

To:	Warden Halliday and Members of Grey County Council
Committee Date:	February 22, 2018
Subject / Report No:	SSR-CW-06-18
Title:	Ministry of Transportation Community Transportation Grant Program – Municipal Stream Application
Prepared by:	Barb Fedy, Director of Social Services
Reviewed by:	
Lower Tier(s) Affected:	County wide initiative
Status:	Recommendation adopted by Committee as amended per Resolution CW62-18; endorsed by County Council March 8, 2018 per Resolution CC30-18;

Recommendation

1. That **SSR-CW-06-18 regarding the Ministry of Transportation Community Transportation Grant Program – Municipal Stream be received, and;**
2. That **Grey County Council support the submission of an application for funding as outlined in this report.**

Executive Summary

The Ministry of Transportation has released a new funding opportunity for municipalities to make application to for community transportation initiatives. The Community Transportation Grant Program – Municipal Stream (CT Program) builds on the two year pilot program that was established in 2015.

The new program expands the original scope of the Community Transportation pilot funding to include the development of intercommunity bus services to link communities across counties and regions. The maximum individual grant is \$500,000 for local community transportation projects and \$1.5 million for intercommunity bus projects spread over a five year period. If successful, the County's application would secure the maximum available provincial funding of \$2M while requiring a County investment of \$250,000 (\$50,000 per year).

Grey County's application to the local funding stream proposes enhanced community transportation within the communities of Hanover and Georgian Bluffs. These settlement areas have been found to be most in need due to their under-served priority populations.

Grey County's application to the long distance connectivity funding stream proposes two routes. One will travel along the Highway 10 corridor south from Owen Sound to Shelburne and the second along the Highway 26 corridor east from Owen Sound to Blue Mountain Resort.

Background and Discussion

Current Pilot Project

Grey County has been working with lead service provider Home and Community Support Services (HCSS) to develop rural transportation solutions with \$149,790 in funding from MTO's Community Transportation Pilot Program since April 2016. This funding is exhausted as of March 31, 2018.

Over the two year period of the pilot, HCSS has led several initiatives through their existing MOVIN'GB transportation service including attempting to coordinate scheduling of rides with other transportation providers through a technology solution, collaboration with Salvation Army in Warton to link vulnerable Grey and Bruce residents to their programs, and TripSpark technology-sharing with the Grey County Ontario Works van program for improved ridership efficiencies. As of February 5th, 2018 the pilot project launched a twice weekly Highway 10 route that is a point-to-point pick up and drop off from Owen Sound to Shelburne twice daily that will run until the end of March.

The pilot program faced several challenges to making a significant difference to the needs of the population most in need. These included:

- Reluctance from other transit providers to commit to a shared scheduling software
- Limited geography being served
- Limited funds
- Temporary nature of the pilot project
- Inability to carry those under the age of 18 or who did not meet one of the HCSS service population criteria

The Case for Continuing to Develop Transportation Options

The lack of transportation options for rural residents of Grey County is regularly noted as a barrier for accessing health care and social services. In addition, the need for affordable transportation is critically important to ensuring the fullest possible participation in the local labour pool.

Recent data from the Four County Labour Market Planning Board shows that the regional labour pool is shrinking (11% reduction in the four counties), the number who are unemployed has reached record lows (4.4% in January 2018) and new employers are expected to move to and expand in the region increasing demand. Newcomers to the region, whether new to Canada or from a larger urban centre, who may be part of the solution to increasing the labour supply, often look for transportation options. Labour is the number one economic barrier, and is a product of issues surrounding access to transportation, attainable housing, childcare and local training. These barriers present challenges to business in its current state, but are anticipated to worsen significantly in the next five years (STTIC Stakeholder Session, August 2017).

With the announcement of the new funding opportunity on December 1, 2017, Grey County retained consulting firm Lough Barnes to work with a steering committee of stakeholders to develop a community survey, complete key stakeholder interviews, and meet with economic development representatives, employers, health and social services sector staff as well as education and training representatives.

Some common themes from the data include:

1. Affordability is an issue, even if there is a bus/taxi in the respondent's community;
2. Lack of connections to get to and from work and appointments;
3. No system for rural students living outside city of Owen Sound to access training;
4. Employers' inability to fill vacant positions and grow business
5. Missed social service and health providers' appointments and follow-up challenges.

A recent survey authored by Town of Collingwood staff, completed with over 40 employers, found that 82% have staff that face transportation challenges, over 64% of respondents identified that they are concerned somewhat, quite a bit or a tremendous amount about employee transportation affecting their organization's ability to hire and retain staff, and over 50% indicated that public transit schedules do not satisfy their staff's transportation needs.

The impact of lack of adequate transportation to daily life is notable. Employers are losing income and expansion opportunities as they cannot staff their current services. Service providers are concerned as they currently are experiencing recruitment issues, advising transportation is necessary for students to obtain local training to meet the demands of the jobs. The most vulnerable citizens continue to remain isolated and not connected to the services they require to lead meaningful, healthy and engaged lives.

As with the previous pilot program, current application guidelines include an emphasis on serving those facing transportation barriers including:

- Seniors
- Persons with disabilities
- Youth
- Persons living on low income

The release of the new grant funding opportunity allows for a broader scope for both a regional and a community transportation option. The five year program permits the formation of infrastructure that can be a backbone to future expansion and although the funding allocations will not solve all transportation needs for Grey County, approvals for both streams will result in a significant improvement to what currently exists.

Funding Stream One: Local Community Transportation

The criteria for this funding stream include:

- New project that coordinates transportation services or resources
- Project previously funded by the Pilot Program
- Project that enhances existing services
- Max \$500,000 over 5 years

Solutions were reviewed for the communities identified most in need:

1. Georgian Bluffs area/northwest of Owen Sound
2. Hanover and surrounding area
3. Centre Grey

These three areas were prioritized based on the criteria of existing transportation options, and the presence of priority populations identified in the project guidelines including seniors, persons with disabilities, youth and persons living on low income.

The available provincial funding would not permit a transportation solution in all three areas, and it was determined the two key priority areas for this community solution needed to be northwest Grey County (Georgian Bluffs into Wiarton) and Hanover and surrounding area.

Centre Grey needs will be somewhat met with the long distance scheduled transportation solution as proposed below, as well as coordination with the Ontario Works Van Transportation program that currently operates in that vicinity. In addition, Grey County staff are aware that Owen Sound is making application for a connection down the Highway 6 corridor to Guelph and Wellington County is looking to develop a connection from Guelph to Mount Forest.

Although SMART isn't identified specifically as a partner in this future state, they, like other service providers, will continue to be vital to a systems approach. All existing transportation services will continue to be needed, with opportunities for improved coordination through scheduling and physically connecting linkages in communities. As per a previous report to Council on December 14, 2017 SMART is now using the same technology as HCSS, TripSpark, which could enable systems to connect.

The proposal recommends accessible vans be placed in Georgian Bluffs and Hanover. Trips would be scheduled through MOVIN'GB and could commence April 2019. A TripSpark technology solution for self-booking is also proposed for those with handheld devices; the *My Ride* app will streamline efficiency and improve access to those who can use, and/or prefer technology. This community transportation service will enable those most vulnerable to access local health care appointments, attend training and employment and will provide transportation to priority groups such as youth who are without any service at this time.

Funding Stream Two: Long-distance Scheduled Transportation

The criteria for this funding stream include:

- Fixed route and fixed schedule
- 5 days a week, 2 round trips/day
- Charges a fare
- Capacity of 10+ passengers
- Provides service to the expiry of the Pilot Program
- Max \$1.5M over 5 years

This more robust funding program permits the development of infrastructure that can be enhanced as ridership grows, awareness and partnerships develop and more connections can result. Through the investigative work of the pilot from 2016 to present and the additional research for this grant proposal, two long distance routes were identified to connect residents to other communities:

1. Highway 26 Corridor Fixed Route
 - AM and PM Run
 - Departing from Owen Sound to the Blue Mountain area to meet employment needs
 - Connects to the bus running from The Blue Mountains to Collingwood
 - Serves communities along Hwy 26
 - Returns to Owen Sound at the end of the run

2. Highway 10 Corridor Fixed Route
 - AM and PM Run
 - Operates from Owen Sound to Shelburne
 - Provides access to health services in South East Grey Community Health Centre and clinics in Shelburne

There were other corridor routes identified as needed, such as County Road 4 from Hanover through to Singhampton. As mentioned, this transportation grant program, although much more robust than the current pilot, will not meet all the needs for all residents of Grey County. However what this can do is to begin to build a network and a solution that enables agencies, service providers and employers to structure their programs, services and employment opportunities to ensure transportation is not the barrier it currently is.

Future Project Management

To date, Grey’s pilot project has been managed in house. With the greater scope and complexity of the proposed projects, a dedicated project manager is required and included in the budget. The responsibilities of the position would include reporting to County Council, reporting to the Ministry of Transportation and working with the HCSS as the continued lead and all the other partners required to enable success of the project. A steering committee would continue to support the project manager. It is not the intention to create a full time position but rather that the workload will decrease after the first year of implementation, developing into a systems monitoring role.

Legal and Legislated Requirements

Agreements will be required for the new grant program and will be reviewed for approval as required.

Financial and Resource Implications

An application for both streams of funding is being developed for maximum allocations for the Local Community Transportation and for Long Distance Scheduled Transportation. See the budget details for each stream as below.

Proposed Local Community Transportation Budget

	Year 1 – Start Up	Annual Operating
Fare Revenue	-	\$5,000

	Year 1 – Start Up	Annual Operating
County Contribution	\$33,000	\$35,000
Capital	(\$45,000)	(\$15,000)
Direct Service Delivery and Operations	(\$1,000)	(\$108,000)
Marketing & Communications	(\$10,000)	(\$1,000)
Project Management & Evaluation	(\$29,000)	(\$6,000)
Licensing and Training	(\$48,000)	(\$10,000)
Total Deficit	(\$100,000)	(\$100,000)
5 Year Deficit	(\$500,000)	
Ministry 5 Year Funding	\$500,000	

Proposed Long Distance Scheduled Transportation Budget

	Year 1 – Start Up	Annual Operating
Fare Revenue	-	\$10,000
County Contribution	\$17,000	\$15,000
Capital	(\$160,000)	(\$40,000)
Direct Service Delivery and Operations	(\$4,000)	(\$206,600)
Marketing & Communications	(\$30,000)	(\$30,000)
Project Management & Evaluation	(\$80,000)	(\$45,000)
Licensing and Training	(\$43,000)	(\$3,400)
Total Deficit	(\$300,000)	(\$300,000)
5 Year Deficit	(\$1,500,000)	
Ministry 5 Year Funding	\$1,500,000	

Included in the proposed budget would be an annualized contribution from Grey County levy funding totaling \$50,000 per year for the five year period of the project, starting in 2019. Without further commitment from the province after the five year period, in order to sustain this service a municipal contribution exceeding \$400,000 per annum would be required.

This project's infrastructure could be used to leverage other public and private partnerships that could garner additional revenue sources in the future, i.e. developers wishing to offer commuter opportunities, employers with existing transportation services that could be incorporated into a systems approach.

Relevant Consultation

Internal

- IT Staff have been consulted regarding the implementation of the TripSpark licensing and application
- Planning Staff have been consulted regarding route and population planning
- Housing and Ontario Works Staff have been consulted regarding needs of vulnerable populations
- Economic Development Staff have been consulted regarding trends and needs
- Finance Staff have been involved in Pilot Project and will continue to be consulted for funding and reporting requirements to the Ministry of Transportation
- Communications Staff have been involved with Pilot Project and supported the outreach to community for new grant

External

- Lough Barnes Consulting Group
- Community engagement through network tables
- Community survey
- Key stakeholder interviews
- Employer interviews
- Economic Development officers from lower tier municipalities
- Neighbouring Municipal staff from Dufferin, Bruce and Simcoe County
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Appendices and Attachments

[Community Transportation Grant Program Frequently Asked Questions](#)

[Community Transportation Grant Program - Municipal Stream Application Guidelines 2017](#)

Respectfully submitted by,

Barb Fedy,
Director of Social Services