

## Moving Ahead on Rural and Community Transportation Blog Post by Laura Schreiner

*How can rural communities make public and community transportation work?*

This was the question on everyone's mind at our recent forum, Moving Ahead on Rural and Community Transportation, on March 29, 2016 in Sutton Ontario. Over 100 participants from municipal governments and organizations, NGOs, private transportation companies, and the provincial government came together to share experiences from rural communities across Ontario and beyond.



Figure 1 Cathy Wilkinson of Routes Community Connections addresses the forum.

Transportation is a major point of discussion in Ontario these days, but the public conversation is often tilted towards the transportation issues of our larger urban areas. Rural areas, meanwhile, have unique transportation challenges and needs. How do youth, seniors, and those who do not drive move around our communities? How do those without vehicles access the health and other services they require? How do we fund, maintain, and promote the community transportation services we wish to have?

Moving Ahead turned the spotlight onto rural transportation challenges, as well as the approaches Ontario communities are taking to address them. Co-hosted by ROI, [Routes Connecting Communities](#), and [Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition](#), the day's agenda explored rural and community transportation issues through keynote presentations, break-out discussion groups, and plenty of opportunities for networking. Key transportation themes considered included:

- **Building community support** – demonstrating the need/making the case
- **Collaboration and partnership building** – managing different mandates
- **Revenue generation and funding** – traditional and innovative approaches
- **Marketing and promotion** – of new or existing transportation services

- **Technology** – software, procurement, etc.

In a particularly well-received presentation, a panel of speakers from three areas demonstrated how similar and how different rural transportation can be. Panelists Rick Williams ([of Muskoka Extended Transit \(MET\)/The Corridor 11 Bus](#)), Heather Inwood-Montrose (of [TROUT](#)), and Brad Smith (of [Ride Norfolk](#)) shared their experiences with transportation in their own communities. While they have found very different target markets to date, ranging from seniors to youths and cyclists, all emphasized the need for collaboration, strong communication and community support, and the challenges of funding programs.

The day also included a welcome announcement from the Ontario Ministry of Transportation: the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry and the ROI to support further rural and community transportation networking events this year. As the Moving Ahead forum made abundantly clear, there is a wealth of knowledge on transportation in Ontario's rural communities, and a tremendous opportunity to share experiences and strategies between regions. ROI looks forward to partnering with the Ministry on this project as it unfolds. Stay tuned to our website for news, or email Norm Ragetlie at [nragetlie@ruralontarioinstitute.ca](mailto:nragetlie@ruralontarioinstitute.ca) to be added to the networking mailing list.

Special thanks to the venue, [The Link](#) – a new community-creative hub housed in a repurposed public school in Sutton. Thanks also to Georgina Trades Training Inc. ([GTTI](#)) for [serving the](#) delicious lunch [catered by Cori's Cafe \(www.coriscafe.com\)](#).



Figure 2 Attendees included representatives of municipal governments and organizations, NGOs, private transportation companies, and the provincial government.



Figure 3 Panelists Rick Williams, Heather Inwood-Montrose, and Brad Smith share their experiences.







Figure 4 Lisa Tolentino of Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition introduces the break-out group discussion activity.



Figure 5 Breakout groups discuss the five key transportation themes of the day.



Figure 6 Jeannie Lee of the Ontario Ministry of Transportation announces funding for rural and community transportation networking events throughout the year.