

Report SSR-SS-05-16

To: Chair Burley and Members of the Social Services Committee
From: Barb Fedy, Director of Social Services
Meeting Date: February 25, 2016
Subject: **Coordinated Rural Transportation Pilot Project**
Status: Recommendation adopted by Committee as presented per Resolution SSC28-16; Amended by County Council April 5, 2016 per Resolution CC44-16, by changing project name to MOVIN'GB

Recommendation(s)

WHEREAS Grey County has been working to develop a strategy to coordinate rural transportation for improved access to residents in Grey County, using funding provided by the Ministry of Transportation for this project in the amount of \$99,790.00;

AND WHEREAS the project is set to launch into two underserved areas in Grey County, including Owen Sound south to Markdale and Owen Sound east to Town of Blue Mountains;

AND WHEREAS Home and Community Supports Services Grey-Bruce, as the lead agency, provides services in underserved areas in Bruce County as well;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Report SSR-SS-05-16 be received;

AND THAT Staff be approved to work with Bruce County Staff to expand this project to meet underserved residents residing on the Bruce Peninsula, and possibly other areas, who require access to the lead agency services;

AND FURTHER THAT marketing for this pilot project, to be called Grey Bruce Ride, be approved to include the expanded area of service.

Background

In 2014 a report was completed by consultants Lough Barnes that indicated there was capacity within the existing transportation service provider landscape to increase ridership with a minimal impact to overall costs. It was found that due to the distances driven to access medical appointments and other needs, there was a significant loss in service with vehicles returning empty and no means to support other riders. This issue of 'deadheading' could in fact be improved and efficiencies found through a more effective means of coordination. Using the learned outcomes from the consultant's report and listening to community, an initial strategy was planned for a collaborative model to bring the existing transportation providers together to best meet the goals of improved access to services through an enhanced scheduling tool.

Grey County received an allocation of \$99,790.00 from the Ministry of Transportation Community Transportation Pilot Grant Program to fund this pilot project.

Since spring 2015 County of Grey staff has been working with transportation stakeholders to determine the most optimal means to meet the goal of accessible transportation in rural communities. Challenges surfaced immediately as service providers cross boundaries into Bruce County to enable residents to access medical and other services. As a result, Bruce County staff and elected officials were also requested to engage in the process. Information was shared and multiple stakeholder meetings took place throughout 2015 to encourage relationship and capacity building for the pilot project.

This model involved shared resources and a draft Memo of Understanding was developed to determine the administration and functionality of the collaborative. Discussions continued to further develop the project and gather feedback to establish the model that would move to operation effective early 2016. A key success factor was establishing a board for oversight and this was to include members of the various transportation partners in Grey and Bruce County, as well as staff from Grey and Bruce County administrations. The lead agency had previously been determined based on their existing capacity and their technology already in place. Home and Community Supports Services Grey-Bruce (HCSS) is a busy and progressive organization that provides services for accessible transportation throughout Grey and Bruce Counties.

However, in late fall 2015 Saugeen Mobility and Regional Transit (SMART), one of the largest service providers in Grey and Bruce Counties, notified Grey County staff that they were no longer interested in a partnership or collaborative model at this time. Shortly afterwards a letter was received by the current Grey County CAO from the President of the SMART board indicating they wished to enter into discussions for a county wide system that would serve both Grey and Bruce Counties with a more regional focus.

Given the need to continue momentum to meet the pilot project guidelines, Grey County staff met with the lead agency HCSS in December 2015 to discuss alternate plans for the project and determined there would be opportunity to improve services to some specific geographic areas in Grey County. In particular need are the specific areas that SMART does not currently serve:

1. Owen Sound south to Grey Highlands (Markdale area)
2. Owen Sound east to Town of Blue Mountains

Further discussion has occurred with partners in Bruce County that once the pilot has launched in the specified areas in Grey County, a logical next step would be a plan to move into serving an underserved area of Bruce County as well, that being:

3. Bruce Peninsula (including North Bruce Peninsula and South Bruce Peninsula)

As the project has evolved to include both Grey and Bruce Counties, we have determined the name of this scheduling initiative to be Grey Bruce Ride. After much thought and discussion, staff believe it makes sense to expand this pilot beyond Grey County borders and work in a collaborative manner with our partners in Bruce County as a future state for this kind of service would be most efficient if it met needs for both municipalities.

As mentioned above, this initiative involves the use of technology for a single point of contact to access transportation services with ease for our residents in Grey and Bruce Counties, permitting advanced dispatching to better utilize valuable transportation resources. The goal of this pilot project is to provide equitable community transportation services to the citizens in Grey and Bruce County who face transportation barriers. An early advantage to this project is the fact that the lead agency currently utilizes technology for scheduling and recently enhanced their services through the purchase of upgraded software, licenses and training. Staff at Home and Community Support Services Grey-Bruce have shared a demonstration of the technology solution and are willing partners, leveraging their capacity to enhance a greater services overall.

This is not a traditional ride share but rather an option to maximize services when there is a pre-existing booking for a vehicle to be in a location that another client may be able to access as well. The technology will preselect the optimal vehicle/route based on the client's needs criteria and as a result there are expected efficiencies due to the limiting of 'deadheading' of the vehicle.

Despite the setback as described earlier with a major partner's withdrawal, this current version of service delivery with the lead agency providing scheduling into underserved areas of first Grey County and then Bruce County is a means to initiate a small project,

with a great deal of potential to follow in steps. Staff are looking to soft launch this pilot in April 2016.

With the developmental phase of this project continuing, next steps include a communication strategy, including media, reporting and billing requirements as well as service agreements and a funding agreement for the lead agency. Given that the lead agency already has the technology in place, the goal is to expand their capacity to fill gaps in service in our communities. A toll free line will allow callers from across the vast rural communities to make one call for assistance with scheduling. Callers who reside in an area that is serviced by SMART will be warm transferred so that their needs can be met, limiting the caller's confusion/duplication. These calls will be tracked for volume for potential future expansion as need and demand grows. HCSS G-B booking staff will use the program to determine best service to meet needs. This might be to one of their own vehicles, or it could be to an alternate service provider that has declared interest in being a partner to this initiative, such as the Meaford Handivan program, the Grey County Ontario Works Van program, the Beaver Valley Outreach transportation program, as well as other service providers who choose to participate as the project evolves. Initially the ridership will be for persons with disabilities who are in need of transportation to appointments, persons who are already served by the interested partners (e.g. Ontario Works clients) however, the eventual goal is to expand this program to include other vulnerable populations such as students, the elderly and people with limited income and no access to transportation and who are unable to access services or resources as they live in rural Grey and Bruce Counties. It is fully anticipated that there will be future discussions regarding expanding this project to include all of Grey and Bruce Counties, however the scope of this pilot is limited and a full report on the outcomes will be provided following the end of the project March 31, 2017.

Financial/Staffing/Legal/Information Technology Considerations

The funding allocation Grey County has received from the Ministry of Transportation for \$99,790.00 will cover some expenses associated with the project, including the consultant (Lough Barnes) and will further be applied to software licenses/training, for the technology solution (Tripspark), communications and media, toll free access telephone line, etc. Further costs pending include a legal review of funding agreement between the County of Grey and lead agency HCSS G-B, costs associated with scheduling staff as well as other core operational needs to ensure the success of this project.

An additional allocation of \$50,000.00 has been included in the 2016 Grey County Social Services Budget to support the project.

Link to Strategic Goals/Priorities

This pilot project meets several of the County's strategic goals including Strategic Goal 5, Listening and Working Together by collaborating with the public, stakeholders and other governments to improve delivery of county services; as well as Strategic Goal 6, Achieving Excellence in Governance and Service through ensuring that county services and programs are inclusive, accessible, and reflective of the diversity of the population.

Attachments

None

Respectfully submitted by,

Barb Fedy, BA
Director, Grey County Social Services

Director Sign Off: *Barb Fedy, Social Services Director*