

Travel Options for Seniors

Panel presentation and Community Discussion

June 13, 2024

Goals:

1. To bring stakeholders in our communities together to share lived experience, challenges, aspirations and data regarding transportation for seniors to allow them to live independently and with dignity at home as long as possible.
2. To collaborate on transportation options for seniors who are unable to drive due to medical, visual, geographic, or accessibility concerns.

Stakeholders: seniors & their families, municipal councils, long term care homes, volunteer drivers from Seine River Services for Seniors (SRS), Villa Youville and Paradise Village, business leaders and senior organizations.

Background

Seine River Services for Seniors (SRS) committed in a strategic plan 2021-2024 to focus on transportation for seniors using a community collaboration approach. This event was the culmination of this strategic plan.

Providing transportation is one of the key deliverables in the contract for the Senior Resource Coordinator program with Southern Health. This deliverable is achieved using volunteer drivers who undergo a formal orientation, police check and driver training tailored to senior passengers. The on-line training videos are provided by the provincial organization, Transportation Options Network for Seniors (TONS). SRS completed a 5-year review of requests for seniors living in our community to highlight the critical need for transportation (See Appendix #1). The report noted that 70-80% of requests were for medical appointments and the majority (60%) were to Winnipeg. The report also showed that 10-20% of requests were denied due to lack of an available driver.

There are a number of private and volunteer options for transportation for seniors who are living independently. These options are summarized in a document in June 2024 prepared for this community meeting. (see appendix #2). Volunteer programs exist at Villa Youville (Ste Anne), Paradise Village (RM Ste Anne) and SRS. These programs have 7, 5 and 7 volunteer drivers respectively but there is no formal coordination of these drivers. Cost is a major barrier for private sector options ranging \$75-150 per round-trip to Winnipeg plus an added standby fee (waiting time for the driver). Cost is a challenge especially when the appointments are frequent such as for chemotherapy or dialysis. The handi-van program with wheelchair accessibility in Steinbach is not available for non-residents of Steinbach. There is 1 volunteer driver at SRS with access to a private ramp van to accommodate selected seniors requiring a wheelchair.

Age Friendly Manitoba has transportation for seniors as a core domain. The RM Ste Anne initiated the process to achieve age-friendly designation in early 2024. This awareness and accountability will bring attention to adequate, efficient and affordable transportation options for seniors

Panel of community leaders

Participants:

Louise Hutton, Consultant to Age Friendly Manitoba and Board chair of Transportation Options Network for Seniors (TONS)

Audrey Harder, Executive Director, Pat Porter Active Living Centre, Steinbach

Fern Piche for Ivan Normandeau, Reeve, RM LaBroquerie

Yann Boissoneault, CEO, Villa Youville, Ste Anne

Jean Gagon, operations manager, LeChalet, LaBroquerie

Bruce Leochko, president, Paradise Village Resident Association

Other presentations from participants

Connie Gamble, SouthEast Regional Transportation Initiative

Cindi Rempel-Patrick, Southeast Cancer Support Services

Regrets

Cornie Klassen, Councilor, Town of Ste Anne

Richard Pelletier, Reeve, RM Ste Anne

Sarah Normandeau, Councilor, RM Ste Anne

Emily MacDonald, Owner of SEshuttle, Steinbach, MB

Questions for the panel & audience discussion

1. How can we increase public awareness of the options for transportation for seniors in our area?
2. How can we improve coordination of volunteer drivers to meet the need?
3. How can we enhance recruitment and retention of volunteer drivers?
4. How can the needs of seniors with special accessibility challenges be best served?
5. Do volunteer and paid drivers need special training in respectful interactions with seniors?
6. Is carsharing an optional model for our rural area?
7. Has there been a shift in need for specialist medical visits to Winnipeg? Has this been helped by having services such as Cancer Care and hemodialysis in Steinbach?
8. Is there adequate opportunity for active transportation such as walking paths in our communities?

Themes from the discussion

Coordination of volunteer drivers: 3 seniors organizations will continue to advertise for volunteer drivers “in-house” using various communication strategies such as newsletters, Facebook (SRS), website (SRS), email blasts, and word of mouth personal communication. There was discussion about a sign-up software to coordinate drivers but most participants felt that this would make the system too complicated. Currently all 3 organizations interview and encourage new residents/volunteers to consider volunteering (particularly driving) as a strategy for keeping active and “aging well”. Posters thought not to be helpful in recruiting volunteers.

Liability: All volunteer drivers with SRS must have minimum \$2million liability insurance with MPI and complete on-line video training. Seniors who have challenges with balance or mobility may be difficult to manage securing in a car. Special training may be necessary. One private ramp van is available for limited use with SRS. Some car dealerships in Steinbach have ramp vans for purchase.

Car-sharing options in the community may be available in future. Villa Youville is partnering with RM Ritchot to have 6 e-vehicles for rent by “members” from the community. Funding is 80% from the federal government through a grant process. This will allow seniors to “rent” a car for personal and group use. RM Piney and Buffalo Point (BPP) have created such a “Rent & Ride” program called Igniting Connections. They have 2 vans that accommodate 7-persons and 10-persons. They also have volunteer drivers who use the car share instead of their own vehicle.

Medical travel Cancer care MB discontinued regional offices including coordination of volunteer driver programs under the banner of “Wheels of Hope” in rural Manitoba in 2000. Central Plains Cancer Services in Portage la Prairie continued this service as a non-profit organization with funding from local fundraising, private and corporate donations. A similar program, Southeast Cancer Support Services, is starting in our region in September 2024 with an office, website and regional coordinator in Steinbach. It will cover 88 communities in the southeast. They will recruit volunteer drivers and list them on their website. Dialysis is another recurring need for medical transportation. The social worker for the Rural Renal Dialysis Program usually contacts our coordinators at Villa and SRS regarding a need, usually for the Steinbach site.

Recommendations

1. Use our current resources for volunteer drivers wisely
2. Continue recruitment of volunteer drivers for all 3 volunteer driver programs
3. Continue to require formal training programs for volunteer drivers at SRS
4. Strengthen collaboration and coordination for 3 local volunteer driver programs
5. Create some form of “community billboard” for coordinating the 3 volunteer driver programs
6. Pursue local charities and businesses to contribute financially to a coordinated volunteer driver programs
7. Encourage and support RM Ste Anne and RM LaBroquerie to achieve Age-Friendly designation.
8. Update the June 2024 document titled Transportation Options for Seniors to include the SouthEast Cancer Support Services

Appendices

1. 5-year summary 2019-2023 transportation provided by Seine River Services for Seniors
2. Transportation Options for Seniors in Town of Ste Anne & RMs Ste Anne and LaBroquerie. June 2024