



2012 COMMUNITY EXCELLENCE AWARDS
Category Worksheet

PARTNERSHIPS

Name of Local Government:

Regional District Central Kootenay
Regional District Kootenay Boundary
City of Nelson

Project/Program Title:

Integration of West Kootenay Transit Services

Project Summary Paragraph

Transit in the West Kootenay Region has evolved significantly. Smaller systems which were predominantly initiated to service those with mobility issues to medical appointments have become relied upon services to get to work and run errands in nearby larger communities. As the needs of riders have changed so have their expectations. This has resulted in increased demand on resources and funding. Currently 9 individual operating agreements exist with BC Transit to deliver transit service in the West Kootenay Area. The Integration of these West Kootenay Transit Services was in response to need for improved services in the region which addressed these changing needs and expectations while addressing the increasing costs to deliver them.

Project Analysis

Please answer the question in 300 words or less in 11 pt Arial font (our judges value directness and brevity). If you experience difficulty answering a particular question, consider the aspects of your program that may relate to the question and show us how they are linked.

1. OBJECTIVE

Please explain the decision-making and thought process behind your decision to take on this initiative.

The delivery of transit has grown to become a significant line item in most municipal budgets. At the same time there are increasing pressures put on local governments to reduce or contain costs. With 9 individual transit service agreements in the West Kootenay region and increasing feedback from riders on the complexity of them, it was felt an opportunity existed to more effectively and efficiently deliver transit. This along with the evolution of transit in the region and the increasing expectations of riders led to the initiative of achieving cooperation among the areas 9 systems.

Staff from the regions' 3 local governments with transit service agreements have worked with BC Transit for over two years on identifying a more effective and efficient method of providing transit in the region. With the confidence that improvements and efficiencies can be achieved through integration, staff created a Terms of Reference for the West Kootenay Transit Committee with the purpose of making recommendations to the 3 local governments on major transit decisions and issues.

2. CHALLENGES

Please provide examples of challenges you faced in taking on this program/project and how you overcame them.

As 3 local governments representing several rural areas and municipalities with their own unique needs and interests, the greatest challenge has been establishing trust in the benefits of integration and seemingly giving up control of their system.

To overcome this, numerous meetings have taken place among local government staff and BC Transit over the past two years to gain a better understanding of the benefits and best ways forward. To address these challenges lots of information to and consultation with locally elected officials took place on the benefits of integration. Throughout the process presentations were made to each of the local governments leading to a final presentation on a proposal for integration at the AKBLG AGM in Trail on April 19th, 2012.

Additionally it was agreed that the committee should initially be established for the purpose of making recommendations back to local governments effectively leaving the final approval in local hands. However, service priorities such as expansions and regional fare strategies should come from the committee and be in line with the West Kootenay Concept Plan which serves as a guide for the committee decisions.

Success of this approach was realized with all 3 local governments signing off on a MOU for Integration and participation on a regional transit committee. On June 6th the first meeting of the West Kootenay Transit Committee was held and established a partnership among the three local governments to improve transit.

3. BENEFITS

Please provide examples of how this program/project benefited the community.

With all 3 local governments approving the integration of services and the regional committee approving a concept for a new fare structure for the region there are several benefits for both riders and local governments will realize.

Transit riders in the West Kootenays can look forward to a single riders guide with information on getting them anywhere in there region. It will provide them the ability to only pay once and be able to ride on any bus on the region. Scheduling the services as one system will provide better connections those traveling between communities and requiring more than one bus to reach their destination. Ultimately the simplification of the system will support the growth of ridership.

Local governments will see with improved ridership increased cost recovery through fares. Overlapping service hours will be better utilized to expand frequency, coverage and provide some cost savings. Strategic operating contracts will provide the ability to better utilize the existing fleet among the current systems and right size vehicles based on service requirements and capacity constraints. This will first be realized following the RFP of Castlegar and Kootenay Boundary transit systems as one contract and one service area beginning April 1, 2013.

The West Kootenay Transit Committee will also provide a necessary advocate for transit and coordinated efforts for the positive promotion of transit in the region.

4. INNOVATION

Tell us why you consider this project/program to be an innovative and/or creative initiative.

This initiative aimed to find a way to bring coordination of 9 systems each with their own operating contract with BC Transit. This involves a partnership with 2 regional districts and 1 city. It involves a municipal operator, a private operator and a non-profit represented by 3 different unions. Achieving collaboration among all these stakeholders required and still requires a truly innovative approach.

Providing a service which in the eye of the riders is seen as one system but delivered by 3 operators with 3 local government signing partners is innovative and was originally seen as very ambitious.

5. GOALS

What did you set out to accomplish with the program/project? How effectively did you meet your goals?

This initiative set out to achieve cooperation among the areas 9 systems and identify ways to more effectively and efficiently deliver transit regionally.

Cooperation among the 9 systems is demonstrated in the establishment of the West Kootenay Transit Committee. At their first meeting on June 6th a concept for a new regional fare structure was approved further demonstrating their commitment to this regional approach.

Efficiencies have been identified in the West Kootenay Integration Proposal which identifies overlapping services with opportunities to better utilize service hours and/or offer savings.

The effectiveness of integration can be demonstrated by the responses from at open houses held in April and May of this year significantly welcoming a regional fare structure and improved connections.

6. SUSTAINABILITY

What measures have you put in place to ensure the continued operation of this initiative? (*e.g. staff time, resources, financial*)

Each local government has committed to representation on the West Kootenay Transit Committee. This committee is responsible for influencing and approving a long term vision for transit in the region. A great deal of consideration went into the appropriate level of representation on the committee which will support the long term commitment to the sustainability of transit in the region.

Thinking regionally first ahead of in some cases local priorities is a commitment made by participating in a Regional Transit Committee. Transit priorities including expansions are vetted through the transit committee before recommendations are made to local governments for final approval. In doing so many efficiencies can be found in overlapping services and a significantly improved experience for transit users in the region.

A key objective of the upcoming service changes is to work within the scope of existing service hours. Identifying first the efficiencies within the existing pool of combined service hours to provide enhanced service levels before expansion is requested will support the financial sustainability of the system. Additionally, viewing the system through strategic

operational zones will allow the greatest opportunity for cost containment of capital assets through improved fleet utilization and providing the appropriate asset for the service.

7. TRANSFERABILITY

How is this program/project transferable to other local governments?

Transit has become a major financial consideration for most local governments. The majority of systems in British Columbia are very small. Finding ways to cooperate regionally and identify efficiencies with bordering systems provides the opportunity to enhance service in the most cost effective way.

The model developed in the West Kootenays allows the local governments to maintain control of their costs while at the same time planning and delivering transit services at a regional level.

8. KNOWLEDGE SHARING

What helpful advice would you share with other communities looking to embark on a similar project?

Ensure all participants in an integrated system realize a benefit from partnering in service delivery and ensure clear communication on the requirements/conditions of doing so. This includes regional prioritization ahead of local initiatives. Think regionally, benefit locally.

There has to be a commitment at the senior staff and at a political level to keep a focus on rider. Once this is established as a clear objective then how this is delivered can evolve. In the West Kootenay partnership this gave BC Transit the latitude to schedule the system as one even though there are different operators and funding partners. Local governments had committed to work through the funding model after the delivery model had been determined, this avoided putting limitations on how the system could best be structured to meet the needs of the riders and to be delivered the most costs effectively.

9. TELL US MORE

Please share any other information you think may help us better understand your submission.

The West Kootenays has a very complex delivery system for transit. Nine different operating agreements; three different operators, local governments and unions. Each system has evolved differently over time, for example Nelson has delivered transit services for over 100 years, whereas others have only recently moved from a para-transit system to a scheduled service.

Schedules loosely meshed but there were gaps where it was very difficult for a person to get from the regional hospital in Trail to Nelson or even from the community college in Castlegar back to Trail. Each local government with an operating agreement was responsible for their own fleet, finding an operator etc. Costs were escalating as fleet replacements were coming up, transit costs were becoming a larger and larger part of local governments' budgets.

The whole system needed to be reworked and a new delivery model was needed. It was through exceptional leadership from BC transit working in conjunction with the local governments that the new delivery model was established.

10. PARTNERS

a.) Please list all the partners involved in this initiative.

- a. City of Nelson
- b. Regional District of Central Kootenay
- c. Regional District of Kootenay Boundary
- d. BC Transit

b.) Why did you choose to work with this/these particular partner(s)?

Geographically this area is already integrated regionally through medical services, post secondary education and major employers. There is a great deal to be gained by recognizing this connection and ensuring cooperation in regional services connecting these communities such as transit.

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