



Hon. Omar Alghabra
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario,
Canada
K1A 0A6

June 21, 2021

Re: Building an affordable and national public transportation system

Dear Minister Alghabra,

We are writing today as a concerned provincial coalition of YWCAs who serve more than 50,000 women, girls and gender diverse people across Ontario. Many of us provide crucial services in communities outside of urban centres where we witness, firsthand, the impacts of rural isolation.

When Greyhound Canada announced in May that it will permanently cease operations in Canada, we worried first and foremost about the women who will be placed at higher risk of physical and economic harm without access to reliable, affordable transportation.

When a woman is experiencing gender-based violence, she is already severely isolated. Options are even further restricted for women who live in rural areas, who face greater risk of violence, and are unable to travel to a town in which there are greater economic opportunities. Lack of access to transportation, like intercity buses, makes both of these situations worse. In 2018, when Greyhound ended its service in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and much of British Columbia, the Native Women's Association of Canada warned that "the lack of safe transportation in and out of communities creates more vulnerability for Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people by encouraging travellers to resort to less safe means of transportation such as hitch hiking or walking unsafe highways.¹" The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls inquiry report released the following year also highlighted a lack of transportation as a serious safety concern.

Ontario has already moved forward with plans to deregulate the intercommunity bus sector and dissolve the Ontario Highway Transport Board, opening up the market for private companies. This has essentially disincentivized bus companies, like Greyhound, from servicing routes in rural communities with smaller populations because those routes are not profitable. While this latest development comes as no surprise, it underscores the urgent need for federal government intervention: Rural transit is

¹ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/greyhound-backstop-rural-routes-1.4741589>

crucial to both economic and physical safety for women in this province. We urgently need a nationally funded plan for transit.

We are proud to have a federal government that self-identifies as feminist, committed to applying an intersectional lens to all of its policymaking. However, any national action plan on gender-based violence or on MMIWG must address rural poverty and isolation and the key role access to affordable transportation plays in mitigating these effects.

In the same way child care provides social infrastructure that will fuel the economic and social well-being of Canada's women and our economy at large, access to transportation between rural communities and cities is the missing link to ensuring safety and economic security for women fleeing violence.

Your government has shown great courage in its commitment to a just recovery. Ensuring equitable and safe access to transportation would be an important part of this commitment.

We look forward to working with you on this.

Sincerely,

Ontario YWCA Coalition

- YWCA Hamilton
- YWCA Cambridge
- YWCA Sudbury
- YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin
- YWCA Niagara Region
- YWCA Muskoka
- YWCA Toronto
- YWCA Durham
- YWCA Kitchener-Waterloo

Cc:

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