



# Staff Report to Council - for Information

**Title:** Bruce County Transit Demand and Feasibility Study

**From:** Claire Dodds, Commissioner of Community Development

**Date:** December 7, 2023

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## Report Purpose:

This report is for information.

## Report Summary:

The report outlines the findings of the Bruce County Transit Demand and Feasibility Study, recently completed by Arcadis IBI Group on behalf of the County. The report outlines seven transit needs that were identified through consultation with the public, community stakeholders and municipal partners through 2023. It outlines short, medium and long-term actions that can be taken by the County and other stakeholders to address these needs.

Staff will review the findings of the study and will bring forward recommendations to Council in future budget years and through Department work plans.

## Background:

In 2022, the County was successful in receiving funding from the Federal Public Transit Program Rural Transit Solution fund to undertake a study to identify the demand and need for a public transit system in Bruce County. The funding supported the County to determine the transit needs of potential users, where demand would be the strongest and to consider possible transit solutions.

In September 2022, the County engaged Arcadis IBI Group through an RFP process, to undertake the Bruce County Transit Need and Demand study. Between September 2022 and March 2023, the consultant prepared a project vision, mission & goals, draft survey and background work.

A significant component of the work on the transit needs and demand study since March 2023 has been the engagement of both the public, municipal partners (staff and Councils), as well as community stakeholders.

In May 2023, the County released the first public survey and municipal/stakeholder engagement sessions on this project which helped identify needs and demands for transit within Bruce County.

The second public survey and municipal/stakeholder engagement session in August 2023 asked for feedback on potential transit solutions to meet the needs identified in Phase 1.

The results of the public survey and community stakeholder/municipal engagement sessions identified that there are seven areas of transit need and demand across Bruce County:

1. Connecting Smaller Communities to Jobs and Services
2. Connecting Seasonal, Service and Occasional Workers to Jobs
3. Intercommunity Connections
4. Transportation within Larger urban Communities
5. Tourism-Oriented Transportation
6. Enhanced Coordination of Specialized Transit
7. Improved Communication, Collaboration and Coordination of Transportation Solutions

The consultant assessed the transportation needs across the County are diverse and cannot be served by a “one-size-fits-all” traditional transit approach. For example, the type of transit service that would best serve seasonal tourism would be quite different from one oriented towards serving local trips within urban communities. The consultant has also noted that the provision of transit in Bruce County, as in many rural communities, is a very challenging and is a costly proposition because of the County’s dispersed population, lack of a single dominant travel destination, and the populations who would benefit most from transit services (e.g. seniors, low-income earners, youth, young professionals, etc.) are distributed throughout the County.

A phased approach is recommended by the consultant to implementing solutions identified in the study, with a view to positioning the County as a coordinator and facilitator of transit. The County can work to help improve coordination and collaboration with agencies already providing transit services in the County and to focus on advocacy for funding to build out a more comprehensive transit network in Bruce County.

Exhibit 4.11 in the report highlights the ridership and funding allocation that other upper-tier County governments are making to operate the transit systems in their jurisdiction. The provision of transit services is heavily subsidized by upper-tier governments through provincial and additional funding through their County tax levy.

At this time, the provincial funding that allowed many upper-tier Counties establish transit services (e.g. Grey Transit System, Wellington County’s Ride Well service and Perth County’s PC Connect system) is no longer available and cannot be accessed by Bruce County. The provincial funding for those upper-tier municipalities who have already set up transit systems is set to end on January 1, 2025.

The cost to deliver comprehensive transit service without receiving funding from other levels of government is not sustainable solely through property taxes and user fees. The study identifies that any long-term comprehensive transit network in Bruce County will require funding from other levels of government. The findings of this study will support any application the County would make for any future rounds of funding for rural transit solutions from the provincial and federal government.

While funding is not currently available to support establishing a traditional transit network at this time in Bruce County, the consultant has identified that low-cost and readily implementable solutions are available and are already being explored by the County.

Examples of actions already underway include:

- Setting up a ride-sharing program in partnership with Bruce Power that all County residents and visitors can utilize;
- Looking for opportunities to collaborate with Home and Community Support Services (HCSS) and Saugeen Mobility and Regional Transit (SMART);
- Partnering with neighbouring transit services to extend routes into Bruce County (extension of GRT #5 to Wiarton & Sauble Beach);
- Communicating what transit services are available in the County to the public; and
- Advocating to other levels of government for long-term stable funding, coordination of private and public transit solutions in Bruce County and connecting the County with regional destinations through transit connections.

The report outlines short, medium and long-term recommendations (chapter 8) that can help be taken by Bruce County to improve transportation options to meet the transit needs and demand identified in this study.

Staff will review the recommendations and assess the implementation of medium and long-term recommendations based on funding and internal capacity to deliver on recommendations.

#### **Financial/Staffing/Legal/IT Considerations:**

The 2024 budget includes funds to support several short-term recommendations proposed in the Transit Demand and Feasibility Study, including:

- the County's portion of maintaining the extension to Grey Transit Route 5 from Owen Sound to Wiarton and Sauble Beach
- the County's portion of funding to initiate a Rideshare program in partnership with Bruce Power
- staff time to develop a communication strategy for promoting Rideshare program and information portal (existing website) to provide one central source of information for transportation services in Bruce County;
- staff time to collaborate with existing specialized transit providers, HCSS and SMART.

Costs associated with other recommendations from the Transit Demand and Feasibility Study will be reviewed by staff and will be considered through the Department Business Plans and budget process for 2025 and beyond.

Staff will remain focused on advocating for and seeking funding from other levels of government to support future transit initiatives within Bruce County through 2024.

There are no staffing, legal or IT considerations for this report. The completion of this study and report was a budgeted expense in 2022 and was partially funded by the Federal Rural Transit Solutions Grant.

#### **Interdepartmental Consultation:**

The Transportation and Environmental Services Department and the Office of the CAO (OOCAO) were consulted on the preparation of the Bruce County Transit Demand and Feasibility Study Report.

Municipal staff and councilors, along with community partners and agency staff (e.g. HCSS and SMART) were engaged through stakeholder consultations which occurred during the two phases of the study.

A significant component of this study was the engagement of the public, community stakeholders and municipal partners. Through two phases of engagement, over 1,650 surveys were submitted by members of the public.

Through this study, staff engaged with staff at Saugeen Ojibway Nation to start to gain understanding of the transportation needs of the Saugeen Ojibway First Nation and Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation.

#### **Link to Strategic Goals and Objectives:**

##### **Strategic Goals**

Goal 1. Build a strong and inclusive community.

- a. Drive community well-being

Goal 2. Enhance and grow partnerships.

- a. Support Indigenous engagement and reconciliation actions.
- b. Work collaboratively between departments and with partners.

Goal 4. Promote responsible growth.

- a. Improve transportation options and connectivity in Bruce County

#### **Report Author:**

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#### **Approved for Submission:**

Christine MacDonald, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer