

1. What is the opportunity?

In mid-December 2017, the Ontario Ministry of Transportation announced the Community Transportation (CT) Grant Program. There are two streams of funding – one for Local Transportation projects and one for Long Distance Intercommunity Transportation. A municipality may not be the lead applicant for more than one grant for each level of funding, but can partner in multiple applications.

The CT Grant Program requires that funding being used to respond to one or both of the following priorities:

- i. More intercommunity transportation service
- ii. More connected transportation services so as to enable intermodal transportation hubs

Within these two priority areas, there are four objectives:

- Improve mobility options for individuals who need access
- Build or enhance capacity to meet local, regional and/or intercommunity transportation demands
- Create or contribute to networks of transportation services
- Improve service delivery and efficiency.

A project which emphasizes the coordination of **Local Transportation** services where two or more partners collaborate can receive up to \$500,000. The proposed community transportation project must be implemented within one year of the agreement and operate until at least the date that the program expires (March 31, 2023).

A project which emphasizes scheduled **Long Distance Intercommunity Transportation** must provide service as least five days per week with two return trips daily, if feasible. Up to \$1.5 million in funding could be approved. The proposed Intercommunity Transportation project must be implemented within one year of the agreement and operate until at least the date that the program expires (March 31, 2023).

2. Why respond to this opportunity?

In Perth County, St. Marys and Stratford, the lack of low-cost, convenient community transportation has been identified by multiple organizations and in multiple studies as one of the key barriers to:

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| ▪ expanding local companies | ▪ accessing public service agencies |
| ▪ expanding the local labour force | ▪ accessing employment |
| ▪ attracting and settling newcomers | ▪ accessing volunteer opportunities |
| ▪ enabling access to skills training | ▪ accessing healthcare providers and |
| ▪ connections with transportation hubs in
London or Kitchener-Waterloo/Toronto | healthcare facilities |

“In Perth County, Stratford and St. Marys, the area’s low unemployment rate is generating significant challenges for local employers in finding, attracting and retaining both skilled and general labour. In some cases, companies are reporting that difficulties in attracting labour are handicapping their ability to grow and succeed ... challenges are particularly apparent in key sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, construction and healthcare.” Opportunity 2020, page 3

“On the issue of transportation ... participants ... suggested the creation of ... bus services between Stratford and London, Stratford and Listowel, and with Kitchener-Waterloo.” Opportunity 2020, page 18

“A limited public transportation network was also raised as a significant challenge for newcomers willing and able to work, but unable to provide their own transportation.” Opportunity 2020, page 27

****The Ministry of Transportation indicates that there are no plans to repeat the CT Grant Program.**

3. Research Activities

Between January 26 and February 12, **thirteen local and regional Community Transportation studies were examined** (including ‘Towards Co-ordinated Rural Transportation’ from the Rural Ontario Institute, the 2012 ‘Transportation Report’ produced by the Social Research & Planning Council, the Perth4Youth Plans, the ‘Opportunity 2020: Transforming the Labour Market in Perth County, Stratford and St. Marys’ study, the Norfolk Transit Study, and the City of Stratford’s ‘Master Transportation Plan’) and **forty key informants interviewed** (including all of the EasyRide agencies, United Way Perth Huron, various Human Resource managers, the City of Stratford Transit Manager, the Stratford Festival, Social Service Agencies, Region of Waterloo, T-Go/Tillsonburg, Huron County, Middlesex County, and the Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance).

Discussions were also held with a number of commercial bus lines and the Town of Innisfil. The Innisfil dialogue focussed on the use of Uber as a community transportation partner.

The goal of the interviews was not to repeat earlier research, but to learn of changes and new ideas or needs which have emerged over the last two years. Research was approached through various lenses - by Municipality; through the needs of the five identified ‘high needs’ groups – seniors, low income, isolated, employers and youth; and through both local and regional perspectives (which involved contact with most surrounding municipalities in order to identify opportunities for regional harmonization).

It was noted that several of the action items proposed in ‘Opportunity 2020’ – for example, implementing a Ride Share portal, creating a multi-partner Transit Committee, and adjusting Stratford Transit schedules and routes to meet manufacturers’ needs - have been implemented and continue to be refined. Work towards a scheduled, long distance community transportation system, however, has been minimal.

Statistics Canada 2016 data on place of work shows that most residents work locally however:

- 3,075 residents commute from locations in Perth County to Stratford for employment
- top commuting destinations for Stratford residents are Kitchener (305), Perth East (320), St. Marys (280), and Waterloo (270)
- St. Marys workers most often commute to Stratford (630) and to London (215)
- 410 Perth South residents commute to St. Marys
- North Perth employees most frequently commute to Minto/Palmerston (350), Woolwich (275), and Perth East (170)

- the top three destinations for Perth East commuters are Stratford (320), North Perth (170), and West Perth (155)
- 1,040 workers commute from West Perth to Stratford daily for employment.

Surveys done in connection with the Perth4Youth Stratford initiative showed that:

- over 40% of respondents ages 15-29 would use improved commuter transit at least once every two weeks
- the most desired intercity destination is Kitchener Waterloo - however nearly 25% also identified a desire to travel west (ie Sebringville, Mitchell) and south (ie St. Marys)
- the top three reasons to use intercity community transportation were recreation, visiting family, and employment.

4. Key Findings

- The Rideshare program established in response to one of the recommendations emerging from the SRPC Transportation Report is poorly used. Statistics show 47 subscribers to the Rideshare program from Perth County communities during 2017. Low usage is a combination of poor public awareness of the program, concerns about security, self coordinated car pooling, and a lack of convenience in terms of individual times and destinations.
- Several of the large manufacturing firms throughout the County, the City, and St. Marys are either organizing employer-managed charter bus transportation for groups of out-of-region production employees or investigating implementing such an activity.
- Transit routes or expanded community transit service into industrial areas are needed.
- The lack of transportation among hospitals within the Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance contributes to inefficient use of healthcare resources and poor visiting access for families.
- EasyRide and its partner agencies are largely meeting its mandate of providing affordable, accessible, and convenient transportation for seniors and Ontario Disability recipients to medical and other appointments.
- Perth East has shown the most aggressive response towards filling community transportation gaps though local citizen initiatives to provide Uber-type services in addition to Milverton Community Outreach.
- Inter-community, low-cost community transportation to local and long-distance medical appointments (non-seniors), adult day programs, and activities such as shopping, entertainment, early childhood programming, and non-medical appointments is identified as needed by many key informants, including the Municipal CAOs.
- Community transportation among Perth communities and into the London and Waterloo Region multimodal transportation hubs is also identified as a priority.
- Frequency and consistency are essential to building ridership when offering either local transportation or scheduled long-distance transportation routes.

5. Options

Option #1 – Establish the following long distance Intercommunity Transportation round-trip routes – (a) London, St. Marys, Stratford, Kitchener; and (b) Listowel-Kitchener. These routes would assist with intercommunity transportation within Perth County as well as providing access to regional multimodal hubs. The arrival/departure times in KW and London would be timed to enable connections with GO transit or VIA Rail as well as other buses. Early conversations with commercial bus lines indicate annual operating costs which could reach \$1 million annually (inclusive of both routes). There would be significant opportunity for local employers bussing in groups of workers from outside communities to collaborate with this service.

Potential Impact – Forty to one hundred passengers per day per route is estimated, based on twice or three times a day frequency from Monday to Friday.

This option would be suitable for the Long Distance Intercommunity Transportation stream and would require a partnership between a municipal lead applicant, a commercial bus line, and support from the additional municipalities.

Option #2 – Enhance existing community transportation and mobility services through the purchase of two mini-buses and three vans so as to enable creation of a new county-wide transportation service for low-cost community transportation to local and long-distance medical appointments (non-seniors), places of employment, and activities such as shopping, entertainment, early childhood programming, and non-medical appointments. The Norfolk and Waterloo Region rural transit models and the TransCab system in Sudbury all provide examples of sustainable transportation that is affordable for users and need-responsive. The proposed Perth County Transit model would involve scheduled routes plus flexibility for additional pick ups/drop offs through advance bookings. By tracking user requests, routes would be refined for maximum effectiveness.

Implementation of the routes could be phased. Based on comments from Norfolk Transit and the Region of Waterloo, estimated operating costs could range from \$150,000-\$275,000 annually for each route plus scheduling and management support and initial vehicle purchases. Fares charged in other regions range from \$2.75 to \$10, depending on the distance travelled.

A budget of \$2.2 million for five years which includes vehicles (2 mini-buses plus 3 vans), operating expenses (\$1.3 million annually), marketing (\$5-10,000 annually), scheduling/administrative support (included with operating), and training is estimated.

Potential Impact – The proposed project would establish a Perth County transit system which would connect local communities as well as creating connections with a commercial bus line (if Option #1 is also approved for implementation). The transit system service would be operated so as to avoid conflict with EasyRide's operating parameters, but overlapping efficiencies with newer seating capacity and more advanced technology vehicles could enable EasyRide to increase its ride capacity by 15% (from 100,000 to 115,000 rides annually). The new Perth County transit system would deliver an estimated 100,000-115,000

affordable transit rides annually for users not qualifying for EasyRide (i.e. employees commuting to work, youth, seniors, and isolated or low income individuals and families).

Note: In the interest of securing maximum grant support, dividing the Perth County transit system project into north and south components should be considered. However, if only one component is approved, new challenges could result.

This option could be suitable for the Long-Distance Intercommunity Transportation stream (it is suggested that Stratford and North Perth/Listowel would be the transportation hubs) and would require a partnership between a municipal lead applicant and at least one other municipality, as well as support from the additional municipalities.

6. Financial Implications

Numbers are still being calculated for both proposed projects. If it were desired by the municipalities to continue the service, the program would require subsidized funding to offset the annual operational costs and vehicle maintenance/replacement.

With that stated, an application to the CT Grant Program would score more highly if municipal support was involved from the beginning. A ratio of 15-20% municipal support/fare box revenues and 80% CT grant would be viewed very favourably.

7. Next Steps

Direction from the Municipal CAOs and County Council is requested so that more detailed research and budget development can be undertaken as appropriate and potential collaborations/alliances identified which would enable completion of the desired Community Transportation grant applications by the February 28th deadline.

Please note that an application for Long Distance Intercommunity Transportation funding also requires letters of support from the municipalities involved. All seven municipalities would be required to have resolutions from their councils by February 27th. Sample text for the resolutions will be provided as soon as possible.

Respectfully submitted,

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