

November 3, 2023

Honourable Minister Rob Fleming
Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure
PO Box 9055 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

Via Email: minister.transportation@gov.bc.ca

Dear Minister Fleming,

I want to begin by thanking you for your outstanding performance in your role as Transportation Minister and former role as Minister of Education. I am writing to you today looking for your support on addressing challenges we are currently facing in our attempts to provide affordable, safe transportation to our residents.

In June 2016, the Kimta Transportation Group Society incorporated under the BC Society Act. One of the main drivers of this project was the need to provide safe, affordable transportation for students wishing to travel to sporting events. The Kimta Transportation Society spent the next number of years fundraising and establishing partnerships in the community to offset the purchase of a community bus and in August 2020, Kimta purchased a 24-passenger bus with accommodation for two wheelchairs. The bus is available for use to any organization in the region including the McLeod Lake Indian Band. Kimta has kept fees as low as possible to remove the financial barrier for clubs and organizations while maintaining a positive bottom line. It is utilized both in the community and for out-of-town travel and has transported students, sport teams, seniors, elders and tourists visiting Mackenzie.

The positive impact on our community with the addition of a community bus spurred the Kimta Transportation Society to address our next transportation challenge which was regular shuttle service between Mackenzie and Prince George. Mackenzie is a small rural community of 3,700 residents located 185 km north of Prince George. Due to our size, residents must travel to Prince George to access basic medical services such as dentists and optometrists and medical specialists. Options for residents without vehicles who require travel to Prince George are:

- Utilize the Northern Health Bus which travels to Prince George and back to Mackenzie each Wednesday. Although this a benefit, it is unrealistic to assume every resident in Mackenzie requiring out of town medical appointments would be able to book those appointments on a Wednesday.

- Our second alternative is the BC Bus North which travels to Prince George on Tuesdays with a return on Thursday; or travel to PG on Friday with a return on Monday. This requires residents to remain in Prince George for two to three nights.

In response to the need for daily shuttle service to Prince George, the Kimta Group applied to Northern Development Initiative Trust (NDIT) for grant funding under "The Northern Community Shuttle Program" to operate a shuttle service to Prince George. In April 2022 we received funding from NDIT to purchase a 7 Seat Sienna Hybrid minivan and assistance with operating expenses for 3 years. Kimta in turn partnered with our newly established Taxi Service in the community who provide properly trained and certified drivers for the shuttle service. This service again was welcomed by the community and has seen continued usage particularly during the winter months when driving conditions can be challenging. The Shuttle Service also provides service to McLeod Lake and Bear Lake.

As you can appreciate, although this service currently meets the needs of our community, it is becoming increasingly challenging to cover operating expenses. To ensure this transportation option is maintained, our specific asks are:

- 1) Lobby the Passenger Transportation Board to provide a variance for Kimta to be exempt from fees to register with the Board. Not for profits, municipalities, Bands and private companies are not required to be registered with the board, unless the not for profit is primarily engaged in transportation. This requirement costs Kimta approximately \$1,000 per year for inspections and licensing. I understand regulations are in place to ensure safety of users, but this is another added expense for the Kimta Transportation Society.
- 2) We are also seeking long term financial support from the Province of BC to subsidize the daily shuttle to Prince George. The Kimta Transportation Society currently faces losses each month to keep the rates affordable. Kimta has committed to providing this service to our community even if only one passenger books a seat. Shuttle users have grown to include more than people attending medical appointments. It also provides residents the opportunity to access services not available locally such as Notaries and Lawyers.

By providing provincial funding for passenger and transportation services in our community, we can enhance the overall well-being of our residents, strengthen our communities, and contribute to the economic development of the region.

We kindly request that you consider our request to address these challenges effectively. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Kind Regards,



Mayor Joan Atkinson
District of Mackenzie

Cc: Mark Robillard, Chairperson, Kimta Transportation Society