in wheelchairs.

According to the Okotoks Transit website, the transit fares cost around \$3.50 and provide service to anywhere within the defined boundaries, which covers the town itself.



Photo Credit: Alta Planning + Design

Figure #7: Roadside pedestrian pathway

Final Thoughts

Small towns face tough decisions when deciding how to allocate their resources, but they need to continue preparing for the increasing population of adults who will be age 65 and older in the coming years. Providing these members of the community with a high quality and affordable variety of transportation options will help ensure that they can maintain a high quality of life in their communities.

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