

Mobile Work in Happy Valley-Goose Bay

Findings from research conducted by the Community Impacts Team of the *On the Move Partnership* in Newfoundland and Labrador

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What is Mobile Work?

Employment-related geographic mobility (E-RGM), or mobile work, involves long-distance commuting across municipal, provincial, or national boundaries to get to and from a place of work. Mobile workers can travel to their place of work by car, bus, or plane, and may commute daily or remain at their place of work for weeks or months at a time. E-RGM also includes multiple or transient worksites, as in the case of homecare workers, and mobile workplaces, such as cargo ships, trains, planes, trucks and fishing vessels (Temple Newhook et al., 2011).

The Community Impacts component of the *On the Move Partnership* sought to identify: 1) how communities are impacted by E-RGM, 2) how various actors have responded to these impacts, and 3) the influence of context (e.g. legislation, corporate policies, proximity to worksite, labour policies, etc.) on E-RGM and related impacts and responses.

Results from the Community Impacts component are based on 182 semi-structured interviews conducted with key informants across Newfoundland and Labrador from 2012 to 2018. 28 interviews were conducted in Labrador, 9 of which came from key informants in Happy Valley-Goose Bay.



Mobile Work in Happy Valley-Goose Bay

Happy Valley-Goose Bay is a source community. Key informants reported that the town is a place of permanent residence for workers employed at Muskrat Falls, the Vale nickel mine in Voisey's Bay, the oilsands in Alberta, and in the Canadian Territories.

Happy Valley-Goose Bay is also a host community for mobile workers. It's proximity to Muskrat Falls has made it a temporary place of residence for some workers associated with the project. Muskrat Falls workers living in work camps were also reported to use services and amenities in the community.

Happy Valley-Goose Bay is also a hub community. The Goose Bay Airport hosts charter flights to Voisey's Bay and sees workers travel to Muskrat Falls from the island by airplane. The Airport has made infrastructural changes to accommodate the travel needs of these workers. Some Muskrat Falls workers are also transported between the Goose Bay Airport and the worksite by bus. As such, Happy Valley-Goose Bay is a hub community for both fly-in/fly-out (FIFO) and bus-in/bus-out workers.

In terms of shifts, Voisey's Bay workers were reported to work two weeks on/two weeks off. Shifts for workers at Muskrat Falls were reported as varying by position, but respondents suggested the more common rotation was two weeks on/one week off.

How has mobile work impacted Happy Valley-Goose Bay?

Study participants noted several changes in Happy Valley Goose-Bay that they felt were the result of E-RGM. These impacts have been grouped into the following themes: Economic, Infrastructure and Service, Social-Cultural, Sustainability, Planning and Governance and Environmental.

Economic

Some businesses in Happy Valley-Goose Bay saw growth related to the resident E-RGM population. Recreational vehicle businesses, wholesale food companies, the airport, hotels and B&Bs, for instance, were thought to have benefitted economically. Some new businesses opened, including shops selling clothing/safety equipment for workers and a bus service transporting workers from the airport to the Muskrat Falls site. Some individuals who arrived in Happy Valley-Goose Bay as temporary foreign workers had started food truck businesses, while others relocated to communities in western Canada after completing their work terms.

Some local businesses had to increase wages for service jobs in an effort to keep workers and compete with wages being offered at Muskrat Falls. For instance, wages increased from \$12 per hour to \$16 per hour for housekeeping jobs at a local hotel. The Goose Bay Airport and Hospital had trouble retaining workers and one restaurant had to close because they lost the majority of their employees to the project. Some businesses had chosen to use temporary foreign workers to retain employees; however, high housing prices had made this difficult since employers are required to provide housing to workers.

We did interviews a couple days ago for—we want to hire a housekeeper. And the lady walks in, and she was like, “If it’s less than \$40 an hour, I don’t want it.”...She was working at Muskrat Falls and that’s what she was making, so she thought she would come in town and make the same thing.

Nalcor negotiated employment contracts with the Innu nation in Labrador to ensure Indigenous employment in the project. While it was felt that this was beneficial in securing employment for Innu tradespeople in the province, it was feared that, once Muskrat Falls was finished, these individuals would struggle to find local trades-work, especially since some acquired work through the agreement without formal apprenticeship training. This transition would be made especially difficult for workers who adapted their lifestyles to suit their

high incomes. It was also suggested that, because negotiations did not take place with the province’s Inuit communities, that this may have equity implications in the long-term. In December 2017, Nalcor also signed a Community Development Agreement with NunatuKavut, that contained provisions related to training, employment and business opportunities among other issues.

Infrastructure and Services

Some new services were present or expected to become present in Happy Valley-Goose Bay related to mobile work. New training programs were being offered at the College of the North Atlantic in Happy Valley-Goose Bay in accordance with the Labrador Aboriginal Training Partnership. The Newfoundland and Labrador Building Trades Council was also prepared to make a \$75,000 donation for the development of a wellness centre and had made a \$100,000 donation for a new daycare to replace the existing daycare facility. These donations were linked to increased demand in the community, particularly for daycare services.

Happy Valley-Goose Bay saw growth in new housing and in the number of houses being rented by mobile workers associated with the Muskrat Falls project. Increased housing prices, resulting from demand, were noted as impacting the ability of younger residents to move out of their parents’ home or purchase homes of their own. The Town was also hearing reports of individuals operating unlicensed boarding houses and people living in garages and in buildings in commercial districts as a result of decreased housing availability and affordability. These challenges have made housing virtually inaccessible for vulnerable populations in the community. A homeless shelter was opened in Happy Valley-Goose Bay in 2016 and has been working towards addressing housing needs for complex-needs residents; however, it has struggled to meet demand for affordable and emergency housing.

Happy Valley-Goose Bay has also seen increased traffic and



Figure 2: Article by CBC reporting on housing challenges for Happy Valley-Goose Bay’s homeless residents (Sept. 2018).

speeding in town. Key informants believe this is directly related to the project, as traffic increases during shift rotations. Worker traffic and vehicles transporting equipment to the Muskrat Falls site has also caused significant damage to local roads, some provincially-maintained and others maintained by the Town.

With regards to providing healthcare services, the local hospital has struggled to meet demand. At the beginning of the project, individuals with chronic healthcare issues were being approved for employment at Muskrat Falls. Health screening procedures adopted for the project also required that, if a health issue was identified, the individual be redirected to the hospital for additional screening. This demand affected the ability of the hospital to address the healthcare needs of the permanent resident population in Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

Social-Cultural

Some key informants felt that the presence of mobile workers negatively impacted community dynamics in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. The Town council had received complaints from residents who felt the presence of workers was negatively impacting their neighbourhoods. For instance, complaints were made about worker households not keeping up their properties. Several key informants voiced that Muskrat Falls occupied many conversations and that it was hard to 'get away from' opinions or news regarding the project.

You can't sit down to a supper table in this town without someone bringing up, "Where do you stand on Muskrat Falls?"

Crime and safety have also become concerns in the community. For instance, reports were made of violence and negative public behaviours towards women from mobile workers. Increased mental health and addictions challenges were also noted, with some key informants suggesting that substances were being used by workers to supplement energy levels while at work. A representative from the hospital reported that there had been increases in drug addictions among both mobile workers and permanent residents of Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

From a family perspective, fears were voiced about children being exposed to the poor lifestyle choices of their parents and related community challenges. Key informants also felt that engagement with mobile work negatively impacts family life because parents have less time to spend at home with their children. Tension and resentment within families based on opinions of the project were also noted.

Work at Muskrat Falls did not seem to impact volunteerism in the town negatively. For instance, the local fire department had 36 volunteers, 10 of which were employed at Muskrat

Falls and a representative from the Fire Department said he has not had issues finding volunteers or having volunteers show up for calls.

Sustainability

During the time of study, some phases of the Muskrat Falls project were winding down. Participants voiced fears about debt among Muskrat Falls workers, particularly younger workers, who had spent money on large homes and recreational vehicles instead of accumulating savings. Some participants indicated that banks had been loaning money to individuals with wages that were not secure long-term, and this fueled worries about what might happen after the project is complete. Several felt that these situations might impact the future sustainability of the community and its residents. Others felt that the Town was diverse enough economically to support itself once Muskrat Falls ended and that new resource projects, such as Gull Island, would begin, providing trades workers with employment opportunities.



Figure 3: A work camp located outside of Happy Valley-Goose Bay, August 2017

Planning and Governance

Key informants indicated that, while some planning and agreements were negotiated prior to the start of Muskrat Falls, the Town was having to address many issues, such as infrastructure degradation, reactively. This made strategic community planning difficult. Community tensions, including protests, surrounding the project had also made cooperative planning efforts challenging. Several key informants felt that there was a lack of communication between Nalcor, the Province, Indigenous communities, and the community. An external stakeholder committee was initiated by Nalcor; however the Town of Happy Valley-Goose Bay did not sit on the committee and it is unclear whether the committee still meets regularly. It was also felt that some recommendations made during the environmental assessment process hosted by Nalcor prior to the start of the project were not followed. Key informants noted that there was still a lot of advocacy in the community for Nalcor to adhere to the recommendations.

Environmental

E-RGM was thought to impact the ability of individuals to spend time on the land, hunting and fishing. While mobile workers have more money to spend on gas and equipment (e.g. skidoos, boats, etc.), they have less time to actually participate in these activities. There were worries that this might negatively impact the exchange of traditional knowledge and health equity in communities.

How have actors responded to the impacts of mobile work at the local level?

In Happy Valley-Goose Bay, responding to the impacts of mobile work has been driven primarily by municipal actors with financial assistance from the provincial government and industry. To try and assist the local housing market, the Town Council in Happy Valley-Goose Bay implemented a vacant land tax on residential and commercial properties. They hoped to encourage property owners holding onto land, but not actively using it, to sell. They also lowered the mill rate by 22% in 2015.

To address infrastructure challenges, the Town lobbied the provincial government and came to an agreement of \$250,000 a year. This money was given in accordance with a municipal capacity agreement put in place to address community needs during the development of Muskrat Falls. This funding allowed the Town to hire a full-time fire chief, a town engineer, and a GIS specialist. The Town also developed a new strategic plan.

Nalcor and the Provincial government were funding some efforts to address challenges associated with Muskrat Falls. For example, funding from the Province was given to the Town of Happy Valley-Goose Bay to address infrastructure challenges and Nalcor was assisting in the development of an emergency notification system; however, these efforts were being made after road degradation and emergencies had occurred.

The Goose Bay Airport had also made physical changes to meet the demand of fly-in/fly-out and bus-in/bus out workers in the community, including the addition of a mobile workforce redistribution centre. Approximately \$23 million in capital improvements were made at the airport

from 2007-2017, and by 2017 an airport representative indicated that the projects had paid for themselves and the airport was debt-free.

What else could be done to help Goose Bay adapt to the presence of mobile workers?

Key informants in Happy-Valley Goose Bay voiced a need for genuine consultation and strategic planning in the development of future projects like Muskrat Falls. Though consultation was done prior to Muskrat Falls and a municipal capacity agreement was negotiated, planning for the challenges of Muskrat Falls were described as more reactive than proactive.

In line with this, it was felt that more thought needed to be given to the impact of large projects on infrastructure and services. The project had placed stress on road infrastructure, housing, and services such as medical, daycare, and emergency accommodations. The Town lobbied for financial support to address some of these concerns; however, key informants felt that proactively planning for these challenges would have been a better approach.

The lack of long-term planning for the project left many study participants with the question: What will happen after Muskrat Falls? Some pointed to the future development of Gull Island as a possible new project for the region; however, others feared that the end of Muskrat Falls would negatively impact the sustainability of the region because there would be a lack of local employment opportunities and decreased demand for housing. It was felt that more concerted efforts to plan for the long-term challenges and benefits of large projects was needed.

About the *On the Move Partnership*

The *On the Move Partnership* is a Canadian research project with international links investigating workers' extended travel and related absence from their places of permanent residence for the purpose of, and as part of, their employment. It is a project of the SafetyNet Centre for Occupational Health & Safety Research at Memorial University and funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), Research Development Corporation of NL (RDC), the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI), and several universities and partners. For more information, please visit www.onthemovepartnership.ca.

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