



**Name of Organization:** Westside Seniors Hub

**Program:** Transportation Initiative

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### **What happened last year?**

Back in early 2021, the Westside Seniors Hub contacted Better Environmentally Sound Transportation (BEST) Seniors' Transportation Coordinator Janet McIntosh about their seniors' transport survey and van-sharing challenges. They wanted information on what model programs WSH partners could use to share vans for outings, and they also wanted to explore public transit challenges and solutions. They knew many rental bus companies had folded during the pandemic, and vans owned by groups like ASK had been idle. They knew the need for group transport was possible and wanted to get to the bottom of how to make that a reality.

WSH hosted a special meeting to discuss the possibilities. The meeting featured distinguished guests like the Executive Directors from ASK and the South Granville Seniors Centre, Strategic Initiatives Planner Bev Pitman from the United Way, and Dale Lutes, Transportation Committee Co-Chair with the city's Seniors Advisory Committee. Prior to the meeting, Westside Seniors Hub members asked all parties to reflect on the transportation challenges their clients faced and come prepared to discuss.

At the meeting, the group collectively offered suggestions for improvement both to the bus system and van-sharing programs. Some of the bus suggestions included adding drop-off zones and accessible public washrooms close to stops; revisiting stop locations with the idea of aging in place and access to health care in mind; rethinking "bus balancing" efforts to ensure seniors are prioritized; increasing geo mapping and the consideration of crosswalks, street lighting, traffic calming, and benches. Van-sharing efforts needed to be reconsidered and reorganized, as well after the pandemic shifted things drastically, and resources needed to be leveraged more effectively through cross-organizational coordination.

Lastly, the group outlined the myriad reasons that taking all of this into consideration was so crucial, including helping people with dementia feel safe and empowered when getting around in their own communities. They made specific recommendations on how to effect concrete change.

### **Challenges and Opportunities:**

The greatest challenge to ride-sharing programming of late has been the pandemic and all the financial hardship to transport businesses (and the economy in general) it has caused. When buses and van-sharing programs are banned from offering rides to senior citizens, they stop running. That limits mobility and a sense of freedom to these groups of people who have, statistically-speaking, been one of the demographic groups hardest hit by the drastic effects of social isolation. The opportunity now is to build out and collaborate on ways to revive ride sharing and bus system accessibility that take senior citizens' needs and priorities into consideration more carefully.

### **What's envisioned going forward into next year:**

The Westside Seniors Council's hope is that partners who identify with the issues raised at this meeting will use the power of the WSH coalition and its partner network to explore solutions and find resources to demonstrate the impact those solutions can have on the wider community. They plan to continue efforts to effect change in this arena. While the Hub continues to explore opportunities, one concrete initiative that's arisen out of this conversation is to mount a public awareness campaign about dementia on local buses. Using messaging developed out of the Hub's Soundbytes initiative, the Hub is spearheading the creation of 250 placards that will be placed on local Translink buses. The aim of the campaign is to raise awareness and combat stigma about dementia, and in order to lever the impact of the campaign each poster placard will have a QR code that links to a wider range of resources on dementia.