

AUDIT AT A GLANCE

Why we did this audit

- Northern residents often travel long distances between communities for work, health, education, and connecting with family and friends.
- For decades, northern residents without cars relied on Greyhound Canada until it withdrew service in 2018. No other private operator came forward.
- Local governments raised concerns that Greyhound's departure would disproportionately affect people with low incomes, those living in rural, remote and Indigenous communities, or people with disabilities.
- In May 2018, the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure directed BC Transit to provide a 12-month interim service ("BC Bus North"). The ministry also committed to finding a long-term solution for intercity travel in the north.
- BC Bus North has now run for more than three years and in November 2020, the government told the ministry to expand it.

Objective

To determine if the ministry:

1. *ensured the delivery of an interim long-distance bus service to B.C. northern communities that aligns with its direction to BC Transit*
2. *had a plan to develop a sustainable solution for long-distance ground transportation that reflects the needs of northern communities*

Audit period: April 1, 2017, to Sept. 1, 2021.

Conclusion

The ministry:

1. ensured the delivery of an interim long-distance bus service to northern B.C. communities but the delivery did not fully align with its direction to BC Transit. While the ministry ensured BC Transit collaborated with Northern Health transportation providers and provided required financial reports, the interim service covered half of all community stops previously served by Greyhound.
2. is working on a plan for intercity ground transportation across the province but it is not yet clear how this planning work will lead to a sustainable solution for northern B.C. specifically.

We made three recommendations focused on monitoring agreements, developing a plan, and engaging communities. The ministry has accepted all three recommendations.

What we found

Ministry ensured an interim service but can improve monitoring

- Directed BC Transit on what to include in interim service
- Worked with BC Transit and Northern Health to find efficiencies
- Set BC Bus North fares about 50% less than Greyhound fares
- Monitored financial data but not all of the passenger and service data required under agreements

Recommendation

1. Ensure it receives and reviews monitoring reports as set out in agreements.

Audit at a glance (continued)

Interim service covered half of former Greyhound stops near communities, with fewer trips

- Greyhound had 62 stops within 10km of a northern community
- BC Bus North covered 35 (56%) of those stops
- Stops were not replaced because they were: on routes into other regions, were unsafe, or alternate services were available
- Greyhound trips were mostly daily but BC Bus North runs once or twice a week

No Recommendation

Ministry working on provincial plan but not clear how it addresses northern needs

- Started planning in 2019, with focus on the north
- Work included limited community engagement, evaluation of BC Bus North, input from subject matter experts
- Scope shifted in 2020 from intercity transportation in north to the entire province
- Ministry is now working to address gaps in ground transportation provincially but it's not clear how this supports northern B.C.

Recommendation

2. Ensure that the plan for provincially ground transportation includes options for sustainable solutions in northern B.C.
3. Ensure broad engagement with northern communities as part of planning for sustainable ground transportation solutions.

After reading the report, you may wish to ask the following questions of government:

1. What is the ministry's timeline for presenting options for long-distance ground transportation in the north?
2. How will the ministry ensure communities are engaged during the planning process?
3. How will the ministry ensure that it regularly monitors the interim service?