



# Safe Rides at Night in Thunder Bay

Results and Recommendations from a  
Survey of Community Perspectives

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# Background

In 2017, the Injury Prevention team of the Thunder Bay District Health Unit undertook a research project to better understand how residents get home safely after a night out. This report shares the results of a qualitative project looking at the current status of late-night transportation in Thunder Bay. Included in the report are user perspectives on challenges and potential solutions to getting a safe ride home on a night out, typical alcohol consumption, as well as examples of promising interventions to improve late-night transportation.

The focus on safe rides home stems from a larger public health concern: reducing the incidence of alcohol-involved collisions. “In spite of a decline in impaired driving rates over the past 30 years, impaired driving still remains one of the most frequent criminal offences and is among the leading criminal causes of death in Canada” (Allen, 2016). In 2015, Thunder Bay had a higher impaired driving rate with 116 incidents per 100,000 population compared to Ontario’s rate of 111 incidents per 100,000 population (Allen, 2016). There were 79 total collisions involving alcohol and/or drugs during 2016 in Thunder Bay (Thunder Bay Police Service, 2016).

According to local statistics in Thunder Bay during 2016, impaired driving by either drugs or alcohol had the highest amount of charges within the 25-34 year-old age group (Thunder Bay Police Service, 2016). This is not surprising, as the proportion of self-reported heavy drinking

among those aged 19 to 44 in the Thunder Bay District, in 2013-14, is 42.7 per cent [95% CI (33.7-51.7)] – significantly higher in comparison to the rate across Ontario at 24.7 per cent [95% CI (23.4-26.0)] (PHO, 2016).

People aged 21-34 are also much more likely to do their drinking in bars than people in other age groups (Groom et al., 2014). This is important as drinking and driving are strongly related to drinking location preference (e.g. bars and restaurants) (Groom et al., 2014). Therefore, understanding the drinking contexts associated with this age group may help in developing strategies to address drinking and driving behaviours.

The concept of a safe ride involves offering intoxicated persons a readily available, free, or low cost method of transportation instead of driving intoxicated (Gieck & Slagle, 2010).

One promising intervention for reducing the negative consequences of drunk driving is the “safe ride”. Some communities have established taxi stands while others have extended bus service (Boisvert et al., 2012; Responsible Hospitality Edmonton, 2012). Whatever the intervention, it has been found that people valued transportation options that are “quick, easy, flexible, and gave the traveller a high degree of independence and control” when travelling for social occasions (Groom et al., 2014).

In Thunder Bay, there is growing concern about the limited options for safe transportation at night, when leaving bars and restaurants (Kiching, 2017). There appears to be a lack of transportation options in Thunder Bay after a certain time (i.e. city buses stop running before 1:00 am). Since bars typically close at 2:00 am there is a need for a variety of transportation options at this time, especially on weekends. Perreault (2015) describes that in Canada in 2015 the highest levels of impaired driving occurred between 2:00 am and 3:00 am, with incidents occurring from Friday night to Saturday, and Saturday night to Sunday. In Thunder Bay, the highest number of collisions involving alcohol or drugs, in 2016, occurred at 2:00 am, which coincides with the time that most bars or establishments serving alcohol close (Thunder Bay Police Service, 2016).

### Current Transportation Options in Thunder Bay

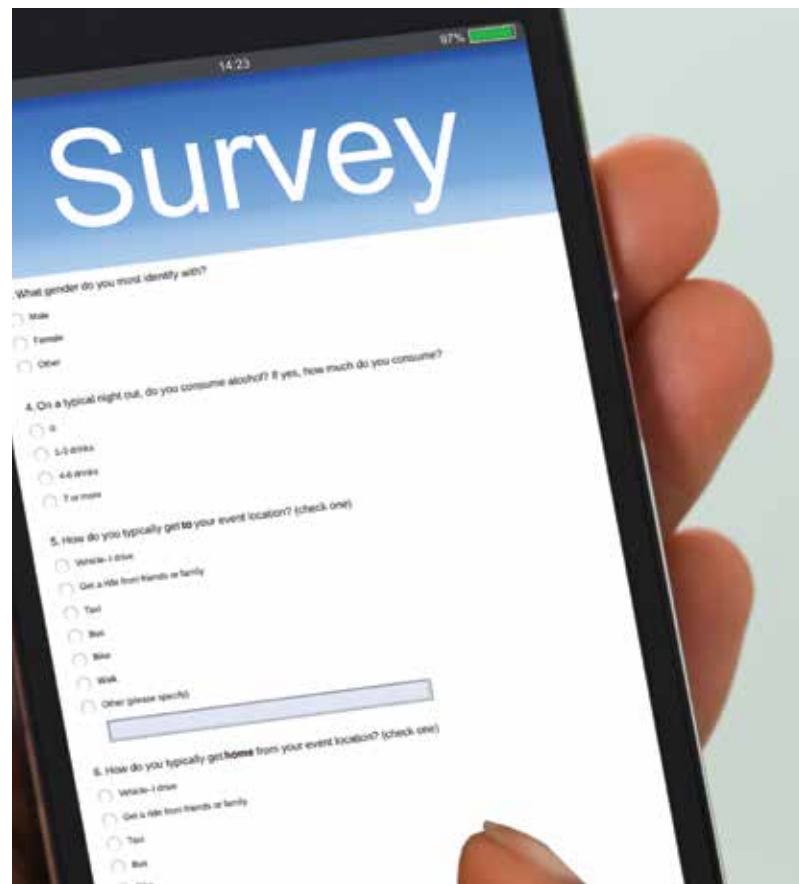
- Taxis (2 companies)
- City buses (service ends before 1:00 am)
- Private ride services
- Operation Red Nose (December only)\*
- Ride-hailing service (1 company) \*
- \*service offers a designated driver or chauffer using your own vehicle

To better understand the current state of late-night transportation use and behaviours in Thunder Bay, a survey was conducted to explore Thunder Bay residents' perspectives on the current available late-night transportation (9:00 pm to 3:00 am) and the transportation methods commonly used during this time. The survey also solicited information on alcohol

consumption on a typical night out. In addition, evidence from grey literature was gathered to identify promising practices. The results described in this report will assist stakeholders to identify gaps in existing services and consider improvements in transportation.

## Methods

An online survey was conducted for one month, running February 8, 2017 to March 8, 2017. Entitled "Getting a Safe Ride Home in Thunder Bay," the survey solicited the residents of Thunder Bay and District about transportation options in Thunder Bay during the evening to investigate and measure resident travel behaviour, service satisfaction, expectation and image/perception (see Appendix for survey). The survey was created using SurveyMonkey and promoted on the Thunder Bay District Health Unit's social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter. Responses from the survey were analyzed using Survey Monkey analytics.



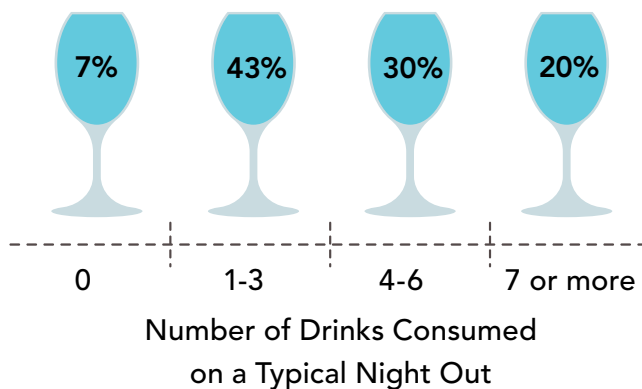
# Results

## Participant Characteristics

A total of 714 survey responses were collected from the online survey. Of those who responded, 86 per cent were female and the highest percentage of respondents were between the ages of 26-35 at 32 per cent followed by 22 per cent within the 36-45 age range.

Forty-three per cent of participants from the survey said on a typical night out they would have one to three drinks of alcohol (Figure 1). When asked about how they travel to and from an event, 44 per cent of respondents said they drive to an event and 24 per cent said they drive home from an event. Overall, 93 per cent of respondents thought exploring options for safe rides to and from events at night is an important issue to address in Thunder Bay.

**Figure 1. Amount of drinks typically consumed by survey respondents on a typical night out.**



## Challenges Getting a Safe Ride

The survey asked participants about the challenges they encounter in getting a safe ride home in Thunder Bay during the evening. Of those who responded, 68 per cent reported having or knowing someone who has had challenges in getting a safe ride home after an evening event. Various challenges accessing services were evident in the survey responses including: lack of availability, lack of equitable options, concerns for safety, and weather and distances. These themes are described below.

### Lack of Equitable Options

Participants shared that transportation options should support the diverse transportation needs for people of all ages, abilities, and income levels throughout Thunder Bay. For individuals who cannot afford a taxi, other safe options should be available (e.g. public transit) to get home. It is important that efforts to ensure equal access to services for those with mobility challenges are considered.

*"No wheelchair accessible rides available"*

*"High cost of cab"*

## Lack of Availability

It was described by participants that between the hours of 9:00 pm and 3:00 am, there is a lack of reliable, available and safe transportation services (i.e. bus system stops before 1:00 am). Participants described specific concerns related to using taxis in Thunder Bay including long wait times and driver's picking up other individuals instead of the initial caller.



*"Cabs are just not available in sufficient quantities when the bars close."*

*"All taxis are booked; no public transit; too late to call someone."*

*"The cabs in our city are unreliable and hard to access. Wait times are unreasonably long and they are not willing to take names when picking up in public locations."*



*"Waiting outside of a nightclub for a taxi with intimidating people around; fear being robbed while waiting."*

*"Wait times, area of town that I don't want to wait outside."*

*"As a female the potential of being followed home by a stranger or being assaulted by someone."*



## Weather and Long Distances

As Thunder Bay is fairly spread out with many social activities located in the downtown core, many participants reported difficulty obtaining affordable transportation to take them long distances home. Participants also mentioned the discomfort of long waits for transportation in the cold weather. This suggests that long waits outside could be a factor in choosing to drive or walk home instead of utilizing safe transportation options.

## Concerns for Safety

Participants described personal safety as a concern while trying to obtain safe transportation home during the evening hours. When bars or events close there is not always the option to wait indoors, which creates an issue of personal safety for some individuals.



*"Takes an hour to get a cab in the cold."*

*"Constantly waiting for taxis. To the point of just walking home in the freezing cold."*

*"The wait for a taxi, in the winter, the risk of frost bite."*



## Preferences for Improving Late-Night Transportation

The survey also asked participants about preferences for improving late-night transportation. Some common themes evident in the survey responses included: introducing alternative ride services, expanding bus routes and hours, increasing available taxis and improving affordability. Table 1 summarizes common challenges and suggestions for improvements from survey participants.

### Introduce Alternative Ride Services

Participants spoke about increasing options for late-night transportation, mentioning the ride-hailing services “Uber” and “Lyft” as potentially offsetting the “extremely long wait times for a taxi”. The app-based ride services appeared to be a popular request to increase choice in late-night transportation.

### Expand Bus routes/hours

Many participants expressed a need for extended bus service past 1:00 am when bars close as it provides an affordable alternative to a taxi (Table 1). Some participants suggested having buses operating later on holidays with large events or extending the hours of certain bus routes on the weekends.

### More Affordable/Available Taxis

Taxi prices have been described as “very expensive” by many participants. Several respondents would like to see a decrease in wait times as well as a decrease in prices.

Table 1. Respondent challenges and suggestions for getting a safe ride home in Thunder Bay.

Respondent Issues and Concerns Related to Safe Rides at Night	Respondent Recommendations/Suggestions
Long wait times for taxis	Introduce alternative ride services
No taxis available or taxi does not show up	Cheaper taxis
High cost for taxi	Buses operate later on weekends or special events
Buses stop running before bars close	Better bus routes
Personal safety	Taxi lines downtown
Cold weather and long waits	Shuttle services for major events
	Flat rates for transportation to rural destinations
	A safe bus depot with security guard

# Discussion

The majority of participants (93%) reported that they drink alcohol on a typical night out. For nearly half of the survey participants (43%), a typical night out included drinking one to three drinks. Nearly one-third (30%) indicated that their “typical night” included four to six drinks and one-fifth (20%) reported drinking seven or more drinks (Figure 1). While these rates are not generalizable, it is worth noting that self-reported alcohol consumption is likely to be under-reported by those under the age of 45 regardless of gender (Stockwell et al., 2014).

The survey also indicated that nearly a quarter of participants who attend late-night events drive home. It is also possible that the percentage of respondents reporting that they drive home from an event is under-reported, due to social desirability biases; some people may not be inclined to admit to driving after drinking, as it is poorly regarded. Alcohol consumption can decrease inhibitions and increase risky behaviours, such as deciding to drive after drinking (Boisvert et al., 2012; Groom et al., 2014). Therefore, it is possible that a higher percentage of respondents may be driving home following a night out that includes alcohol.

## Lack of Current Late-Night Transportation Options

Based on the results of the survey, a lack of current late-night transportation options appears to be a key issue in Thunder Bay.

Many participants discussed limitations of local taxi services, specifically, the limited number of taxis and long wait times. There are currently two taxi companies that serve Thunder Bay, with a total of 95 taxi licences operating (Walters, 2017). The current taxi by-laws have a limitation on the number of taxi vehicle licences issued in Thunder Bay; however, proposed changes to the city’s taxi by-law would remove this cap (Walters, 2017). There has been some speculation that this limitation is one factor impacting the inability of taxis to meet riders’ needs during high-demand hours (i.e. weekend nights). Therefore, it will be important to monitor how changes in the proposed by-law affect late-night transportation options, should the changes be implemented.

### PROMISING PRACTICE: TAXI STANDS

Seattle Washington has had success with implementing taxi stands to reduce wait times and improve convenience. Taxi stands involve a queue area on a street or on a private property where taxicabs line up to wait for passengers. Designated taxi stands are a way to concentrate potential fares so taxi drivers know where to find individuals and a place for patrons to wait for taxis, knowing the taxi drivers will frequent the location (Boisvert et al., 2012). From 11:30 pm until 2:30 am on three separate nights in each of the five neighbourhoods, taxis were being used at the stands by 25-40 patrons per hour and the wait times were generally less than 10 minutes (Boisvert et al., 2012).

Another common issue that arose among participants was the lack of bus service after 1:00 am. As already noted, participants suggested extending bus service for certain main routes during holidays or weekends when the demand would be higher.

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## Support for Alternative Services

Many survey participants indicated support for alternative ride services that provide more affordable options. Ride-hailing services are popular with the public, especially young adults. This popularity has fostered the quick expansion of these services in larger cities. Thunder Bay has one such service recently on the scene, allowing users to order rides using a smartphone app. Uride services are provided by local limousine companies rather than by community citizens (Kiching, 2017).

With the addition of these and other ride services in Thunder Bay it is important to continue to monitor trends in drinking and driving, the number and quality of service provided and the acceptance of community members in Thunder Bay.

### PROMISING PRACTICE: EXTENDED BUS SERVICE

The City of Edmonton piloted a night ride bus for extended bus service until 3:00 am, with consideration being given to service frequency for the late night rush hour (2-3 am) and that weekends be the starting point for service (Responsible Hospitality Edmonton, 2012). Following the successful pilot, Edmonton now has five bus routes that run until 3 am seven nights a week.

### PROMISING PRACTICE: AWARENESS RAISING

In Seattle, Washington, an intervention titled Last Call was developed by a collaboration between Harborview Injury Prevention and Research Center and Public Health Seattle and included: the use of taxi stands to promote taxi use, point-of-sale information to patrons at partner bars in priority neighborhoods and a mass media campaign to support the designated driver/ safe ride home message. Wallet size cards were created and distributed that displayed the Last Call message, phone number for three taxi companies and the location of taxi stands (Boisvert et al., 2012). The cards were distributed a variety of different ways along with a public education campaign to promote the messages of the Last Call program which was "Going out? Grab a cab, bus or friend," asking the audience to plan ahead when they go out drinking. The campaign increased awareness among all ages and both genders (Boisvert et al., 2012).



## Lack of Exposure/Awareness of Services

An underlying theme also emerged from survey responses. Comments suggest that participants are not aware of all current transportation options or have incomplete information. One survey participant commented, “Hear [sic] there is a year round “Operation Red Nose” program. Although I don’t see it advertised much.”

Clearly knowledge of transportation options is key to their uptake among those who might need it. Increased awareness of available services or changes could be beneficial so the public is aware of what is available in the community. Survey participants would like residents of Thunder Bay and visitors to have easily-accessible information about the full range of transportation options available to them, to improve the customer experience and to help customers match options with individual travel needs.

## Personal Safety

The focus of the survey was to understand Thunder Bay residents’ perspectives on the current available evening transportation (9:00 pm to 3:00 am) and the transportation methods commonly used. Although our intentions were to identify service gaps and opportunities to address impaired driving, personal safety was mentioned on a few occasions in relation to waiting alone for transportation or walking home. This was an unintended, yet important, finding from the survey that should be considered when planning for safe rides home.

One survey respondent described her challenge, “as a female the potential of being followed home by a stranger or being assaulted by someone.” The safety concerns mentioned tended to focus more on being vulnerable to assault rather than avoiding being involved in an alcohol-related collision in a car, on public transport or as a pedestrian. The high percentage of female respondents could be a factor in this finding. Research suggests that gender differences in precautionary behaviours persist because women feel more vulnerable than men when they are away from their place of residence (Keown, 2010). Improving transportation options is likely to improve community members’ sense of personal safety, particularly among women.



# Conclusion & Recommendations

Driving after drinking alcohol increases the risks of driving, even at low levels of alcohol consumption (Groom et al., 2014). Findings from our survey confirm that most respondents have at least one drink on a typical night out, and nearly a quarter of those who responded drive home after a typical night out. As such, nearly all survey respondents felt that exploring options for late-night transportation to and from events is an important issue to address in Thunder Bay.

Participants experienced a number of challenges in finding safe transportation at night, and their suggestions for improving late-night transportation options reflect these challenges. The survey findings suggest participants desire improvements and advances in the available transportation during late night hours for greater customer satisfaction and safety. Some commonly mentioned suggestions included: improving availability and accessibility especially between the hours of 9:00 pm and 3:00 am, introducing alternative ride share services, including equitable options, improving awareness of transportation services to the public and addressing the safety concerns of individuals.

It is hoped that the findings and recommendations described in this report lead to a better understanding of the current context for late-night transportation in Thunder Bay and stimulates dialogue on service gaps and potential solutions. This report also shares some successful strategies for getting safe rides home at night from grey literature sources. In order to provide safe, late-night transportation for Thunder Bay residents, both survey findings and plausible, effective strategies should be considered in the context of Thunder Bay's unique geographical context.



**1**

***Explore how current late-night transportation options can be modified to address service gaps between the hours of 9:00 pm and 3:00 am.***

Modifications to current services should consider the challenges noted by community members: bus service hours and routes; taxi licence limitations, fees and taxi stands; and the promotion of transportation options and approaches to increase safe rides. Any changes implemented should be tracked and monitored to measure the impact on improving safer, late-night transportation options.

**2**

***Identify alternative ride services that could be introduced to increase late-night transportation options.***

Alternative ride services should complement transportation options already in place and help meet the demand for safe rides during peak times. Ride hailing services can bring more choice and options to the market, increase convenience, reduce wait times and reduce prices. (Hahn & Metcalfe, 2017)

**3**

***Identify ways to address personal safety concerns related to getting a safe ride home.***

More research is needed to better understand personal safety concerns that occur when leaving late-night events and getting a safe ride home, particularly among certain vulnerable groups. These groups should be engaged in the process of identifying key concerns and appropriate strategies to address them.

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## Appendix: Getting a Safe Ride at Night in Thunder Bay Survey

### Getting a Safe Ride Home in Thunder Bay

The Thunder Bay District Health Unit wants your opinion on safe rides to and from events in Thunder Bay between 9pm-3am. This survey defines safe rides as law-abiding transportation, particularly not driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol or riding as a passenger of an individual under the influence.

This survey will determine if there is a lack of options for safe rides to and from events at night (9pm-3am) in Thunder Bay. It should only take 5-10 minutes to complete and results of this will be used as feedback to improve safe transportation in Thunder Bay and generate ideas for future campaigns. The survey can be anonymous but if you would like to be entered to win a \$25 gift card, please write your name and phone number after completed. Your name will only be used for the purpose of the draw and will not be associated with the attached questions.

Please answer the following questions based on your typical "night out" in Thunder Bay (any event between 9pm and 3am).

1. Where do you currently live?

- North Ward (Port Arthur)
- South Ward (Fort William)
- Thunder Bay District
- Other (please specify)

2. What is your age?

- 19-25
- 26-35
- 36-45
- 46-55
- 56-60
- Over 60

3. What gender do you most identify with?

- Male
- Female
- Other

4. On a typical night out, do you consume alcohol? If yes, how much do you consume?

- 0
- 1-3 drinks
- 4-6 drinks
- 7 or more

5. How do you typically get **to** your event location? (check one)

- Vehicle- I drive
- Get a ride from friends or family
- Taxi
- Bus
- Bike
- Walk
- Other (please specify)

6. How do you typically get **home** from your event location? (check one)

- Vehicle- I drive
- Get a ride from friends or family
- Taxi
- Bus
- Bike
- Walk
- Other (please specify)

7. Have you or anyone you know faced challenges in getting a safe ride to or from an event at night in Thunder Bay?

- Yes
- No

8. What are some challenges you've faced in getting a safe ride to or from an event at night in Thunder Bay?

9. What options for getting a safe ride to and from events at night would you like to see improved or made available in Thunder Bay?

10. Do you think exploring options for safe rides to and from events at night is an important issue to address in Thunder Bay?

- Yes
- No

11. OPTIONAL: Enter your Full Name and Phone Number for a chance to win a \$25 gift card

