Carefree Society Accessible Tourism – Pilot Project Concept: Carefree Service

July 29, 2024

The Carefree Society (Carefree, the Society) is a non-profit organization located in Prince George, BC, on Lheidli T'enneh's ancestral lands. Carefree has been collaboratively delivering custom transit services – accessible and inclusive transportation - in the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George for over 50 years.

In 2023, the Carefree Society ceased being the HandyDart service provider in Prince George due to the amalgamation of services under one RFP. Now, with an accessible and inclusive transportation lens, Carefree has set out to assess gaps and opportunities, by engaging community: seniors and disability services organizations, all levels of government, and community stakeholders.

It is critical that we continue to participate in activities that support wellness – the act of attaining better physical and mental health outcomes. In line with legislation, the spirit and intent of accessibility and inclusion means low or no barriers to access and participation in activities that promote wellness. Carefree Society's concept and plan is to collaboratively deliver a destination-based service in and around Prince George. The *Carefree Service* concept is focused on supporting seniors and persons with disabilities to access destinations in nature, or for other recreational, cultural, or heritage purposes in support of their *wellness* needs. The Carefree Service will include:

- 1. An exceptional community-based accessible and inclusive transportation service, beginning with 1 to 2 full shifts of service weekly.
- 2. A specialized support service delivery model, partnering with service agencies to facilitate, that riders receive support services specific to their needs, with service values that are respectful, holistic, trauma-informed, harm-reduction focused, and culturally appropriate.
- 3. Destinations that meet specific accessibility and wellness criteria, including not duplicating existing accessible transportation efforts,
- 4. Serving Prince George and area residents.

There is a great need for this Service, and the Carefree Society has a proven track record to effectively deliver effective accessible and inclusive transportation. The need is demonstrated through our community's voice today, as well as an increasing trend in the numbers of persons with disabilities of all types, vulnerable populations in general, and seniors populations. Also, with caregiver burnout on the rise, the Carefree Service will benefit riders and support workers.

The Carefree Society is engaging and sharing knowledge from every direction, ensuring that we learn how to best deliver the Carefree Service and will continually improve it to best serve the local community and our partners. It is critical to innovate right now to support our community's social and wellness objectives, and provide time to plan this needed service to begin delivering it in the 2025/2026 fiscal year. Carefree will also work with government partners to ensure that related physical and service infrastructure is achievable for chosen destinations.

The Carefree Society is seeking support in principle and financial support to deliver the Carefree Service in partnership.

Thank you for your consideration and support.

Carefree Service: Accessible & Inclusive Transportation Project / Operational Overview

Provided to the City of Prince George for consideration of support by City Council.

The Carefree Society (the Society or Carefree) supports and delivers community-based accessible and inclusive, specialized transportation services. The Society previously operated the HandyDart program until August 2023. The Carefree Society has been planning to re-establish its accessible and inclusive transportation services while continuing to engage community to best deliver and support custom transit services in and around Prince George.

The proposed project, the *Carefree Service*, will initially include destinations- (excursion) and special events-based accessible and inclusive transportation services. The Carefree Society is targeting delivery of the Carefree Service no later than mid-2025.

An application is being made to the myPG Community Grant. The Carefree Society is requesting funding, whether through the myPG grant and/or through alternative approval.

The Carefree Society is seeking the City of Prince George's financial support to develop and deliver the Carefree Service. as well as support in collaborating to deliver this service across jurisdictions.¹

The Carefree Society will continue to serve seniors, people living with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, and anyone that is currently under- or un-served by existing transit services and supports – that reside both inside and outside of City limits. In the spirit of diminishing barriers to service, the Carefree Service is aligning itself with the principles of the Accessible BC Act: inclusion, adaptability, diversity, collaboration, self-determination, as well as universal design², with a view to articulating criteria for the application of these principles in the development and delivery of the Service.

The Carefree Service will consist of destinations (or excursions, which are identified locations, amenities or services) connecting people to nature, recreation, heritage and culture. Out of town destinations (or excursions) are to include Ancient Forest /Chun T'oh Whudujut Park, potentially Barkerville Historic Town and Park, and other rider preferred destinations.

Some of the in and around Prince George destinations identified include, for example, Cottonwood Island Park, Lheidli T'enneh Memorial Park, Huble Homestead, Wilkins Park,

1

¹ Ideally, support for the Society collaborating with the City of PG, Regional District of Fraser-Fort George, Lheidli T'enneh, other area partners, and BC Transit, MLA, etc. would be most beneficial in achieving the Society's objectives.

² Designing with people to embed inclusion.

and others. Local event venues are also being identified.³ Carefree will determine how direct transportation needs can be supported, in collaboration with current service providers, without duplicating services.

The Carefree Society initially drafted a brief summary dated July 29, 2024, entitled: Accessible Tourism – Pilot Project Concept: Carefree Service. *(attached* shared with City staff earlier) to introduce the Carefree Service concept.

Important elements of the Carefree Service include the health and wellness benefits of accessing nature, as well as recreational, heritage and cultural services and amenities.

The Carefree Society is:

- Engaging, and will be influenced by key partnerships (ie. Non-profit societies, Lheidli T'enneh), collaboratively exploring where to best develop scheduling and routes to demanded destinations, where peak demand frequency, after-hours and statutory holiday service, and people being outside of City limits, are barriers to service,
- flexible and adaptive to needs, as community feedback will keep continuously improving the service,
- to provide at least 20 hours of weekly service initially, and increasing services by year two, contingent on an approved budget, that is fully funded through grants, sponsorship / fundraising, and fees, as applicable,
- facilitating a holistic support program.

Riders will include people that Carefree reaches through engagement leading up to and after operating start up within City limits, which includes existing HandyDart riders.

Many individuals and advocates have come forward to note the gaps in custom transit in Prince George's peripheral areas. There is opportunity to support existing services, while future custom transit is planned (See Future Transit Plan).⁴

The Carefree Society is consulting the City of Prince George, Lheidli T'enneh First Nation, and various community partners, in innovative ways of delivering an accessible and inclusive destination based service that serves to bring the community and the greater area of Prince George together.

The Carefree Service is principled on:

- removing barriers to access, to strive for full and equal participation for all, addressing factors that act to marginalize and alienate potential service users (eg. Levels and type of

³ For a broader list of destinations, see Survey attached.

⁴ At this time, any service that is not specifically destinations based is beyond the base level of service noted herein, but may result in additional service arrangements.

training for staff, focusing on a positive experience for all, reaching out to identify and connect with people that are not using existing services, inclusive evaluation mechanisms, etc.).

- being accessible in terms of physical- space, equipment and supports, and a service that is flexible, adaptable and inclusive.
- aligning with universal design principles in the development of the service.

As significant resources are needed to deliver the Carefree Service model, the Service will include a one vehicle transportation service initially (7-14 passenger vehicle). Related supports needed to effectively deliver this service include:

- Assessment resource,
- Driver duties,
- Physical supports to and from home or pick up point, to respective destination,
- First aid/ acute supports,
- Mental health and spiritual support,
- Social supports,
- Educational / Tour guide.⁵

The Carefree Service will also include Special Events transportation arranged through key non-profit society partners. These events-based services will be arranged outside of the base level of scheduled routes and service hours.

As related or other areas of accessible transportation service need are identified, the Carefree Society will work with partners to best support service improvements and enhancements.⁶

PROJECT RATIONALE:

Engagement and Surveying

As of early 2024, the Carefree Society has embarked on engaging community seniors and disability service sectors, and continuing to explore gaps in accessible and inclusive transportation, with a view to establishing its role moving forward. This engagement has included the City, Regional District, BC Transit, and Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure. This has led to proposing the Carefree Service, as the most viable service

⁵ The supports provided as part of the program are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and will be facilitated by the Society in partnership to ensure appropriate and effective delivery of the Carefree Service.

⁶ For example, existing custom transit service gaps, Northern Health input, or other current service providers, as applicable.

gap for a small scale restart, while continuing to engage and collaborate with community to support the Carefree Service, and the accessibility of transportation in general.⁷

There is much evidence to support the health and wellness benefits of getting into nature, and for recreational, cultural and heritage related activities. For example, connecting with nature can support mental health, lowering depression and anxiety.

Surveyed community members (identifying as persons with disabilities, seniors, other people marginalized by, or recognizing gaps in, services) have expressed that destination excursions are important because they value nature, social inclusion, social connection, and getting out and reducing isolation.⁹

Surveying so far shows that the Ancient Forest /Chun T'oh Whudujut Park and Barkerville Historic Town and Park are two of the most desired out of town destinations to visit. There are various in- and around-Prince George destinations – parks and venues, some of which were noted above.

Accessibility & Inclusion

The Accessible BC Act lays out principles of accessibility: inclusion, adaptability, diversity, collaboration, and self-determination. The framework for designing services includes people that currently use, or would benefit from, utilizing the services. The services are being designed to ensure access, understanding and use of the services to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability. This universal design principle ensures a service that can adapt to all needs in terms of all aspects of the service.

The distribution of people across Prince George into rural areas reflects the need for community-based transportation, health and social service solutions. Under- and unserved people are being identified but further steps will be taken to identify and engage prospective riders. Some of the area population demographics are noted below to try to quantify and further explain the need for the Carefree Service.

Populations & Demographics:

Despite not having many Prince George specific statistics on hand (yet), as the population of people living with a disability in BC has been increasing, from 24.7% in 2017 to 28.6% in 2022, we can infer that almost 25,000 people in the Prince George census agglomeration are people living with a disability. This is closer to 22,000 within

⁷ Over 50 stakeholder entities were identified and contacted initially (eg. Council of Seniors, Northern Health, AimHi, Lheidli T'enneh, UNBC, and many other seniors and disability service organizations).

⁸ A short annotated bibliography is available relating to accessible transportation and accessing nature.

⁹ Based on surveying conducted in 2022, and continued August 2024 onward.

City limits if we can infer that the rate is the same between City limits and the Metro area. Factors to consider later include income and affordability, poverty (and approaches to identifying marginalized people through partners), and that the prevalence of people identified as living with disabilities may still be growing.

The seniors (65+) population of Prince George was 12,390 or over 16% in 2021 and may still be growing.¹⁰

Transportation Service – Accessibility & Inclusion

We know that HandyDart continues to serve a pre-Covid ridership of around 1,500 riders. Covid has had impacts on people not getting out as often, although we have learned that ridership is increasing towards pre-Covid rates.

The Carefree Service is developing a people centred approach to supporting people, based on their specific transportation and related support needs, regardless of whether a person self-identifies as living with a disability. A large proportion of the City's population consists of people living with a disability. Homelessness, poverty, and marginalization of local people, may further exclude people from the census and/or the portion identified as living with a disability. Current custom and conventional transportation services may exclude people based on needing to be at a pick-up or drop off/return location at a certain time, needing service supports that are not available or sufficient (eg. Including not having but being required to or needing accompaniment), not being able to read, listen to or understand a driver, etc. Some of these are systemic issues that cannot easily or readily be resolved within the current transit system.

The Carefree Service will act as an enhancement to existing services, serving existing riders where the current system *does not go there* or cannot go there on a riders terms (late pick up, facilitated supports assigned to riders and while at the destination, exceeding baggage limits, and extending the type of support, *recapturing* riders marginalized by the existing system¹¹ (see support program description), etc. Hence, the population served by the Carefree Service can include existing custom and conventional transit riders, and people to be identified that are in need but do not or cannot use existing services (marginalization, out of City limits,... I.e. People identified as under- or un-served by existing services: of the 22,000 persons identified as living with disabilities, and statistically excluded seniors).

Outside of the City, but within the Census Agglomeration, there are potentially up to 3,000 people identifying as living with disabilities. Even identifying a pool of 500 people

¹⁰ See Statistics Canada and Canadian Survey on Disability (2022).

¹¹ To the extent of understanding their needs (and sharing lessons with existing transit services) and their demand for specific destinations based service.

in the periphery as *potentially* under-served and desiring inclusion in Carefree Services would be capturing an un-served portion of people in need in the periphery.¹²

Further work will be done to identify more closely the people that need a custom, specialized form of transportation outside of City limits.¹³ This is all prior to considering Lheidli T'enneh specific needs and initiatives.¹⁴

Various custom transit gaps have been identified within and outside of Prince George. Understanding that there are municipal and provincial responsibilities, Carefree Society will continue to meet with government and stakeholders to best support improvement of services, whether in a planning, advisory or delivery capacity.

Some key gaps identified include:

- after hours or on statutory holidays,
- during peak hours,
- in the periphery outside of City limits, and
- pick up from, Eg. medical appointments or airport.
- stressful, confusing and anxiety-inducing application processes.
- City infrastructure (curb stops cutting, snow clearance, etc.)¹⁵
- Inter-community accessible transportation, remote.

The Carefree Society would like to engage City staff (including the Advisory Committee on Accessibility and Inclusion) to discuss City and Committee roles, and related accountabilities towards continuously improving existing services.

PROJECT DETAILS:

Routes / Scheduling:

¹² Before considering people unserved beyond the Prince George area.

¹³ Noting that community associations in other electoral districts may highlight additional needs to be assessed. Lheidli T'enneh has an interest in getting people to the Ancient Forest. Seasonal visitors exceed 12,000 visits (vehicles) annually. The accessibility of this and other destinations is being reviewed, including recent studies on specific accessibility criteria for nature spaces.

¹⁴ In contact with Lheidli T'enneh. Pending discussion regarding potential partnership opportunities.

¹⁵ Additional information can be shared.

The Carefree Service will provide:

Door-to-door pick up and drop off service,

Base operation includes 20+ (base service) to 40 hours of service (initially estimated as half in-community and half out-of-community.

- 1-2 trips out of town (5-10 hours) every 1-2 weeks¹⁶,
- 2-3 days per week of in (and around) community-destination service (flexible scheduling).¹⁷

Additional Special Event/Group transportation will be arranged based on specific preplanned bookings. 18

Destinations / Locations:

Although destinations for initial service have not been formally selected, out of town destinations should include the Ancient Forest, and other Regional District of Fraser-Fort George destinations, as well as Barkerville, and other destinations that may fall outside of these boundaries. ¹⁹

In town destinations routes may include multiple stops. To be reviewed with the City, BC Transit, HandyDart, and other community partners.

Destinations will be established through engagement and surveying results, and reviewing and/or conducting accessibility assessments for desired destinations.

Seasonality: Rider preferences and winter conditions will influence resulting route scheduling.

¹⁶ Noting that a potential partnership with Lheidli T'enneh would likely increase this frequency within 6-12 months to 1-2 trips per week to the Ancient Forest.

¹⁷ i.e. 50% to 75% of the base schedule will be for in-town services, dependent on seasonal scheduling.

¹⁸ This category is based on specific non-profit society partnerships and sponsored trip to support accessible and inclusive transportation for special events.

¹⁹ The Carefree Service will (continue to) operate within the general vicinity of the Regional District of Fort-George, which includes the Dakelh (Carrier), Secwépemc (Shuswap) and Tse-Khene Peoples. Several First Nations have history and territory in the broader area, including the Lheidli T'enneh, Lhtako Dene, Nazko, Lhoosk'uz, Ulkatcho, ? Esdilagh, Xatśūll, Simpcw, McLeod Lake, and West Moberly.

Operations:

- Vehicle moves 7-14 passengers²⁰ (excluding driver)
- Accommodating minimum of two wheelchairs or scooters
- Flexible vehicle seating configuration
- Access to Service:
 - o Routes / Scheduling established through identified needs.
 - Bookings: Rider list communications (Sample of potential partners and users of services: Lheidli T'enneh First Nation, Council of Seniors, AiMHi, Canadian Mental Health Assocation, Alzheimer's Society, Brain Injured Group, Tourism PG,...).
 - Flexible approach, short notice for in-town services.
 - Support services facilitation: On board support worker.

Support Program:

- The support program (as facilitated by the Carefree Society and its partners) comprises the services to be delivered by staff, and volunteers as/if/where applicable, to support individual needs.
- Services include:
 - Driver delivered supports,
 - Direct accompaniment,
 - Medical First Aid,
 - Mental health, spiritual and social supports,
 - Educational / Tour guide,
 - Partner collaboration to develop and deliver the assessment and support program:
 - assessment criteria, understanding specialized support needs,
 - accompaniment requirements²¹,
 - support worker role,
 - reducing stigma,
 - extending beyond current levels of support generally delivered from/by transportation service providers.

The Support Program model will be holistic, integrated program learning from inclusive assessment tools used by multiple sectors to develop and adopt an appropriate model for the Carefree Service and its diverse ridership.

²⁰ Vehicle selection criteria will be solely based on the most appropriate vehicle for a diverse selection of riders with varying support needs. Accessibility, inclusion, safety and durability will be the foremost criteria used for the pending bid request process.

²¹ Understanding supports to benefit daily living as relating to transportation needs.

- Riders' support services include all interactions with Carefree Society staff inquiring, booking, utilizing the service, and being supported at destination amenities and services.
 - o To be developed in partnership²²,
 - Delivery may include, for example, Lheidli T'enneh support service staff, and various partner supported program resources.

Training & Qualifications: Qualified drivers will be recruited. All staff will be trained, including elements of physical safety, being trauma informed, harm reduction focused, cultural safety, and diversity.

RATES:

Rates will be established in line with initial budgeting.

As fee collection may act as a barrier to accessibility, this will be reviewed to ensure it is not a barrier to use of the Service.

Recoverable fees are seen as being negligible and add to the administration of the program.

Exceptions may be made for specific ancillary service agreements, as/if/where applicable.

Resulting sustainable funding will further shape the rate structure.

PROJECT MILESTONES: Preliminary targets²³

Operational - Procedural / Contractual review	Sep – Dec 2024
Needs Assessment - ongoing	Sep – Dec 2024
Funding Proposals / Sponsorship engagement	Sep – Dec 2024
Partner engagement	Sep 2024 – Mar 2025
Lheidli T'enneh	Oct 2024

²² Further collaboration with Northern Health is anticipated in terms of survey feedback, and also in terms of agency, interest, support for and participation in the Carefree Service facilitating extra community supports for people in need.

²³ Many target dates are flexible and subject to change, subject to funding and partnership arrangements, highlighting that time is of the essence in initiating service delivery.

Northern Health (continuing) Oct - Nov 2024 Survey Collation Oct 2024 -Communications / Website Oct - Dec 2024 Nov 2024 Vehicle quotes / decision Financial plan: Budget revision, strategy adjustments Dec 2024 Sponsorship campaign decision Dec 2024 - Mar 2025 Operations Plan - Service re-development / Org structure Jan – Mar 2025 HR Planning / Recruitment - Coordinator Jan – Mar 2025 Support program development / partnering Jan 2025 -Knowledge collaborations (validation) / report(s) Jan 2025 Funding Proposals – Year 1 Budget Secured Jan - Mar 2025 Operations - Standards / Regulatory review complete Feb 2025 Peer / Stakeholder engagement Feb - Jun 2025 Operations – Booking process established (initial) Mar 2025 Special Events/Group initial partners established Mar 2025 Recruitment - Drivers Mar - May 2025 Staff training program (re)development / delivery Mar – Jun 2025 Vehicle Operations & Maintenance Plan Apr 2025 Collaborative route / destination planning completed Apr 2025 Volunteer program (re)initiated Apr 2025 – Initial prospective riders (list) Jun 2025 Initial route scheduling established Jun 2025 Carefree Service operational Jul – Aug 2025

Oct 2024

BC Transit (continuing)

Carefree Society
CAREFREE SERVICE - PROJECT BUDGET
DRAFT

VERSION 0.97 25-Sep-24

REVISED START UP: Base Budget (20+ hour schedule)

	2024			2025		2026
Expenses	Oct - Dec	Jan - Mar	Apr - Jun	Jul - Sep	Oct - Dec	Jan - Mar
Wages						
- Program planning / mgmt	21600	21600	21600	21600	21600	21600
- Program coordinator		10000	15000	15000	15000	15000
Dispatch				1,500	1,500	1,500
Office / Admin Overhead	5250	5250	5250	5250	5250	5250
Direct vehicle operation:						
Maintenance					600	600
Lease/Buy*			10000	15000	15000	15000
Gas				4550	4550	4550
Insurance				700	700	700
Driver				9100	9100	9100
Software						
Building Maint, Utilities, Insurance	2280	2280	2280	2280	2280	2280
Contingency	870	870	870	870	870	870
Operating Expenses	30,000	40,000	55,000	75,850	76,450	76,450
				Oct 2024 - Sep 2025:		200,850
			Jä	an 2025 - Dec 2025:		247,300
			Apr 2025 - Mar 2026 (fiscal):		283,750	
			А	nnualized base operation:		305,800

Hourly cost of direct service:

Direct vehicle operation:	Hourly	Hours / Wk	Annual		
Year 1	\$ 115	20	119,600	Annualized operating	
Year 2	\$ 100	40	208,000		
Year 3	\$ 80	60	249,600		
Notes: Economies of scale achieved with greater hours of service for base operational structure.					

Proposed sources - draft	October-December	January-March	April-June	July-September	Oct - Dec	Jan - Mar
	30,000	40,000	55,000	75,850	76,450	76,450
Sponsorship, Interest & Fees**	8,000	8,000	7,500	9,500	8,500	8,500
Grant proposals submitted (Disability Alliance of BC)	-	10,000	15,000	5,000	-	
City Grant (October, unconfirmed)	4,000	4,000	4,000	4,000	4,000	4,000
Pending Proposal Submissions:						
Province - pending proposal				5,000		
Other grants - pending proposals	6,250	6,250	61,250	62,250	62,250	62,250
Subtotal - Sources	10,250	20,250	80,250	76,250	66,250	66,250
EQUITY / IN-KIND / PENDING PROPOSALS*	- 19,750	- 19,750	25,250	400	- 10,200	- 10,200

Notes:

Initial budget with identified sources reflects a deficit. Priority 1 is to request shortfall funding.

Pending proposals to NDIT, Gaming, Northern Health, Regional District, PG Community Foundation, and other formal (pending) grant calls, as/if/where applicable, as well as exploring other options with Province, including ancillary services.

Equity contribution for capital lease/purchase being confirmed.

Budgetary measures may include potential for volunteerism, and increased sponsorship fundraising.

<u>Carefree Society – Carefree Service Survey</u>

Do you think there are gaps in accessible and inclusive transportation today?

Circle most suitable answer. □ YES	S □NO		
Comments:			
What destination(s) v	vould you like to vi	sit, that you feel should be	
easier to get to or acc	ess? Choose up to fi	ive destinations that apply.	
☐ Ancient Forest	☐ CN Centre (events)	☐ Central BC Railway & Forestry Museum	
☐ Connaught Hill Park	☐ Cottonwood House (Quesnel) ☐ Cottonwood Island Nature Park		
☐ Eskers Provincial Park	☐ Exploration Place	☐ Forests for the World	
☐ Ginters Meadow	☐ Good Sir Nature Park	☐ Huble Homestead	
☐ LC Gunn Park	☐ Lheidli T'enneh Memorial Parl	k 🗆 McMillan Creek Regional Park	
☐ Prince George Symphony Orchestra	☐ Purden Lake Provincial Park	☐ Quesnel Museum	
☐ West Lake Provincial Park	☐ Wilkins Park / Miworth	☐ Great West Life Mobility Trail	
☐ Barkerville	☐ Moore's Meadow Nature Park ☐ Theatre Northwest		
☐ Other:	☐ Other:		
Why is it important to you t	o visit this/these place	(s)?	
Tring to trimiportaine to your	o montamo, andoo placo	(0).	
What type of personal assi	stance do vou feel that	this type of service should	
provide?	otanioo do you root that	this type of solvios should	
☐ Personal Aid if you don't have your ow	n □ 1 helper in addition to	o the driver	
Othor:	•		

E-mail: christos@carefreesociety.org Mail: 2832 Queensway St. Prince George, BC V2L 4M5