



Committee Minutes

Hanover-Owen Sound Task Force February 19, 2021 – 9:30 am

The Hanover-Owen Sound Task Force met on the above date through electronic participation with the following members in attendance:

Present: Chair Brian O’Leary; Councillors Milne and McQueen; and Warden Hicks

Regrets: Councillor Desai

Staff

Present: Kim Wingrove, CAO, Randy Scherzer, Director of Planning, Savanna Myers, Director of Economic Development, Tourism and Culture, Anne Marie Shaw, Director of Housing, Barb Fedy, Director of Social Services, Scott Taylor, Senior Planner, Stephanie Lacey-Avon, Intermediate Planner, Heather Morrison, Clerk, Brian Tocheri, Hanover CAO and Tim Simmonds, Owen Sound CAO

Guests: Dennis Kefalas, Director-Public Works and Engineering, Owen Sound, Stephanie Stewart, Manager-Community Transportation, Grey County

Call to Order

Chair O’Leary called the meeting to order at 9:30 am.

Declaration of Pecuniary Interest

There was none.

Business Arising

Randy Scherzer provided an update of the Recommendations and Opportunities document related to the January 11 and 15th meetings. The January 11th meeting spoke to policing related issues while the January 15th meeting related to planning and development in Hanover and Owen Sound. Mr. Scherzer provided highlights, opportunities and further information requested from previous Task Force meetings.

Mr. Scherzer spoke to questions arising from the previous meetings.

Delegations

Dennis Kefalas, Director, Public Works and Engineering, Owen Sound

Mr. Kefalas provided an overview of the Owen Sound Transit services noting that there are four primary routes and one temporary route within Owen Sound which includes 157 stops within the city limits. There were approximately 136,000 riders in 2020 down from previous years due to the pandemic. He provided an overview of the various fares for transit service and outlined the current COVID precautions in place. He noted that a new Midtown route has been implemented in 2020 to assist the other routes during the pandemic.

Mr. Kefalas noted that Owen Sound provides door to door transportation services for residents of Owen Sound with mobility limitations that would otherwise be unable to access public transit. The accessible transit runs Monday-Friday 6:30 am-6:00 pm and Saturday from 9:00 am-4:00 pm and does not run on Sundays or statutory holidays.

Mr. Kefalas then provided an overview of GOST (Guelph-Owen Sound Transportation) which connects people from Owen Sound to Guelph through various stops along Highway 6 including Chatsworth, Williamsford, Durham, Mount Forest, Arthur, Fergus and Elora. He outlined the fares which will vary depending on the length of the trip. Ridership is low still due to the pandemic and the service will be re-evaluated later this year. Positive feedback for the service has been received from riders. He noted that the service is needed by residents and provides that connection to various points between the communities.

He highlighted the challenges of operating a public transit service including the operational costs. He noted that the fares only cover 25% of the total cost to operate the transit service. The annual cost is approximately \$1.3 million for the ongoing operation of transit services. Staff are currently looking at an expansion of the service to the areas of Sydenham due to increase in development in this vicinity.

He noted that the current operational hours do not always meet the needs to the users, there is limited seating on each bus and the topography of Owen Sound impacts the type of buses used for the service due to the many hills within the city limits.

Questions from task force members arose related to the true cost of operating the services and how it compares to the cost of personal transportation. Mr. Kefalas noted that within smaller communities, transit fares do not cover the total costs of the transit system. Transit services within smaller communities are normally used by people who cannot afford a vehicle.

Kim Wingrove encouraged members to look at the benefits a transit service provides. It allows residents to get to employment, health care appointments, entertainment and other destinations within the City which will continue to improve the overall quality of life.

Ridership was discussed and whether the lower number of riders currently would assist with future grant opportunities. Mr. Kefalas noted that the gas tax rebate is used to offset some of the transit expenses. He noted that the service becomes more affordable with more users and can assist with offsetting greenhouse gases with less cars on the road.

Discussion occurred on raising awareness and providing education about the service and the difference it makes to people's lives. A question arose wondering if there is a jurisdiction where transit service is profitable. Mr. Kefalas noted that Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver make a profit for normal operating costs associated with transit services. This does not account for capital costs related to services upgrades. He noted that fares may cover day to day costs but there may be an impact to taxpayers for capital costs for service expansion.

Mr. Kefalas then spoke to opportunities that may lead to an increase in ridership on the transit service including the development of larger employers in a concentrated industrial area and capitalizing on high school and post-secondary student riders within the city. He noted that a transit study is being completed in 2021 to look at models to assist with ridership and development areas. The study will look at overall service including routes, snow removal, timing, transfer options etc.

Warden Hicks spoke to Hanover transportation noting that a small footprint has the benefit of being a walkable community. Hanover does rely heavily on SMART transit due to high level of senior residents. Launchpad youth also benefits from the Highway 4 GTR corridor.

Stephanie Stewart, Manager-Community Transportation, Grey County

Stephanie Stewart provided an overview of the GTR (Grey Transit Route). She noted that the project was funded by both a provincial grant and Grey County with the service beginning in September 2020. The service was designed in response to public concerns regarding a lack of transportation options within Grey County that could provide safe, affordable, and reliable transportation. The system connects residents to areas within Grey County and beyond to health care, employment, grocery stores and entertainment.

Ms. Stewart then highlighted the GTR routes, connections available at various drop off points, and ridership numbers for the past several months. The impact of the current pandemic on ridership numbers was noted. She noted that the Owen Sound Transit Terminal is the most popular drop-off/pick-up location on the routes. The Smart

Centres, hospital and college ridership were reviewed. She did note that lower ridership at the hospital and Georgian College is a direct result of the current pandemic. The Highway 4 route, being the newest route for the GTR, was then reviewed. Ms. Stewart outlined the various partnerships brought together to encourage ridership of the GTR.

She then outlined the differences between conventional transit and on-demand transit. Ms. Stewart has presented to several community groups and councils about the benefits of the GTR, delivered posters to businesses and is continuing to work with stakeholders such as the YMCA, Social Services and United Way for other opportunities to increase ridership. Opportunities for service expansion were then highlighted including additional stops in Hanover and surrounding areas, a stop survey for local residents, increase in the days of service including weekends, working with employers to refine current schedules, the ability to sell GTR tickets throughout Grey and Bruce Counties, and conducting youth outreach to increase ridership.

Questions then followed related to transit and how it fits with challenges heard by the taskforce to date. It was noted that transit is often a support to assist with the other challenges already heard by the task force. The opportunity for future funding was discussed noting that the pandemic has not allowed for accurate ridership so advocacy for continued funding is being pursued by various municipalities.

Conventional transit requires a fixed route and fixed stops rather than informal stops along the route. Staff noted that they have been informed by province of its intent to move forward with changes related to intermunicipal transit functions. Discussions occurred on the use of smaller vehicles for more efficient service and more point to point service.

Riders currently must prebook, although there is some flexibility if the buses are not full as staff doesn't want technology to be a barrier to the service. The turnaround time for booking online is just minutes for pick up. Education on the service continues.

Other Business

There was none.

Next Meeting Dates

March 19, 2021 9:30 am.

On motion by Councillor Milne and Warden Hicks the meeting adjourned at 11:01 am.

Brian O'Leary, Chair