

<b>To:</b>	Warden Milne and Members of Grey County Council
<b>Committee Date:</b>	February 22, 2024
<b>Subject / Report No:</b>	CAOR-CW-03-24
<b>Title:</b>	Changes to Grey County Community Transportation
<b>Prepared by:</b>	Stephanie Stewart, Manager of Community Transportation
<b>Reviewed by:</b>	Kim Wingrove, CAO
<b>Lower Tier(s) Affected:</b>	County-wide
<b>Status:</b>	

## Recommendation

1. That Council receives Report CAOR-CW-03-24 Changes to Grey County Community Transportation; and
2. That Council directs staff to enact Option \_\_\_\_; and
3. That Council directs staff to undertake further research and stakeholder engagement to assess the viability of ridesharing forms of transportation and to bring a report to a future council meeting.

## Executive Summary

The Grey Transit Route is a public transit service that began running in September 2020. The service is supported with base funding from the Community Transportation (CT) Grant provided by the Province of Ontario. This funding ends on March 31, 2025. Grey County has provided additional funding to enhance the service since April 2022 and that funding was not continued in the 2024 budget. This report recommends changes to the service that align costs to available grant funds at the completion of the notice period to the service provider. The proposed service model attempts to balance preserving some service everywhere while directing the greatest service to those routes which have had the strongest ridership. Since ridership has grown to 28,000 rides annually, there is a demonstrated need for intercommunity transportation in Grey County. Staff recommend further analysis of the opportunities and challenges facing the private sector in providing services with the goal of ensuring Grey County is well suited for private sector investment in providing services to the travelling public.

## Background and Discussion

The GTR connects local transit in Owen Sound, Meaford, Orangeville, Collingwood, Wiarton, Town of the Blue Mountains, Markdale, Flesherton, Dundalk, Georgian Bluffs, Chatsworth,

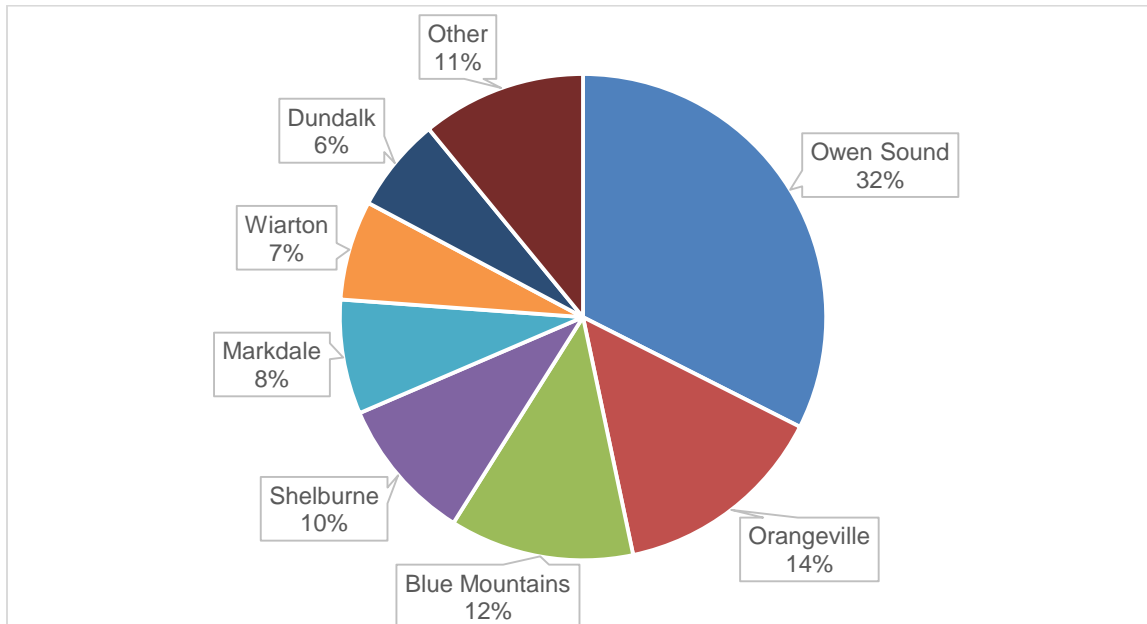
Sauble Beach, and Shelburne. Connections in Collingwood and Orangeville allow passengers to connect to GO transit and access to the GTA.

On December 15, 2023, Grey County Council directed staff to reduce the GTR service to align with the remaining Community Transportation Grant dollars. In order to meet the new budget, staff used recent survey responses, direct ridership feedback, and detailed ridership data to recommend potential options for Council's consideration. Additionally, the elimination of select stops is required to stay within the budget, these stops were selected by riders' access to these stops via another transit system, walkability of the community, connection to highways/major Grey County corridors, desire to offer a stop in each community, and length of time it takes to get into and out of a stop.

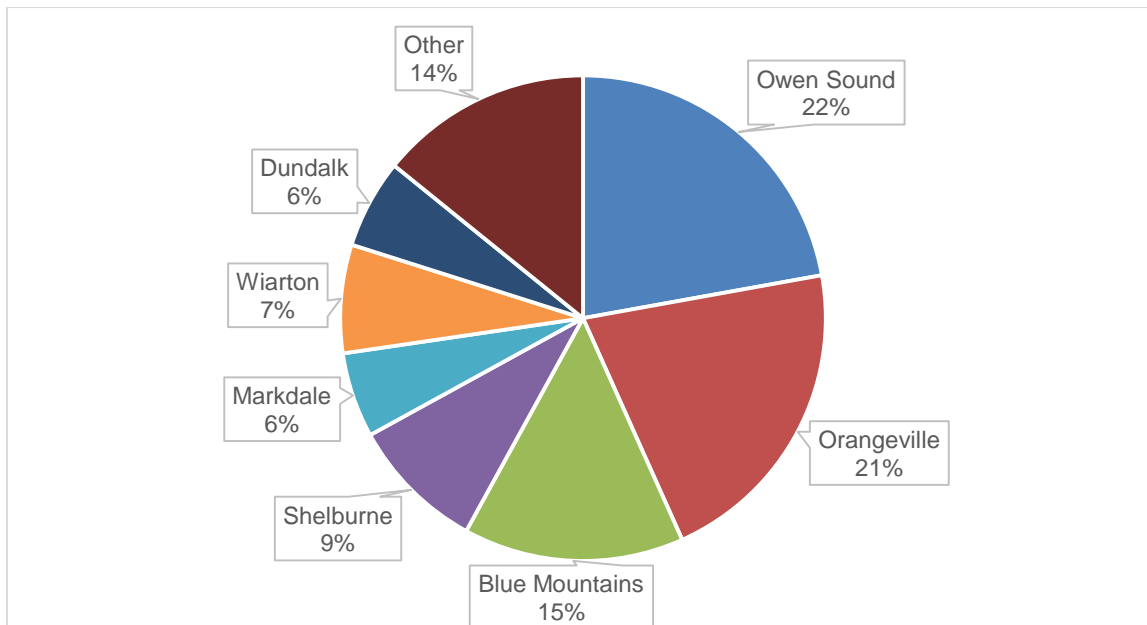
## Grey Transit Route – Rider Survey 2024

In an effort to better understand the needs of our current riders, a survey was conducted between December 21, 2023, and January 19, 2024, and received 155 responses. Respondents were very clear that the removal of any service level would be detrimental to their lives for a variety of reasons. To see the full survey results, see Appendix A.

**Question 1 – Where do you usually board the GTR? ( select all that apply)**



**Question 2 – What are your destinations when you ride the GTR? ( select all that apply)**



**Question 3 – At what times of the day would you typically use GTR? ( select all that apply)**

1. Weekday midday ( 8:30 AM to 3 PM)

2. Weekday afternoon rush (3 PM to 7:30 PM)
  3. Weekday morning rush hour (before 8:30 AM)
- \*top three responses\*

The people who use the current service rely on it. Respondents were very clear that the removal of any service level would be detrimental to their lives for a variety of reasons.

**Question 4 – For what reasons do you travel?**

1. Employment
  2. Shopping and errands
  3. Appointments
- \*top three responses\*

**Question 5 – On average, how many trips do you take, or do you plan to take on the GTR in a typical month ( a roundtrip to and from a destination is considered two trips)?**

1. 6-10
  2. 11-20
  3. More than 20
- \*top three responses\*

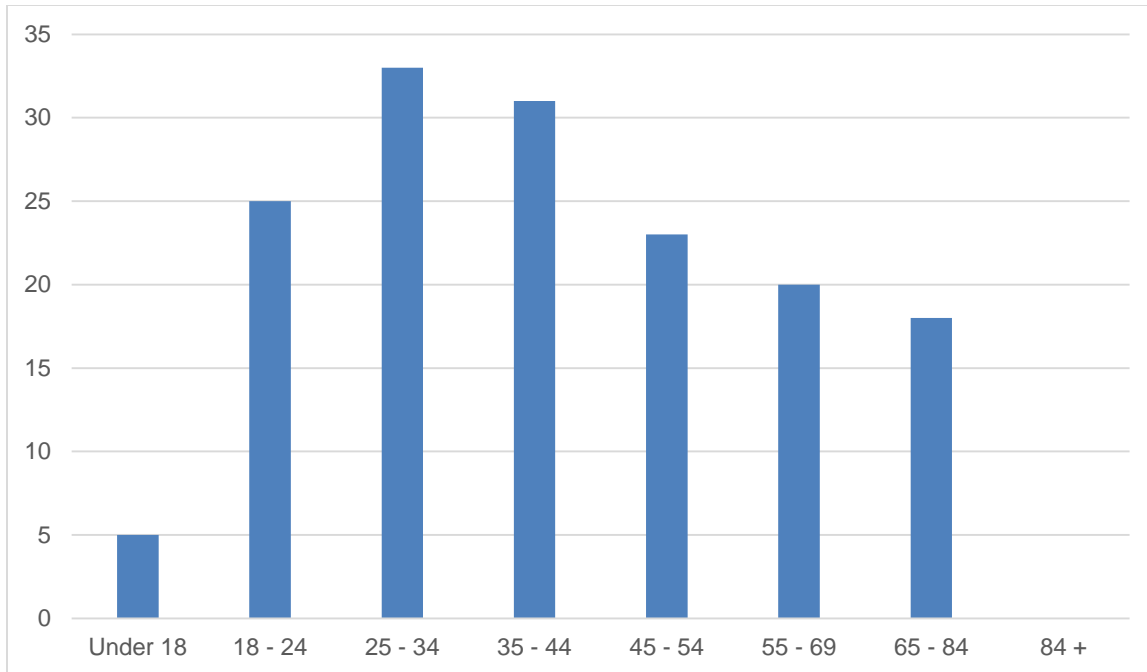
**Question 6 – How would the removal of your current preferred GTR route(s) impact you?**  
Refer to Appendix B.

**Question 7 - Would you pay more to ride the GTR to maintain your current preferred route times?**

- Yes - 67%
- No – 4%
- Unsure – 29%

Many people commented, “must be reasonable.”

**Question 8 - How old are you?**



**Question 9 - Do you have any other feedback to provide on the GTR service?**  
Refer to Appendix C.

## GTR Service Plan May to December 2024

It is staff's recommendation based on an endorsement from community stakeholders to continue operating the Grey Transit Route system at a reduced service level to extend some service for as long as possible.

## GTR Bus Stop Reductions

Ridership statistics were used to determine which stops to eliminate to assist in saving costs. The below charts represent the total pick-ups and drop-offs at each bus stop from July 2023 – January 2024.

## Analysis of Ridership by Stop - July 2023 – January 2024

Green highlighted stops to be removed.

<b>Total Pick Ups &amp; Drop Offs</b>	<b>Route 1 Bus Stops</b>
3517	Owen Sound Transit Terminal
413	Grey County Building
543	Stone Tree
399	Chatsworth Ball Diamond
198	Holland Centre
1488	King Edward Park
300	Flesherton Arena
3328	Dundalk
<b>Total Pick Ups &amp; Drop Offs</b>	<b>Route 2 Bus Stops</b>
3641	Dundalk Arena
333	Skyview
840	Col Phillips Drive
647	Greenwood Crescent @ Fiddle Park Ln
876	Victoria St. @ Red front Store Ln
567	Simon Rd & School Rd
150	Super Burger
4070	Hansen Blvd. @ First St
190	Georgian College Orangeville
1050	Transfer (Fourth St.)
<b>Total Pick Ups &amp; Drop Offs</b>	<b>Route 3 Bus Stops</b>
2319	Owen Sound Transit Terminal
46	Bumstead Family Medical Centre
2766	Downtown Meaford
742	SmartCentres Owen Sound
154	Owen Sound Hospital
77	Georgian College Owen Sound
<b>Total Pick Ups &amp; Drop Offs</b>	<b>Route 4 Bus Stops</b>
1619	Downtown Meaford
344	Bill's Valu Mart
414	Thornbury Foodland
187	Blue Mountain Community Health Centre
15	Craigeleith Community Centre
1633	Blue Mountain Village
<b>Total Pick Ups &amp; Drop Offs</b>	<b>Route 5 Bus Stops</b>
1605	Owen Sound Transit Terminal
195	No Frills Georgian Bluffs
69	Shallow Lake Arena
249	Hepworth Visitor Centre
842	Foodland Warton
442	Louisa Street
576	Sauble Beach

# Financial Requirements

**Option 1:** Maximizes grant funds for transit service from May 1st, 2024, to March 31, 2025. This option funds management expenses in 2024 from the One Time Funding Reserve. There is no allowance for management expenses in 2025.

The current level of service for the GTR will be maintained until April 30, 2024, to allow for the provision of the notice period with the vendor that provides the transit service. In order to cover this notice period, as well as management expenses for 2024, a transfer of \$208,700 is required from the One-Time Funding Reserve. Provincial funding of \$244,400 and expected fare revenue of \$30,000 will also be used during this notice period to cover the costs of transportation as well as other administrative costs such as licensing, advertising, and fuel surcharges.

The chart below illustrates the level of service that is currently in effect until April 30th.

Route	Days of Service	Daily Round Trips
1 – Owen Sound to Dundalk	Monday - Sunday	4
2 – Dundalk to Orangeville	Monday – Friday	4
3 – Owen Sound to Meaford	Monday - Sunday	4
4 – Meaford to Blue Mountains	Monday - Sunday	4
5 – Owen Sound to Wiarton	Monday – Friday	3

The chart below illustrates the new level of service that would come into effect on May 1, 2024, and run until March 31, 2025, if Council endorses Option #1. Provincial Funding of \$488,700 as well as \$44,500 in expected sponsorship and fare revenue will be used from May 1 until December 31, 2024, to cover the cost of transportation as well as other administrative costs such as licensing, advertising, and fuel surcharges.



<b>Route</b>	<b>Days of Service</b>	<b>Daily Round Trips</b>	<b>Cost per Month</b>	<b>Total Cost May-Dec 2024</b>
1 – Owen Sound to Dundalk <i>Eliminate Bus Stops</i> - Grey County Admin Building - Holland Centre	Monday - Friday	4	\$16,411.45	\$131,291.60
2 – Dundalk to Orangeville <i>Move Bus Stop</i> - Dundalk Arena to Dundalk Library <i>Eliminate Bus Stops</i> - Super Burger - Simon Road & School Road - Greenwood Crescent & Fiddle Park - Orangeville Georgian College	Monday - Friday	4	\$15,902.65	\$127,221.20
3 – Owen Sound to Meaford <i>Eliminate Bus Stops</i> - Bumstead Clinic Meaford - SmartCentres Owen Sound - Owen Sound Hospital - Georgian College Owen Sound	Monday - Friday	4	\$9,966.65	\$79,733.20
4 – Meaford to Blue Mountains <i>Eliminate Bus Stops</i> - Blue Mountains Medical Centre	Monday - Friday	4	\$12,765.05	\$102,120.40

<b>Route</b>	<b>Days of Service</b>	<b>Daily Round Trips</b>	<b>Cost per Month</b>	<b>Total Cost May-Dec 2024</b>
<i>- Craigleith Depot</i>				
5 – Owen Sound to Wiarton <b>until September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024</b> <i>Eliminate Bus Stop</i> <i>- Shallow Lake</i>	Monday – Friday	3	\$13,483.20	\$53,932.80
<b>Total May 1 – December 31, 2024 Transportation Cost</b>			<b>\$68,528.99</b>	<b>\$494,299.20</b>

**Option 2:** Service will be further reduced on routes 3 and 4 beginning on May 1, 2024, as management expenses are covered through provincial grant funding until March 31, 2025.

As in Option #1, the current level of service for the GTR will be maintained until April 30, 2024, to allow for the provision of the notice period. In order to cover this notice period, a transfer of \$121,900 is required from the One-Time Funding Reserve. Provincial funding of \$244,400 and expected fare revenue of \$30,000 will also be used during this notice period to cover the costs of transportation as well as other administrative costs such as licensing, advertising, and fuel surcharges.

The chart below illustrates the level of service that is currently in effect until April 30th.

<b>Route</b>	<b>Days of Service</b>	<b>Daily Round Trips</b>
1 – Owen Sound to Dundalk	Monday - Sunday	4
2 – Dundalk to Orangeville	Monday – Friday	4
3 – Owen Sound to Meaford	Monday - Sunday	4
4 – Meaford to Blue Mountains	Monday - Sunday	4
5 – Owen Sound to Wiarton	Monday – Friday	3

The chart below illustrates the new level of service that would come into effect on May 1, 2024, and run until March 31, 2025, if Council endorses Option #2. Provincial Funding of \$489,600 as well as \$39,600 in expected sponsorship and fare revenue will be used from May 1 until December 31, 2024, to cover the cost of transportation as well as other administrative costs such as licensing, advertising, and fuel surcharges.

<b>Route</b>	<b>Days of Service</b>	<b>Daily Round Trips</b>	<b>Cost per Month</b>	<b>Total Cost May-Dec 2024</b>
1 – Owen Sound to Dundalk <i>Eliminate Bus Stops</i> - Grey County Admin Building - Holland Centre	Monday - Friday	4	\$16,411.45	\$131,291.60
2 – Dundalk to Orangeville <i>Move Bus Stop</i> - Dundalk Arena to Dundalk Library <i>Eliminate Bus Stops</i> - Super Burger - Simon Road & School Road - Greenwood Crescent & Fiddle Park - Orangeville Georgian College	Monday - Friday	4	\$15,902.65	\$127,221.20
3 – Owen Sound to Meaford <i>Eliminate Bus Stops</i> - Bumstead Clinic Meaford - SmartCentres Owen Sound - Owen Sound Hospital - Georgian College Owen Sound	Monday - Friday	2	\$4,983.33	\$39,866.64
4 – Meaford to Blue Mountains <i>Eliminate Bus Stops</i> - Blue Mountains Medical Centre - Craigleith Depot	Monday - Friday	2	\$6,382.53	\$51,060.24

<b>Route</b>	<b>Days of Service</b>	<b>Daily Round Trips</b>	<b>Cost per Month</b>	<b>Total Cost May-Dec 2024</b>
5 – Owen Sound to Wiarton <b>until September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024</b>  <i>Eliminate Bus Stop</i>  <i>- Shallow Lake</i>	Monday – Friday	3	\$13,483.20	\$53,932.80
<b>Total May 1 – December 31, 2024 Transportation Cost</b>			<b>\$57,163.15</b>	<b>\$403,372.48</b>

It should be noted that there are some assumptions and risk factors under both Option #1 and Option #2. The GTR has historically received \$12,500 per year in sponsorship revenue and staff are assuming in both options that this sponsorship will continue for 2024. However, with the reduction in service and some routes being discontinued, there is a risk that the sponsorship may not be collected. If this is the case, provincial grant money could be used to cover any shortfall, however, if this is done, a future reduction in service will be needed at the beginning of 2025 to ensure no tax dollars are used for the transit service.

An additional risk and assumption for both options relates to the fare revenue. Because fare revenue is not guaranteed, staff have calculated fare revenue conservatively, however, there is still the risk that fare revenue could come in lower than predicted. Once again, provincial grant money could be used to cover this shortfall, however, a future reduction in service would be needed at the beginning of 2025 to ensure no tax dollars are used for this service.

Additionally, as of May 1, 2024, GTR phone lines will be open Monday - Friday from 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m., a reduction from the current level of service offered daily from 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

## Looking beyond March 31, 2025

County Staff have heard from residents and stakeholders who shared their challenges with the current transit options in Owen Sound and the County in general.

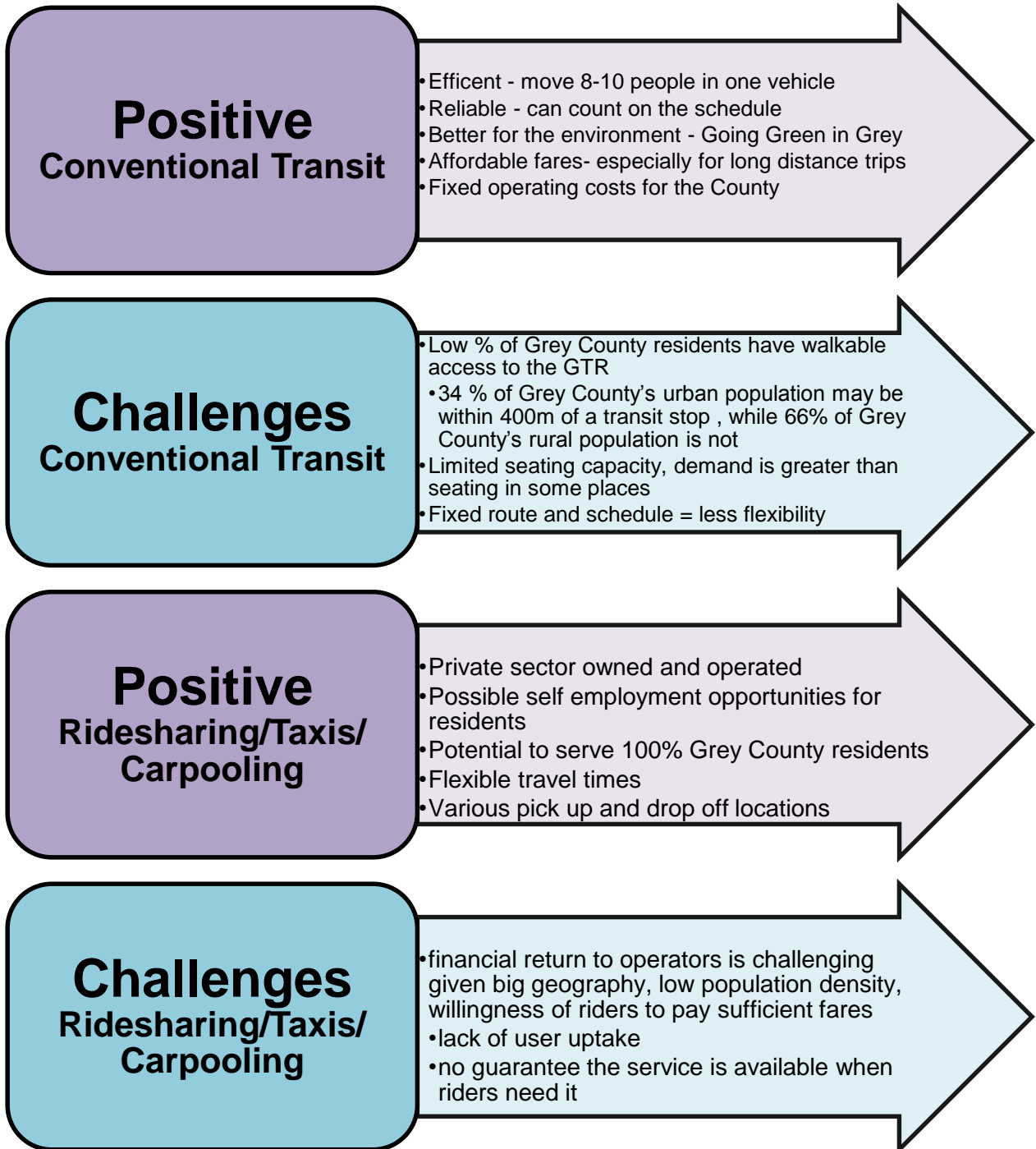
- The current operating environment (costs and regulations) poses challenges to existing and potential future taxi-type businesses. Without a strong business case to invest, the availability of transportation has not kept up with demand. Where service does exist, long wait times for service are reported frequently.
- There is a need to revisit municipal bylaws, to ensure they have kept up with inflation and the changing ride-sharing landscape.
- Businesses are concerned about a lack of transit options for their employees and customers.
- Without a vehicle, employees are challenged to maintain their employment.
- There are many stores, restaurants, and services on the “sunset strip” in Georgian Bluffs but there is no transit service to that area.
- Transit operating hours don’t align with business operating hours. Some employers are driving employees home to ensure they can stay open beyond 6 p.m.
- Restaurants and entertainment venues believe their business would grow if taxi services were easily available to get patrons home in the evening.

During this wind down period, staff propose to begin community consultation regarding the development of a Taxi, Limousine and Vehicle for Hire By-law.

An established by-law would mean.

- Established minimum insurance coverage for providers.
- Required driver screening and training.
- Standard vehicle inspections, including accessibility requirements.
- Fare consistency

## Comparing Conventional Transit Service with Rideshare Model



## Legal Considerations

N/A

## Financial and Resource Implications

Direction was provided in the December 15, 2023, budget meeting to meet a reduction of \$438,800 from the 2024 budget for Grey Transit. It was noted in the meeting that there would be a notice period required to the service provider that staff recommended be funded from the One Time Funding Reserve. In option 1, this requires funding of \$208,700 with option 2 requiring \$121,900.

## Relevant Consultation

- Internal: Finance, Legal, Clerks, Economic Development, Communications
  - AODA Compliance (describe)
  - Contribution to Climate Change Action Plan Targets

The Grey Transit Route contributes positively to the Going Green in Grey initiative as it helps reduce carbon emissions as it offers residents the opportunity to carpool.

In April 2022, Grey County adopted a Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP) which found that in 2018, 47 % of the population lived in urban areas while 53% of the population live in rural areas of Grey County. Private vehicle use, both on and off-road, accounts for 99 percent of the vehicle kilometers travelled. Less than 1 percent of all trips made are by active modes (walking and cycling) and transit.

- External: Local Municipalities, Owen Sound Chamber of Commerce, Local Businesses

## Appendices and Attachments

Appendix A: Survey Results.

Appendix B: detailed survey responses for Question 6

Appendix C: detailed survey responses for Question 9