Long Distance Labour Commuting from a Northern Canadian small town: The Workers’ Perspective

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Outline

• Background
• Study
• Evaluations of LDLC
• Discussion
Background
Remote resource development

- “Rushes”
- Boomtowns
- Instant town
- Fly-in, fly-out (FIFO), long distance labour commuting (LDLC)

- Historical trade off between new towns and LDLC
  - Remoteness
  - Length of production run
    - LDLC cheaper in short run, costly over long-term

- Shift cycle norms were different for new towns and LDLC
Contemporary tradeoffs between new towns and LDLC

- LDLC costs are decreasing
- More sophisticated / comfortable camps
- New town costs increasing dramatically
  - New environmental standards
  - Land claims issues
  - Access routes

- Transition in worker expectations
  - ‘Golden handcuffs’ of salary replaced by quality of life desires for whole family & multiple employment opportunities

- Worker shortages
  - Migrant / temporary foreign workers
• Offshore oil industry origins in 1940s
• Growth in application since 1960
  – Especially for remote mines
  – First in Canada in mid-1960s
• Dominates new developments
• Hybrid models:
  – Fort McMurray (town with massive worker mobility)
• Changed shift schedules to fit:
  – Dominant model in several sectors
  – i.e. 20/8, 21/7, 42/14
Mackenzie, BC

• Instant town
• Built in the late 1960s
• New regional forest industry
• Significant economic downturn in 2008
  – Closure of all major forest industry operations
  – Many forest workers had to engage in long distance labour commuting (LDLC)
LDLC Study

- Household survey
  - 1,537 households, 633 returns (41.2% response rate)
- Key informant interviews
  - Impacts on community
  - 17 community groups / organizations
- Worker interviews
- Preliminary investigations to set stage for multi-year study
LDLC Study

- Household survey
  - 1,537 households, 633 returns (41.2% response rate)

- Key informant interviews
  - Impacts on community
  - 17 community groups / organizations

- Worker interviews

- Preliminary investigations to set stage for multi-year study
Worker project:

- 22 workers interviewed – May 2012
- Explore the impacts of LDLC on:
  - Workers
  - Family / community life
  - Contributions to community capacity
Worker Evaluations of LDLC

- Scale
- Benefits
- Concerns
Worker Evaluations of LDLC

• Scale
• Benefits
• Concerns
Did any household members work out-of-town following the 2008 mill closures?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th># of Respondents</th>
<th>% of Respondents</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>73.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>631</td>
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2012 Household Survey
### Gender of family member(s) who worked out-of-town

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th># of Respondents</th>
<th>% of Respondents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>85.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>14.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>99.9</td>
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</table>
Do any family member(s) continue to work out-of-town?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th># of Respondents</th>
<th>% of Respondents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>40.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>59.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2012 Household Survey
Where did family member(s) go to work out-of-town?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th># of Respondents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia</td>
<td>156</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alberta</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12</td>
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</table>

Note: some people identified multiple locations.

2012 Household Survey
### Out-of-town sector(s) worked?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th># of Respondents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forestry</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil and Gas</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trades</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road Maintenance</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Worker Evaluations of LDLC

• Scale
• Benefits
• Concerns
Key Benefits I

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

“The benefit package in Fort McMurray is a flexible benefit package. So maybe one year, you didn’t spend any money on dental, so you could afford to spend that much more on something else. Whereas, here, it’s basically one blanket. You’re basically told you spend this much money on dental and then this much money on massage therapy” (LDLC Interview #20)
Key Benefits II

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

“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)
Key Benefits III

• Expanded networks / job contacts
  – Enhanced reputation to start own business
  – Expand support network
  – Efficiently access key decision-makers in distant centres

“One of the key things is when you actually work in [job site], you get to personally know the gatekeepers in those offices in [job site]. That makes a big difference. I can call up people I got to know quite well personally. It’s a different world. I now know who to call and they know who you are” (LDLC Interview #5)
Key Benefits IV

• 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

“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)
Key Benefits V

- Access to additional services / amenities not available in Mackenzie
  - Health care
  - Shopping

“But a lot of times, hey let's go meet daddy in Grand Prairie or let's go meet daddy in Edmonton and do a whole whack of shopping there” (Mackenzie Group Interview #15)
Worker Expectations of LDLC

- Scale
- Benefits
- Concerns
Key Concerns I

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

“The job I had, the wages dropped and I had to pay my own benefits. That’s why I say the only thing was you had a full-time job. But then you have to maintain two households and pay your bills at both ends and then you take a look at your wages and go hmm.....was it worth it” (LDLC Interview #21)
Key Concerns II

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

“Concerns would be winter driving. That would be one of my biggest concerns to long distance commuting in northern BC. The highway conditions and driving in snowstorms was the worst (LDLC Interview #11).”
Key Concerns III

• Emotional impacts
  – Loneliness from family
  – Stress
  – Burnout / fatigue
    • Time off spent paying bills / household repairs

“You can lose touch with your kids. When you return after 7 days, you may be focused on one aspect of your kids’ lives, but they have moved on to other things (LDLC Interview #23).”
Key Concerns IV

• Health impacts
  – More frequent sickness
  – Poor diet
  – Depression
  – Addictions

“You’re diet’s affected because you’re not eating home cooked meals. You’re eating out a lot. You’re eating camp food; although, the camp food at the last one was pretty good (LDLC Interview #24).”
Key Concerns V

• Household impacts
  – Spouses assumed more household duties

“Well there was a lot of fatigue and stress on your relationship. It’s tough to keep up with the responsibilities, especially with kids missing out on activities. I had to work full-time and deal while looking after the house” (LDLC Survey #162)
Discussion 1

To build capacity / resiliency:
• Flexible shift schedules
• Adopt flexible benefit packages
• Support workers’ ongoing capacity / skills development
  – Foster team learning environment / succession planning
  – Monitoring / evaluation
• Invest in communication, conflict resolution, and problem-solving skills for workers
Discussion II

- Invest in fatigue management training
- Adopt stricter safety procedures
- Broaden infrastructure / opportunities for interaction to connect workers / families with support networks
  - On the job site counseling supports
- Lobby for more resources / outreach supports (i.e. flexible child care, home maintenance / repairs, snow removal)