

Transit Ridership Options for Town Hall Events: Community, Disparities, Solutions

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Introduction

I am here today to bring awareness and seek solutions to the isolation of transit riders in Fort Erie and the barriers they face to participate in events that are supported by or run by the Town of Fort Erie which occur at days and times when transit is unavailable.

As a resident of Crystal Beach, as someone who is on a low income and as a renter, I know what it feels like and how frustrating and disappointing it can be year after year to miss your favourite events, such as the Canada Day fireworks because you do not have transit.

Important to Note:

- There is a lack of alternate modes of transit such as taxis and ride shares in Fort Erie
- Transit riders in neighbouring areas of Fort Erie such Crystal Beach, Ridgeway, Stevensville, and Black Creek are quite isolated from events lacking transit.
- That is why it is important that we seek solutions for transit riders today

Transit & Events in Fort Erie

- There are many events throughout the year in the Town of Fort Erie
- Some are organized by the Town and others by community organizations
Some groups events are geared to include families, adults, older adults or other designated groups.
- The *Find Your Fort Erie* guide, Town of Fort Erie Social Media, and other outlets allude citizens to events
- Some annual dates in which transit riders year-after-year miss out on due to lack of transit include but are not limited to events running on:
 - Mother's Day (with some exceptions this year)
 - Father's Day
 - Canada Day
 - Events run on Sundays and other holidays
 - Events occurring past 8pm leaving riders stuck for a safe ride home

Special Transit Groups Affected by Lack of Transit for Town Hall Events

Reports in Niagara on transit have pointed to different groups suffering disparity from lack of transit, including the connection with social aspects of life. Below are the groups affected and we will briefly touch on each:

- Persons with disabilities
- Low-income individuals and families
- Children
- Seniors
- High school and post-secondary students

Persons With Disabilities

- Persons with disabilities are more at risk for poverty than those without disabilities (Niagara Priority Profiles: Disabilities. 2021, p. 6).
- In that way persons with disabilities both are more marginalized in the area of transit from the economic as well as the physical barriers they face.

Low-Income Individuals & Families

- It is expensive to own a car and many families in Fort Erie are isolated from social events occurring in the Town due to lack of transit
 - 16% of households in Fort Erie (2016) are surviving on a low income.
 - Further, single mothers, single parent families and their children suffer isolation from lack of transit (Rader 2022) thus stressing the importance of including their transit needs in scheduling town events to help them to feel included in the community

Special Transit Groups cont...

High School & Post-Secondary Students

- In Niagara 50% of post-secondary students are transit commuters (Living In Niagara, Transportation & Mobility, 2020, p. 9).
- The needs of high school students requires further study and statistics, however self-autonomy to use transit for events especially when parents do not drive is a factor to keep into consideration.

Children

- Child poverty is a persistent issue in Niagara with food insecurity being an important marker of poverty and transit intersects with poverty (Living in Niagara, Economic Prosperity, 2020, p. 14-15).

Seniors

- Seniors are a diverse group of transit users who can be further marginalized within society including seniors who are Indigenous, racialized or new to Canada (Report on the Social Isolation of Seniors, 2014, p. 9)

Lack of Transit for Town Run Events: Negative Effects

Studies in Niagara from the YWCA, the Niagara Poverty Reduction Network, Brock University, Niagara College, Public Health including the Living in Niagara Report 2020 point to the importance of community belonging for transit riders and the negative effects of social isolation when transit lacks including:

- A lack of social engagement due to long commutes and non-existent transit (Living In Niagara, Transportation & Mobility, 2020, p. 9).
- Missed social networking opportunities for employment and volunteering leaving low-income women and individuals missing out on economically gainful activities (Rader 2022)
- Inequality between children who use transit and their peers
- Social isolation has been found to damage the sense of belonging to seniors and other groups in the community (Report on the Social Isolation of Seniors, 2014, p. 9).
 - Social isolation of seniors can lead to self-harming behaviours such as substance abuse, mental health issues, suicide, and overall declining wellbeing (Report on the Social Isolation of Seniors, 2014, p. 8)

Other Niagara Communities Have Geared Up Events with Transit

It's time for the Town of Fort Erie to follow suit with other municipalities and to consider transit riders more in their town-run events. Other municipalities have experienced success running events on dates and times when transit is available or offering shuttle buses to events where there is no transit available.

Other Niagara Communities Have Geared Up Events with Transit

Examples from our broader Niagara community:

The City of Welland's Victoria Day Event 2023

- Rather than hold the event on the holiday when there is no transit the event occurred on a Saturday night, May 20th, 2023.
- This event gave transit riders access to the festivities that occur before the fireworks between 6:30 pm and before 9:00 pm nearing the final busses

Port Colborne & Canal Days

- The City of Port Colborne hosts Canal Days in August 2023 which is a transit friendly event.
- We know that low income children suffer for a lack of transit and with canal days in Port Colborne most children across Niagara who utilize transit with their families should be able to travel to and from their municipality using NRT to attend the family activities which run between August 5th-7th between 11am-5pm allowing transit riders to reach the event.
- Further for the concert series and the fireworks which occur later at night, Port Colborne also offers a shuttle service from the Vale Health and Wellness Centre which is helpful for some Port Colborne residents who can access the locations close to home.
- The City of Port Colborne has demonstrated that shuttles are an affordable option in ensuring transit riders including marginalized groups like seniors and children are able to attend major city events without question.

Canada Day: City of Niagara Falls

- It is also important to note for daytime Canada Day activities that the City of Niagara Falls is offering shuttle buses to their Canada Day festivities at various checkpoints to allow transit riders to participate in their event at Fireman's Park
- It is noteworthy because shuttle busses are being used by Port Colborne as well as Niagara Falls for important events that this is an option for Fort Erie to explore.

Positive Effects of Promoting Inclusivity of Transit Riders

- Increasing a sense of inclusivity for transit riders in Fort Erie that they are not excluded from Town run events
- Reduce the social isolation for transit riders allowing them to take full benefit of the opportunities both social and networking of participating in town run events
- Promote equality and inclusion of children and youth who parents/guardians utilize transit
- Events strengthen the community so ensuring that all members including transit riders can come to Town run events will only make Fort Erie a better place to live for all.

Goals of Delegation

- I have come here today and shared this information with you all to share the point of view of transit riders and the disparities they face in trying to attend town run events when there is no transit available
- I am appealing to council to work to ensure that future events that are town run will be inclusive to transit riders by invoking the following solutions:
 - Offering shuttles
 - Running the main event during transit hours
 - Advocating to increase transit hours and availability for Fort Erie

References

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