



June 2017

Need and History

In the large geographical region of East Kootenay, the City of Cranbrook serves as the service hub for many of the surrounding smaller rural communities. To access health services such as medical and specialist appointments, many East Kootenay residents have to travel to the regional hospital in Cranbrook, which can be challenging, especially for seniors and others not able to drive or without access to a car. In response to concerns about the lack of transportation options from seniors and advocates from rural communities, the Kootenay East Regional Hospital District approved taking on the operation and administration of the Health Connections transit system for the East Kootenay Health Service Area, which includes the East Kootenay region, as well as Golden and Creston.

Program Details

This service, called [Health Connections](#), primarily provides transportation services for residents in the region to travel to medical and specialist appointments in Cranbrook. In order to maximize the use of the Health Connections buses, people can also use the service for other reasons (such as shopping) when space is available. The bus services must be booked in advance, and if you notify the hospital and medical services that you are using the Health Connections Bus, they can book your appointments at certain times to coincide with the bus's schedule. The cost of the service is \$2.50 each way, no matter how far you are travelling. There are [four Health Connection bus routes](#): Golden (Mondays and Friday); Elkford (Wednesdays and Fridays); Creston (Tuesdays and Thursdays); and Kimberley (Tuesday to Friday). Along each route, the bus stops at smaller communities, which helps to further increase rural access.

Operating Partners and Funders

The Health Connections buses are a partnership between the Regional District of East Kootenay, Kootenay East Regional Hospital District, and BC Transit. Funding for the buses is provided by Interior Health Authority.

Impact and Challenges

A 2008/09 Interior Health evaluation found that:¹

- 30% of East Kootenay users would have been unable to attend their medical appointments without the service
- Nine out of ten users rated the service as good or excellent
- In 2007/08, East Kootenay Health Connections cost approximately \$257,000
- Since the implementation of the Health Connections Buses:
 - Over 90% of rural communities in the East Kootenay area are serviced
 - The number of communities with transportation services available increased from one to ten

¹ See Interior Health Authority. (2009). Health Connections Program: Evaluation Report. Interior Health Authority.

Overall the findings of the report were positive and the service was seen to be very valuable. However, at that time, it was noted that occupancy rates of the buses could be increased and efforts should be made to increase the ridership of the service.