



July 4, 2017

Dear Honourable Minister of Justice, Jody Wilson-Raybould and Honourable Minister of Transport, Marc Garneau:



We are writing to you in regards to actions by a provincial government that have national implications. We are encouraging your government to take action on this issue, as we believe the Government of Saskatchewan is unfairly making cutbacks in critical public services that put women's lives and well being at risk.



The Saskatchewan government has closed down the only public transportation system that services people outside of cities – the Saskatchewan Transportation Company (STC). Saskatchewan has a high population – 35.6% - living in rural and remote areas and this makes the closure particularly harsh. The implications of this cut for women are serious and extend beyond provincial jurisdiction. For example, the possibility of another Highway of Tears in Saskatchewan is very real when women, without accessibility or choice, are forced to hitchhike because they have no other alternative. The links between public transportation and missing and murdered Indigenous women have been made in British Columbia (BC). On the Highway of Tears in BC, between 18 and 50 Indigenous women went missing or were murdered, and public transportation was recommended in several studies as a major way to eliminate the barriers to safety for women. The Northern BC route finally received public transportation services this month.

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/a-long-time-coming-highway-of-tears-gets-2-new-bus-routes-1.4166749> A human rights complaint has been filed by an Indigenous women on this issue.

There is increased hitchhiking in Northern Saskatchewan since STC closed at the end of May. This corresponds with a study from University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) that linked hitchhiking along the Highway of Tears in BC to a lack of public transportation <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/b-c-highway-of-tears-study-polls-hitchhikers-habits-1.2653808> . Along with the closure of intra-provincial public transportation in Saskatchewan and despite rhetoric to the contrary, no private companies have applied to offer public services in the North. The looming disaster is unconscionable in a time of public reconciliation and, particularly, if the government is paying heed to the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous women (MMIW). The Saskatchewan government, however, is disinterested in the link between MMIW and accessibility of transportation. Indeed,



when this issue was raised in the Legislature of Saskatchewan by Metis MLA, Buckley Belanger, the Speaker closed down debate (see p 2577 in Handsard, May 18, 2017).

As national and provincial women's organizations, we want you to know that we are taking the closure of this service very seriously. We believe it disproportionately harms women, and particularly, marginalized women. For example, the 2015-2016 STC Annual Report showed that over 60% of STC users were women and over 70% were marginalized.

Saskatchewan's domestic abuse rate is twice the national average and it also has one of the highest rates of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada. The Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan (PATHS) links the high rates of domestic violence and the need for public transportation particularly in rural areas where rates of violence are among the highest. The director of PATHS called STC a lifeline for rural women and said that without it, the consequences will be disastrous

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/paths-domestic-violence-june-1-1.4141284>

The 2012 Statistics Canada disability statistics demonstrated that 1 in 5 people with disabilities use public transportation [http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2015001-eng.htm - a8](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2015001-eng.htm#a8). The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code recognizes the right to equal transportation for people with disabilities. The fact that there are no transportation services for people with disabilities outside of cities in Saskatchewan demands federal attention when a provincial government consistently disregards this human right.

We recommend the following:

- That immediate attention be placed on the current public transportation in Saskatchewan and that violations both legal and ethical be publicly scrutinized and condemned, as appropriate;
- That you seriously consider working with Members of Parliament representing ridings in Saskatchewan in securing changes to the criteria to access federal infrastructure funds, which would allow Saskatchewan to access monies for intra-provincial infrastructure development; and
- That the federal government intervene in the name of reconciliation, equality, and human rights to rectify the situation of public transportation access in Saskatchewan.

We also realize that similar situations may be faced in other provinces, such as Manitoba with the closure of passenger rails in the North, and we immediately ask

that attention be placed on austerity policies that demonstrate disregard and disrespect for the lives of people living in remote locations. Canada 150 should include this basic respect. We would appreciate consultation with your offices on this serious issue.

Sincerely,



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Cc:

Honourable Maryam Monsef, Minister of Status of Women
Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Indigenous Affairs and Northern Development
Honourable Ralph Goodale, Minister of Public Safety
Honourable Amarjeet Sohi, Minister of Infrastructure and Communities
Honourable Carla Qualtrough, Minister of Persons with Disabilities
Honourable Tina Beaudry-Mellor, Minister for Social Services and Status of Women,
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MMIW Inquiry