



EVALUATION OF THE REMOTE PASSENGER RAIL PROGRAM

Evaluation Summary, August 2024



The **Remote Passenger Rail Program (RPRP)** is a contribution program that provides funding to two First Nations-owned railways: Tshiuetin Rail Transportation (TRT) and Keewatin Railway Company (KRC). Rail services are crucial for many remote communities, providing affordable transportation options and access to essential services, such as medical services, employment, and educational opportunities. RPRP funding is provided to enable passenger rail services, in certain established remote communities, where rail is the only means of surface transportation.

TRT provides rail services between Sept-Îles and Schefferville, QC and owns the portion of track between Emeril and Schefferville. For TRT, the RPRP provides both operational funding (e.g., for train fuel and crew salaries) and capital funding (e.g., for rail line rehabilitation, equipment acquisition, facility construction/maintenance).

KRC provides passenger rail services between The Pas and Pukatawagan and owns the portion of the track between Sherritt Junction and Lynn Lake. KRC receives capital funding only through the RPRP; it receives operational funding through a separate agreement with VIA Rail.



The evaluation of the RPRP assessed the issues of relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency. Data collection methods included a document review, interviews, and data review. The scope of the evaluation covered the period from 2017-18 to 2022-23. As a grants and contributions program with five-year average actual expenditures of \$5M or greater, the RPRP must be evaluated every five years. The last evaluation of the RPRP was completed in May 2018.

KEY CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

- 1 Round trip air tickets are up to 10x more expensive than the rail equivalent
- 2 No new roads have been built to the remote communities since the last evaluation
- 3 KRC was instrumental in evacuating 1,500 people when wildfires threatened Pukatawagan in July 2022

Over 6 years (2017-18 to 2022-23)



Amount of cumulative contributions

\$71.9M

FINDINGS



There is an ongoing need to provide passenger rail services to remote communities along the rail lines served by TRT and KRC. The RPRP addresses this need.



TRT consistently surpassed the minimum thresholds for round trips and ticket prices during the evaluation period. KRC demonstrated strong performance in both indicators for the years with available data. However, incomplete data for KRC hindered a comprehensive assessment for the entire evaluation period.



Both TRT and KRC provided safe rail services from 2018 to 2022.



Capital funding is largely used to support critical ongoing activities such as maintenance and repair of infrastructure and equipment.



Vegetation control along railway tracks poses a growing safety threat with potential implications for rail operations.



The adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and other factors have heightened concerns about the need for contingency funding for emergency situations.



Several program indicators are not consistently tracked for both railways.



TC's relationship with recipients, particularly with TRT, has improved since the previous evaluation in 2018.



RPRP is delivered in an efficient manner as demonstrated by comparing the ratio of Operations and Maintenance costs to the amount of contribution disbursements made.



Program staff reported that the team is adequately staffed to deliver the program.

RECOMMENDATION

ACTIONS

THE PROGRAM SHOULD:

Refine and streamline performance metrics

The RPRP should refine and streamline their program outcomes and indicators, in collaboration with recipients, to ensure that it is feasible and useful to collect them

THE PROGRAM AGREED TO:

Management agrees with the recommendation and will:

- Develop a new series of performance indicators for the RPRP renewal based on the Evaluation and Advisory Services (EAS) recommendation.
- Coordinate new performance indicators with EAS for input/guidance.
- Collaborate with RPRP recipients to ensure the feasibility of indicators, and collection capacity.
- Streamline program outcomes in alignment with new performance indicators.
- Integrate new performance indicators into renewed agreements.

These steps are **completed**.

