



Responses to Worker, Household, and Community Impacts of Labour Mobility

Laura Ryser, Greg Halseth, and Sean Markey

1

Outline

- Mobile labour / labour mobility
- Worker perspectives
- Household impacts
- Community impacts
- Strengthening opportunities to retain workers and families

2

Rise of Labour Mobility

- Rural and small-town economic change
- Senior government and industrial disengagement from community
- Industrial restructuring
 - Technology and transportation



3

Rise of Labour Mobility

- Long distance labour commuting not new
 - Used in many resource-based sectors since 1950s
- Accelerated since 1980s
 - Limited local skilled labour pool
 - Difficulty encouraging skilled labour to relocate
 - Worker choice, family preferences
 - Used largely during construction / maintenance, but also increasingly used in operations

4

Long Distance Labour Commuting

- Fly-in, fly-out; bus-in, bus-out; drive-in, drive-out
- Workplace is isolated by a distance of at least 200 kilometres from the worker's home community
- 42/7; 21/21; 21/7; 7/7; 14/7...

Source: ebbsandflowers.com



5

Case Study: Mackenzie, BC

Instant town

Built in the late 1960s

- New regional forest industry

Downturn in 2008

- Closure of major forest industry operations
- Many forest workers engaged in long distance commuting



6



The Workers' Perspective

7

Long Distance Labour Commuting



8

Key Benefits I

“When you’re trained at [job site], you’re **trained as a team**. At the mill, you’re trained as an individual. That’s one of the things I brought back. My training to work as a team instead of as an individual. There can be that “It’s not my job, it’s somebody else’s” (LDLC Interview #11)

Financial Support

- Income
- Travel / living allowances
- Company vehicle to offset transportation costs
- Good / flexible benefit packages

Education and Training

- First aid training / safety courses
- Driving courses
- Industry specific trade certificates

9

Key Benefits II

“Coming from a mill environment, you’re just basically doing a job. But at [job site], I had to go back to using computers, logging people in. I had to do a lot **out of my comfort zone**. On the mill lines, you’re just pushing a button, pushing a button” (LDLC Interview #11)

Expanded Networks

- Enhanced reputation to start own business
- Expand support network
- Expanded employment networks

Work Experience in Other Sectors

- Experience with new vehicles / equipment
- More transferrable skills
- More supervisory skills / responsibilities
- More communications / conflict management skills
- Opportunities for advancement

10

Key Concerns

Financial Costs

- Costs to maintain 2 households
- Costs of commuting to work site

Safety Concerns

- Winter driving
- Lack of sleep
- Long distances to commute

Emotional Impacts

- Loneliness from family
- Stress
- Burnout / fatigue

Health Impacts

- More frequent sickness
- Poor diet
- Depression
- Addictions

11



Household Impacts

12

Household Responsibility

*I think there was a lot more pressure put on the person doing the long distance commuting. Mainly like the men because if they are at work for two weeks and home for a week, what they could do if they were working for three weeks here they had to do in one week. So it's not like they can come home and spend time with the wife and kids because **you come home and the wife has her honey-to-do list** (Mackenzie Interview #15).*

13

Time

- Less time for friends and neighbours
 - Fatigue + shift schedule
 - Impact on social circles
 - Less time for volunteer activities
-
- Contrast: enhanced community engagement and support for remaining residents

14

An Emphasis on Managing Functional Lone-Parent Households

Additional attention to *education and training* is needed on:

- The impact of mobile lifestyles on all household members (including physical and mental wellness)
- Impacts of mobile lifestyles on children and grandparents
- Household financial literacy aligned with mobility expectations
- Social networking to overcome isolation and create support circles

15

*I think the community did a good job in general in trying to provide opportunities for people. So Mackenzie Counselling had a **drop-in time** for parents needing to bring their kids. So that's parents who were single parenting had an opportunity to get together. I think the district **worked hard to keep recreational things happening**...The Community Awareness Committee was meeting a lot more often during that time to **monitor what was going on** and to perceive what people's needs were and to make sure there were things to keep people entertained.*

16

Supports for Functional Lone-Parent Households

Mechanisms are needed for supporting *additional community services* for functional lone-parent households, especially with:

- Isolation supports
- Transportation supports
- Property maintenance supports

17



18

Volunteerism

- Loss of skills, expertise and time (i.e. fire dep't)
- Leadership / board roles in community
- Impact on volunteerism rates
- Away or family focused during home rotation



19

Impact on Business

- Increased local shopping
- But limited range of local businesses induced out-of-town shopping
 - To regional centres
 - To stores in host communities
- Lack of entrepreneurial skills and supports



20

Increased Flexibility

- Community Responses:
 - Business hours
 - Service hours
 - Increase use of drop-in services
 - External assistance (coaches)



21

Strengthening Opportunities to Retain Workers and Families

22

Choices for Workers



23

Issues that Lead to Out-migration

- Aging housing assets
- Services not strategically used to support retention
- Aging commercial infrastructure
- Difficulty leveraging policy / planning tools

24

Investment in Research and Marketing

- Survey of mobile workers
- Ensure that information about local, regional, provincial, and federal supports is up-to-date, accessible, and in multiple formats
- Community packages sent to mobile labour
- Site visits to promote services
- Survey to understand interests and needs of the next generation workforce

25

Planning and Governance

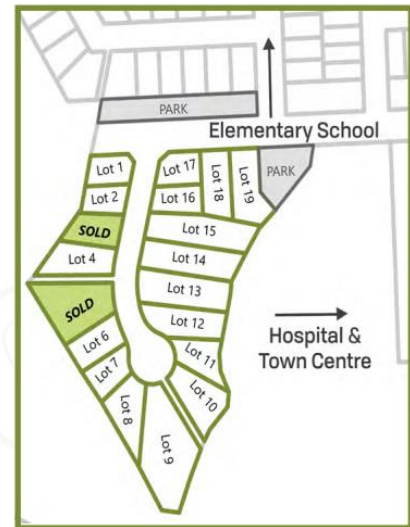
- Complete infrastructure and service assessments
- Use multi stakeholder groups to track worker issues and connect people with groups and services
- Invest staff resources to facilitate collaboration
- Provide tax incentives to implement strategies



26

Renewing Housing Assets

- Introduce tax incentives for secondary suites and home renovations
- Complete strategic investments in subdivisions and waterfront infrastructure



27

Final Thoughts

- Keep program / activity costs low with consistent delivery
- Organize interagency meetings to share information and strengthen coordination
- Provide flexibility in timing and delivery of supports
- Ensure supports are in place to facilitate community participation (i.e. child care, transportation, etc.)
- Devote attention to succession planning and strengthen the capacity / leadership skills of the entrepreneurial and volunteer base

28

THANK YOU!

- Laura Ryser, University of Northern BC:
laura.ryser@unbc.ca
- Greg Halseth, University of Northern BC:
greg.halseth@unbc.ca
- Sean Markey, Simon Fraser University:
spmarkey@sfu.ca

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)