

Missing the Bus: Public Transportation in Charlottetown

by Erin FAGAN

A number of public transportation initiatives have been developing recently in Charlottetown. The implications of these projects could be of significant interest to UPEI students and the way they get around.

Currently, there is a privately-based one-bus transit operation, maintained by Trius, which receives a subsidy from the City of Charlottetown. A chief complaint with this system is of a severe lack of information on the schedule of this bus.

"The information out there is very, very vague ... it's just terrible," says Mapus student Millie Trainor, who is now campaigning to have UPEI included as a stop for the bus.

Trainor has been working to have a meeting set up with City Councillor Mitch Tweel within this month, in the hopes that the bus will be mandated, "to go around the loop, to the AVC and the library." So far, Trainor has obtained very little information.

"It's just in limbo ... We still don't know, it's up really to city hall." Trainor believes that the company may have concerns about any increased costs involved in changing the route and schedule.

"They used to go to the campus, but students wouldn't use it," she says, adding, "If we do accomplish this, I hope students will use it."

One fourth-year student, Gordon Knowles, stated that, "It would be stupid not to include UPEI," and expressed that he would use that service if it was available to get downtown from the campus and back. Another student, who lives in a rural area and has his own car, doubted that he would need this route but noted that his brother lives twenty-five minutes away from campus.

"He must walk or take a cab, and it gets expensive ... a bus would be great for him, if it was only early enough [in the morning] for him."

"I am disturbed by the lack of [public transportation] in

Charlottetown ... it's one of the areas that should definitely be addressed."

Advocacy groups have been attempting to address this issue, seeking to achieve a far more public system of bussing throughout the city and its amalgamated communities.

The Transportation Initiative to Reduce Emissions (T.I.R.E.), operating under the Environmental Coalition of P.E.I., has an extensive collection of research and information at the website www3.istas.net/~ecopei. This group has become concerned by the environmental consequences of not having this system in place.

"P.E.I.'s residential greenhouse gas emissions per person are higher than the national average, with each Islander producing, on average, 8.4 tonnes of GHGs."

-Eco-PEI Website

According to the website, "P.E.I.'s residential greenhouse gas emissions per person are higher than the national average, with each Islander producing, on average, 8.4 tonnes of GHGs. As of 1997, 29 percent of CO2 emissions (1,420,000 tons) came from personal travel, and 21.5 percent from commercial transport. 80 percent of vehicles are single occupancy (S.O.V.)."

The website also reports that, "Generally, it has been found that the lack of transportation keeps many of the unemployed or under employed from getting to where jobs and education opportunities are."

In promoting the cause, the site also includes these factors: the costs of owning or of running one (or more) cars, potential government savings such as through eliminating, "the need for construction of parkades,"



A bus stop. Kind of.

and the support for seniors, the disabled and students.

One proposed idea has been that of "para-transit": public transportation through the existing approximately eighty taxis of Charlottetown or through a fleet of mini-vans, booked through a central dispatcher, and having fixed destinations with the option of transfers. This could be accomplished, the website states, through an estimated \$185,000 subsidy and a approximately 55 cent per ride rate. This plan is currently operating in British Columbia centres.

David MacKay, with the Public Transportation Coalition, co-wrote a recent article in the Summer 2001 publication of Eco-News, describing the popular movement. In the process, he reports, there have been "roadblocks ... conflicting moves by municipal, federal and provincial officials, and new initiatives by governments to expand the Island's car-centred transportation system."

The article cites Transport 2000 findings that 30 percent of Islanders lack automobile transportation. This number goes up to about 40 percent when those under the age of sixteen are factored in.

Since the 1970s, according to the article, agencies and consultants (Transport Canada, Charlottetown

Area Regional Planning Board), and other committees have drawn up "detailed plans and/or have recommended public transportation at least in the Charlottetown area."

"I saw seniors crawling over snowbanks this past winter"

-David MacKay

The current campaign began in 1997 with "The Freedom to Move" conference, which examined negative impacts of the gap in public transportation while making comparisons with similar Island infrastructures. Apparently, this research concluded that, "PEI is unique in offering no [province]-wide public transportation."

In Spring, 2000, a provincial government study titled "A Place To Stay" recommended that a public transportation system for the Island be developed.

By Fall 2000, Eco-PEI had "picked up the torch," with fourteen different community groups entering a coalition. The speech from the throne that year had "revealed plans for a thorough study of the economic and social benefits of public transportation, and how it could be developed