

# Canadian Community Initiatives Addressing Transport Poverty: Report and Catalogue

RESEARCH  
REPORT

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SABAT ISMAIL



**MOBILIZING  
JUSTICE** \_\_\_\_\_

Towards Evidence-Based  
Transportation Equity Policy

# About Mobilizing Justice

The Mobilizing Justice Partnership is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). Based at the University of Toronto Scarborough, the national intersectoral research partnership aims to understand and address transportation poverty in Canada and to improve the well-being of Canadians at risk of transport poverty. Learn more at [www.mobilizingjustice.ca](http://www.mobilizingjustice.ca).

## Our Partners

Amalgamated Transit Union Canada	Federation of Canadian Municipalities	Toronto Transit Committee (TTC)
Autorité régionale de transport métropolitain (ARTM)	Infrastructure Canada	Transit App
Canadian Institute of Planners	McGill University	Translink
Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC)	McMaster University	United Way of the GTA
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Centre for Active Transportation	Pantonium	University of Oregon
CIRODD (École de Technologie Supérieure)	Pembina Institute	University of Texas Austin
CIRRELT (Université de Montréal)	Region of Waterloo	University of Toronto
City of Calgary	RideShark	University of Waterloo
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City of Vancouver	SPIN	Ville de Montreal
ESRI Canada	Statistics Canada	York Region

## Author Contributions

This report was produced in summer 2021 by Sabat Ismail, a graduate student intern jointly supervised by Dr. Meghan Winters, Professor, Simon Fraser University, and Nancy Smith Lea, Director, The Centre for Active Transportation at Clean Air Partnership.



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# Introduction

**This report is intended to assist in establishing an understanding of community initiatives in Canada that support transport equity and increase modal choice, especially for those experiencing transport poverty.** It describes the process by which a scan of 245 community initiatives in Canada was conducted, provides an overview of initial findings, highlights from six initiatives of particular interest, and is accompanied by a catalogue of all 245 community initiatives (Appendix A). Community initiatives for the purposes of this catalogue include grassroots coalitions or programs of larger organizations with a partial or central focus on transportation issues that benefit those experiencing transport poverty.

The report and catalogue provide some insight into the adaptive practices across Canada that those experiencing transport poverty have established to meet their daily travel needs. The goal of the report is to support the development of a better understanding of the barriers to engaging in different modes of transportation (e.g., walking, cycling, public transit, and car sharing) across Canada.

The hope is that this work will also support the development of evidence-based policy recommendations to advance transport equity.

## Methodology

I conducted my research using Google, social media sites, and transportation reports, beginning with initiatives in Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area. I gathered data from the websites of these initiatives as well as from government transportation reports, which often provide a list of community stakeholders. I repeated this approach in other geographic areas.

When researching and inputting the names of initiatives into the catalogue I developed criteria for inclusion and exclusion. I excluded an initiative if it seemed as though its central focus was on generating profit. Furthermore, I was less likely to include an initiative that was not community-led/did not support the development of local self-determination related to community transport poverty issues.

Early in my research process, I primarily relied on Google searches such as "public transit Toronto" and "walking organizations Toronto." This approach yielded a significant amount of results, so I scaled this to larger geographic areas and other modes. In my research Canada-wide, I often needed to rely on Facebook pages since for many small community groups, this is their only online presence. I started looking through these pages and relied upon them more heavily as I continued with my research process. The "About" section helped to establish whether an initiative focused on transport poverty and to determine who their partners may be. The "Events" section was useful for finding other initiatives focused on transport poverty, as many collaborated with other initiatives to put on events. On these pages, I found conferences and panels with speakers representing other transport poverty-related initiatives or organizations.

I also relied on news articles to find other transport poverty organizations/initiatives. Media articles frequently quote advocates from transport equity community initiatives or organizations as an interview source on a transportation issue. Thereafter, I would focus on a topic related to transport access/transport poverty and compose a Google search to lead me to these initiatives. For example, I was aware that the Province of

Ontario cancelled its funding of Hamilton's LRT system, which made news across the province. In locating the media coverage about the issue, I found public transit advocates who were quoted about the LRT cancellation. I then looked up terms such as "Hamilton LRT advocate" and "Hamilton LRT province funding advocacy." I continued to use this method when conducting my research across Canada because I found it to be fruitful; I discovered over a dozen organizations using that method.

For the purposes of greater representation of transport poverty-related initiatives across Canada, Theme 2 leads reached out to other members of the *Mobilizing Justice* leadership committee to ask about relevant initiatives to include.

During my research, I recognized that when an organization focused on supporting local transportation was mentioned frequently, they were likely doing other relevant work in their communities, including collaborating with other transport organizations; in this way, I generated additional initiatives to add to the catalogue.

### Community Initiative Scan Details

I inputted the details of the 245 community initiative scan into an Excel spreadsheet. In this excel spreadsheet, I also developed a data dictionary, where I inputted information on the initiatives that were readily available. The resulting catalogue (Appendix) includes the following information:

- **City, town, province (if province-wide), or national (if nationwide):** Location of operation for the initiative.
- **Region:** Across 6 categories: British Columbia; Prairies (Saskatchewan, Alberta, Manitoba); Ontario; Québec; Atlantic (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, PEI, Newfoundland); and North (Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut). Additionally, separately recorded are initiatives that operate nationally.
- **Community Initiative Name:** Community initiatives for the purposes of this catalogue includes grassroots coalitions or programs of larger organizations, with a partial or central focus on transportation issues that benefit those experiencing transport poverty.
- **Host Organization:** The larger umbrella organization that hosts and supports the community initiative (if any). If the initiative has no larger umbrella organization, the name of the community initiative is repeated here.
- **Collaborating partners:** Initiatives that collaborate with partners from other organizations to make their work possible, as mentioned on respective websites.
- **Explicitly focus on transport poverty:** Based on their web page and social media, if the initiative provides services, supports campaigns, or develops programs that make mode-specific transportation more accessible to individuals experiencing transport poverty. Applicable answers include: yes (Y), no (N), and maybe (M).

- **Population focus:** Across 17 categories: Accessibility, Commuters, Cyclists, General public, Indigenous people, Low-income, Migrant farmworkers, Newcomers to Canada, Pedestrians, People with disabilities, People with incarcerated loved ones, Public transit users, Residents, Seniors, Students, Youth, Visually-impaired
- **Mode focus:** The mode focus of the organizations/initiatives. The modes included are active transportation, walking, cycling, public transit, sustainable transportation and rideshare. Active transportation is any form of self-propelled, non-motorized transportation, primarily walking and cycling. Walking includes travel by foot as well as while using assistive mobility devices. Rideshare is a form of transportation that entails a mutual arrangement where a passenger travels in a privately owned vehicle for a fee. The category “sustainable transportation” was used when the mode focus of the initiative encompassed both active transportation and public transit.
- **Programming & Projects:** Complementary programs and projects the host organization leads.
- **Web page (if available):** The most relevant webpage for understanding the community initiative.
- **Key Players:** The names of community leaders or other individuals supporting the efforts of the initiative.
- **Highlighted/flagged:** These 13 initiatives may be of particular interest (e.g. unique approach to addressing transport poverty.) The Mobilizing Justice team may want to contact the community leaders to understand how their successful and innovative work could be more widely shared and modelled.
- **Summary:** A brief description (approx 100 words) of 27 of the most interesting initiatives. These summaries provide a brief overview of the highlighted initiative (and host organization if any), who is leading it, the date it was launched, its vision/mission, and what it does.

This work was supervised by Dr. Meghan Winters (SFU) and Nancy Smith Lea (TCAT) through weekly meetings between June-August 2021.

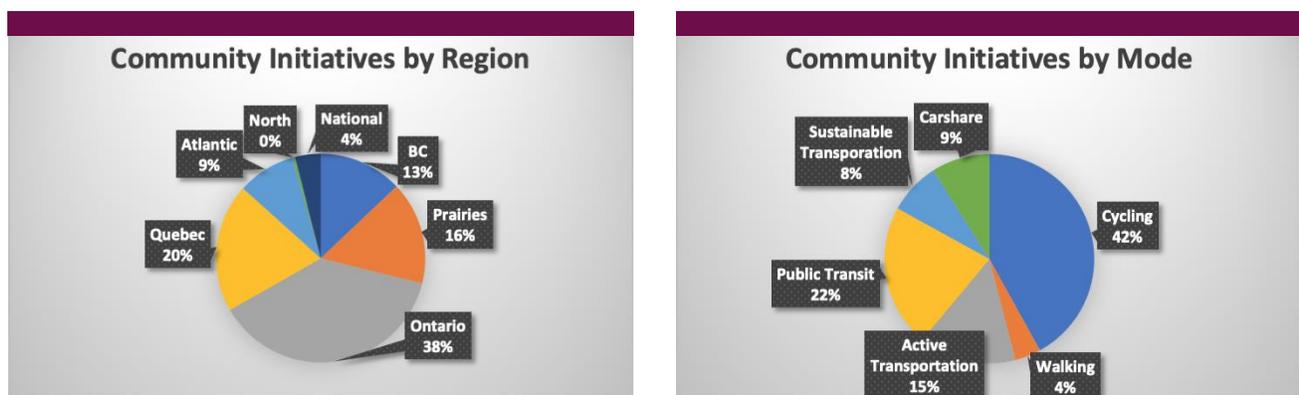


Figure 1 – Initiatives by mode and region

# Results

## DISCUSSION

There were a total of 245 initiatives recorded throughout the research (*Table 1*). Six regions from across the country were designated: British Columbia, Prairies, Ontario, Quebec, Atlantic, and North. Additionally, separately recorded are initiatives that operate nationally.

This work identified a large number of initiatives, though we cannot know if they are representative of work underway across the country. The greatest number of initiatives identified are based in Ontario (94), followed by Quebec (49), Prairies (40), BC (31), Atlantic (21), National (9), and North (1). Ontario and Quebec are the largest and second-largest populations, respectively, which may account for this overrepresentation to some degree.

A sizeable number of initiatives identified are cycling initiatives (104), followed by public transit (54), active transportation (36), carsharing (22), sustainable transportation (19), and walking (10). However, the research process may have resulted in some initiatives not being identified.

**Table 1 - Overview of transport poverty-related initiatives, by mode and geographic location**

Region/Mode s	Active transport	Cyclin g	Walkin g	Public Transi t	Sustainable Transportatio n	Carshar e	Tota l	Region %
British Columbia	2	11	1	6	5	6	31	13%
Prairies	3	13	1	8	3	12	40	16%
Ontario	10	48	3	21	9	3	94	38%
Québec	15	21	2	9	2	0	49	20%
Atlantic	1	10	1	9	0	0	21	9%
North	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	<1%
National	5	1	1	1	0	1	9	4%
Total	36	104	10	54	19	22	245	
Mode %	15%	42%	4%	22%	8%	9%		

## HIGHLIGHTED INITIATIVES

For the purposes of the report, six initiatives are highlighted in **Table 2**. These are examples of how communities are addressing transport poverty in Canada within different contexts, transportation modes, and geographic locations.

**Table 2 - Summary of initiatives highlighted in the report**

Initiative	Region	Location	Population focus	Mode
1. Creating Accessible Neighbourhoods (CAN)	British Columbia	British Columbia (province-wide)	People with disabilities	Public transit
2. Ikwe Safe Rides	Prairies	Winnipeg	Indigenous women and children seeking to access a safe taxi service	Car share
3. Rescue Bike	Ontario	Toronto	Unhoused community members	Cycling
4. Coalition Mobilité Active Montréal	Québec	Montréal	General public	Active transportation
5. Rural Transportation Association (RTA)	Atlantic	Nova Scotia (rural communities)	Seniors, persons with disabilities, and those with low incomes	Public transit
6. Whitehorse Walks	North	Whitehorse	General public	Walking

## HIGHLIGHTED INITIATIVES

### 1. Creating Accessible Neighbourhoods (CAN)

**Figure 3** shows an accessibility tour led by CAN in Vancouver.



Founded in 2005, Creating Accessible Neighbourhoods (CAN) (formerly Citizens for Accessible Neighbourhoods) was established as an organization created by and for people with disabilities in Metro Vancouver. CAN was conceived due to its founder Heather McCain's experiences encountering barriers such as inaccessibility, ableism, and gatekeeping on public transportation. CAN has a focus on accessibility, community outreach, and advocacy related to public transit. CAN also leads consultations, education sessions, workshops, and presentations on ableism and accessibility pertaining to public transit. CAN is being highlighted because it does prominent work focused on transportation justice and how that connects to social and mobility justice, which is important to consider when creating strategies to address transport poverty.

## 2. Ikwe Safe Rides

**Figure 4**  
a vehicle from  
the IKWE Safe  
Rides fleet.



IKWE (Women Helping Women) Safe Ride Mission is a Winnipeg-based non-profit, created in 2016 to provide a safe alternative taxi service for Indigenous women and children. The organization was created after numerous instances of harm that Indigenous women recounted after accessing taxi services in Winnipeg. The organization is supported by dozens of women volunteer drivers that centres safety and mobility as paramount. Ride requests are filtered through the organization's Facebook group which has 18,000 women members and IKWE Safe Rides has supported over 80,000 rides thus far. IKWE Safe Ride is highlighted because it is seemingly the only rideshare organization aimed at supporting the safety and mobility of Indigenous women and children that has been able to expand and sustain the services it offers. Additionally, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) concluded that lack of access to safe and reliable transportation played a role in the kidnapping of Indigenous women, girls, two-spirit people, and this is important to consider for Mobilizing Justice and to combat transport poverty.

### 3. Rescue Bike

Rescue Bike operates out of the South Riverdale Community Health Centre (SRCHC) in Toronto. Rescue Bike is a do-it-yourself (DIY) bike space that operates build-a-bike and DIY bike repair programming. The organization, since its inception in 2005, was created to support those in the shelter system that rely upon bikes for affordable transportation. The program also supports their client base by introducing them to a health care setting and attempting to connect them to other SRCHC services and programs. In recent years, Rescue Bike has been able to sustain itself through funding from the City of Toronto's Solid Waste Management Division and it has expanded to run summer bike tune-ups clinics in local Toronto Community Housing Buildings. Rescue bike is highlighted because it is a model of a DIY bike initiative, one of many across the country. It is also highlighted because it inventively provides services to one of the populations that most adversely experiences transport poverty.

**Figure 7**  
an outdoor bike  
tune-up clinic at  
Rescue Bike.



#### 4. Coalition Mobilité Active Montréal

Coalition Mobilité active Montréal (Montréal Active Transportation Coalition) is a non-profit and volunteer-run initiative founded as Coalition Vélo Montréal (Montréal Bike Coalition) in 2012. The initiative aims to represent the needs of citizens and initiatives involved in active transportation in the Montréal region. It was founded to bring together different cycling groups across Montreal. In 2020, upon consideration of its work to support the needs of all vulnerable users (including pedestrians), the coalition decided to change its name to better represent its focus and mission. It engages with authorities at all levels of government to support the needs of vulnerable road users. Furthermore, it promotes the development of initiatives across the City to build local decision-making power and support active transportation advocacy.

The coalition aims to back the work carried out by its member organizations and other local advocates. It also seeks to be a distinct place of convergence for the active transportation community and advocacy in Montréal. The initiative is one of only a handful of active transportation coalitions in Canada, and provides a unique model for unifying advocates, building power, strategies, and initiatives supporting vulnerable road users.

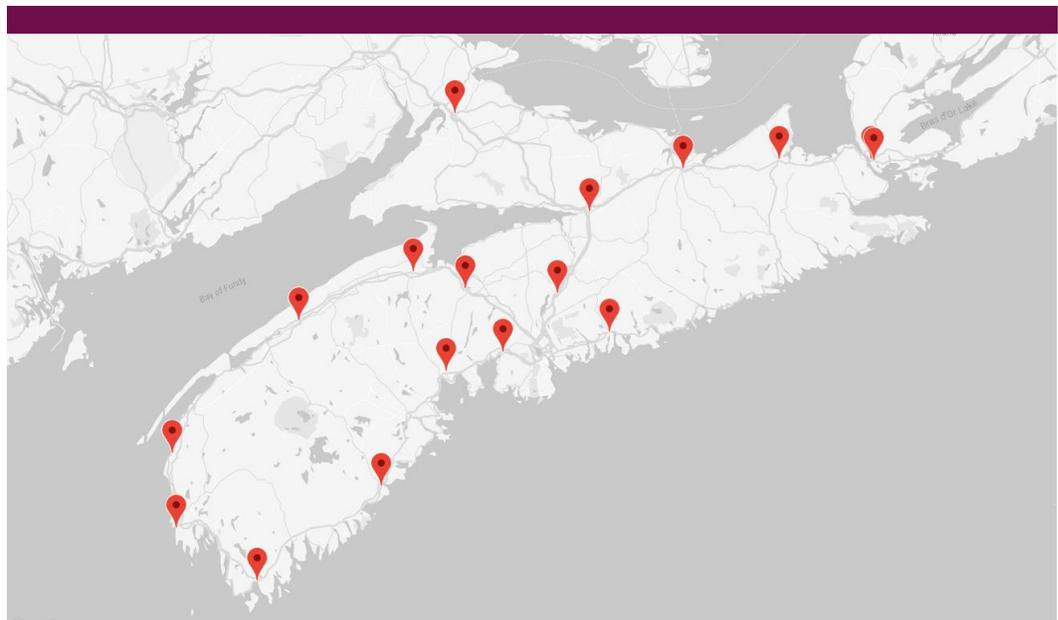
**Figure 6**  
A volunteer with  
Coalition Mobilité  
active Montréal on  
their cargo bike.



## 5. Rural Transportation Association (RTA)

Formed in 2011, the Rural Transportation Association (RTA) is a non-profit coalition consisting of a group of rural transportation service providers across Nova Scotia, currently with 19 partners. Figure 5 illustrates shows the geographic diversity of RTA 19 current partners. The purpose of the RTA is to provide a forum to share information and support for community-based transportation that is and for it to be more accessible to services providers, communities, different levels of government, and other organizations. The RTA provides transportation services for all, though they prioritize providing access to seniors, persons with disabilities, and those with low incomes. The RTA is highlighted because it focuses on rural public transit, which is often non-existent or underresourced. Yet, the organization and its members have been able to provide support to rural municipalities across Nova Scotia in a manner distributed across numerous rural municipalities across the province, which has not been comparably seen in other parts of the country.

**Figure 5**  
RTA partners  
across Nova  
Scotia.



## 6. Whitehorse Walks

Whitehorse Walks is a resource established in 2012 that promotes walking in the City of Whitehorse. Whitehorse Walks focuses on informing residents of walking-related changes happening at the municipal level and provides those interested in walking for utility or recreation access to resources. These resources have pertained to walking in icy or rainy conditions, walking tips for older adults, and most notably, Whitehorse Walks develops and publishes maps of the city's different recreational trails and loops. This initiative is highlighted because it was the only initiative from the North identified and because it has a walking focus.

# Conclusion

Over the course of this research, I discovered that many diverse initiatives have been created to combat transport poverty. I also learned that this advocacy often has a hyper-local focus. For example, advocacy in Western Canada to nationalize for-profit cross-provincial bus routes; organizing in locations with large migrant worker populations to provide them bicycles; and a BC ferry advocacy initiative emerging to advocate for improved ferry access. Furthermore, many initiatives are quite small, grassroots, and organized by local advocates. While often operating on limited resources, these smaller initiatives seem to be more attuned to the evolving needs of the communities they serve and attempt to create initiatives to meet these needs directly. Additionally, the amount of cycling advocacy across the country demonstrates the appetite that exists for more cyclable communities.

If there had been more time available for this research, it would be allocated towards identifying other initiatives for representation across Canada, and adding summaries for more initiatives in the catalogue.

Another important next step for the project would be to conduct interviews with some of the community leaders (see the “Key Players” column in the Appendix) whose initiatives particularly stand out as notable in addressing transport poverty. They could be an asset to interview because they may provide insight into innovatively engaging communities and meeting transport poverty-related needs. Prospective interview questions/questions are as follows:

- Why was this initiative started? What are its objectives?
- What impact has your initiative had in the community you serve?
- How have the needs of program participants/communities that you advocate for shifted over time?
- What barriers do participants or community members face related to accessing transportation?
- From your experience organizing, what issues do you see as connected to transport poverty?
- From your vantage point, how has the COVID-19 pandemic altered the transportation mode choices your community members make?
- How has this initiative changed over time?
- How does your organization increase transport equity and increase modal choice?
- What challenges does your initiative face in carrying out your work?
- What solutions or tools do you think would aid in combating transport poverty?

Overall, the next steps for the project will continue to consist of close collaborative efforts with community advocacy efforts addressing transport poverty and focusing on collaborative research to combat transport poverty.

# Appendix

[Transport Poverty Community Initiatives Catalogue](#)

## Acknowledgements

This work is supported in part by funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council 's partnership grant: Mobilizing justice: towards evidence-based transportation equity policy. Learn more at [www.mobilizingjustice.ca](http://www.mobilizingjustice.ca).

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