

SAUGEEN MOBILITY

and REGIONAL TRANSIT

603 Bruce Road 19
Box 40 Walkerton, ON N0G 2V0
519-881-2504 1-866-981-2504

saugeenmobility.ca

REPORT TO ARRAN-ELDERSLIE – July 5th, 2023

Saugeen Mobility and Regional Transit, or SMART, as its nickname, specializes in public transit serving the mentally and physically challenged residents of Arran-Elderslie, Brockton, Chatsworth, Grey Highlands, Hanover, Huron-Kinloss, Kincardine, Saugeen Shores, Southgate and West Grey. This covers more than 5000 square kilometers, the largest geographical transit area in Ontario and the second largest in Canada.

SMART currently has a fleet of 20 vehicles and 19 drivers. The fleet includes 9 9-passenger accessible buses, 10 accessible minivans and one 30-passenger accessible bus.

SMART is run by a Board of 10 Directors, one from each client municipality, and Councillor Townsend is one of the Directors.

local and personal since 1977

SMART is also a registered Canadian charity. Donations are gratefully received and tax receipts are issued for all donations.

Individual user fees are currently \$2.00 plus \$.55/km with a \$7.50 minimum per ride. Waiting time is charged at \$22.00 per hour. Out of area rides or where a vehicle and driver are deemed to be 'chartered' are charged at \$.55/km plus \$22.00 per hour from the time the vehicle arrives at the client's residence until the client is done with the vehicle. There are no 'deadhead' charges. Deadhead charges are those related to the passenger-less vehicle getting to and from the client's residence.

A 'ride' is defined as one person going from point 'A' to point 'B'. A 'return trip' is 2 'rides'. As per the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, each client may have a companion or attendant ride free of charge. As well, extra stops between destination points are counted as rides since there is a charge for them.

In the view of the Ontario Ministry of Transportation, public transit services are a municipal responsibility. The Government of Ontario, however, provides funding to all transit systems in the province to support their operations through the Ministry of Transportation's Dedicated Gas Tax Funds for Public Transportation Program. Funds under this program are paid based on population and ridership data from two calendar years prior (for example, March 2022 funding was based on 2020 statistics).

In keeping with MTO methodology, municipal contributions are calculated annually with a 30% weight applied to population and a 70% weight applied to ridership. This overall contribution percentage or 'share' is then applied to the total municipal contribution to give the amount due from each municipality.

The Town of Hanover acts as SMART's 'Host Municipality' for the purpose of receiving and holding 'in trust' this dedicated Gas Tax funding until such time as it is used for capital purchases, operational deficits or other projects deemed to be improvements to the transit service in accordance with MTO guidelines and criteria.

Currently, Arran-Elderslie has 134 active clients. Arran-Elderslie's share of the 2023 municipal contribution is \$72,132, compared to \$62,104 in 2022.

In 2022, clients from your community took 2244 rides, compared to 1805 in 2021. Number of rides are steadily going back to

pre-pandemic numbers where, for example, there were 2423 rides in 2019.

For local taxpayers, SMART represents a tremendous value when compared to other specialized public transit services. SMART serves a population of more than 100,000 which makes it one of 21 transit agencies in Ontario serving populations of 50,000 to 150,000.

For those who use and depend on SMART, this is a service that is highly valued. The service provided by SMART helps to keep the most vulnerable members of your community independent, mobile and involved. Many studies have shown a direct link between mobility and good health, both physical and mental.

Medical related rides constitute an estimated 36% of the rides supplied by SMART. The remaining rides are for social outings, shopping and work-related transportation.

Municipal services like SMART are not simply expenditures. They are investments in building communities. People no longer just live where they were raised or work; they live where they can find the 'life' balance they want. Public services, especially municipal services, are a large part of that equation. If the services they want (or need) are not available in a particular community, they will choose (or perhaps be forced) to live somewhere else where those services are available.

The population of Canada, especially in rural areas, is aging (as you no doubt know). There will only be increasing demand for this type of service over the next few decades. According to statistics from the 2021 census, both Grey and Bruce Counties had 26% of their population aged 65 or older. This compares to 18.5% for the Province of Ontario as a whole. The average age of the population in Bruce County is 45 years old and in Grey County it is 46 years old, compared to 42 years old provincially.

Luckily, the provincial government recognizes this fact and appears very interested in transportation issues, especially in rural areas.

In response to these demographics, communities in Grey and Bruce have been adding a considerable number of new housing units for their aging residents. A safe, dependable and affordable transportation service for those residents is going to be a critical part of their quality of life and their being able to remain independent for as long as possible.

SMART is also considering moving to three Levels of Service (LOS):

Essential: current services & fee structure

Enhanced: Evening (M-W) & Sunday service

Cost: one vehicle (\$150K) } **190K**
one driver (\$40K)

Enhanced Plus: taxi-like service 7 days a week

Cost: two vehicles (\$300K) } **380K**
two drivers (\$80K)

If you have further questions or comments regarding SMART, I can be reached at 519-881-2589 or by e-mail at stephan@saugeenmobility.ca.