

First Nations in BC on the Move:

*Recommendations for Advancing First Nations
Low-Carbon Transportation and Mobility.*

DRAFT
***BC First Nations
Transportation
Assessment
Report and
Action Plan***

October 30, 2025



BRITISH COLUMBIA
ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

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BCAFN acknowledges the Ministry of Energy and Climate Solutions (formerly the Ministry of Energy, Mines and Low-Carbon Innovation) for their financial support and partnership throughout the development of this report. We would also like to thank the Community Energy Association (CEA) for their valuable support and collaboration in preparing the survey, contributing to this report and the BCAFN First Nations Low-Carbon Transportation Project more broadly.

Honouring the Legacy of Leona Humchitt

A member of the Haíłzaqv (Heiltsuk) Nation, Leona’s leadership transcended local, regional, national, and international boundaries in advancing Indigenous climate policy and action. She fiercely championed First Nations’ worldviews, knowledge systems, environmental justice, and

food sovereignty through intergenerational knowledge sharing and the recognition and implementation of First Nations' rights and self-determination. Leona represented the Hałtzaq Nation as one of five Pilot Project Communities selected by BCAFN to develop a Low-Carbon Transportation Plan, paving the way for more sustainable and accessible mobility and transportation solutions. Beyond her climate leadership, she also contributed to several other BCAFN initiatives, including those focused on housing, cannabis policy, and the rights and well-being of Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ (Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual. The + acknowledges all other gender identities and sexualities not captured by the acronym) individuals. Her legacy continues to inspire our work and collective path forward.

About BCAFN

[The BC Assembly of First Nations \(BCAFN\)](#) is a Provincial Territorial Organization (PTO) advocating on behalf of the 204 First Nations in British Columbia (BC). Led by Regional Chief Terry Teegee—elected by BC First Nations leadership in BC for his third term and supported by a Board of Directors—BCAFN advocates for the rights, title and interests of First Nations in BC, guided by resolutions passed at BCAFN Chiefs Assemblies. Specific to this project, BCAFN advocates for the Crown to uphold First Nations rights and climate leadership in addressing the climate crisis. This approach aligns with the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration)*, which is an international framework that affirms the rights of Indigenous Peoples to self-determination, lands, territories, culture, and governance.

Canada adopted the *UN Declaration* federally in 2021 through the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (UNDA)*, while BC became the first province to adopt it into law in 2019 with the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (Declaration Act)*. The *Declaration Act* was developed in collaboration with rights and title holders in BC as well as the [First Nations Leadership Council \(FNLC\)](#), as directed by First Nations Chiefs, creating a framework for reconciliation in BC, in alignment with the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action](#). Through BCAFN's advocacy work on various portfolios, BCAFN works alongside First Nations in BC and partners to ensure a just, equitable and sustainable transition that upholds First Nations' Rights, self-determination, sovereignty, Knowledge systems, and leadership.

Executive Summary

This BC First Nations Transportation Assessment Report and Action Plan (“Transportation Action Plan”) was prepared by the [British Columbia Assembly of First Nations \(BCAFN\)](#) in collaboration with the [Community Energy Association \(CEA\)](#) to identify and provide actionable recommendations to address the challenges, gaps, barriers and opportunities First Nations in BC face in accessing transportation and low-carbon transportation. The report and action plan outline concrete recommendations to address systemic barriers, improve First Nations mobility, and ensure equitable access to safe, reliable, accessible, and affordable transportation, while supporting a just transition to a low-carbon transportation system.

The report’s recommendations, background and analysis draw on desktop research, survey results, engagement, a peer-review and interviews and five Nation-led low-carbon transportation pilot projects’ experience, insights, and wisdom under the [BCAFN First Nations Low-Carbon Transportation Project](#). The results identify that equitable access to safe, reliable, accessible and affordable transportation and low-carbon transportation remains a significant barrier to equity, self-determination, and climate resilience for First Nations, underscoring that transportation is not merely about mobility, but is deeply connected to sovereignty, health, safety, climate justice, and economic resilience. As the province transitions to low-carbon transportation system, it must acknowledge the colonial impacts, historic injustices, and ongoing challenges of the current system for First Nations and ensure that this transition is just, fair, and equitable, and that no Nation is left behind.

The recommendations and action plan are aligned with the implementation of the *UN Declaration* and will support BCAFN and First Nation-led advocacy with the goal of influencing transportation and climate policy, decision-making, program reform and governance. Addressing First Nations transportation needs requires a transformational, collaborative, and culturally respectful systems change. The 47 recommendations are grouped into 10 themes including:

1. Substantially increase investment and strengthen policies to support multi-modal transportation and improved public transit for First Nations.
2. Close the infrastructure gap.
3. Advance meaningful improvements in cultural and physical safety, especially for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals.
4. Support First Nation-led and self-determined active transportation.
5. Enhance First Nation self-sufficiency by building capacity, improving services and infrastructure on-reserve.
6. Prioritize First Nations' access, safety, protocols and rights in marine transportation.
7. Ensure a just transition that centres First Nations rights and self-determination.

8. Facilitate collaboration, innovation, shared decision making and partnerships between Crown governments, Crown corporations, local governments, organizations, industry and First Nations.
9. Reform funding and program delivery and support First Nations-led transportation planning and capacity.
10. Commit to equitable and affordable access to private vehicles, licensing, zero-emission vehicles, hybrids or plug-in hybrids and innovation in low-carbon fuel.

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Preamble

First Nations in BC have maintained extensive transportation systems and trading routes since time immemorial, which were disrupted by colonial policies that limited mobility and isolated Nations. Mobility¹ encompasses more than just the physical act of moving from one place to another and must be reflective of First Nations sovereignty and inherent right to freely travel, gather, harvest and connect across traditional territories, between Nations, reserves, communities, and across colonial and international borders. Advancing mobility requires not only access to transportation infrastructure and services, but also the removal of systemic barriers that limit mobility. Ultimately, enhancing mobility and transportation in BC and Canada is necessary for reconciliation and for the effective implementation of the *Declaration Act* and *UNDA*.

“It is our right to move safely and freely within our territories—and it is essential that we are key leaders of the low-carbon transition on our own terms and with justice, equity and our rights central to this transition”

— BCAFN Regional Chief Terry Teegee

The impacts from colonization continue to impact First Nations’ mobility and access to transportation through chronic underinvestment, discrimination, violence, racism, unsafe travel conditions, poor or aging infrastructure and limited access to services. As BC transitions to a low-carbon transportation future, it must acknowledge these ongoing colonial impacts when developing policies, programs and re-designing the economy. This transition must be just, equitable and rooted in self-determined, culturally appropriate, and context-specific solutions and ensure that no First Nation is left behind.

Grounded in the *UN Declaration*, this report promotes holistic First Nations-led approaches that uphold mobility and access to equitable, accessible, safe, affordable, and reliable transportation as a human right and a pathway to climate resilience, safety, and individual and collective well-being. Despite this report and recommendations being developed during a period of fiscal austerity and economic uncertainty, the passing of fast-tracking legislation at both the provincial and federal level, pausing of several electric and plug-in hybrid rebates and a challenging geopolitical context, there is an urgent need for increased investment and improved policy to support First Nations access to equitable, accessible, safe, affordable, and reliable transportation. Investment in transportation and low-carbon transportation systems is essential to meeting BC and Canada’s legislated climate commitments and upholding First Nations jurisdiction and inherent rights, title and treaty rights.

¹ Mobility involves access to transportation infrastructure and services, as well as addressing systemic barriers that limit mobility.

Scope of Report and Action Plan

The recommendations and findings outlined in this report and action plan will support BCAFN's and First Nation-led advocacy to Crown governments, local governments, Crown corporations, organizations and industry for improved policies, programs, governance, shared decision-making, and investment that prioritize a just, equitable, accessible, safe, affordable, and reliable transportation and low-carbon transportation system that aligns with the needs, realities, and priorities of First Nations in BC.

This report and action plan focuses on the most common passenger transportation modes utilized by First Nations in BC, including personal vehicles, public transit (such as buses, train, ferries, community shuttles, land and water taxis, ride-sharing services), and active transportation² (such as walking or cycling), with the goal of proposing innovative solutions and policy recommendations to improve First Nations individual and collective mobility. Due to limitations in scope and data, this report and action plan does not comprehensively address all travel modes in detail. Specifically, it excludes recommendations and analysis on private or community-operated water taxi networks, air travel, privately owned passenger ferries (i.e. Hullo Ferries) or inland ferries, and commercial transportation, including freight and logistics, medium- and heavy-duty vehicles, off-road vehicles (such as All-Terrain Vehicles or Side by Sides), which are all foundational to the mobility, well-being, food security and economic development for many First Nations.

This report and action plan was developed by the BCAFN, in collaboration with the Community Energy Association (CEA), and draws on extensive research and engagement from a diverse range of sources, from desktop research to insights from the [BCAFN First Nations Low-Carbon Transportation Project](#) Phase 1 Pilot Project Communities. Although efforts were made to include as much input from First Nations as possible, BCAFN recognizes that the diversity of geography, history, culture, needs, realities and perspectives among First Nations in BC means that not all transportation barriers, opportunities, or innovations may be fully captured. Despite these limitations in scope, this report and action plan offers the most comprehensive research of its kind to date and provides a solid foundation for advancing mobility equity and a just transition to a low-carbon transportation system for First Nations in BC.

Introduction

First Nations in British Columbia have maintained and utilized complex transportation networks since time immemorial.³ Long before European contact, First Nations navigated extensive land and water routes, linking communities across mountains, rivers, and coastlines. From the

²Active transportation: getting from one place to another through the means of one's own human power. This includes but is not limited to walking, biking (including e-bikes and e-scooters), skateboarding, in-line skating/rollerblading, jogging and running, non-mechanized wheel chairing, canoeing, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing Public Health Agency of Canada. (2017). *Active transportation - Canada.ca*. Canada.ca. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/being-active/active-transportation.html>

³ Joseph, B. (2017, July 5). Indigenous Trade Networks Thrived Long Before the Arrival of Europeans. *Www.ictinc.ca*. <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/indigenous-trade-networks-thrived-long-before-the-arrival-of-europeans>

mighty Fraser, Skeena and Columbia Rivers to ocean-going canoe routes along the Pacific Coast to the famous Nuxalk-Carrier Grease Trail, these trade corridors facilitated the movement of people and goods over vast distances and supported the development of complex economic relationships and kinships spanning colonial borders between Nations in BC, Canada and internationally.

Colonization severed many of these complex transportation systems and sought to isolate and control the movement of First Nations through racist and discriminatory government policies and laws, such as the Indian Act, and the reserve and pass systems. These injustices disrupted traditional travel and trade routes and created a legacy of geographic isolation, poor infrastructure, and access to services and discrimination that continues to impact First Nations mobility and access to transportation in BC

As a result of the continuation of colonial policies, transportation systems in rural and remote areas and on-reserve are fragmented, underfunded, at times dangerous, and not meeting the needs of First Nations. Canada's modern transportation infrastructure priorities have focused largely on private automobile-centric policies and investment, leading to a transportation system with few choices or alternatives to private vehicles. The lack of a multi-modal transportation⁴ system and the continuation of the status quo present many unique challenges for many First Nations, which are often less densely populated and/or more remotely located than cities or municipalities. The lack of connectivity to other Nations or services centres restricts First Nations' access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and employment, and reinforces dependence on private vehicles or unsafe alternatives such as hitchhiking—further compounded by challenges in obtaining driver's licenses.

The decades of underinvestment in public, active, and low-carbon transportation options have resulted in limited public transit, active transportation infrastructure, low-carbon mobility options, and a dependence on private vehicles. Chronic underfunding exacerbates these issues, while aging infrastructure and a growing infrastructure gap—estimated at \$70.7 billion in BC—pose additional obstacles to equitable service delivery.⁵ Decades of underinvestment have compounded this forced remoteness—the last major federal transportation infrastructure investment for First Nations was in 1980.⁶

Government cutbacks and austerity have led to the cancellation of many bus and train routes that First Nations depended on, which continues to contribute to the ongoing social and physical isolation and restricting access to essential services as well as harming family connections and cultural practices.⁷ Road infrastructure and maintenance are often prioritized in more densely populated areas, leaving Northern and Coastal regions with the highest

⁴ According to the provincial government, multi-modal transportation means all existing and emerging forms of transportation that shape the systems and networks that move people and goods on a local, regional, and provincial scale across British Columbia and beyond. An effective multimodal transportation system prioritizes and supports safe, convenient, and accessible options to all users while promoting and enabling goods movement and strengthening the economy.

⁵ AFN. (2023). *Closing the Infrastructure Gap by 2030 A Collaborative and Comprehensive Cost Estimate Identifying the Infrastructure Investment Needs of First Nations in Canada*. <https://afn.bynder.com/m/367574a3a5cb5abe/original/1-AFN-Closing-the-Infrastructure-Gap-by-2030-National-Cost-Estimate-English-report-1.pdf>

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Addressing Transportation Inequities for Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ (2024) <https://yellowheadinstitute.org/2024/08/06/addressing-transportation-inequities-for-indigenous-women-girls-and-2slgbtqia/>

percentage of remaining roadless areas.⁸ This has resulted in poorer road conditions and limited or, in some cases, no road access to reserves. Additionally, some First Nations in BC are only accessible by water, air, or ice roads.

A UBC study between 1991 and 2010 found that Indigenous people in BC experience transportation-related injuries at a rate 1.89 times higher than the general population.⁹ This disparity persists despite a general decline in injury rates. First Nations women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ peoples continue to face increased risks, safety concerns and violence. Along Highway 16 in Northern BC—widely known as the “Highway of Tears”—the lack of safe transportation has led to countless tragedies and family members that never came home. Reclaiming Power and Place: The *Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls for Justice (2019)*¹⁰, the *Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendations Report (2006)*¹¹, *BC’s Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry (2012)*¹² and the *Red Women Rising: Indigenous Women Survivors in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside Report (2019)*¹³ all have calls and actions around transportation and mobility but only a few have been partially implemented despite ongoing advocacy from First Nations (see Appendix D).

Compounding this crisis, despite their minimal contribution to greenhouse gas emissions, First Nations in BC face disproportionate impacts of climate change and bear the brunt of poor transportation infrastructure.¹⁴ Slow onset climate impacts, such as rising sea levels, changing seasonal weather, and increasing temperatures, are disrupting transportation routes and access to territories for food, social, and ceremonial uses. Additionally, extreme weather events or climate-related disasters such as flooding or forest fires have the potential to isolate Nations due to inadequate emergency egress routes or a lack of climate resilient infrastructure. Transportation infrastructure in rural areas is often the first point of failure, particularly forest service roads.¹⁵ As outlined in the *Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction for First Nations in BC*, defined policies are needed to clearly outline what is meant by “build back better,” as it is not enough to just fund the replacement of what was there prior to the emergency event and the importance of access routes and emergency egresses being identified prior to an emergency (Theme 4, Recommendation 30).

⁸ BC Ministry of Environment and Parks. (2018). *Land & Forests Roads & Roadless Areas in British Columbia*.

https://www.env.gov.bc.ca/soe/indicators/land/print_ver/envreportbc_roads_May2018.pdf

⁹ Brussoni, M., George, M. A., Jin, A., Amram, O., McCormick, R., & Lalonde, C. E. (2018). Hospitalizations due to unintentional transport injuries among Aboriginal population of British Columbia, Canada: Incidence, changes over time and ecological analysis of risk markers. *PLOS ONE*, 13(1), e0191384.

<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0191384>

¹⁰ National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. (2019). Reclaiming Power and Place, The Final Report of The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Final_Report_Vol_1a-1.pdf

¹¹ Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendations Report. (2006). <https://highwayoftears.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Highway-of-Tears-Symposium-Recommendations-Report-January-2013.pdf>

¹² Forsaken: The Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry. (2012). <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/law-crime-and-justice/about-bc-justice-system/inquiries/forsaken-es.pdf>

¹³ Martin, C., & Walia, H. (2019). RED WOMEN RISING Indigenous Women Survivors in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside. <https://dewc.ca/content/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/RedWomenRising-Report-DEWC-2019.pdf>

¹⁴ FNLC. (2022). Climate Strategy and Action Plan. <https://www.bcafn.ca/sites/default/files/2022-04/BCFNCSAP%20Final%20Draft%20%2822April2022%29.pdf>

¹⁵ Partington, M., Senior Researcher, M., Bradley, A., Associate, P., Leader, R., Durand-Jézéquel, M., Eng, Researcher, A., Forrester, R., & Researcher, P. (2017). *Adapting Resource Road Infrastructure to Climate Change*. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/farming-natural-resources-and-industry/natural-resource-use/resource-roads/climate-change-adaptation/fpi_tr2017n61.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Meanwhile, transportation-related emissions, from vehicle exhaust, tires and asphalt continue to rise, contributing to negative health impacts from air pollution. Health Canada estimated that in 2018, air pollution contributed to 17,400 premature deaths and 3.6 million asthma symptom days across Canada.¹⁶ A UBC study further found that in Vancouver, Indigenous residents are disproportionately at risk from air pollution.¹⁷ This further underscores the urgent need for a just and equitable transition to low-carbon and circular economic models that are inclusive of First Nations knowledge systems, science and leadership.

Without reliable multi-modal transportation networks to reach hospitals, schools, evacuation routes or other services, First Nations are disproportionately vulnerable to both social and environmental threats. Mobility and transportation are critical to reconciliation and the exercise of First Nations' inherent rights in BC and are directly linked to many of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action*, several articles of the *UN Declaration* 18 including Articles 3, 10, 18, 19, 21, 23, 25, 28, 29, 32 and 36 that affirm right to self-determination, jurisdiction over Nations' lands, territories and resources, right to improve social and economic conditions, Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), and inter-Nation and cross-border connections (see Appendix D).

Transportation and mobility are indirectly reflected in [Canada's UNDA Action Plan](#) and directly mentioned in [BC's Declaration Act Action Plan](#) via Action items 2.13 and 3.9 (see Appendix D). Although both the federal and provincial governments have adopted the *UN Declaration* as law and signed the Paris Agreement, many of the targets and actions related to transportation, infrastructure and greenhouse gas emissions have not been met or have not come with the necessary commitment, resourcing, consultation or shared decision-making. These shortcomings require urgent action, innovative policies and significant investment by Crown governments, Crown corporations, local governments, organizations and industry in partnership with First Nations in defining a new transportation vision that supports not only GHG reductions but also improves transportation and mobility for First Nations and upholds First Nations rights. Furthermore, [CleanBC](#) and future provincial climate plans or roadmaps must centre the needs, priorities and rights of First Nations and consider the unique challenges and barriers they face, which go beyond transportation-related carbon emissions.

This report is structured into two main sections. The first section focuses on the background, policy review, and methodology. The second section presents 47 recommendations grouped into 10 themes that provide an action plan to address the transportation-related systemic barriers and gaps. The recommendations aim to improve the safety, reliability, accessibility and affordability of the transportation system, while encouraging a just and equitable transition to a low-carbon transportation system for First Nations.

¹⁶ Canada, H. (2022, January 21). *Outdoor air pollution and health: Overview*. [Www.canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/air-quality/outdoor-pollution-health.html). <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/air-quality/outdoor-pollution-health.html>

¹⁷ UBC. (2020, December 21). *Marginalized groups experience higher cumulative air pollution in urban Canada*. UBC News. <https://news.ubc.ca/2020/12/marginalized-groups-experience-higher-cumulative-air-pollution-in-urban-canada/>

¹⁸ United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. (2007). *Human Rights Quarterly*, 33(3). <https://doi.org/10.1353/hrq.2011.0040>

Background

What is Low-Carbon Transportation?

Low-carbon transportation generally refers to ways of getting around that emit fewer greenhouse gases (GHGs) than single-occupant internal combustion engine-based vehicles. As carbon dioxide (CO₂) is the most prevalent greenhouse gas, it is common to refer to forms of transportation that emit fewer GHGs as being “lower carbon.” Low-carbon transportation encompasses a variety of ways of getting around, including Zero Emission Vehicles (ZEV), buses, trains, walking, cycling, etc. Some low-carbon solutions might reduce but not eliminate carbon (e.g. electric vehicles still generate emissions through electricity production and non-exhaust sources such as tire and brake wear, even though they are called ‘Zero Emission Vehicles’) while others might generate no carbon at all (e.g. walking or any other form of active transportation¹⁹); both are still considered low-carbon transportation.

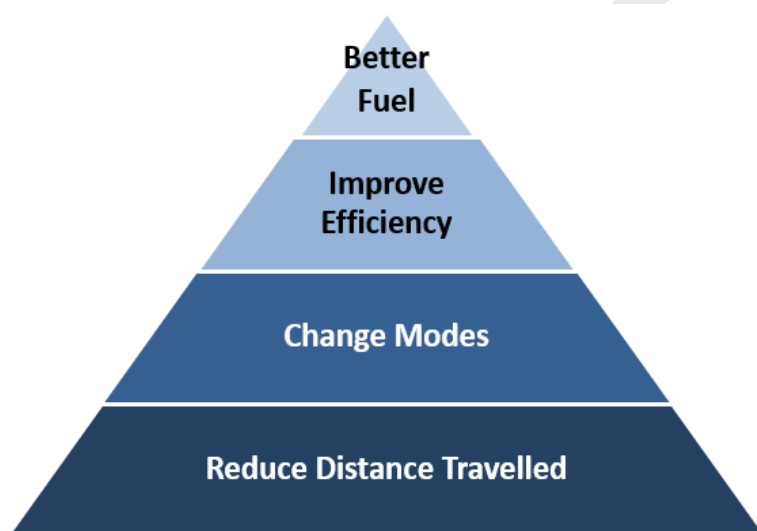


Figure 1: Transportation Pyramid, Source: Community Energy Association

A “transportation pyramid”, or hierarchy, can help to visualize and prioritize different approaches to reducing emissions. The pyramid developed by CEA in Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between transportation options and associated emissions reductions. The base of the pyramid represents the most significant opportunities to reduce the emissions associated with transportation which include reducing distance travelled and choosing, for example walking over driving.

The approach used in this report and action plan aims to empower First Nations to access transportation modes that produce fewer emissions, where feasible, as part of a multi-modal transportation system. However, due to the ongoing systemic and colonial barriers faced by First Nations in accessing transportation, some of the recommendations and outcomes

¹⁹ Active transportation: getting from one place to another through the means of one’s own human power. This includes but is not limited to walking, biking (including e-bikes and e-scooters), skateboarding, in-line skating/rollerblading, jogging and running, non-mechanized wheel chairing, canoeing, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing Public Health Agency of Canada. (2017). *Active transportation - Canada.ca*. Canada.ca. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/being-active/active-transportation.html>

discussed are not always the lowest-carbon alternatives available. This includes recognising the potential for alternative solutions like hybrids or plug-in hybrid electric vehicles that meet the self-determined needs of remote First Nations where full ZEV infrastructure might not yet be feasible.

“Low-carbon transportation must be a path toward reconciliation, equity and justice, not another form of exclusion.”

— BCAFN Regional Chief Terry Teegee

BCAFN First Nations Low-Carbon Transportation Project

In March of 2023, the BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly passed [Resolution 12/2023](#), mandating BCAFN to *“assess gaps and opportunities that restrict and assist First Nations in BC to access equitable, safe, reliable, and affordable low-carbon and active transportation and transportation services within and between communities, and provide recommendations for legislation, policy, and program reform to advance these goals.”* To fulfill this mandate, with support from the former BC Ministry of Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation (now BC Ministry of Energy and Climate Solutions), in 2022, BCAFN launched a 3-year [First Nations Low-Carbon Transportation Project](#) (“Transportation Project”) with additional funding secured to extend the project for an additional two years. BCAFN engaged CEA as a technical transportation consultant to assist with research, technical support and the development and delivery of project materials.

The Transportation Project is aligned with the implementation of the [BC First Nations Climate Leadership Agenda \(BC FNCL Agenda\)](#) (Theme 7, Recommendation 7.1) and the [BC First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan](#) (Theme 4.2, Objectives 4.2.1 and 4.2.2) including specific priorities and actions to ensure *“reliable, safe and affordable low-carbon and active transportation within and between First Nations communities,”* including conducting a *“review [of] state-led policies and programs relating to low-carbon transportation and active transportation projects [to] develop reform recommendations to support the needs and priorities of First Nations both on and off reserve.”*^{20 21} The FNLC, as mandated by First Nations leadership via resolutions at assemblies of the BCAFN, Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) and the First Nations Summit (FNS), endorsed the BC First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan in April 2022.

The Transportation Project’s overall goal is to accelerate opportunities for First Nations in BC, including rural and remote First Nations, to access safe, affordable, and reliable low-carbon and active transportation. The project recognizes that transportation and the transition to a low-carbon transportation system solutions must be approached holistically from a rights, equity and reconciliation lens. The consequences of decades of lack of investment, the reserve system and colonization more broadly have had many impacts, from infrastructure, racism, to the

²⁰ FNLC. (2022). Climate Strategy and Action Plan. <https://www.bcafn.ca/sites/default/files/2022-04/BCFNCSAP%20Final%20Draft%20%2822April2022%29.pdf>

²¹ BCAFN. (2025a). *BC First Nations Climate Leadership Agenda*. <https://www.bcafn.ca/priority-areas/environment/climate-emergency/bc-fncl-agenda>

ongoing violence and murders of First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. The Project's key objectives include:

- Assessing gaps and opportunities that restrict and assist First Nations in BC to access equitable, safe, reliable, and affordable low-carbon transportation and transportation services; and developing recommendations for legislation, policy and program reform to advance these goals
- Strengthening capacity and climate awareness in eleven First Nations communities through the development of their self-determined Low-Carbon Transportation Plans and Gaps and Opportunities Analysis Reports
- Developing a comprehensive [First Nations Safe, Equitable, Affordable, and Low-Carbon Transportation Planning Guide](#).
- Ongoing advocacy for improved transportation and low-carbon transportation policies, legislation and program delivery for First Nations in BC

The Project has two Phases: Phase 1 (Winter 2022 – March 2025) and Phase 2 (April 2025 – March 2027).

- **Phase 1 (Fall 2022 – March 2025):** Deliverables included a desktop research project, a First Nations Safe, Equitable, Affordable, and First Nations Safe, Equitable, Affordable, and Low-Carbon Transportation Planning Guide, two surveys and a Survey Report (429 responses from 114 First Nations), four out of five Pilot Project Communities delivered a Low-Carbon Transportation Plans and Gap and Opportunity Analysis Reports²² and a first draft of the BC First Nations Transportation Assessment Report and Action Plan ("Transportation Action Plan"), which is the culmination of the research, feedback, engagement and inputs from Phase 1.
- **Phase 2 (April 2025 – March 2027):** Deliverables for Phase 2 includes hosting a BC First Nations Low-Carbon Transportation Forum in May 2025, supporting six additional Pilot Project Communities via an Expression of Interest issued in April 2025, continued Transportation Action Plan engagement and drafting, and continuing advocacy efforts with Crown governments and relevant partners.

In 2023, five Pilot Project Communities were selected in response to an open call for Expressions of Interest and include representation from a diversity of First Nation Language groups, lived experience, geography, including coastal, remote northern, remote interior, and suburban or urban. Each selected Pilot Project Community received up to \$65,000 in flexible funding to support the development of a Low-Carbon Transportation Plan and Gap and Opportunities Analysis Report. BCAFN staff provided ongoing support to the Pilot Project Communities, including regular meetings, check-ins and the option of an in-person visit and technical support. BCAFN Phase 1 Pilot Project Communities included (see Figure 2):

²² Heiltsuk Nation is still in the process of completing its Low-Carbon Transportation Plan and Gaps Analysis Report. Tragically, Leona Humchitt, the lead for Heiltsuk Nation's pilot project, passed away in March 2025. Leona was a fierce advocate for First Nations-led climate action and was an inspirational leader. We expect that this tragedy, along with capacity constraints, will mean that Heiltsuk Nation will deliver their Low-Carbon Transportation Plan and Gaps Analysis Report along with the Phase 2 Pilot Project Communities in late 2026.

1. **Sḵw̓xwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation)** – An urban/semi-urban Nation whose traditional territory encompasses multiple municipalities and well-established transportation corridors and transit systems along the Sea to Sky Corridor.
2. **Haíłzaqv (Heiltsulk) Nation** – A Nation located on the central coast whose traditional territory encompasses ferry routes and marine travel corridors as well as land-based transportation.
3. **Nisga’a Lisims** – A northern, coastal, modern Treaty and self-governing Nation whose remote traditional territory encompasses provincial highways.
4. **Daylu Dena Council** – A remote transboundary northern nation located near the BC-Yukon border.
5. **?Esdilagh** – One of six T̓silhqot’in Nations with the reserve cut in two by the Fraser River, located between Williams Lake and Quesnel.



Figure 2: Phase 1 BCAFN First Nations Low-Carbon Transportation Project Pilot Communities

Policy Review

Provincial

The BC government's [Move. Commute. Connect. Active Transportation Strategy](#), launched in 2019, sets an ambitious goal to double the percentage of trips taken by active transportation by 2030, aiming to make walking, cycling, and other human-powered modes safer, more convenient, and better connected with transit and other transportation networks.²³ In 2021,

²³ CleanBC. (2019). *Move Commute Connect B.C.'S ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION STRATEGY*. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/driving-and-transportation/funding-engagement-permits/grants-funding/cycling-infrastructure-funding/activetransportationstrategy_report_web.pdf

the provincial government released the [CleanBC Roadmap to 2030](#), which set a target to reduce GHG emissions from the transportation sector 27-32% below 2007 levels by 2030.²⁴ The provincial government has set numerous targets to reduce emissions by increasing active and public transit, but continues to fall short in meeting its targets. BC's Transportation sector emissions in 2022 were up 18% from 2007 and continued to account for the largest share (42%) of B.C.'s GHG emissions.²⁵

Many of the province's plans, targets and strategies related to transportation have not been supported by clear implementation plans and sufficient investment. While the *CleanBC Roadmap to 2030* pointed to general actions and commitments intended to help achieve these targets, including reducing private or light duty vehicle travel by 25% by 2030 and increasing the share of walking, cycling, and transit trips to 30%, 40%, and 50% by 2030, 2040, and 2050 respectively, there was no clear plan to achieve this.²⁶ The [Clean Transportation Action Plan \(CTAP\)](#) was a key commitment made by the provincial government in the *CleanBC Roadmap to 2030* with the goal of identifying key actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the transportation sector.²⁷ CTAP's release was postponed due to it be integrated into the ongoing independent review of Clean BC, despite the CleanBC Roadmap's commitment to deliver it in 2023.

The disconnect between the government's goals and actions is evident in their transportation investment priorities and policies, which continue to favour private vehicles. In 2025/26, the province is set to spend nearly twice as much on highway operations (\$738.7 million) as on public transit operations (\$395.6 million).²⁸ Even when accounting for SkyTrain and subway investments, planned transit infrastructure spending makes up less than 40% of total transportation infrastructure investments, with the majority directed toward highway and bridge improvements and expansions.²⁹ Moreover, much of this investment is concentrated in Metro Vancouver. The 2025 BC Budget reveals that only \$47 million has been committed to support community transportation networks compared to the \$6 billion to construct the Surrey Langley SkyTrain project or \$4.2 billion to construct an eight-lane immersed tube Fraser River Tunnel.³⁰

Similarly, active transportation infrastructure investment remains marginal, with investments not individually broken down in the latest Service Plan but described only as "supportive" under broader highway programs—suggesting that, as in previous years, it accounts for approximately

²⁴ CleanBC. (2021). Roadmap to 2030. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/climate-change/action/cleanbc/cleanbc_roadmap_2030.pdf

²⁵ CleanBC. (2024). Climate Change Accountability Report. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/climate-change/action/cleanbc/2024_climate_change_accountability_report.pdf

²⁶ CleanBC. (2021). Roadmap to 2030. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/climate-change/action/cleanbc/cleanbc_roadmap_2030.pdf

²⁷ CTAP was intended to outline actions related to: Reducing vehicle kilometres travelled, shifting to more efficient modes, increasing vehicle efficiency, transitioning the market to zero-emission vehicles and transitioning to cleaner fuels.

²⁸ BC Ministry of Transportation and Transit. (2025a). *Ministry of Transportation and Transit 2025/26 -2027/28 Service Plan*. <https://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/2025/sp/pdf/ministry/trans.pdf>

²⁹ BC Ministry of Transportation and Transit. (2025a). *Ministry of Transportation and Transit 2025/26 -2027/28 Service Plan*. <https://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/2025/sp/pdf/ministry/trans.pdf>

³⁰ BC Gov. (2025). BC Budget 2025. https://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/2025/pdf/2025_Budget_and_Fiscal_Plan.pdf

1% or less of total transportation infrastructure investments.³¹ [BC's Active Transportation Strategy](#) acknowledges that active transportation infrastructure and funding remain limited and unevenly distributed, with only a minimal number of Nations benefiting from the patchwork of current grant funding programs. Urgent, sustained investment in public and active transportation is needed to close these gaps and deliver more equitable outcomes across the province.

Despite calls from First Nations during the CleanBC Roadmap's development in 2021 to prioritize safe, reliable, and culturally appropriate transportation solutions beyond electric vehicles or ZEVs, the government remains focused on electrification and transitioning to ZEVs without providing clear evidence that this alone will lead to significant emission reductions. BC is aiming for 26% ZEV sales by 2026, 90% by 2030, and 100% by 2035, five years earlier than the federal government and the province has committed \$650 million in funding to transitioning to ZEVs since 2011.³² The combination of a focus on ZEVs, which promote the continuation of a reliance on private vehicle transportation, combined with environmental concerns and a lack of investment in public and active transportation, has contributed to the government's failure to reduce emissions.

The provincial government has recognized the right to equitable transportation through the *Declaration Act Action Plan* with Action 3.9, "identify and implement multi-modal transportation solutions that provide support and enable the development of sustainable, safe, reliable and affordable transportation options for First Nations communities" being led by the BC Ministry of Transportation and Transit, the primary provincial body responsible for transportation infrastructure and service delivery.³³ This work to date has been focused on engagement ([What We Heard Report](#)) and planning (developed a [First Nations Transportation Planning Guide](#)), but lacks a clear pathway or investment to implementation. The [2024/2025 Annual Report](#) states that "competing priorities and resourcing could delay certain deliverables for Action 3.09," signalling that investing in implementation is not a top priority for the government.³⁴ The provincial government also has commitments to support clean energy and climate resilience with First Nations (*Declaration Act Action Plan*, Action items 4.43 and 2.12). However, future funding for these commitments remains uncertain. The 2024/2025 Annual Report states that "future collaboration and engagement processes on CleanBC and the B.C.'s [Climate Preparedness and Adaptation Strategy](#) will need to consider current economic uncertainty and a constrained fiscal environment."

There continues to be significant jurisdictional barriers for First Nations from infrastructure projects to participation in transportation governance. Under both the Local Government Act

³¹ Litman, T. (2023). Provincial Policies for Achieving Transportation Emission Reduction Targets Comments for the BC Clean Transportation Action Plan Consultation Paper. <https://www.vtpt.org/pptter.pdf>

³² BC Go Electric. (2025). *Go Electric Program - Province of British Columbia*. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/electricity-alternative-energy/transportation-energies/clean-transportation-policies-programs/clean-energy-vehicle-program#>

³³ Government of British Columbia. (2022). Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/government/ministries-organizations/ministries/indigenous-relations-reconciliation/declaration_act_action_plan.pdf

³⁴ Government of British Columbia. (2024). Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act 2024-2025 ANNUAL REPORT https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/indigenous-people/aboriginal-peoples-documents/2024_2025_declaration_act_annual_report.pdf

and the BC Transit Act, First Nations are not included as "local governments," which are the only entities with the legislated authority to initiate, fund, and co-govern regional public transit systems.³⁵ This effectively denies First Nations the authority to initiate or co-lead transit services in their own territories. They have to rely on Community Partnership Agreements with BC Transit and local governments to have input into transit decisions and jointly fund and operate transit which are challenging to set up particularly for remote and rural First Nations³⁶

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In addition to the several challenges Nations face around transit and transportation governance, the BC Ministry of Transportation and Transit's highway and road maintenance contracts—many of which pass through or serve First Nations—are issued every 10–15 years, limiting flexibility and excluding First Nations voices from prioritization decisions. One of the few exceptions to this rule is Tsawwassen First Nation who negotiated a modern treaty with a formalized role in decision-making processes through the TransLink Mayors' Council on Regional Transportation.³⁹

Federal

Canada's [2030 Emissions Reduction Plan \(2022\)](#) sets a target of 40–45% emissions reductions below 2005 levels by 2030 and achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.⁴⁰ However, Canada is likely to fall short of its climate targets and its international commitment under the Paris Agreement. The Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development found that implementation of measures in this Plan remains insufficient to meet Canada's targets and emissions have only been reduced by 7.1% from 2005–2022.⁴¹ This shortfall is partly due to the Plan's limited focus on expanding public transit and active transportation, despite transportation being the second-largest contributor to emissions (25%).^{42 43} In Canada, transportation emissions have steadily increased between 1990 and 2023 (apart from a decrease during COVID-19) caused in part by an increase in the number of vehicles on the road and a preference for SUVs and light-duty trucks.⁴⁴ Although the federal government's 2030 Emissions Reductions Plan places a heavy emphasis on ZEVs, including a ZEV mandate which has a target for all new light-duty vehicle sales to be zero-emission by 2035, the ZEV market

³⁵ UBCM. (2025). *Request for First Nations Participation on Commissions* | Union of BC Municipalities. Ubcm.ca. <https://www.ubcm.ca/convention-resolutions/resolutions/resolutions-database/request-first-nations-participation>

³⁶ BC Ministry of Transportation and Transit. (2025). *What We Heard Report*. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/driving-and-transportation/transportation-infrastructure/planning/planningtogetherbc/first-nations-transportation-planning-guide/what-we-heard-report-five-transportation-initiatives.pdf>

³⁷ Northern Development Initiative Trust. (2023). *INTER-COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION STUDY* August 2023 PREPARED BY PREPARED FOR NORTHERN BC. <https://www.northerndevlopment.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Northern-BC-Inter-Community-Transportation-Study.pdf>

³⁸ UBCM. (2025). *Request for First Nations Participation on Commissions* | Union of BC Municipalities. Ubcm.ca. <https://www.ubcm.ca/convention-resolutions/resolutions/resolutions-database/request-first-nations-participation>

³⁹ Translink. (2022). *Regional Transportation Strategy*. https://www.translink.ca/-/media/translink/documents/plans-and-projects/regional-transportation-strategy/transport-2050/final_report/rts_introductions.pdf?sc_lang=en&hash=EF4E3F7E74C7DA75EA0EED6046075A70

⁴⁰ Environment and Climate Change Canada. (2022). *2030 EMISSIONS REDUCTION PLAN* Canada's Next Steps for Clean Air and a Strong Economy https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2022/eccc/En4-460-2022-eng.pdf

⁴¹ Office of the Auditor General of Canada. (2024). *Report 7—Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act—2024 Report*. Oag-Bvg.gc.ca. https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_cesd_202411_07_e_44576.html

⁴² Environment and Climate Change Canada. (2022). *2030 EMISSIONS REDUCTION PLAN* Canada's Next Steps for Clean Air and a Strong Economy https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2022/eccc/En4-460-2022-eng.pdf

⁴³ Transport Canada. (2024, January 22). *Canada's Zero-Emission vehicle sales targets*. Government of Canada. <https://tc.canada.ca/en/road-transportation/innovative-technologies/zero-emission-vehicles/canada-s-zero-emission-vehicle-sales-targets>

⁴⁴ Government of Canada. (2024, May 2). *Greenhouse gas emissions*. Government of Canada; Government of Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/environmental-indicators/greenhouse-gas-emissions.html>

share was only 9.2% in Canada for Q2 2025.⁴⁵ ⁴⁶ Light-duty trucks and cars continue to make up a large source of air pollution and made up more than half of all transport emissions in 2023.⁴⁷

This persistent reliance on personal vehicles is rooted in deeper, structural issues—most notably, Canada's longstanding underinvestment in public transit. Historically, Canada has lacked a coordinated national transit policy framework and stable, predictable federal funding to support long-term transit planning and implementation. In 1990, the Conservative federal government cut VIA rail's routes in half, laying off a third of its employees, and significantly reducing subsidies.⁴⁸ This decimated passenger rail throughout the country and increased reliance on private vehicles. Broader and more systematic cuts to public transportation came during the Liberal government's 'Program Review' from 1994–1998, where transportation spending saw the deepest budget cuts among federal departments, with a reduction of over 50%.⁴⁹ These budget cuts affected a wide range of transportation programs beyond VIA Rail, including subsidies to other forms of public transit and infrastructure. Since then, federal funding has been intermittent and focused mainly on capital projects rather than integrated, multi-year operating and planning support.⁵⁰ ⁵¹ This limited the ability of local governments and provinces to execute comprehensive, long-range transit strategies.⁵²

While recent federal programs signal a shift toward recognizing the importance of transit, implementation has been uneven and funding insufficient. Programs such as the Rural Transit Solutions Fund, the Zero Emission Transit Fund, and the Active Transportation Fund reflect an increased policy focus on public transportation. However, these programs remain piecemeal and are not always fulfilling their intended purpose. The Rural Transit Solutions Fund, though well-intentioned, has not meaningfully improved transit access for many rural First Nations. Despite its name, one study found the fund has supported only one rural census area (population under 1,000) and no remote communities, instead favouring small population centres (1,000–29,999).⁵³ Moreover, the fund does not provide consistent or predictable operational funding—the very cost that research identifies as the greatest barrier to sustaining rural transit. The total investment—\$250 million over five years—is also limited. In addition, the commissioner found that for this and other funds, “the pace of resource disbursement for

⁴⁵ Note: In September 2025, Prime Minister Carney announced a pause on the ZEV sales mandate for 2026, and a 60-day review of the Canada-wide ZEV mandate to support Canadian automakers who are struggling with the US tariffs.⁴⁵

⁴⁶ S&P Global. (2025). Canadian Electric Vehicle Industry Insights: Q4 2024. S&P Automotive Insights. <https://www.spglobal.com/automotive-insights/en/blogs/2025/03/canada-electric-vehicle-industry-insights>

⁴⁷ Government of Canada. (2024, May 2). *Greenhouse gas emissions*. Government of Canada; Government of Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/environmental-indicators/greenhouse-gas-emissions.html>

⁴⁸ Active History. (2020, February 21). *End of the Line? The History of Canada's Precarious Passenger Rail Network*. Active History. <https://activehistory.ca/blog/2020/02/21/end-of-the-line-the-history-of-canadas-precarious-passenger-rail-network/>

⁴⁹ Lydia Miljan, Tegan Hill, and Niels Veldhuis. (2020, February 28). “CHAPTER 2: Spending Reductions and Reform: Bases for the Success of the 1995 Budget,” in William Watson (ed.), *The Budget that Changed Canada: Essays on the 25th Anniversary of the 1995 Budget*, Fraser Institute, pp. 16-17. <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/chapter2-spending-reductions-and-reform.pdf>

⁵⁰ Victoria Transport Policy Institute & Stantec Consulting Ltd. (2011). *NATIONAL STRATEGIES ON PUBLIC TRANSIT POLICY FRAMEWORK Final Report*. <https://cutaactu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/G8-report-into-national-strategies-on-public-transit-policy.pdf>

⁵¹ Fraser Institute. (2011). Learning from the Past How Canadian Fiscal Policies of the 1990s Can Be Applied Today <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/learning-from-the-past.pdf>

⁵² Victoria Transport Policy Institute & Stantec Consulting Ltd. (2011). *NATIONAL STRATEGIES ON PUBLIC TRANSIT POLICY FRAMEWORK Final Report*. <https://cutaactu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/G8-report-into-national-strategies-on-public-transit-policy.pdf>

⁵³ Breen, S.-P., Gibson, R., & Main, H. (2025). Beyond the City Limits: Analysis of Federal Funding of Public Transit in Rural Canada. *Canadian Public Policy*, 51(2). <https://doi.org/10.3138/cpp.2024-040>

Indigenous peoples was slow.”⁵⁴ Even the Canada Public Transit Fund (CPTF), announced in 2024 and set to provide \$3 billion in funding per year from 2026 over 10 years, only covers capital expenditures and not operations, and it remains to be seen whether this Fund will adequately support rural transit development.⁵⁵

Critically, First Nations transportation needs continue to be overlooked in national policy frameworks. Although *Canada’s UNDA Action Plan*, has some important action items such as First Nations Measure 15 related to closing the infrastructure gap, it does not explicitly mention transportation or mobility.⁵⁶ While the Federal Pathway to Address Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People includes some commitments to improving safe, affordable, and reliable transportation, it is supported by minimal dedicated funding.⁵⁷

Provincial and Federal Fast Tracking Legislation (Bill 14, 15 and C-5)

The “fast-tracking” of industrial and extractive projects via recent federal and provincial legislation is effectively deprioritizing the climate crisis and the health of the environment, while simultaneously violating First Nations title, rights and treaty rights. Provincially, *Bill 14 (Renewable Energy Projects - Streamlined Permitting)* and *Bill 15 (Infrastructure Projects Act)*, received Royal Assent on May 29, 2025, in the BC Legislature unilaterally without meaningful First Nations co-development or support, undermining the Province of BC's Interim Approach. Both aim to ‘fast track’ infrastructure development in BC and could have wide-ranging implications and impacts on First Nations rights, climate emissions and transportation investment. Furthermore, neither Act contains provisions to uphold First Nations' FPIC or create a legislative framework for meaningful partnership with First Nations before a project is designated and approved for streamlining (a requirement of the *UN Declaration*). Moreover, there are legislative assurances that First Nations' infrastructure needs will be prioritized.⁵⁸ In addition, Bill 14 risks prioritising non-renewable energy projects in the name of electrification, undermining the very emissions reductions a ZEV transition is meant to achieve.⁵⁹

Meanwhile, Bill C-5 (the *Building Canada Act* under the *One Canadian Economy Act*), much like BC’s Bills 14 and 15—was developed without meaningful inclusion and co-development with First Nations, which received Royal Assent on June 26, 2025. The legislation raises significant concerns that projects deemed to be in the “national interest” could be passed without FPIC and without regard of their impacts on First Nations rights, title or Treaty rights.⁶⁰ Effectively Bill C-5 undermines First Nations rights, the *UN Declaration* and vital safeguards through

⁵⁴Office of the Auditor General of Canada. (2024b). Reports of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development to the Parliament of Canada Independent Auditor's Report | 2024. https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/docs/parl_cesd_202411_07_e.pdf

⁵⁵ CBC News. (2024, July 23). *Federal \$30 billion fund may not be enough to save struggling transit services, critics warn*. CBC. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/canada-public-transit-fund-trudeau-1.7271401>

⁵⁶ Government of Canada. (2023). United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (UNDA) Action Plan <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/declaration/ap-pa/index.html>

⁵⁷ Government of Canada. (2021, April 6). *The Federal Pathway*. Wwww.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca. <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1617731561423/1617731691291>

⁵⁸ BCAFN. (2025, May 15). *Kill the Bill: First Nations Call on B.C. Government to immediately withdraw Bill 14 and Bill 15* | *British Columbia Assembly of First Nations*. Bcafn.ca. <https://www.bcafn.ca/news/kill-bill-first-nations-call-bc-government-immediately-withdraw-bill-14-and-bill-15>

⁵⁹ Yellowhead Institute. (2025, June 24). *“Fast-Track” to Disaster: BC’s Bill 14/15, Indigenous Rights & the Climate Crisis*. Yellowhead Institute. <https://yellowheadinstitute.org/2025/fast-track-to-disaster-bcs-bill-14-15-indigenous-rights-the-climate-crisis/>

⁶⁰ FNLC. (2025, June 27). *FNLC Communique - Bill C-5: Overview and Discussion* | *British Columbia Assembly of First Nations*. Bcafn.ca. <https://www.bcafn.ca/news/fnlc-communique-bill-c-5-overview-and-discussion>

bypassing existing environmental protection laws including providing the Governor in Council authority to exempt projects from environmental assessments.

Methodology

This report and action plan draw on a comprehensive range of inputs between 2022 and 2025 (See Figure 3). Foundational work for the project included a BCAFN-UBC Sustainability Scholar internship, CEA and BCAFN-led desktop research and analysis, including a review of existing policies (as outlined in the previous section), and interviews with key government ministries, Crown corporations and organizations. This report and recommendations were guided by the previous foundational climate-related work completed, including the [*BC First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan*](#), the [*BC First Nations Climate Leadership Agenda*](#) and the [*Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction by First Nations in BC*](#).

Throughout the development of this report and action plan, BCAFN continuously engaged with government and Crown corporations, including monthly meetings with the BC Ministry of Energy and Climate Solutions (formerly Ministry of Energy, Mines and Low-Carbon Innovation) and the BC Ministry of Transportation and Transit (formerly Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure) to share information, discuss programs, and provide updates on respective projects. The desktop research, interviews and insights from the BCAFN Phase 1 Pilot Project Communities uncovered substantial gaps in First Nations' equitable access to safe, affordable, reliable, and accessible transportation.

In response to these gaps, BCAFN, in collaboration with CEA, launched a province-wide First Nations Transportation Survey in Spring 2024, which received over 400 responses. To further contextualize the findings and recommendations, BCAFN supported five Phase 1 First Nation-led Pilot Project Communities to carry out their own Nation-specific transportation Gaps Analysis Reports. Throughout the research process, BCAFN engaged regularly with federal and provincial governments, Crown corporations, and other key organizations. This included conducting semi-structured interviews with representatives from over 14 government ministries, Crown corporations and other relevant organizations.

Based on these various inputs, in-depth analysis and lived experience from the five BCAFN Phase 1 Pilot Project Communities, 47 recommendations were developed, grouped into 10 key themes to guide action. To seek additional feedback and validate the findings, BCAFN arranged for two First Nations transportation experts to peer review the Transportation Action Plan. In addition, BCAFN hosted a session on the Transportation Action Plan at the First Nations Low-Carbon Transportation Forum in May 2025 and hosted a Virtual Engagement Session on September 8, 2025. For further details on the inputs to this report and action plan, please refer to Appendix A.

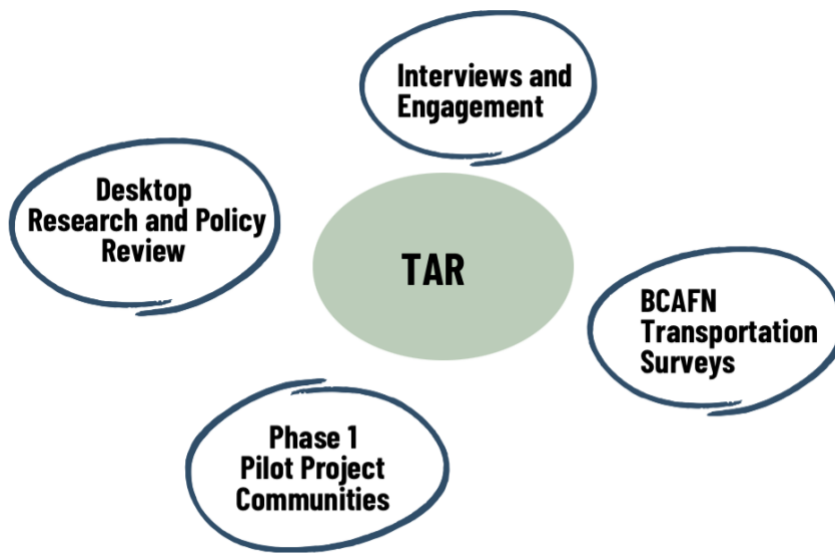


Figure 3: Transportation Action Plan Inputs

Recommendations

Many structural, legal and crosscutting issues continue to impact First Nations' access to equitable, safe, affordable, accessible and reliable transportation and low-carbon transportation. The themes and recommendations are holistic and interconnected and presented as an action plan. Implementation of these recommendations is urgently needed to support the development of a multi-modal and culturally safe transportation system and substantially improve First Nations transportation and mobility in BC.

All recommendations are intersectional and uphold First Nations rights, title, treaty rights and jurisdiction; seek to mitigate and build First Nations resilience in the face of the climate emergency and support a First Nations-centred and just transition to a low-carbon transportation system and economy.

Crown governments, Crown corporations, local governments, organizations and industry must work in partnership with First Nations Chiefs and rights and titleholders to effectively implement the following recommendations based on each First Nation's distinct culture, history, perspectives and self-determined needs, priorities and realities. Intersecting all themes outlined in this action plan is the need for urgent and long-term substantial investment, a whole-of-government approach and a strong political commitment for implementation in alignment with the *UN Declaration*.

1. Substantially increase investment and strengthen policies to support multi-modal transportation and improved public transit for First Nations

RATIONALE

Public transit connects people to education, healthcare, employment, food security, and cultural life. For most First Nations in BC—particularly rural, remote, and northern

communities—public transit systems are limited, unreliable, unaffordable, or non-existent. This has resulted in significant mobility inequities, economic exclusion, persistent safety concerns and dependence on private vehicle travel or hitchhiking.

The *CleanBC Roadmap to 2030* set a goal to increase the public transit mode share to 30% by 2030 and 50% by 2050.⁶¹ As BC transitions to a low-carbon transportation system, accessible and well-designed public transit systems remain among the most effective tools for encouraging mode shifts and creating a multi-modal transportation system which reduces greenhouse gas emissions, while also supporting economic development and enhancing quality of life, service access, and well-being. However, current public transit models and governance structures in BC and across Canada do not adequately reflect or serve the diverse geographies, cultures, and transportation needs and priorities of First Nations.

The *Missing the Bus Report* highlights how the lack of public transit investment disproportionately affects First Nations—even if they exist, on-road public transit options are often insufficient for many rural and remote First Nations.⁶² Even suburban First Nations communities are often poorly serviced by public transit and lack connectivity with other transportation networks. The *BCAFN-UBC Sustainability Scholar Report* found that public transit remains largely inaccessible for many First Nations, with no province-wide well-structured network and limited inter-city services. First Nations, particularly in rural and remote regions, face infrequent service, inadequate infrastructure, affordability challenges, and a lack of physical and cultural safety. Current signage within stations and at bus shelters may not be easy to understand for people who are not accustomed to taking transit and is generally not culturally safe.⁶³ Although not mentioned explicitly in the federal government’s *UNDA Action Plan*, access to adequate, reliable, affordable and safe public transit is woven in various articles of the *UN Declaration* (see Appendix D).

The lack of investment by both the provincial and federal governments in public transit in favour of private vehicles is stated in the policy review. The Crown government’s policy and investment have largely focused on reducing emissions through transitioning to ZEVs over investing in public transit and active transportation. These policies support the status quo of dependence on private vehicles rather than a shift to a more sustainable and equitable multi-modal system. This is despite the fact that First Nations have consistently stated that they prefer the development of public transit over ZEVs as highlighted during the engagement in the development of the *CleanBC Roadmap to 2030*, in the *Ministry of Transportation and Transit’s (MOTT) latest What We Heard Report* (68% of survey respondents rated transit as an important priority), and the BCAFN Transportation Survey. In 2018, although not a perfect service, the termination of Greyhound bus services in BC left a significant gap in services. Several private bus companies have entered the BC market, and other Initiatives, such as the Northern

⁶¹ CleanBC. (2021). Roadmap to 2030. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/climate-change/action/cleanbc/cleanbc_roadmap_2030.pdf

⁶² Perry, A. et al. (2021). Missing the Bus: Indigenous Women and Two-Spirit Plus People and Public Transit in Western Canada. <https://chrr.info/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Perry-Duhamel-Thorpe-et-al-KSG-Final-Report-15-December-2021.pdf>

⁶³ Translink. (2021). What We Heard Report-Indigenous Engagement: April 2021 – October 2021. https://www.translink.ca/-/media/translink/documents/plans-and-projects/regional-transportation-strategy/transport-2050/transport_2050_what_we_heard_report_indigenous_engagement.pdf

Community Shuttle program and BC Bus North, have attempted to fill the long-haul and inter-regional service gaps, but these lack connectivity, have infrequent schedules and high-ticket prices.

BCAFN engagement and research suggest that provincial long-haul and regional bus services need to offer more frequent and affordable options that align schedules with BC Transit or TransLink public transit systems. Although there are limited long haul and regional bus options throughout the province— several privately-owned options (e.g. Ebus and Rider Express) have tried to fill the demand after Greyhound closed. Public, private and First Nation partnerships to advance a multi-modal transportation system and improve access to long haul, regional and intra-regional buses is essential.

On-demand, shared, and community-owned mobility solutions were a significant priority articulated in the BCAFN Transportation Survey results. This includes First Nation-led community shuttles, which some Nations have taken on themselves and have been successful in supporting trips within First Nations reserves and to the nearest service centres. For example, the Nisga'a Village of Gingolx secured funding through Northern Development Initiative Trust (NDIT) to provide a bus transit service which allows Nisga'a members to travel to Terrace—the nearest service centre and connection point with BC Transit's BC Bus North. Despite this success story, the BCAFN Transportation Survey results suggest that these community shuttles currently lack consistent funding, particularly for operational costs such as driver salaries and maintenance, putting existing shuttle services at risk.

Beyond policy changes and increased investment to encourage regional and provincial bus connectivity, the provincial government should consider amending the BC Transit Act, as the Act only enables local governments to act as a sponsoring partner for transit service and not First Nations.⁶⁴ The current system puts too much onus on municipalities to provide capital and operational funding for public transit when they have limited revenue-generating mechanisms, suggesting a need for provincial support to provide sustained regional public transit.⁶⁵

Although rail has been underinvested in for decades, the desktop research, BCAFN Transportation Survey, and engagement indicate that many First Nations support the development or repurposing of rail infrastructure to meet their transportation needs. Despite rail requiring a high initial investment, trains have the potential to efficiently move goods and people and significantly contribute to reducing emissions. As passenger rail is developed in BC it is essential for government and industry to respect self-determination, uphold the principles of FPIC and consider the potential environmental and cultural impacts of rail travel. For example,

⁶⁴Northern Development Initiative Trust. (2023). INTER-COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION STUDY August 2023 PREPARED BY PREPARED FOR NORTHERN BC. <https://www.northerndevlopment.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Northern-BC-Inter-Community-Transportation-Study.pdf>

⁶⁵ Victoria Transport Policy Institute & Stantec Consulting Ltd. (2011). *NATIONAL STRATEGIES ON PUBLIC TRANSIT POLICY FRAMEWORK Final Report*. <https://cutaactu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/G8-report-into-national-strategies-on-public-transit-policy.pdf>

in certain cases, reinstating rail may not be desirable for specific Nations whose lands the rail line runs through, such as the Island Rail Corridor.⁶⁶

A PhD candidate and Secwèpemc woman, Dawn McGrath, is researching the technical and economic feasibility of an Okanagan Valley Electric Regional Passenger Rail (OVER PR) service along a route parallel to Highway 97, suggesting that passenger rail should be seriously considered in BC.⁶⁷ A paper suggests that OVER PR not only would increase tourism revenue, but also improve road safety, make access to health services more affordable and equitable, reduce congestion and improve productivity for freight trucks on Highway 97 and decrease travel time from outlying areas for commuters. In addition, there are innovative examples of Indigenous-owned rail, which should be explored, such as Tshiuetin Rail Transportation established in 2005, which provides essential freight and passenger transportation between First Nations.⁶⁸ Other important examples of rail services include the Tsal'alh Koaham Shuttle, rail line in Lillooet that is owned by the BC government (as part of the former BC Rail) and leased to Canadian National Rail's (CN Rail). Tsal'alh First Nation depends on the Tsal'alh Koaham Shuttle to access essential services and connect their community to Lillooet. In July 2025, CN Rail announced their intention to discontinue a BC Rail Route from Squamish to Lillooet and up to north of 100 Mile House by July 2026, which may put the Tsal'alh Koaham Shuttle at risk.⁶⁹

To implement different modes of public transit effectively, the BC government should consider creating a long-term, First Nations Provincial Public Transit Strategy in full partnership with First Nations. A regional inter-community transportation study commissioned by the Island Coastal Economic Trust, with funding from the province, summarized regional engagement, including calls for the establishment of regional transportation authorities to provide oversight, direction, and governance to transportation within the region.⁷⁰ These authorities provide an opportunity to systematically ensure First Nations are represented in transportation governance by requiring that First Nations have a seat at decision-making tables.

Meanwhile, the federal government must dedicate more funding towards public transit, particularly rural transit funding. Research suggests that this could be a continuation of the Rural Transit Solutions Fund or a targeted rural stream within the \$3 billion-per-year Canada Public Transit Fund.⁷¹ Emphasis should not only be on capital funding but also on long-term predictable operational funding, as these pose the most significant challenge to rural transit systems. Supporting public transit and a multi-modal transportation system would not only

⁶⁶BC Ministry of Transportation and Transit & Island Corridor Foundation. (2022). Island Rail Corridor Interests and Possible Uses Assessment Acknowledgement. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/driving-and-transportation/reports-and-reference/reports-and-studies/vancouver-island-south-coast/island-rail-corridor/island-rail-corridor-engagement-summary-first-nations-2023-01-25.pdf>

⁶⁷ Tye Boray, Hegazi, M., Busche, H., & Lovegrove, G. (2024). The Economic Feasibility of (Re-)Introducing Tram-Trains in Canada: Okanagan Valley Electric Regional Passenger Rail. *Sustainability*, 16(10), 4081–4081. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16104081>

⁶⁸ Canada Infrastructure Bank. (2021). *Tshiuetin Railway* | Canada Infrastructure Bank (CIB). CIB-Bic.ca. <https://cib-bic.ca/en/projects/trade-and-transport/tshiuetin-railway/>

⁶⁹ CBC News. (2019, October 27). *Rail makes getting to B.C.'s remote Seton Portage an epic adventure*. CBC. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/shalalth-seton-portage-1.5323710>

⁷⁰ ICET. (2023). *What We Heard Report*. <https://islandcoastaltrust.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Transportation-What-We-Heard-Report.pdf>

⁷¹ Breen, S.-P., Gibson, R., & Main, H. (2025). Beyond the City Limits: Analysis of Federal Funding of Public Transit in Rural Canada. *Canadian Public Policy*, 51(2). <https://doi.org/10.3138/cpp.2024-040>

improve First Nations' access to low-carbon transportation while reducing emissions but could also reduce vehicle-related injuries and fatalities, improve air quality, and strengthen regional economies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 The BC Ministry of Transportation and Transit, in partnership with First Nations, BC Transit, TransLink and local governments, must co-develop a First Nations Public Transit Strategy with an equitable governance model for implementation with First Nations representation.

- Ensure the strategy reflects First Nations laws, governance, culture and regional diversity—including the unique needs of remote, rural, and coastal First Nations.
- Embed First Nations' needs, priorities and realities, such as accessibility, safety, sustainability, and community ownership, into public transit planning and delivery.
- Ensure connectivity between the First Nation Public Transit Strategy and other provincial and First Nation strategies.
- Facilitate public and private partnership opportunities with First Nations to close gaps in public transit, particularly in rural and remote areas.
- A transportation governance model must be co-designed and co-developed with First Nations; this may include the formation of Regional Transportation Authorities with First Nations representation.

1.2 Amend the British Columbia Transit Act to align with the Declaration Act

- Implement recommendation 3b from the NDIT inter-community transportation study: *"Expand the BC Transit Act to include First Nations to be able to act as a sponsoring partner for transit service."*⁷²
- Increase the BC government's financial contribution when cost-sharing public transit projects with First Nations, ensuring a higher provincial share of funding to reduce the financial burden on Nations.
- Provide a clear framework and mechanisms for integrating First Nations needs into transit service delivery (e.g., through specific updates to Transit Partnership Agreements and/or Annual Transit Operating Agreements when involving First Nations).
- Require local governments to engage First Nations during all phases of transit projects as a condition of funding. This may include the BC government amending policies to encourage and provide incentives to local governments to incorporate Nations into their public transit planning and routes.

1.3 The BC government, particularly the Ministry of Transportation and Transit, must improve the reliability, affordability, and safety of existing public transit services and fully implement Declaration Act Action Plan Item 3.9.

⁷²Northern Development Initiative Trust. (2023). INTER-COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION STUDY August 2023 PREPARED BY PREPARED FOR NORTHERN BC. <https://www.northerndevlopment.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Northern-BC-Inter-Community-Transportation-Study.pdf>

- Invest in multi-modal transportation solutions that provide support and enable the development of equitable, safe, reliable, and affordable transportation options for First Nations.
- Prioritize seamless, safe connections between First Nations and regional hubs, such as health and service centres.
- Increase investments to expand route coverage, frequency, and reliability of public transit services serving First Nations.
- Ensure affordability through fare subsidies, free transit for Elders and youth, and income-based fare programs.
- Improve public transit signage to be more culturally safe and promote First Nations culture, language, and identity.

1.4 Fund the operation of existing and new First Nation-led community shuttles and explore opportunities to increase shared transportation services and rural transit

- Provincial, federal, and local governments must provide direct, predictable, and long-term funding, including capital and operational funding, for the provision of First Nation-led community shuttles.
- The BC government must support First Nations-led pilots, scalable solutions, and low-carbon transportation options, including car sharing, van sharing, water taxis, and other self-determined shuttle services.
- The federal government must create a dedicated stream towards supporting long-term First Nations-led rural transit, such as through the \$3 billion-per-year Canada Public Transit Fund.⁷³

1.5 Leverage existing infrastructure and invest in the development of a passenger rail system in BC.

- The BC government must increase investment in passenger rail development, fund First Nation-owned rail pilots, and seek innovative ways to support equitable access to passenger rail. For example, First Nation and/or BC resident rates should be reduced on trains used primarily by tourists, such as the Rocky Mountaineer or VIA Rail.
- The provincial and federal governments must leverage infrastructure funding and existing CN Rail and Canadian Pacific Rail (CPR) infrastructure to support the development of affordable and accessible rail service in BC in collaboration with First Nations.
- The provincial and federal governments must engage First Nations to identify key needs and priorities around the development, expansion and improvement of passenger rail in BC, particularly where rail impacts Nations' territories and rights.

⁷³ Breen, S.-P., Gibson, R., & Main, H. (2025). Beyond the City Limits: Analysis of Federal Funding of Public Transit in Rural Canada. Canadian Public Policy, 51(2). <https://doi.org/10.3138/cpp.2024-040>

2. Close The Infrastructure Gap

RATIONALE

First Nations in BC face a significant and growing infrastructure gap. Aging roads, inadequate transportation networks, and a lack of investment have created unsafe, unreliable, and disconnected systems that limit mobility, economic development, health and wellbeing, community cohesion and access to essential services. The last major federal infrastructure investment for buildings and utilities took place in the period of 1994-1996, and 1980 for transportation-related infrastructure.⁷⁴ There is currently \$4.8 billion worth of federally funded assets on-reserve that are rated as in "poor condition" and are a federal liability in need of either immediate repair or replacement.⁷⁵

According to the [*AFN Closing the Infrastructure Gap by 2030*](#) report, which was supported and endorsed by Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), closing the infrastructure gap for First Nations will require an estimated \$70.7 billion in BC by 2030. This includes major investments in transportation infrastructure.⁷⁶ Investing in infrastructure will not only generate substantial economic returns for Canada, including \$635 billion in economic output and nearly 2.4 million jobs over seven years, but will have broader socio-economic benefits such as improved access to healthcare, increased educational attainment, growth in industries, and overall expansion in national output and labour productivity.^{77 78} The *UNDA Action Plan* also contains priorities related to closing the infrastructure gap in First Nations Mandate 15 (see Appendix D).

The research and the survey results suggest that many First Nations do not have consistent highway and road access, or reliable active transportation connections between communities and service centres. Transportation infrastructure is often in poor condition, lacks emergency egress routes and is vulnerable to climate impacts such as flooding, landslides, and wildfires. 81% of the BC Ministry of Transportation and Transit First Nations survey respondents rated road conditions as an important priority.⁷⁹ Without targeted, sustained investment and innovative and inclusive policy, these gaps will continue to widen—undermining both First Nations rights and the province’s climate goals. Addressing the transportation infrastructure gap is essential to reconciliation, safety, economic development, and adapting and mitigating climate change. This is also highlighted in the *BC FNCL Agenda* report Recommendation 7.1: “the federal government, in partnership with the provincial government, must prioritize repairing and upgrading roads and highways on and off-reserve to ensure infrastructure is

⁷⁴ AFN. (2023). *Closing the Infrastructure Gap by 2030 A Collaborative and Comprehensive Cost Estimate Identifying the Infrastructure Investment Needs of First Nations in Canada*. <https://afn.bynder.com/m/367574a3a5cb5abe/original/1-AFN-Closing-the-Infrastructure-Gap-by-2030-National-Cost-Estimate-English-report-1.pdf>

⁷⁵ Ibid

⁷⁶ Ibid

⁷⁷ AFN. (2025, March 5). *The Benefits of Closing the Gap - Assembly of First Nations*. Assembly of First Nations. <https://afn.ca/economy-infrastructure/infrastructure/closing-the-infrastructure-gap/the-benefits-of-closing-the-gap/>

⁷⁸ AFN. (2025, May 15). Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and the Conference Board of Canada 2025 Benefits for All Canadians (Part 2): Long-term Socio-economic Impacts of Closing the Infrastructure Gap by 2030. <https://afn.bynder.com/m/ed507b40c639af3/original/CTIG-Report-Benefits-for-All-Canadians-Part-2.pdf>

⁷⁹ BC Ministry of Transportation and Transit. (2025b). What We Heard Report. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/driving-and-transportation/transportation-infrastructure/planning/planningtogetherbc/first-nations-transportation-planning-guide/what-we-heard-report-five-transportation-initiatives.pdf>

designed to handle increased water flows and other climate-related impacts and disasters.”⁸⁰ This will also ensure that First Nations in BC have full access to evaluation routes to prevent isolation during natural disasters.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The federal and provincial governments must dedicate flexible, reliable and long-term funding to close the First Nations transportation infrastructure gaps and support the development of a multi-modal and climate resilient transportation system.

- In alignment with the *AFN Closing the Infrastructure Gap recommendations*⁸¹, the federal and provincial governments must collaboratively co-develop with First Nations in BC a tangible, phased plan to close the infrastructure gap, while rapidly increasing long-term funding and investment for infrastructure, planning and capacity to fulfill First Nations self-determined transportation and mobility needs (see also Recommendations 9.2 and 9.4)
- The federal government, in collaboration with the provincial government and First Nations must fund, co-develop and implement a province-wide assessment of critical infrastructure and asset management on First Nations reserves, including transportation infrastructure (see also *BC FNCL Agenda Recommendation 7.1*).⁸²
- Integrate climate adaptation planning, nature-based solutions, and First Nations knowledge and science into all transportation-related infrastructure projects.
- Local governments must work in partnership with Nations to close the transportation related infrastructure gap and prioritise connectivity between municipalities and First Nations reserves.

2.2 Provincial and local governments must engage First Nations to ensure their needs and priorities in provincial highway maintenance, planning and capital funding decisions, employment and procurement.

3. Advance meaningful improvements in cultural and physical safety, especially for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals

RATIONALE

Safety is a critical concern for First Nations when considering transportation, with Indigenous people in BC experiencing transportation-related injuries at nearly twice the rate of the general population.⁸³ First Nation women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals encounter unique

⁸⁰ BCAFN. (2025a). *BC FIRST NATIONS CLIMATE LEADERSHIP AGENDA REPORT*. <https://www.bcafn.ca/priority-areas/environment/climate-emergency/bc-fncl-agenda>

⁸¹ AFN. (2023). *Closing the Infrastructure Gap by 2030 A Collaborative and Comprehensive Cost Estimate Identifying the Infrastructure Investment Needs of First Nations in Canada*. <https://afn.bynder.com/m/367574a3a5cb5abe/original/1-AFN-Closing-the-Infrastructure-Gap-by-2030-National-Cost-Estimate-English-report-1.pdf>

⁸² BCAFN. (2025a). *BC FIRST NATIONS CLIMATE LEADERSHIP AGENDA REPORT*. <https://www.bcafn.ca/priority-areas/environment/climate-emergency/bc-fncl-agenda>

⁸³ Brussoni, M., George, M. A., Jin, A., Amram, O., McCormick, R., & Lalonde, C. E. (2018). Hospitalizations due to unintentional transport injuries among Aboriginal population of British Columbia, Canada: Incidence, changes over time and ecological analysis of risk markers. *PLOS ONE*, 13(1), e0191384. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0191384>

compounding challenges related to the lack of access to safe and reliable transportation. Colonial transportation policies have systematically excluded the perspectives of First Nation women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, hindering their ability to fully participate in community life and access essential services safely.⁸⁴ The 'Highway of Tears', 725-kilometer stretch of Highway 16 between Prince George and Prince Rupert where dozens of women have gone missing, emphasizes the vast extent of the abuses against First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals in BC.⁸⁵

Persistent and deliberate abuses against First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, specifically rooted in a lack of safe and reliable transportation options, have been consistently documented in multiple reports. The *Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendations Report*, which was released almost 2 decades ago in 2006, outlines 33 recommendations and found that poverty is a major factor contributing to hitchhiking, "as women simply have no other transportation options. They have very little money, and vehicles are considered a luxury item that many families cannot afford."⁸⁶ The *Missing the Bus Report* highlights the link between declining transit across Canada, including the closure of Greyhound, and violence against Indigenous women and girls.⁸⁷ The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls also has a specific Calls for Justice (CFJ) related to safe transportation (4.8 and 8.1).⁸⁸

Although safety issues are well-documented and advocacy has been ongoing for decades, action across all levels of government has been limited with unsustainable funding and short-term initiatives. The [AFN 2024 CFJ Progress Report](#) states that "no progress has been made on Call for Justice 4.8" and the [AFN 2025 CFJ Progress Report](#) states that Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people "continue to face disproportionate levels of violence."^{89 90}

The BCAFN Transportation Survey revealed that a higher percentage of women cited health and safety concerns as a key barrier and indicated a proportionally higher interest in both public transit and safety and security. First Nations Leadership and technical staff survey input highlighted public safety and health as one of the biggest challenges for transportation. BCAFN Phase 1 Pilot Project Communities also frequently reported that the lack of transportation infrastructure (such as sidewalks, pathways, and lighting) increases safety risks. The Pilot Project Communities, in particular, remote and rural Nations, highlighted the challenges with

⁸⁴Perry, A., Thorpe, J., Secondary, K., Belachew, B., Bowers, H., Hourie, S., Support, W., Lariviere, K., Plaut, S., & Tennent, P. (n.d.). Missing the Bus: Indigenous Women and Two-Spirit Plus People and Public Transit in Western Canada Content warning. <https://chrr.info/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Missing-the-Bus-2024.pdf>

⁸⁵ Carrier Sekani Family Services. (n.d.). *Highway of Tears program | Carrier Sekani Family Services*. Highway of Tears. <https://highwayoftears.org/highway-of-tears/>
⁸⁶ Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendations Report. (2006). <https://highwayoftears.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Highway-of-Tears-Symposium-Recommendations-Report-January-2013.pdf>

⁸⁷ Perry, A., Thorpe, J., Secondary, K., Belachew, B., Bowers, H., Hourie, S., Support, W., Lariviere, K., Plaut, S., & Tennent, P. (n.d.). Missing the Bus: Indigenous Women and Two-Spirit Plus People and Public Transit in Western Canada Content warning. <https://chrr.info/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Missing-the-Bus-2024.pdf>

⁸⁸ National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. (2019, May 29). *Final Report | MMIWG*. Mmiwg-Ffada.ca; MMIWG. <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/>

⁸⁹ AFN. (2024). *Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice PROGRESS ON Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice A CFJ PROGRESS REPORT*. <https://afn.bynder.com/m/2ea645db802ef4/original/Breathing-Life-into-the-Calls-for-Justice-A-CFJ-Progress-Report.pdf?>

⁹⁰AFN. (2025b). Assembly of First Nations Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice: Thematic Analysis on Human Trafficking 2025 CFJ Progress Report. <https://afn.bynder.com/m/2d9148a283482600/original/Breathing-Life-into-the-Calls-for-Justice-Thematic-Analysis-on-Human-Trafficking2025-CFJ-Progress-Report.pdf>

road conditions and limited access routes, leading to heightened safety risks during emergencies or evacuations.

There was agreement among participants at the 2025 BCAFN Women's Dialogue Session that they often felt unsafe driving along Highway 16, and that cell service coverage is patchy and unreliable. In addition, participants felt unsafe taking taxis or ride-sharing services and that the lack of public transit increases the reliance on hitchhiking and led to many struggles fleeing domestic violence. It was also acknowledged that human trafficking is often associated with and facilitated by the lack of access to adequate cell service and reliable transportation services. Solutions recommended by participants included increasing lighting along travel routes, developing designated active transportation trails/bike lanes, improving monitoring of taxi drivers and supporting First Nations in operating their own community shuttles.

The BC government has worked to increase transit provision and cell coverage along Highway 16. There has been a BC Transit expansion, BC Bus North, and the Northern Community Shuttle program. The BC government has also worked with telecommunications providers to increase cell coverage along the highway.⁹¹ However, First Nations repeatedly shared that these programs and initiatives remain insufficient and are progressing too slowly. First Nations have called for long-term sustainable funding beyond short-term pilot projects and community-driven solutions that expand cell service, throughout all rural and remote areas of the province. For example, the Northern Community Shuttle program only secured 2 years of funding until 2027, and the previous intake was oversubscribed according to NDIIT.⁹² In addition, as of January 2024, 4,800 km of primary and secondary highways in BC (32%) lacked advanced cellular service, and when service roads and other rural routes are considered, a larger gap exists.⁹³

Solutions to address the many transportation-related safety challenges that fall under several recommendations outlined in this report, including active transportation infrastructure and improving public transit delivery (see also Recommendation Themes 1 and 4).

RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 The federal and provincial governments must fully implement Call for Justice 4.8 and 8.1 from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) and provide adequate funding for implementation

3.2 The BC government must work with First Nations in BC to implement key outstanding recommendations from the Highway of Tears Symposium Report.

⁹¹ Vancouver City News. (2024, December 30). *New cell towers along B.C.'s Highway of Tears now active*. CityNews Vancouver.

<https://vancouver.citynews.ca/2024/12/30/bc-highway-16-highway-of-tears-cell-towers/>

⁹² BC Gov News. (2025, April 23). Northern Community Shuttle Program approves services

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2025TT0041-000357>

⁹³ BC gov. (2024). *Connectivity coverage in B.C. - Province of British Columbia*. Gov.bc.ca. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/connectivity-in-bc/20358#>

3.3 Local, provincial and federal governments, Crown corporations, and transit providers must co-develop policy with First Nations to improve the physical and cultural safety of active transportation and transit systems (see also Recommendation Theme 1).

- Ensure that urgent long-term funding is made available to implement policies and address physical and cultural concerns in locations where inadequate active transportation infrastructure puts vulnerable groups—such as children, women, 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, and Elders—at immediate risk, including but not limited to improving lighting and investing in sidewalk infrastructure.
- Fund a series of First Nations-led dialogue sessions or forums specifically related to transportation-related safety and cultural safety to formulate recommendations and inform policies and investments.

3.4 The BC government and local governments must co-develop policy and legislation with First Nations to improve the safety of taxi and rideshare services for First Nations women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals.

- This could include establishing mandatory First Nations-led safety training for drivers, enforcing a requirement for a panic button in rideshare vehicles, remote monitoring systems for taxis, and having mandatory cameras in vehicles.

3.5 The federal and provincial governments must work with telecommunications providers to expand cellular service on all highways and forest service roads in BC and commit to uninterrupted cell service along BC highways and forest service roads by 2030.

- The provincial government must also immediately implement emergency phone booths along highways where there is no current cell service.

3.6 Crown governments, Crown corporations, local governments, organizations and industry must take a First Nations Gender-Based Analysis Plus (FNGBA+) and rights-based approach when developing and designing transportation policy, systems and initiatives.

3.7 The BC government and local governments must co-develop culturally appropriate, evidence-based, data-informed Motor Vehicle Crash prevention programs and initiatives.

- This process must involve direct collaboration with First Nations and First Nations organizations, such as the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA), as recommended by the BC Provincial Health Officer in the report on motor vehicle crashes.⁹⁴

4. Support First Nation-led and self-determined active transportation

RATIONALE

First Nations have been practicing active transportation for millennia, including walking, canoeing and horseback riding. As shown by the Grease trails and many other trade routes, First Nations created, maintained and utilised sophisticated land and water routes throughout

⁹⁴ BC Gov. (2016). Provincial Health Officer Annual Report - Where Rubber Meets The Road <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/reports-publications/annual-reports/reducing-motor-vehicle-crashes-bc.pdf>

BC.⁹⁵ Colonization forcibly stopped or limited First Nations' mobility while systematically underinvesting in active transportation infrastructure, including sidewalks, lighting and trail maintenance (both traditional trails and paved trails).

Despite active transportation infrastructure being a core part of a multi-modal transportation system and crucial for health, cultural wellbeing and safety, it has not been prioritized or sufficiently invested in for decades on reserve. There are specific BC government programs, such as the [BC Active Transportation Infrastructure Grants Program](#), which has been beneficial to many Nations, but these remain insufficiently integrated into the broader transportation infrastructure and funding frameworks in BC. Federally, ISC does not fund sufficient sidewalk or bike lane infrastructure on reserve when constructing or repaving roads, leading to safety issues. This was echoed by the BCAFN Phase 1 Pilot Project Communities, who reported a significant lack of sidewalks and bicycle lanes on reserve.

This lack of investment poses a significant safety challenge for many First Nations who do not own or cannot operate a vehicle and so don't have any other options but walking, cycling etc. Active transportation is most used by those who do not have other means to travel which often coincides with those most vulnerable, including Youth, Women, 2SLGBTQQIA+ and Elders. BCAFN repeatedly heard from Nations stories of relatives who had been killed while walking or biking on highways between their communities and the nearest town, as there were no sidewalks or bike routes. Rail tracks, including those dividing reserves, can be a dangerous barrier and in some locations, walking along the train tracks is the only convenient access point. This issue is particularly acute in the Fraser Valley where multiple rail lines, including those operated by CN Rail and CPR, pass through First Nation reserves, contributing to over 120 deaths since the 1980s.^{96 97}

From the BCAFN Transportation Survey results, top improvements suggested by respondents include well-lit pathways, funding/rebates for e-bikes (electric bikes)/e-scooters (electric scooters), and better security measures to enhance safety while using active modes. There was also an interest in shared micro-mobility options such as bike sharing. The BCAFN Phase 1 Pilot Project Communities also identified the need to develop dedicated paths and safe cycling infrastructure to encourage walking and cycling. 22% of First Nations in BC were interested in e-bikes as a form of active transportation. Unfortunately, the province does not have significant funding or sufficient rebates to support the purchase of e-bikes, which remain unaffordable to many Nations. Despite their success in improving access, [encouraging active travel and reducing car use](#), the e-bike rebates launched by the province in 2023 were highly competitive, and

⁹⁵ Armstrong, C. G., Spice, A., Ridsdale, M., & Welch, J. R. (2023). Liberating trails and travel routes in Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en Territories from the tyrannies of heritage resource management regimes. *American Anthropologist*, 125(2). <https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13817>

⁹⁶ Current, F. V. (2025). *Trauma and the tracks: First Nations wrestle with the legacy of rail deaths and land theft*. Fraser Valley Current. <https://fvcurrent.com/p/indigenous-rail>

⁹⁷ Lyall, G. R. (2020). *View of "They smashed it right through our reserve": The Problem of Settler Consultation for Infrastructure on Chawathil IR4*. Library.ubc.ca. <https://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/bcstudies/article/view/191820/190023>

funding was limited.⁹⁸ This meant that many applicants, including Nation members, had difficulty accessing the program before it was paused.⁹⁹

There are many Nations that have undertaken several successful initiatives to restore traditional trails, rebuild connections to other Nations and the territory and improve active transportation safety. For example, the Great Blue Heron Way is a multi-use trail located on Tsawwassen First Nation land and is part of a broader vision led by Elder Ruth Mary Adams to create a regional greenway network that reconnects First Nations around the Salish Sea, which can be used as a roadmap for future Nation-led projects. The Great Blue Heron Way aims to promote reconciliation, cultural revitalisation and connection and mobility justice through safer, more inclusive active transportation routes.¹⁰⁰ Restoring traditional trails is a high priority for many Nations, which is foundational for connecting to the land and neighbouring Nations/Communities, promoting cultural awareness of how First Nations traditionally travelled.

However, there are currently many jurisdictional burdens placed on Nations who want to restore trails alongside the financial barriers. Some First Nations, such as Nisga'a Lisims, one of the BCAFN Phase 1 Pilot Project Communities, are connected via provincial roadways. In certain instances, communities, culturally significant sites, recreation, services, or other destinations are within a distance accessible via active transportation. However, when these destinations are separated by a provincial roadway, the Nation has no jurisdiction to build active transportation infrastructure within the provincial road right-of-way.

Active transportation is an integral part of a multi-modal transportation system, and these recommendations are deeply connected to safety and First Nations-led transportation planning (see also Recommendation Themes 3 and 9).

RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Increase investment through flexible and long-term active transportation planning, infrastructure and maintenance for First Nations, for example, the BC Active Transportation Infrastructure Grants Program should be a permanent ongoing funding stream.

4.2 When ISC funds roadbuilding on reserves, Nations must co-design and consent to project plans, and active transportation infrastructure must be considered in parallel in the planning phase.

4.3 Increase rebates for active transportation modes and micro-mobility options, in particular e-bikes, for First Nations.

⁹⁸ UBC. (2025, September 23). *B.C.'s e-bike rebates boost affordability, health and sustainable mobility* - UBC News. UBC News. <https://news.ubc.ca/2025/09/bc-e-bike-rebates-benefits/>

⁹⁹ Global News. (2023, June 2). "Jump start": B.C.'s e-bike craze in full swing as rebate wait-list exceeds 7,000 people. Global News. <https://globalnews.ca/news/9742311/bc-ebike-craze-rebate-wait-list/>

¹⁰⁰ Metro Vancouver. (2024, April 3). METRO VANCOUVER REGIONAL DISTRICT REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE MEETING <https://metrovanancouver.org/boards/Parks/PAR-2024-04-03-AGE.pdf>

- The provincial government must increase the availability of rebates for active transportation micro-mobility options, such as e-bikes, to accelerate equitable access to clean, affordable mobility options.
- Shared micro-mobility providers must commit to making their services affordable, culturally appropriate, and physically accessible to First Nations across the territories where they operate.
- It is imperative that while exploring opportunities to increase shared micromobility options with First Nations, government and/or other organizations consider the availability, accessibility, and safety of active transportation infrastructure (see also Recommendation 3.3).

4.4 The BC Ministry of Transportation and Transit, in collaboration with municipalities and First Nations, should identify and pursue opportunities to develop active transportation routes—such as safe bike lanes and sidewalks—along provincial roadways and highways that run through or near First Nations reserves.

- These projects must connect Nations with neighbouring communities and service centres while respecting each Nation's rights, priorities, and self-determined wishes.

4.5 CN Rail and CPR must directly engage with Nations that railways pass through their reserves and co-develop and fund safety measures in collaboration with municipalities, such as signage, warning signals, new overpasses, and stronger barriers on tracks. CN Rail and CPR must work with First Nations and municipalities.

4.6 The BC government must reduce administrative and jurisdictional barriers and provide direct, flexible funding to Nations for the restoration and revitalization of ancestral trails and trade routes that historically connected Nations and Nation members to the territory.

5. Enhance First Nation self-sufficiency by building capacity, improving services and infrastructure on-reserve

RATIONALE

BCAFN Phase 1 Pilot Project Communities and survey respondents often indicated the need to travel outside of their immediate community or Nation to access essential services. In most cases, daily service needs (e.g. grocery, school, health care), are not available within an individual First Nation reserve. This often means that long-distance trips are common, and therefore there is more reliance on modes that can deliver those trips, such as private vehicles which are costly, or infrequent buses and community shuttles. This makes accessing services for Elders or those without personal vehicles particularly difficult. This also presents concerns related to access to essential services in the event of inclement weather or emergencies.

As noted above, even if services are in a directly adjacent municipality, there is often an infrastructure gap between the reserve and the municipality. This makes active transportation modes less desirable and safe than a private vehicle. Although it is important to address these gaps (see Recommendation Theme 4), increasing community self-sufficiency and service

provision in rural/remote First Nations would reduce the need to travel, thereby reducing emissions while improving wellbeing and economic development opportunities. Internet connectivity is particularly important to accessing remote online-based services such as healthcare, education, banking, and digital employment and economic generating opportunities. However, despite increased investment from the provincial and federal government and the inclusion of connectivity in the *Declaration Act Action Plan*, close to 20% of BC First Nations households on reserve and Modern Treaty Nation lands cannot access high-speed internet services.¹⁰¹ The First Nations Technology Council finds that apart from the availability of services, affordability of internet services and the devices needed to access them remains a significant, unresolved issue especially in particularly in rural and remote areas.¹⁰² Facilitating convenient, reliable access to online services such as medical appointments, driver's licensing and training, education and training opportunities, and/or other government services to help reduce the need for First Nations people to travel longer distances to access them.

For some individuals, online service delivery may not be accessible or desirable. Investing in regular in-community delivery (e.g., through annual or semi-annual "pop ups") would alleviate the need for some individuals to travel to the service, reducing the overall transportation burden. Medical services might be suited to this type of approach instead of individuals travelling for hours to access appointments. In addition, developing localized skills training and entrepreneurial opportunities can help to build in-community skills, empower youth and improve capacity for all-types of vehicle servicing, road maintenance work, or other transportation skills as necessary.

RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 The BC government must ensure that every First Nation has access affordable and reliable internet services by 2027.

- The BC government must work with internet service providers to fulfil its commitment to connect all First Nations to high-speed internet access by 2027 and ensure that the services provided are reliable and affordable.¹⁰³

5.2 The provincial and federal governments must work together with the First Nations and relevant organizations to discuss opportunities for enhancing routine service delivery on reserve, such as health services.

5.3 The provincial and federal governments must work together with Nations and relevant organizations to support the development of localized skills training and entrepreneurial programs tailored to the specific needs of each community, particularly in areas such as vehicle servicing, road maintenance, and other transportation-related skills, reducing

¹⁰¹ BC Ministry of Citizens' Services. (2019, July 4). *Connectivity in B.C. - Province of British Columbia*. Wwww2.Gov.bc.ca. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/connectivity-in-bc>

¹⁰² First Nations Technology Council. (2024). *BC First Nations Community Internet Connectivity*. <https://technologycouncil.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/FNTC-JDES1.pdf>

¹⁰³ Government of Canada. (2024a, March 4). *Governments of Canada and British Columbia working together to bring high-speed Internet to more than 7,500...* Canada.ca; Government of Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/innovation-science-economic-development/news/2024/03/governments-of-canada-and-british-columbia-working-together-to-bring-high-speed-internet-to-more-than-7500-households.html>

reliance on external service providers, empowering youth and creating sustainable employment opportunities. (see also Recommendations 7.4, 9.4 and 10.4).

6. Prioritize First Nations access, safety, protocols and rights in marine transportation

RATIONALE

Many Nations, both coastal and inland, rely on BC Ferries to stay connected with family and to travel to service centres for both urgent and routine medical, dental, and other essential needs. However, the lack of reservations earmarked for First Nations—along with limited service frequency and high costs—creates significant barriers to accessing services and emergency care, participating in ceremonial gatherings, and maintaining family connections. During the summer months when tourism overwhelms services, many Nations report not being able to access ferries for essential services. For example, dental health is currently not classed as a priority for travel. In addition, when First Nations are travelling with cultural objects such as canoes, they are not able to stay with them on enclosed vehicle decks due to Transport Canada rules, which is against cultural protocols.¹⁰⁴ Even if ferries do run, they are often not timed well with community shuttles, school hours or employment hours making commuting difficult.¹⁰⁵ Many coastal First Nations must rely on personal boats or costly water taxis when ferries are unavailable, options that are often expensive, less reliable, and less environmentally sustainable.¹⁰⁶

BC Ferries operates and has terminals in many coastal regions throughout BC on First Nation territories without their consent. This has displaced many Nations and impacted their inherent rights and connection to the land and water. BC Ferries continues not to take responsibility for coastal erosion, which has affected the preservation of old villages and burial sites. Many First Nations have expressed additional concerns related to the environmental impacts of ferry operations, such as vessel emissions, propeller noise, and potential spills, which have affected whales, other marine animals and more-than-human relatives. Ferries have also impacted traditional fishing, gathering and ceremonial practices. These impacts are made more apparent in the context of the climate emergency where coastal First Nations face increased risks to climate disasters and slow onset climate impacts such as sea level rise, erosion and flooding which has the potential be exacerbated by ferry operations.

Given these ongoing impacts on First Nations' lands, waters, and rights, many have called for greater recognition, engagement, accountability, and tangible benefits from BC Ferries operations. Elder Ruth Adams said, *"They should have our names on the ferries. People keep passing by our territory without knowing that we are still alive. I am so angry that ferries are on our lands. As an Elder I would say that they owe us rent!"* First Nations throughout our

¹⁰⁴ BC Ferries. (2020). *News Release | Transport Canada Rescinds Temporary Flexibility for Passengers to Remain on Enclosed Vehicle Decks*. Bcferries.com. <https://www.bcferries.com/news-releases/transport-canada-rescinds-temporary-flexibility-for-passengers-to-remain-on-enclosed-vehicle-decks>

¹⁰⁵ BC Ministry of Transportation and Transit. (2025b). *What We Heard Report*. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/driving-and-transportation/transportation-infrastructure/planning/planningtogetherbc/first-nations-transportation-planning-guide/what-we-heard-report-five-transportation-initiatives.pdf>

¹⁰⁶ Ibid

engagement called for economic reconciliation and a serious environmental commitment by BC Ferries. Suggestions included revenue-sharing agreements, First Nations procurement and hiring policies and levy or surcharge such as an 'Airport Improvement Fee' for each ferry ticket sold to support Coastal First Nations self-determined needs, but may include restoration, conservation or cultural gathering.¹⁰⁷

Heiltsuk Nation, a BCAFN Phase 1 Pilot Project Community, depends on BC Ferries to deliver food and essential goods, but also to access essential services off the remote island on the central coast. The ferry is their "highway," but issues with schedules, high cost of tickets and the prioritization of tourism over Heiltsuk Nation members has impacted access to essential transportation for community members. Heiltsuk Nation members are given the shoulder season rate, but they are only eligible to receive this rate on the Bella Bella to Port Hardy route, limiting onward travel. Another barrier is the limited numbers of Heiltsuk Nation members spots for reservation, and to receive the discount requires Nation members to have an identification that has a Bella Bella address on it—which is a particular barrier for youth. One Nation member mentioned that securing a reservation for a ferry in the summer is nearly impossible, and despite booking six months in advance, they were still waitlisted for the ferry in June 2025.

In alignment with the *UN Declaration*, FPIC must be obtained, and First Nations rights and treaty rights must be upheld when decisions are made regarding BC Ferries routes and services that may impact their traditional territories or access to this essential service. A key mechanism to re-establish and build relationships with First Nations is through Relationship Protocol Agreements. Despite the efforts by BC Ferries to sign relationship protocols, many Nations have expressed the relationship with BC Ferries has been strained for some Nations and several conflicts have arisen. BC Ferries has signed Protocol Agreements with Snuneymuxw First Nation and W̱JÓŁŁP (Tsartlip First Nation) to guide their work together and establish a framework for collaborating on areas of mutual interest. They have negotiated a process for securing Tsartlip's Free, Prior and Informed Consent for BC Ferries' projects within W̱JÓŁŁP territory. Although some Nations throughout BCAFN's engagement have indicated that these protocols can be a useful mechanism to advance priorities or address concerns, other Nations have highlighted that there needs to be increased investment and focus on reconciliation and rebuilding relationships between BC Ferries and First Nations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 BC Ferries must prioritize First Nations in BC in accessing urgent and non-urgent ferry services and reservations.

6.2 Substantially reduce BC Ferries rates for First Nations and barriers to accessing discounted rates to support equitable access— this must include accessing emergency medical services

¹⁰⁷ YVR. (2020). *Airport Improvement Fee* | YVR. YVR. <https://www.yvr.ca/en/airport-improvement-fee>

and other non-essential services, including participation in cultural activities, ceremony, and visiting family.

6.3 BC Ferries must work in partnership with First Nations to align ferry schedules to arrive at optimal times and coordinated with public transit, community shuttles and school buses to ensuring accessibility and safety for First Nations commuters and students.

6.4 BC Ferries must work in partnership with First Nations to develop culturally centred policies, including safety and emergency preparedness plans and protocols.

6.5 BC Ferries must increase employment and economic opportunities, specifically for First Nations, particularly those with BC Ferries Routes or Terminals in their traditional territories.

- BC Ferries should sign revenue sharing agreements with First Nations on whose territories they operate on.
- BC Ferries should prioritise training and employment for First Nations, particularly youth.

6.6 BC Ferries must focus more funding and attention on strengthening and fostering sustainable, long-term, and respectful relationships between BC Ferries as determined by the Nations.

- Relationship building can be facilitated through individual Relationship Protocol Agreements if the Nation wishes but BC Ferries must also consider province-wide strategies to increase First Nations participation in decision-making and governance such as having a certain percentage of First Nations representatives on the BC Ferries Board of Directors.
- FPIC must be upheld in all aspects of BC Ferries' operations, including the expansion and development of ferry routes on First Nations' traditional territories.

6.7 BC Ferries must co-develop a climate and environmental plan to address Nations' concerns related to ferry terminal sites, cultural and burial sites, sensitive ecosystems, water pollution, coastal erosion, and biodiversity and environmental impacts of BC Ferries operations.

- Despite BC Ferries' revenues being highly regulated by the BC Ferry Commission, the provincial government must legislate BC Ferries to charge a levy or surcharge on all tickets similar to an Airport Improvement Fee to support Coastal First Nations-led restoration, cultural events, conservation and stewardship activities.

6.8 BC Ferries and Transport Canada must collaboratively review and amend Transport Canada policies in alignment with the UN Declaration and First Nations cultural protocols.

- Transport Canada should work with BC Ferries and Nations to ensure that they are able to transport canoes and other culturally significant items in a way that is appropriate to them, including allowing them to stay with objects below deck during the ferry ride.

7. Ensure a just transition that centres First Nations rights and self-determination

RATIONALE

The provincial and federal government must acknowledge the compounding colonial impacts, historic injustices and ongoing challenges of the current transportation system for First Nations. Canada's transition to a low-carbon future is currently framed around meeting emissions reduction targets, yet little attention has been given to how these targets will be achieved, particularly in a just and equitable manner.

This is reflected in BC's *CleanBC Roadmap to 2030*, which outlines ambitious goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the transportation sector by 27–32% below 2007 levels by 2030.¹⁰⁸ However, the Roadmap lacks concrete, actionable steps to achieve these reductions in a way that addresses existing inequities. Its heavy emphasis on ZEVs risks reinforcing the status quo of a society reliant on private vehicles rather than transforming the system to better serve all communities, particularly those who have long been underserved, including First Nations. The accompanying *Clean Transportation Action Plan (CTAP)*, intended to detail the next phase of implementation, although it was supposed to be published in 2023, it has yet to be publicly released. Not surprisingly, emissions from the transportation sector have continued to rise—emissions in 2022 were up 18% from 2007 and continued to account for the largest share (42%) of B.C.'s GHG emissions¹⁰⁹—undermining the province's climate goals.

A transition to a low-carbon economy must be grounded in justice and a genuine commitment to reconciliation. This includes full First Nations participation in decision-making, equitable revenue-sharing models, the respect of self-determination and upholding FPIC consistent with the principles of the *UN Declaration*. All actions taken by Crown governments, Crown corporations, local governments, organizations and industry must align with First Nations land-use plans, transportation and infrastructure plans, First Nations laws, legal orders, land rights and inherent responsibilities to steward the land and waters. This transition to a low-carbon transportation must also take into consideration factors unique to First Nations in BC, while ensuring it is just, fair and equitable, and that no First Nation in BC is left behind.

RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Crown governments, Crown corporations, local governments, organizations and industry must respect the right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), and the recognition of self-determination, consistent with the principles of the UN Declaration in all transportation and energy projects.

¹⁰⁸ CleanBC. (2021). Roadmap to 2030. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/climate-change/action/cleanbc/cleanbc_roadmap_2030.pdf

¹⁰⁹ CleanBC. (2024). Climate Change Accountability Report. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/climate-change/action/cleanbc/2024_climate_change_accountability_report.pdf

7.2 The BC government must finalize, approve and publish the Clean Transportation Action Plan (CTAP) and allocate resources for its implementation.

7.3 Crown governments, Crown corporations, and local governments and industry must prioritize First Nations ownership, partnership and leadership in transportation, energy projects and other low-carbon sectors.

7.4 Crown governments, Crown corporations, local governments, organizations and industry and educational institutions must invest in First Nations training and leadership to build long-term capacity, empower youth and expertise in low-carbon transportation and energy projects (see also recommendations 9.4 and 10.4 related to training).

8. Facilitate collaboration, innovation, shared decision making and partnerships

RATIONALE

The current transportation landscape in BC is highly fragmented and siloed, leading to disjointed decision-making and creating significant barriers to implementing change. This is especially true for First Nations who have to deal with additional jurisdictional complexities to improve transportation. For example, if there is a provincial roadway that cuts through a community, the Nation has no jurisdiction to build active transportation infrastructure to improve safety within the provincial road right-of-way.

Additionally, there is a lack of knowledge-sharing platforms that prioritize First Nation leadership and inclusion in transportation innovation. The BCAFN First Nations Low-Carbon Transportation Forum stands out as a notable exception—it was the first of its kind to take a holistic approach in examining transportation challenges and opportunities from a First Nations perspective. In contrast, most other government-funded forums or conferences tend to focus narrowly on specific topics, such as ZEV adoption, and often do not reflect the broader transportation realities or priorities of First Nations. The creation of regular, in-person gatherings is important for Nations to discuss issues and opportunities related to transportation and a just transition.

As highlighted in the *BC First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan* and the *BC FNCL Agenda*, more collaboration is needed between First Nations and Crown governments, Crown corporations, local governments, organizations and industry to break silos, build partnerships, support knowledge sharing and shared decision making (see also Theme 9, Recommendation 9.1).

An illustrative case of effective partnership is the example of Simpcw First Nation's collaboration with provincial and industry partners. Simpcw First Nations built a relationship and partnered with the BC Ministry of Highways and Dawson Construction, to replace a neglected gravel road that provided limited access to services and caused excessive wear on

vehicles.¹¹⁰ This project improved safety, reduced emergency response times, and lowered the cost of maintaining vehicles and transporting essentials.¹¹¹ It also enhanced educational and healthcare access for both First Nations and neighbouring non-First Nations communities, while fostering cultural exchange and increased tourism.¹¹²

RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Develop mechanisms and collaborative tables to break silos between First Nations, Crown governments, Crown corporations, local governments, organizations and industry while upholding the UN Declaration.

8.2 Crown governments and Crown corporations must fund in-person, bi-annual First Nation-led transportation-related events, dialogue sessions and gatherings to facilitate relationship building and knowledge sharing.

8.3 Revise provincial and federal legislation and transportation governance to ensure First Nations have joint decision-making authority, sufficient time to consider information to deliberate internally to provide their Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC).

9. Reform funding and program delivery and support First Nations-led transportation planning and capacity

RATIONALE

Current funding models and program delivery related to transportation and low-carbon transportation are fragmented and inefficient. The current program delivery model requires large-scale reform and a whole-of-government approach to meet the needs of First Nations. The BCAFN Transportation Survey respondents reported that grant application and reporting requirements are too demanding for communities with limited administrative resources and take crucial time from implementing projects to fulfill the administrative burden. More personalized and culturally-relevant reporting requirements must be considered for government or organizational programs, such as completing site visits, videos, storytelling or holding project summary meetings with the Nation's project managers.

From the policy review and desktop research, BCAFN found that funding programs are often split into separate planning and capital streams and between various ministries, which creates ambiguity around eligible costs at different project stages and the administrative burden of grant stacking and reporting. For example, a Nation with a completed Low-Carbon Transportation Plan may need conceptual or detailed design work before construction, but it is unclear which stream these fits under—delaying action and adding costs. If projects become

¹¹⁰AFN. (2025, May 15). Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and the Conference Board of Canada 2025 Benefits for All Canadians (Part 2): Long-term Socio-economic Impacts of Closing the Infrastructure Gap by 2030. <https://afn.bynder.com/m/ed507b40c639af3/original/CTIG-Report-Benefits-for-All-Canadians-Part-2.pdf> 3

¹¹¹Ibid

¹¹² Ibid

delayed, they become more vulnerable to political shifts, cost escalations, and funding gaps. Specifically, funding programs for public transit typically exclude operating costs, covering only planning or capital expenses. This creates major barriers for First Nations to pilot or expand services, as they must shoulder ongoing operations with limited revenues, undermining both viability and service quality.

Additionally, much of the burden of planning and community engagement falls on First Nations when applying for transportation funding. In the *BC Ministry of Transportation and Transit's (MOTT) latest What We Heard Report*, only 17% of First Nation respondents indicated that their community has a transportation plan. Survey respondents also noted that First Nations, in particular smaller rural communities, lack the funding or staff capacity to complete detailed transportation planning and implementation. The *BC FNCL Agenda* (Theme 2) and *BC First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan* (Theme 2.1) echo these concerns around staff capacity. With many Nations lacking sufficient staff to manage core portfolios—let alone dedicate someone to transportation—this area often falls through the cracks.

While BCAFN and CEA developed a First Nations Safe, Equitable, Affordable, and Low-Carbon Transportation Planning Guide and the province recently developed a First Nations Transportation Planning Guide, there are few capacity supports to draft, conduct engagement or implement these plans apart from the Active Transportation Network Planning Grant (intake currently closed).¹¹³ There is a clear need for greater investment in self-determined First Nations-led planning processes that are flexible, responsive to community needs, and enable self-determined transportation solutions, such as car-sharing or bike-sharing initiatives.

Another barrier identified through BCAFN's research is that many programs have fixed intake windows. Nations may have to rush applications, hire external support at their own expense, or submit multiple applications for different stages of the same project. Some BCAFN Phase 1 Pilot Project Communities reported that current funding processes are overly complex and administratively heavy within short timelines. Rolling application intakes and a flexible funding models would provide more reliable access, reduce administrative strain, and enable long-term planning for project delivery and transportation outcomes.

Overall, these findings echo numerous concerns and ongoing calls related to capacity, program reform and planning articulated in several reports, including the *BC FNCL Agenda* and the 2020 Joint Committee on Climate Action Annual.¹¹⁴ First Nations continue to advocate for changes in program delivery and for long-term reliable funding, and in response to these calls some government ministries have been trying to streamline funding programs. For example, the [New Fiscal Relationship \(NFR\) Grant](#) administered by ISC, is a funding mechanism that provides predictable and flexible funding to eligible recipients for up to 28 programs and services. The NFR grant aims to support self-determination, flexibility and provide long-term funding

¹¹³ BC Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure . (n.d.). *B.C. Active Transportation Infrastructure Grants Program - Province of British Columbia*. [Www2.Gov.bc.ca. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/transportation/funding-engagement-permits/funding-grants/active-transportation-infrastructure-grants](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/transportation/funding-engagement-permits/funding-grants/active-transportation-infrastructure-grants)

¹¹⁴ JCCA. (2020). Joint Committee on Climate Action Annual Report to the National Chief and the Prime Minister -2020. <https://www.afn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/21-0015-JCCA-Annual-Report-EN.pdf>

predictability through a renewable term of up to 10 years. Despite some government ministries' willingness to reform program delivery, a whole-of-government framework is needed. Furthermore, Crown governments, Crown corporations, and local governments must collaborate externally and cross-ministerially to address the complexity and barriers to accessing federal funding and improve both provincial and federal funding frameworks and programs to reflect First Nations' priorities on climate change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 The provincial and federal governments must reduce the number of programs and redesign funding programs that are flexible, long-term, and co-developed with First Nations to support improved mobility and access to equitable, safe, affordable, and reliable transportation and low-carbon transportation.

- Create a comprehensive, new whole-of-government framework for program delivery to improve, streamline, simplify and reduce the number of federal climate funding programs, eliminate the bureaucratic processes for funding application and ensure adequate government support is provided when applying for funding (see also *BC FNCL Agenda* Recommendation 3.2)
- The provincial and federal government must adopt rolling intake, flexible or open-application models (an example is ISC's New Fiscal Relationship Grant) specifically targeted for First Nations and transportation funding programs and ensure operational and maintenance costs are eligible.
- The provincial and federal governments must simplify government program reporting requirements to reduce the burden on Nations, while providing culturally centred alternatives.

9.2 The provincial and federal government must support and fund self-determined First Nations transportation and low-carbon transportation capacity, planning and implementation, while leveraging the process and deliverables from the BCAFN First Nations Low-Carbon Transportation Project

- Long-term funding to support First Nations capacity and staffing is essential for transportation planning and implementation and closing the infrastructure gap (see also Recommendations Theme 2).

9.3 Crown governments, Crown corporations, organizations and industry must fund and scale up First Nation-led pilots that support the transition to a low-carbon transportation system, for example ZEV car-sharing, solar-powered, rail projects microgrids, or electric marine transport for coastal Nations

9.4 Invest in training and technical resources to support First Nations capacity building to design, plan, manage, and implement low-carbon solutions, including First Nations youth and staff capacity (see also Recommendation 7.4 and 10.4 related to training)

10. Commit to equitable and affordable access to private vehicles, licensing, Zero Emission Vehicles (ZEVs), hybrids or plug-in hybrids and innovation in low-carbon fuels

RATIONALE

Affordability and lack of perceived suitability to remote communities remain major barriers to the adoption of ZEVs, for many Nations. Most respondents (85%) of the BCAFN Transportation Survey (Staff and Leadership) indicated the organization or Nation they represent has not yet invested in electric vehicles or other low-carbon transportation infrastructure, citing the lack of affordability a key barrier. Similarly, the BCAFN Transportation Survey (Community) found that financial burden is the most cited barrier to accessing safe and affordable transportation, underscoring how cost is a critical obstacle to the adoption of ZEVs in First Nations communities.

The cheapest ZEV mentioned on the EmotiveBC website is the Fiat500e which costs \$39,995.¹¹⁵ Even when a BC or Federal rebate was available, that puts the minimum cost over \$30,000. The average cost of a ZEV is likely much higher, considering the current high demand for ZEVs in Canada and the lack of supply.¹¹⁶ For many individuals, this upfront cost is too high even if ZEVs have lower operating and maintenance costs in the long run.¹¹⁷

The BCAFN Phase 1 Pilot Project Communities articulated that efforts to transition to ZEVs have failed to account for the significant infrastructure barriers unique to First Nations. Although the charging point network is improving through Provincial and Federal programs, it is still insufficient for many First Nations living in remote communities to get around with a ZEV reliably.¹¹⁸ In addition to having to travel greater distances to access essential services, remote communities face additional range challenges in winter - when temperatures drop below –20 °C, range can decrease by up to 50%, making longer journeys with a ZEV unfeasible.¹¹⁹ This makes plug-in hybrids and hybrids potentially more suitable for rural and remote communities. Safety is another major barrier, for example ZEV charging stations lacking basic amenities like bathrooms and having limited cell service, all of which make extended stops unsafe. BCAFN Phase 1 Pilot Project Communities and New Relationship Trust research highlighted that many First Nation grids are at capacity, so ZEV chargers are not feasible on reserve.

Natural Resources Canada and industry experts' projections suggest that by 2030, end-of-life EV batteries will become a global source of over 380,000 tonnes of recyclable metals^x including

¹¹⁵ EmotiveBC (n.d.) Electric Vehicles in BC <http://www.emotivebc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Electric-Vehicles-in-BC.pdf>

¹¹⁶ CBC News (2023). The government wants you to own an electric vehicle — but who can even afford them? <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/windsor/government-wants-you-to-own-an-electric-vehicle-1.6727061>.

¹¹⁷ Government of Canada (2022) Canada's Action Plan for Clean On-Road Transportation https://tc.canada.ca/sites/default/files/2023-03/ROAD-04-ON-ROAD-ACTION-PLAN-REPORT_EN_V09.pdf

¹¹⁸ Pembina Institute. (2022, August 30). How remote communities should be included in the push to electrify transportation. Pembina Institute. <https://www.pembina.org/blog/how-remote-communities-should-be-included-push-electrify-transportation>

¹¹⁹ Indigenous Clean Energy. (n.d.). Electric Vehicles in Rural and Remote Communities Identifying Opportunities, Understanding Challenges Prepared for Indigenous Clean Energy. <https://indigenoucleanenergy.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Electric-Vehicles-in-Rural-and-Remote-Communities-Report.pdf>

lithium, nickel and cobalt.¹²⁰ First Nations and several research inputs have expressed environmental concerns over ZEVs and the critical minerals required to produce the batteries, and the lack of a circular supply chain for the production of batteries in Canada or an established recycling facility to deal with batteries at the end of their life. According to several sources, a circular battery value chain will be essential to meeting the Paris Agreement climate targets and dealing with the impacts of the current unsustainable battery value chain.¹²¹

In addition, the focus on ZEVs obscures the reality that acquiring a license, buying and operating a private gas-powered vehicle, is already out of reach for many Nations. The BCAFN Transportation Survey (Community) found that financial barriers—including the cost of gas, vehicle purchase, maintenance, and licensing—are the main obstacles to vehicle ownership. Licensing itself is a significant hurdle, with 16% of respondents reporting they do not hold a valid driver's license. These services can be located long distances outside of the community, requiring long-distance travel to access. Logistical barriers (e.g., access to a testing centre or lessons) were the third most cited challenge to licensing by survey respondents. Survey Respondents suggested that free driver's training, funding to cover licensing costs, and hands-on support with applications and testing would help support access to obtaining a driver's license. These barriers need to be addressed in tandem with electrification and other innovative low-carbon fuels.

BCAFN's Transportation Survey reported that 80% of respondents own a personal vehicle, and this is even higher for remote residents, where only 18% do not own a vehicle. Remote and rural First Nations are unlikely to be able to give up their car entirely, even if they would like to see more options for biking and public transit. ZEVs, hybrids, and plug-in hybrids must be part of the solution to transition to low-carbon transportation, but the government must focus on increasing affordability, reducing environmental impacts, and improving charging infrastructure specifically targeted at First Nations. On May 15, 2025, the provincial government paused its [CleanBC Go Electric](#) passenger vehicle rebate program and is undergoing a review. Thus, providing an opportune time to make rebates more effective and accessible for First Nations, while broadening rebates to include hybrids and plug-in hybrids. Another method of reducing costs is to increase competition of ZEVs—Currently, Canada has a 100% tariff on Chinese ZEVs, which are fast becoming the most affordable ZEVs worldwide.¹²²

Charging infrastructure must continue to be expanded on First Nations reserves through increased investment and grid upgrades. The improvement of grid infrastructure on reserve and support for First Nations-led or equity ownership in renewable energy projects is necessary to increase electricity generation for electrification. The [First Nations Energy and Mining Council \(FNEMC\) Final Summary Report from Phase 4 Engagement: BC Hydro 2024 Call for Power](#) states that electrification of transportation will necessitate an increase in power

¹²⁰ Smart Prosperity Institute (2022). Towards a North American Circular Economy for Electric Vehicle Batteries, Event Summary Report: <https://www.circulareconomyleaders.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Summary-Report-Towards-a-North-American-Circular-Economy-for-Electric-Vehicle-Batteries.pdf>

¹²¹ Ibid

¹²² CBC News. (2025, March 20). *Should Canada ease its 100% tariff on electric vehicles from China amid trade war with U.S.?* CBC. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/canada-china-electric-vehicles-1.7486204>

generation and First Nations are well placed to lead this '[Call for Power](#)', however FNEMC has many recommendations on how this can be done more equitably.¹²³ At the same time, programs such as the [Community Energy Diesel Reduction \(CEDR\)](#) program must be continued to ensure Nations can reduce their reliance on diesel for power generation and develop their own clean energy projects.¹²⁴ Low-carbon fuels also have the potential to act as an important stepping stone for many First Nations communities to transition to cleaner forms of transportation. Heiltsuk Nation, one of the BCAFN Phase 1 Pilot Project Communities, is a leader in this space, having received \$200,000 from the CEDR for a pre-feasibility study on the viability of producing hydrogen through electrolysis to reduce its community's reliance on diesel.¹²⁵

In tandem, vehicle services such as mechanics, service garages, and fuel are lacking in First Nation communities, both for internal combustion engine vehicles and electric vehicles. ZEV-specific servicing is presently a gap for many communities in BC and Canada, not only First Nations. As investments are made to grow this sector, there is an opportunity to empower First Nations to be leaders in adopting ZEVs, should they choose to do so, but they must be able to access First Nations-specific training programs to ensure that operations and maintenance of charging stations don't become a significant burden.

RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 The provincial and federal government must reintroduce ZEV, hybrid and plug-in hybrid passenger vehicle rebates and create a dedicated funding stream for First Nations that covers up to 50% of the purchase price, while also supporting fleet adoption through enhanced rebates and access to low-interest lending.

10.2 The federal government must collaborate with rights and titleholders on all foreign policies related to ZEV's including a review of the 100% tariff on Chinese ZEVs.

10.3 The provincial and federal government must increase investment and reduce barriers in implementing ZEV charging infrastructure project both on and off First Nations reserves

- Lighting and internet connectivity at ZEV charging sites must be mandatory to ensure safety
- Utilities and other public/private providers of ZEV charging stations in BC must reform policies to favour First Nations equity ownership, and the construction and operation of charging stations in partnership with First Nations as charging networks are built out throughout BC.

¹²³ BC First Nations Energy and Mining Council. (2025). *BC First Nations Energy and Mining Council Final Summary Report*. <https://fnemc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/2025-05-24-UPDATED-final-FNEMC-Final-Report-Phase-4-BC-Hydro-2024-Call-for-Power.pdf>

¹²⁴ New Relationship Trust. (2023). *Community Energy Diesel Reduction*. New Relationship Trust. <https://newrelationshiptrust.ca/community-energy-diesel-reduction-cedr/>

¹²⁵ BC Gov News. (2024, December 2). Remote First Nations transitioning from diesel to clean energy. BC Gov News. <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2024ECS0069-001616>

10.4 The BC Ministry of Energy and Climate Solutions must co-design and fund ZEV-related training programs with relevant educational institutions, specific to rural and remote First Nations, to support the maintenance and operations of ZEVs and charging stations (see also Recommendations 7.4 and 9.4 related to training).

10.5 ICBC and the BC government must improve access to vehicle licensing for First Nations through free driver training, funding to cover licensing costs, and hands-on support with applications and testing.

10.6 Multiple levels of government, in collaboration with organizations, industry and First Nations, must develop and implement a strategy to improve the circularity and sustainability of ZEVs, hybrids and plug-in hybrids value chains.

10.7 Develop policies and programs that ensure First Nations are equitable partners and improve energy sovereignty through renewable energy and low-carbon/renewable fuel initiatives.

- Crown governments and Crown corporations must implement the recommendations from the *First Nations Energy and Mining Council (FNEMC) Final Summary Report from Phase 4 Engagement: BC Hydro 2024 Call for Power* and fully implement the *Declaration Act Action Plan* and Section 3 Alignment, Item 4.43.¹²⁶
- Crown governments must co-develop programs in partnership with First Nations-led organizations such as New Relationship Trust's *Community Energy Diesel Reduction* program to ensure that Nations can continue to develop self-determined solutions to increase their energy self-sufficiency.

Conclusion

The recommendations outlined in this report and action plan are essential to improve and advance First Nations' mobility and equitable access to safe, affordable, accessible, reliable transportation and low-carbon transportation in BC. Intersecting the themes and recommendations is the urgent need for a substantial increase in long-term funding and investment, innovative policies and program delivery, a whole-of-government approach and a strong political commitment for implementation in alignment with the *UN Declaration*.

BCAFN calls on Crown governments, Crown Corporations, local governments, organizations, and industry to fully implement the recommendations outlined in this report and action plan in partnership with First Nations. First Nations access to mobility and transportation in BC and Canada is vital to advancing reconciliation and effectively implementing the *Declaration Act* and *UNDA*. FPIC, shared decision-making, long-term and sustainable investment in First Nations capacity, and meaningful partnerships with First Nations are essential to effective and culturally

¹²⁶ BC First Nations Energy and Mining Council. (2025). *BC First Nations Energy and Mining Council Final Summary Report*. <https://fnemc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/2025-05-24-UPDATED-final-FNEMC-Final-Report-Phase-4-BC-Hydro-2024-Call-for-Power.pdf>

centred transportation and low-carbon transportation policies, infrastructure projects, planning, and investment decisions.

Advancing First Nations mobility is intrinsically connected to improving access to safe, affordable, equitable, and just transportation and low-carbon transportation infrastructure and services. Systemic and discriminatory barriers must be removed that limit and impact mobility, safety, access to transportation, and infringe on First Nations rights, jurisdiction, and sovereignty. Although ZEVs are part of the solution, innovative and circular policies and investment are required to design multi-modal transportation systems that move away from private vehicle-dependent policies and respond to the unique needs, realities and priorities of First Nations in BC.

As the impacts of the climate emergency continue to compound, First Nations must have a central role in the transition to a low-carbon transportation system and economy that respects First Nations' inherent rights, title and interests. Crown governments must fully resource and commit to fulfilling their transportation, mobility, and climate-related obligations, targets and commitments in alignment with the *UN Declaration*. The transition to a low-carbon transportation system should not be solely focused on political agendas or a technocratic-driven vision for the future, but should be rooted in self-determination, inherent rights, reconciliation, equity, and justice, and position First Nations as climate and transportation leaders.

Appendices

APPENDIX A: Detailed Methodology

Desktop Research and Policy Review

In 2023, the BCAFN collaborated with a UBC Sustainability Scholar to conduct a comprehensive desktop research report on the topic of transportation for First Nations within BC. The UBC Sustainability Scholar worked closely with BCAFN to develop *A Review of Barriers and Opportunities facing First Nations in accessing Equitable, Reliable, Safe, Affordable, and Low-Carbon Transportation in BC*. This report was guided by the *BC First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan* and the *BC First Nations Climate Leadership Agenda*, and includes a review and analysis of previous studies, research, and reports as well as findings from interviews with organizations in the transportation space. The report identifies significant and persistent transportation barriers facing First Nations across BC, rooted in the legacy of colonization, systemic underinvestment, and jurisdictional fragmentation. It also identifies initial recommendations, but its primary purpose was to offer insights to guide the BCAFN Transportation Surveys and provide support to the Phase 1 Pilot Project Communities in the creation of their own Gaps and Opportunities Analysis Reports. Additional desktop research and a review and analysis of current government policies and programs were conducted during the development of the Transportation Action Plan.

Interviews and Engagement

During the project's kickoff and desktop research phase, BCAFN met with and interviewed multiple organizations, including Infrastructure Canada, TransLink, First Nations Health Authority (FNHA), Victoria Transport Policy Institute, Northern Development Initiative Trust (NDIT), the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC), and Fraser Basin Council (FBC).

To collect additional information, six semi-structured interviews with representatives from the New Relationship Trust, Island Coastal Economic Trust, Northern Development Initiative Trust, Economic Trust of the Southern Interior, BC Ferries, and the Ministry of Transportation and Transit (including the marine transportation branch) between Autumn 2024 and Winter 2025. The semi-structured interview results suggest that transportation support for First Nations in BC is characterized by fragmented jurisdiction, one-time project funding, and systemic exclusion from decision-making processes. This points to the need for legislative reform, dedicated and ongoing provincial and federal investment, and recognition of First Nations as equal partners in governance. Without these current policies, we will continue to reproduce inequities and prevent First Nations from leading transportation solutions that meet their distinct needs.

To validate the findings and provide additional feedback, BCAFN hosted the inaugural First Nations Low-Carbon Transportation Forum on May 27-28, 2025, which provided a valuable platform for gathering feedback on the Transportation Action Plan recommendation themes through a panel and a Mentimeter questionnaire. BCAFN also hosted out a Virtual Engagement

Session on September 8, 2025, with First Nations Chiefs, Leadership and Technical Staff attending.

BCAFN Transportation Surveys

Two surveys were carried out in Spring 2024 to collect primary data and add nuance to the understanding of transportation issues faced by First Nations and better understand the lived experiences and perspectives of First Nation community members, leaders, and staff. One survey was developed for BC First Nations members broadly, and one survey was developed for BC First Nations staff and leadership. These surveys were published and widely distributed online and at in-person events from March 2024 to April 2024.

The surveys collectively received 429 responses from First Nations community members, technical staff and leadership. The survey's focused on the topics of:

- Active transportation
- Alternative and traditional First Nations modes of travel
- Ferry travel
- Personal vehicle ownership and licensing
- Capacity building to support transportation service and infrastructure
- First Nations involvement in decision-making processes and bodies

BCAFN Phase 1 Pilot Project Communities

Five First Nation Pilot Project Communities were selected to participate in this Project's Phase 1 from 2023 to 2025, with key deliverables including a Low-Carbon Transportation Plan and a Gaps and Opportunities Analysis Report, which outlines key challenges, barriers and opportunities for improving transportation and low-carbon transportation within their Nations and were used as inputs to this document. BCAFN also worked closely with each Pilot Project Community during Phase 1 to gather feedback on their experiences and gain a deeper understanding of their needs and potential recommendations or solutions for improvement. This approach allowed BCAFN to gather firsthand insights directly from Nations, ensuring that this report reflects the unique needs, perspectives, realities, challenges, and opportunities.

The Phase 1 Pilot Project Communities reflect a diversity of geographies and contexts yet share several persistent transportation challenges. These include limited infrastructure, inadequate services, and institutional constraints, alongside opportunities to address gaps through strategic planning, collaboration, and targeted investment. Overall, the Pilot Project Communities emphasize that without sustained funding, institutional capacity, and structural reform, transportation planning will remain reactive and inequitable. However, they also present clear and actionable opportunities for transformation rooted in local leadership, partnership-building, and First Nation-specific solutions.

APPENDIX B: First Nation Transportation Surveys Results

The survey findings have been summarized across key themes to reflect shared challenges and opportunities identified by First Nations respondents. Unsurprisingly, personal vehicles remain

the dominant mode of travel, though access is constrained by financial, health, and licensing barriers. While not unexpected given BCAFN's engagement with Nations, it is still striking that most respondents spend 20–30% of their income on transportation—well above the provincial average. This may be due to having no other alternative to operating a personal vehicle, which has become more and more unaffordable. While a majority of respondents would like to use active transportation within their communities, significant obstacles—such as safety, distance, and lack of infrastructure—limit broader adoption. Leadership perspectives indicated that low-carbon transportation remains a secondary priority and that, despite strong interest in community-led solutions like shuttles and e-bike programs, uptake is hindered by cost and capacity constraints.

Affordability

- First Nations respondents spend a disproportionately high share of income on transportation, with most respondents estimating they spend 20 to 30% of their income on transportation, compared to the provincial average of 10%

Travel Habits and Modal Preferences

- Over half of community respondents travel outside their immediate communities for essential trips, reflecting systemic impacts of the reserve system and regional service access
- Personal vehicles dominate as the primary mode of transportation (75%) for community respondents, followed by buses (12%)

Vehicle Ownership and Licensing

- 80% of community respondents own a personal vehicle, mostly gasoline-powered.
- Key barriers to vehicle ownership and licensing include financial constraints, health limitations, and lack of support for training and testing
- Supports such as free driver training, licensing funding, and hands-on assistance were most requested by unlicensed respondents

Active and Low-Carbon Transportation

- While more than half of community respondents state they use active transportation to get around, major barriers include distance, health, safety, and lack of infrastructure
- Respondents called for well-lit pathways, e-bike funding, and improved community security, including infrastructure and/or services to support active transportation
- Bicycles were the most popular low-carbon transportation priorities, with e-bicycles received 22% and traditional bicycles received 20% for nearly half of all responses

Institutional and Policy Insights

- Leadership responses suggest low-carbon transportation is seen as a secondary priority to general transportation planning, with 85% reporting no investment in ZEVs or other low carbon transportation infrastructure
- In terms of transportation barriers, cost was cited as a primary hurdle for increasing use across all modes of low-carbon transportation
- When asked about which transportation solutions should be prioritized, responses indicated an interest in localized solutions such as First Nation-led community shuttles and carpooling and on demand car service, but uptake is hindered by cost and capacity limitations

Regional Differences

- Consistent concerns emerged across regions around affordability, infrastructure, and equitable access
- Specific regions emphasized needs such as public transit (Vancouver Island, Cariboo), accessibility (Lower Mainland), and clean vehicle infrastructure (Thompson-Okanagan, Nechako, Kootenay)

APPENDIX C: Phase 1 Pilot Project Communities: Key Findings

A summary of the findings from the Phase 1 Pilot Project Communities is below, broken down into key themes.

Transportation Infrastructure Gaps: Transportation infrastructure gaps are widespread. Communities report a lack of active transportation infrastructure (such as sidewalks, lighting, and safe pathways), poor road conditions, and outdated or missing supportive elements like signage or rest areas. For example, both Daylu Dena and ?Esdilagh face major physical barriers to safe travel, including deteriorated roads and river crossings with no viable alternatives. Opportunities identified include improving internal connections, adding dedicated infrastructure, and collaborating on regional planning and upgrades.

Service Provision: Service provision is similarly constrained, with most communities lacking access to basic amenities such as vehicle registration, repair services, or healthcare. Travel to access these necessities often involves long, costly, or unsafe journeys. Pilot Project Communities propose increasing in-community services, offering mobile or pop-up alternatives, and leveraging digital tools to reduce travel burdens.

Inadequate Public Transportation: Public transportation is largely nonexistent or inadequate. Shuttle services, where available, are infrequent and underfunded, and formal vehicle sharing or transit partnerships are absent. In some communities, informal ridesharing occurs but raises concerns over safety and affordability. Opportunities include regional shuttle development, ride-hailing programs, and electric or low-carbon transit options, often tied to broader goals of sustainability and affordability.

ZEVs: ZEV infrastructure is extremely limited. While a few Nations (such as Nisga'a) have charging stations, most reserves have no public EV infrastructure, and adoption remains low due to cost and awareness barriers. Suggested actions include fleet electrification plans, EV education initiatives, and building charging infrastructure in coordination with provincial and federal programs.

Governance, Capacity and Program Delivery: Limited staff capacity, burdensome funding requirements, competing priorities in the Nations (i.e. housing or health), and a lack of dedicated transportation roles. Several communities flagged that current grant models demand time, resources, and upfront contributions that many Nations cannot provide. Recommended solutions include hiring dedicated transportation staff, streamlining funding applications, and advocating for more accessible, flexible grant models that respect First Nations governance, self-determination and unique planning priorities.

APPENDIX D: Overview of Relevant Articles, Action Plan Items and Reports

The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019) Calls for Justice

4.8 We call upon all governments to ensure that adequate plans and funding are put into place for safe and affordable transit and transportation services and infrastructure for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people living in remote or rural communities. Transportation should be sufficient and readily available to Indigenous communities, and in towns and cities located in all of the provinces and territories in Canada. These plans and funding should take into consideration:

- ways to increase safe public transit;
- ways to address the lack of commercial transit available; and
- special accommodations for fly-in, northern, and remote communities.

8.1 We call upon all transportation service providers and the hospitality industry to undertake training to identify and respond to sexual exploitation and human trafficking, as well as the development and implementation of reporting policies and practices.

The Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendations Report (2006) Recommendations

Recommendation #1 That a shuttle bus transportation system be established between each town and city located along the entire length of Highway 16, defined as the Highway of Tears.

Recommendation #2 That while the RCMP does a commendable job in patrolling the highway, these patrols can no longer drive past a hitchhiker who fits the victim profile.

Recommendation #3 That the RCMP be provided the resources to increase their highway patrols during the hitchhiking season, more specifically increase these patrols along the sections of Highway 16 near First Nation communities, towns and cities.

Recommendation #4 That the Greyhound Bus Company's free ride program be expanded, and target marketed to the population in the Highway 16 corridor who fit the victim profile.

Recommendation #5 That every public sector employee working between Prince George and Prince Rupert be contacted and used as a female hitchhiker detection network.

Recommendation #6 That a number of safe homes similar to (and possibly including) MCFD and aboriginal social service safe homes be established at strategic locations along the entire length of Highway 16, between the cities of Prince Rupert and Prince George, British Columbia.

Recommendation #7 That the Rural Crime Watch Program be expanded to include a highway watch component along the full length of the Highway of Tears.

Recommendation #8 That a number of emergency phone booths be placed along the highway at strategic locations between the cities of Prince Rupert and Prince George, British Columbia.

Recommendation #9 That a number of billboards and many more posters be placed at strategic locations along the Highway 16 corridor between Prince George and Prince Rupert, British Columbia.

Recommendation #10 That an annual awareness and prevention campaign be delivered to every elementary school, high school, college, university, and silviculture company located in and between the cities of Prince Rupert and Prince George prior to the hitchhiking and tree-planting season.

Recommendation #11 That every First Nation community and First Nation family living in the towns and cities located on or near Highway of Tears be targeted in a more intensive awareness and prevention program.

Recommendation #12 That aboriginal youth that live in rural First Nations communities and urban aboriginal youth who live in the towns and cities on the Highway of Tears be organized and listened to.

Recommendation #13 That recreational and social activity programs for rural and urban aboriginal youth be increased in the First Nation communities, towns, and cities located along the Highway of Tears.

Recommendation #14 That media campaigns be launched on the subject of the murdered and missing women, and contain specific key victim prevention measures targeting young women viewers and readers along the Highway of Tears.

Recommendation #15 That the number, types, and frequency of essential health and social services be increased for direct delivery to the First Nation communities located along the Highway of Tears.

British Columbia's Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry (2012)

Recommendation 6.1 That the Provincial Government fully support the implementation of The Highway of Tears Symposium action plan, updated to the current situation and in a manner that ensures involvement of all affected communities along Highway 16.

Urgent Measure 2 To develop and implement an enhanced public transit system to provide a safer travel option connecting the Northern communities, particularly along Highway 16.

Red Women Rising: Indigenous Women Survivors in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside Report (2019)

Key recommendation 26 Provide an annual transport allowance for Indigenous women in the DTES to be able to travel to their home community.

Key recommendation 34 Establish free public bus transportation between each town and city located along the entire length of Highway 16 and all other highways, with a number of safe homes and emergency phone booths along the length of all the highways.

Recommendation 1 to End Violence Against Indigenous Women in the DTES Adopt a national-level integrated action plan to eliminate violence against Indigenous women and girls that:

- a. Addresses all the socio-economic factors impacting Indigenous women's, girls', trans and two-spirit's safety including equitable access and self-determination over land, culture, language, housing, child care, income security, employment, education, and physical, mental, sexual, and spiritual health.
- b. Incorporates the specific needs of extremely marginalized communities like the DTES.
- c. Sets public timelines for implementation of existing recommendations from CEDAW, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, UN Human Rights Committee, Assembly of First Nations, Missing Women Commission of Inquiry, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Highway of Tears Symposium, and Native Women's Association of Canada.
- d. Establishes a national database on murdered and missing Indigenous women, with accurate data collection on rates of violence against Indigenous women and girls.
- e. Prioritizes a public education campaign in schools, transit system, media outlets, and community centres on Indigenous rights and systemic racism.
- f. Immediately establishes free public bus transportation system between each town and city located along the entire length of Highway 16 and all other

highways, with a number of safe homes and emergency phone booths along the length of all the highways.

- g. Ensures adequate human, technical, and financial resources allocated for implementation, monitoring, and assessment of such a plan.

Recommendations 9 to End Indigenous Women's Displacement from Land On reserve

The federal government must guarantee:

- a. Access to clean drinking water; food security based on a traditional diet; critical infrastructure, including roads and sanitation systems; and essential health, education, child care, housing, transport, recreational, cultural, and emergency services on every reserve.
- b. Safe, affordable, and livable housing for every woman on her reserve that is independent of her matrimonial status.
- c. Affordable child care and licensed day care options on every reserve.
- d. Complete complement of maternal and infant/child health services on reserve to enable women to remain closer to home to give birth.
- e. Free public transportation between each town and city located along the entire length of Highway 16 and all other highways, with a number of safe homes and emergency phone booths along the length of all the highways.
- f. Increase funding on all reserves for programs and services that strengthen traditional and cultural knowledge grounded in Indigenous laws, values, and practices.
- g. Range of anti-violence services including preventive programs, crisis intervention, victim services, advocacy support, restorative justice circles, shelters, transitional housing, and second-stage housing on every reserve.
- h. Cultural sensitivity training for all first responders, such as police, healthcare professionals, and social workers, who assist survivors of violence on reserve.

UN Declaration (2007)

Article 3 Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

Article 10 Indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories. No relocation shall take place without the free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned and after agreement on just and fair compensation and, where possible, with the option of return.

Article 18 Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with

their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own indigenous decision-making institutions.

Article 19 States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them.

Article 21

1. Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security.
2. States shall take effective measures and, where appropriate, special measures to ensure continuing improvement of their economic and social conditions. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities.

Article 23 Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. In particular, indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions.

Article 25 Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard.

Article 28

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to redress, by means that can include restitution or, when this is not possible, just, fair and equitable compensation, for the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned or otherwise occupied or used, and which have been confiscated, taken, occupied, used or damaged without their free, prior and informed consent.
2. Unless otherwise freely agreed upon by the peoples concerned, compensation shall take the form of lands, territories and resources equal in quality, size and legal status or of monetary compensation or other appropriate redress.

Article 29

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources. States shall establish and implement assistance programmes for indigenous peoples for such conservation and protection, without discrimination.
2. States shall take effective measures to ensure that no storage or disposal of hazardous materials shall take place in the lands or territories of indigenous peoples without their free, prior and informed consent.
3. States shall also take effective measures to ensure, as needed, that programmes for monitoring, maintaining and restoring the health of indigenous peoples, as developed and implemented by the peoples affected by such materials, are duly implemented.

Article 36

1. Indigenous peoples, in particular those divided by international borders, have the right to maintain and develop contacts, relations and cooperation, including activities for spiritual, cultural, political, economic and social purposes, with their own members as well as other peoples across borders.
2. States, in consultation and cooperation with indigenous peoples, shall take effective measures to facilitate the exercise and ensure the implementation of this right.

Declaration Act Action Plan (2022-2027)

2.13 Identify and advance reconciliation negotiations on historical road impacts and road accessibility with First Nations on reserve, treaty and title lands, including reporting-out on the completion and implementation of these negotiations collaboratively with First Nations partners. (Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure)

3.9 Identify and implement multi-modal transportation solutions that provide support and enable the development of sustainable, safe, reliable and affordable transportation options for First Nations communities. (Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure)

UNDA Action Plan (2023-2028)

First Nations Mandate 1: Continue work underway with First Nations partners on a new fiscal relationship to provide sufficient, predictable and flexible funding in support of closing socioeconomic gaps and advancing self-determination. (Indigenous Services Canada)

First Nations Mandate 15: Continue to work with First Nations on closing infrastructure gaps on reserve – based on priorities identified by communities - with the goal of improving current service delivery (including increasing the number of housing units) as well as supporting increased First Nations capacity for housing governance, management and planning. (Indigenous Services Canada).

Shared Priority Mandate: Together with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, advance an Indigenous Climate Leadership Agenda, including distinctions-based strategies, that vests the resources and authorities necessary for Indigenous peoples to fully exercise their right to self-

determination on climate. This includes ensuring that First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples have stable, long-term financing to implement their climate actions, make climate-related decisions with the Government of Canada, and that systemic barriers to Indigenous climate leadership are addressed. (Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada and Environment and Climate Change Canada).

Federal Sustainable Development Strategy 2022 to 2026

Target and Indicator: By 2030, 22% of commuters use public transit or active transportation (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities)

- This indicator tracks the percentage of the population using public transit or active transportation for commuting. In 2016, 19.3% of commuters used public transit or active transportation.

Short-term milestone supporting the goal: Support the purchase of zero-emission buses

- By the end of 2026, support the purchase of 5000 zero-emission buses and the necessary supporting infrastructure.

Implementation strategy supporting the target: Invest in public transit and active transportation Invest in long-term public transit, rural transit and active transportation solutions to provide reliable, fast, affordable and clean ways for people to get around.