

Mobile Work in Long Harbour

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

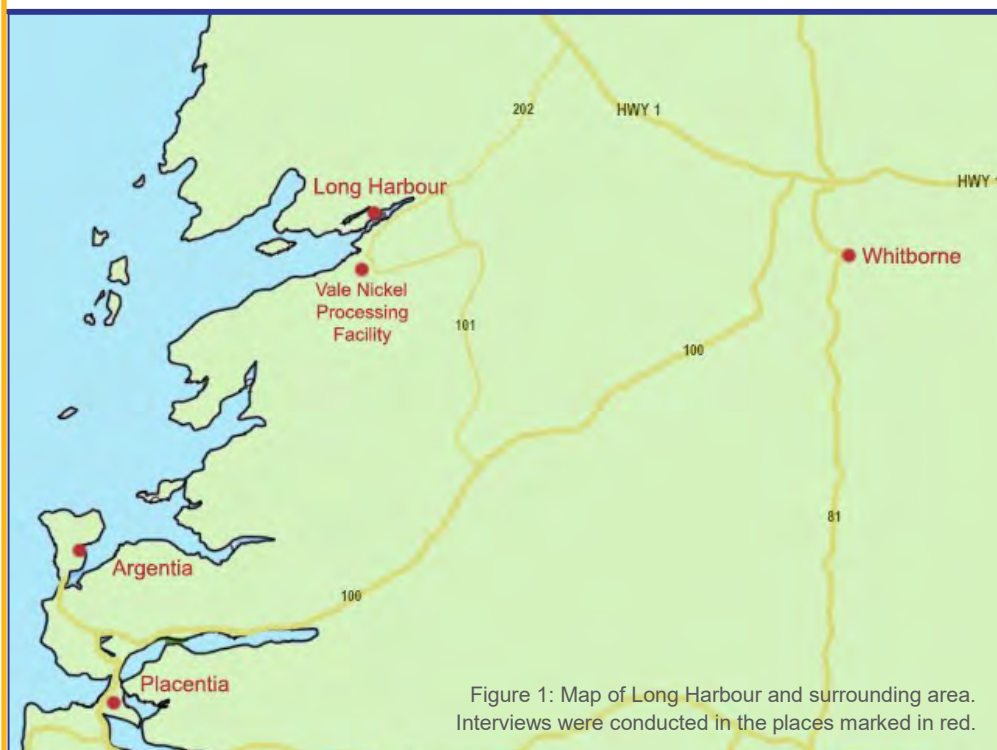
Heather Hall, Kelly Vodden, Josh Barrett, Leanna Butters

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 extended periods of 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 and stakeholders across Newfoundland and Labrador from 2012 to 2018. 35 interviews were conducted in and around Long Harbour. A questionnaire was also distributed to employees at Vale's facility.



Mobile Work in Long Harbour

Long Harbour is a host community for most mobile workers employed at Vale's nickel processing facility. Workers were found to commute into Long Harbour from across the province but mostly from communities within the St. John's Census Metropolitan Region (CMA). Findings suggest that **Long Harbour is also a source community**, with many residents commuting daily into St. John's for work and some commuting long-distance to Alberta and Ontario. This project, however, focused on the community impacts of mobile workers

commuting to and from the nickel processing facility both for their source and host communities in the province.

The majority of questionnaire respondents travelled over 50km to Long Harbour by car on a daily basis. 66% of respondents carpooled to work while 27% drove to work alone and 7% did both. Findings suggested that access to services and amenities, such as grocery stores, played a significant role in the decision of mobile workers to commute into Long Harbour rather than reside there permanently. Findings suggested that the majority of respondents who commuted 50km or more had children and wanted to be close to amenities (e.g. recreation opportunities for their families). Findings also suggested that younger respondents were more likely to reside in urban areas, often for access to services and amenities as well.

The nickel processing facility is a 24-hour operation. In terms of work schedules, questionnaire respondents were employed in one of three work rotations: 12 hour rotational (28 day cycle, day and night shifts); 12 hour day rotational (8 day cycle, 4 days on/4 days off); 8 hour shift (5 day cycle, Monday-Friday).

Phase I: The Community Impacts of E-RGM in Long Harbour

Research at Long Harbour was conducted in two phases. Phase I sought to identify the impacts of E-RGM on the community of Long Harbour and surrounding communities (Argentia, Whitbourne, and Placentia). Study participants noted several impacts that they felt were related to mobile work: Economic, Infrastructure and Service, Social-Cultural, Sustainability, and Planning and Governance.

Economic

The Vale site was formerly home to a phosphorus plant. Due to the need for specialized trades during construction, some residents of Long Harbour were employed at the Vale facility; however, fewer have been employed in operations. It was suggested that employment opportunities and higher wages in Alberta and within NL were attracting young residents and tradespeople to work and/or relocate away.

With the opening of the Long Harbour nickel processing facility, the Town of Long Harbour hoped to see economic growth; however, they have seen limited new business development and, despite attempts to attract Vale employees to live in Long Harbour, a lack of amenities and services proved to be a challenge for urban population retention/growth.

Key informants noted that the two stores in town did benefit from local spending; however, they believed that mobile workers spent more money in communities like Whitbourne, located between St. John's and Long Harbour, at hotels, B&Bs, gas stations, and restaurants. It was also believed that car and recreational vehicle businesses in the Avalon were benefiting from spending by mobile workers working for Vale.

Infrastructure and Services

It was felt by some participants that housing availability in several communities in the Placentia and Clarenville-Isthmus regions had been impacted by the influx of workers to Long Harbour during the construction phase. A work-camp was made available for workers onsite and 'the Lodge', a hotel for managers and contractors, was set up in the community. However, workers being paid an allowance to live off-site found accommodations in several communities within the region. Mini homes were developed in Long Harbour to house managers during construction. It was hoped they would at-

"They had a...camp built, which was full...For those who were being paid a living allowance, you know, that's what filled up all the homes in the immediate area, probably in a 50-mile radius. Just about every community was full."

tract workers to live in Long Harbour post-construction; however, some have remained vacant while others have been purchased by locals who have moved them to other areas of town. Housing prices have been impacted by lack of demand.

The level of traffic increased in the community during construction. Participants noted that the condition of the roads leading to Long Harbour was bad and presented a safety concern. Vale purchased and gifted the Town a new fire hall and fire truck. Key informants suggested that the Town was able to maximize some capital works projects, including a new water treatment plant and improved piping in the community. A new park was developed in cooperation with Vale and the Lodge and Training Centre (now Community Centre) was gifted to the town after the construction phase.



Figure 2: New Fire Hall in Long Harbour, March 2017

Social-Cultural

Some questionnaire and interview informants felt that mobile work contributed to family challenges, including tensions between spouses that they believed may result in divorce. They also suggested that, when mobile workers were home, they were often too tired to engage with or volunteer in their home communities. For instance, sports teams in source and host communities were struggling to find coaches.

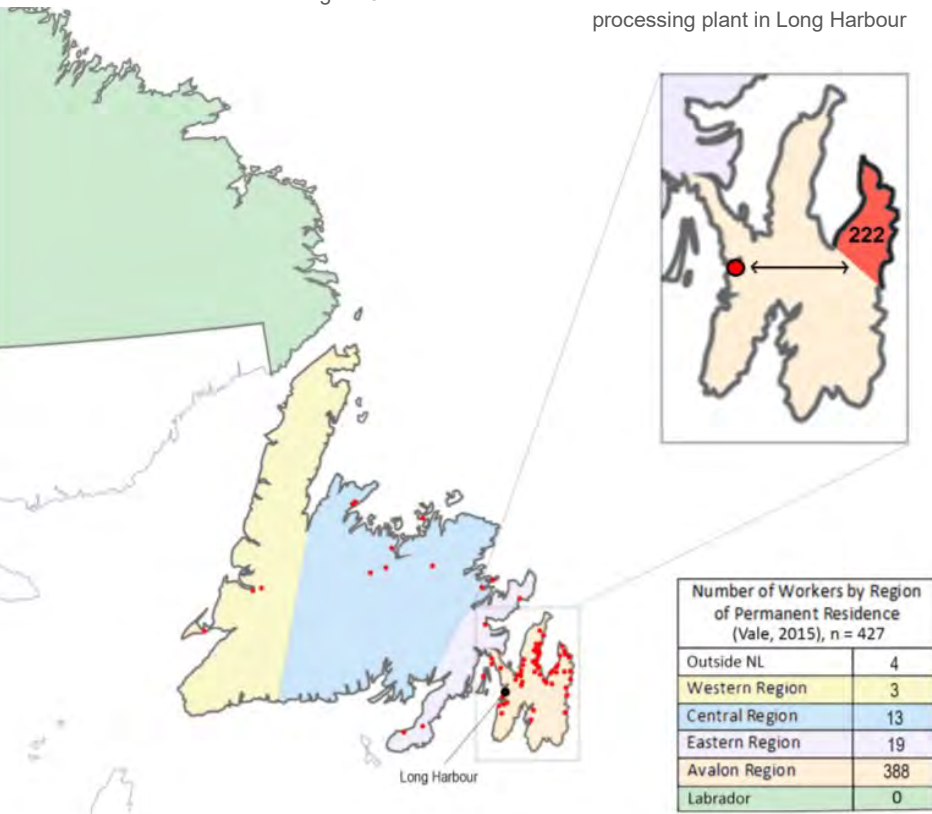
Sustainability

Some key informants believed that residents of the region needed to be involved in mobile work due to a lack of well-paying jobs locally. Despite the economic advantages of being a mobile worker, the precarity of mobile employment was raised as a concern. This was thought to be particularly challenging for young people because individuals just coming out of school would be making large salaries in their first jobs. It was thought that this might give them an inflated expectation of what their work is worth and allow them to develop lifestyles based on an income level that is unrealistic.

Planning and Governance

A sub-agreement was struck between the Town and Vale to provide infrastructural assets to residents of the community, as mentioned above. A community liaison committee was also mandated in the processing facility agreement. It consists of community representatives/leaders and Vale representatives. Members are responsible for reporting project progress to their communities and bringing community concerns to the representatives from Vale. Key informants felt that the relationship between the community and Vale had been positive overall.

Figure 3: Source communities of mobile workers at Vale's nickel processing plant in Long Harbour



Phase II: The Impacts of E-RGM Vale's Mobile Workers

Phase II looked at the social and economic impacts of E-RGM on the source communities of mobile workers who commute to and from the nickel processing facility at Long Harbour. A questionnaire (131 completed questionnaires, 33% response rate) and 21 interviews were conducted with mobile workers on site and in St. John's. Phase II sought to answer three primary questions: 1) What factors influence a worker's decision to stay in their source communities and commute rather than relocate closer to the worksite, 2) How do mobile workers spend their time in source communities, and 3) How do mobile workers financially contribute to the local economy in their source communities?

An analysis of data provided to the research team by Vale indicated that 222 (52%) of the 427 workers with addresses listed in 2015 com-

muted to Long Harbour from communities within the St. John's CMA. Others resided in regions across the island and outside the province (see Figure 3). The majority of survey respondents (80%) travelled more than 50km one way to get to the worksite by car and 97% lived outside of Long Harbour. This study found that amenities and services, like grocery stores and shopping malls/centres, played an important role in the decision of workers to commute rather than relocate to the community of Long Harbour.

Social Impacts

Findings suggested that workers commuting over 50km to Long Harbour had a reduced sense of belonging to their home communities. Literature has noted that being active in community events, services, and programs leads to increased sense of belonging, community cohesion, and social development. However, this study found that work rotations and commute length can reduce the amount of time individuals spend participating in community activities, such as volunteerism, community events, entertainment, sports, and recreation. Workers that travelled less than 50km to work at Long Harbour were able to remain engaged in community activities in their source communities; however, workers that travelled over 50km were less likely to engage in community activities in their source communities.

Economic Impacts

It is assumed that mobile workers contribute economically to their source communities through, for example, taxation and local spending. This study found that the ways an individual contributed to their source community financially depended on a variety of factors. These included: the amount of income they receive, the availability of goods and services in their source community, their proximity to an urban centre, family size, stage in their lifecycles, and others. When possible, many workers preferred to stay in their source communities and purchase locally to reduce the amount of time they spent driving. This may have provided economic spinoffs in their region of residence. Workers have also contributed locally by purchasing homes and/or investing in property. Vehicle purchases by Vale workers have also contributed to economic development, though primarily in St. John's. That being said, it is difficult to suggest that all source communities of Vale workers are experiencing significant local economic benefits, particularly communities with small concentrations of workers.

For more detailed Phase II findings, please see:

Barrett, J. (2017) Commuters and Communities: The Social and Economic Impacts of Labour Mobility on Source Communities. MA Thesis. Submitted to the Department of Geography, Memorial University, St. John's NL.

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

In Long Harbour, responses to the impacts of mobile work were taken up by local actors. This includes municipalities, Vale, and businesses in the region.

To find opportunities for local hiring by Vale, a survey was conducted by the Long Harbour Development Corporation. The survey identified the skills and certifications of existing residents of Long Harbour. It was hoped this data would be drawn on by Vale when hiring employees. A recent announcement by the provincial government (June 11, 2018) indicates that more technicians will be employed at the Long Harbour facility after 2021.

In response to traffic challenges, the Town of Long Harbour met with the RCMP to discuss safety. Vale also initiated a bus service in 2018 to transport workers between St. John's and Long Harbour, an alternative to carpooling.

It was suggested that some businesses in the wider region had adapted their policies and/or practices to accommodate a mobile workforce. During the construction phase, it was noted that some grocery stores extended their hours to allow commuting workers to shop after their rotations.

Finally, representatives of six towns in the Placentia, Isthmus, and Burin regions (Marystown, Placentia, Long Harbour, Sunnyside, Come by Chance and Arnold's Cove) began the Small Town Big Industry Initiative. This initiative brought municipal representatives and planners together allowing them to share their experiences operating in the presence of large industries.

What else could be done to help Long Harbour and surrounding communities adapt to the presence of mobile workers?

Key informants felt that increased local hiring by Vale would benefit the community of Long Harbour in the long term. Recognizing that Vale requires certain skillsets for employees, it was felt that the development of a training program in the region for nickel processing and related activities might address this challenge.

It was also felt that the region should pursue economic diversification in order to increase economic sustainability overall. Aquaculture was raised as an area of potential interest. In line with this, it was felt that the development of training programs in aquaculture in the region could be a potential opportunity for encouraging local employment in the future.

Overall, it was hoped that the presence of the nickel processing facility at Long Harbour would attract services to the region that would, in turn, assist in attracting new residents.



Figure 4: View of the Nickel Processing Plant at Long Harbour

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.

This research builds on post-doctoral research conducted by Heather Hall (see: Hall (2014). Regional Development, Nickel Processing & Labour Mobility: A comparison of Sudbury ON and Long Harbour NL; Hall (2016). Exploring the nature, extent, and community impacts and responses to E-RGM in Long Harbour, Newfoundland and Labrador and Sudbury, Ontario).

This report was completed by the Community Impacts Team in June 2018 and published in February 2020.



Long Harbour Team



Heather Hall
Community Impacts
Co-Investigator

Assistant Professor, School of Environment, Enterprise and Development, University of Waterloo



Kelly Vodden
Community Impacts
Team Lead

Vice President Research and Graduate Studies, Grenfell Campus, Memorial University



Joshua Barrett
Community Impacts
Team Trainee

MA, Department of Geography, Memorial University



Leanna Butters
Community Impacts
Team Trainee

MA, Environmental Policy Institute, Grenfell Campus, Memorial University