



Staff Report to Council - for Information

Title: Update on Bruce County Transit Initiatives

From: Claire Dodds, Commissioner of Community Development

Date: October 17, 2024

Report Number: TES-2024-024

Report Purpose:

This report is for information.

Report Summary:

This report provides a summary of activities undertaken by staff in 2024 to advance the County's work on transit. Staff have been focused on implementing a number of short-term (0-2 years) recommendations outlined in the Bruce County [Transit Demand and Feasibility Study](#).

Background/Analysis:

Bruce County completed a [Transit Demand and Feasibility Study](#) in December 2023.

This study provided a number of short, medium and long-term recommendations that can be considered by County Council to grow the transportation options available to residents in Bruce County.

This study concluded there were a diverse variety of transportation needs that could not be served by a "one-size-fits-all" transit approach. It also concluded the provision of transit service in Bruce County, as in many rural communities, is a very challenging and costly proposition because of the County's dispersed population, lack of a single dominant travel destination, and the spread of populations who might benefit most from transit service (e.g. seniors, low-income earners, and youths) across different communities around the County.

The study did, however, identify that there are low-cost and readily implementable solutions available to the County. The study recommended a phased approach proposing short, medium, and long-term actions the County. The study did note that the phasing and implementation of recommendations should also consider sustainable sources of funding that may come available.

The study identified several short-term (0-2 years) actions to help improve travel access for County residents while collecting more data, strengthening coordination and collaboration with agencies already providing transit services in the County, and time to advocate for and seek funding to build out a more comprehensive transit network.

The consultant identified 8 short term actions (0-2 years) that meet a variety of identified transportation needs.

Through 2024, the Commissioner of Community Development, along with the Director of Transportation & Environmental Services have been working to advance action on 4 of the 8 recommendations, including:

- Develop a Smart Commute program to encourage and support carpooling using technology-enabled ridesharing software;
- Develop detailed communications plan surrounding ridesharing program to ensure it can attract a significant pool of drivers needed to successfully operate the service;
- Establish an information portal on the County website
- Explaining available transit services including the rideshare program, conventional and specialized transit services; and
- Commence regular dialogue with specialized transit providers SMART and HCSS on improve specialized transit coordination to explore opportunities to improve efficiency of each organization.

These actions are all in progress, with the goal of launching Smart Commute later this Fall and launching the transit webpage on the County site at the same time. Having regular dialogue with specialized transit providers is an on-going activity.

In addition to these actions, Government Relations staff continue to advocate for funding to advance transit initiatives in Bruce County:

- The County had a productive delegation with the Ministry of Transportation at the 2024 AMO Conference about funding to support the continuation of Grey Transit Route #5 to Wiarton, as well as support to make sustainable funding available to advance transit initiatives in Bruce County.

County staff continue to work with South Bruce Peninsula staff, and Grey County staff to consider the future of Grey Transit Route #5. While Grey County originally proposed to end this route in September 2024 due to lack of system funding, County Council provided funding jointly along with South Bruce Peninsula Council, to extend this route to December 31, 2024. Staff are currently in conversation with Grey County staff to understand the status of the Grey Transit System heading into 2025.

County staff continue to monitor funding programs that may be available to further transit initiatives:

- On October 7th, 2024, the Ministry of Transportation released its Ontario Transit Infrastructure Fund (OTIF) which offers \$5 million of funding annually to deliver local and intercommunity transportation projects in unserved and underserved areas in Ontario, particularly in rural areas. The focus is on supporting projects that can transition to become financial sustainable. This fund is structured to provide 50% funding for multi-year transit projects and has an open intake period.

- Federal Rural Transit Solutions funding continues to be available for the Planning stream. The capital stream is fully subscribed until the next intake. Timing of the next capital project intake is unknown.

Staff will evaluate proceeding with an application for OTIF funding once program criteria have been fully reviewed and potential projects have been assessed. Based on OTIF program criteria, a supportive resolution from Council is required to apply for OTIF funding. As such, staff will bring forward a subsequent report to Council outlining any proposed project prior to applying for OTIF funding.

Financial/Staffing/Legal/IT Considerations:

Costs associated with the delivery of transit initiatives, including the Smart Commute program, are included in the approved Transportation & Environmental Services 2024 budget & proposed within the 2025 draft budget.

Existing staff resources are available to implement the initial launch of the Smart Commute Program. Advancing and optimizing the utilization of the Smart Commute Program over time will require additional resource to be considered in future budget years.

Interdepartmental Consultation:

Transportation & Environmental Services, the Office of the CAO, Finance and Information Technology have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

Link to Strategic Goals and Objectives:

Growth and Innovation - Strengthen County's use of technology and innovative initiatives

Growth and Innovation - Promote responsible growth

Link to Departmental Plan Goals and Objectives, if any:

Advance work on short-term recommendations outlined in the Bruce County [Transit Feasibility and Demand Study](#)

Report Author and Departmental Approval:

Claire Dodds, Commissioner of Community Development

Approved for Submission:

Christine MacDonald, Chief Administrative Officer

Attachments:

None