 Committee Report

Report SSR-CW-04-17

**To**: Warden Barfoot and Members of Grey County Council

**From**: Barb Fedy, Director of Social Services

**Meeting Date:** June 29, 2017

**Subject: Coordinated Rural Transportation Pilot Project Update and Ministry of Transportation Community Transportation Pilot Amending Agreement**

**Status**: Recommendation adopted by Committee as presented per Resolution CW124-17; Endorsed by County Council July 13, 2017 per Resolution CC38-17;

Recommendation

1. **That Report SSR-CW-04-17 be received and that staff be approved to continue to work with MOVIN’GB and other transportation providers to continue to grow the Coordinated Rural Transportation Pilot Project to meet underserved residents residing in both Grey County and Bruce County; and**
2. **That the Warden and Clerk be authorized to execute Amending Agreement No. 1 regarding the Community Transportation Pilot between Grey County and the Ministry of Transportation prior to County Council approval as per Section 24.13 (b) of Procedural By-law 4876-14.**

Background

Report SSR-SS-05-16 on the Coordinated Rural Transportation Pilot Project was adopted by Committee and amended by resolution (changing the name from Grey Bruce Ride to Movin’GB) by Grey County Council on April 5, 2016. Grey County received an allocation of $99,790.00 from the Ministry of Transportation Community Transportation Pilot Grant Program to fund this project. Home and Community Supports Grey-Bruce (HCSS) is the lead service provider for the operation of additional services to residents in need of transportation.

The MOVIN’GB pilot project was an attempt to improve the lives of county residents who did not have access to adequate and reliable transportation options. Pilot services were to assist seniors and people with disabilities to access affordable and more transportation options. TRIPSPARK, a scheduling technology, is utilized to coordinate the transportation services of multiple local providers more efficiently, with a single point of contact for customers.

Project Scope and Implementation

The 2015 Lough Barnes consultant study identified capacity within the existing transportation service provider landscape to increase ridership with a minimal impact to overall costs. Due to the distances driven to access medical appointments and other services, a significant loss in service efficiency (with vehicles returning empty - deadheading) is experienced by all providers. The strategy was a collaborative model to bring existing transportation providers together to best meet the goal of improved service access through a scheduling tool.

While developing the project scope, HCSS and County staff met to review the areas of unmet needs in the county, initially focusing on the underserved areas of Owen Sound south to Grey Highlands and Owen Sound east to Town of Blue Mountains. It was agreed this service would be beneficial to all but in particular for adults and seniors living on a low or fixed income, as well as persons living with a disability who were not residents of an area currently serviced by another transportation provider.

Project Progress

The technology was fully in place and systems were streamlined at HCSS by late fall 2016. In early 2017, HCSS added services to North Bruce Peninsula and South Bruce Peninsula. In March an additional route was offered into and out of Wiarton (two assigned days/week). Although this community is in Bruce County and the pilot is a Grey County initiative, engagement with the Wiarton Salvation Army highlighted deep needs. With MOVIN’GB offsetting some of the demand for seniors and other adults to access services in the Bruce Peninsula, the Salvation Army vehicle became more readily available to transport other vulnerable groups such as sole support parents with young children and youth to access the food bank, Early Years Programs and educational/ training opportunities.

Utilization

| **Total of New Riders** | **Average new clients per day** |
| --- | --- |
| May 1/16-Sept 21/16  | 183 | 1.27 |
| Oct 1/16-Dec 31/16 | 122 | 1.33 |
| Jan 1/17-Mar 31/17 | 116 | 1.29 |

| **MOVIN’GB Ridership Stats April 16-March 17 (including New Riders)** | **2889** |
| --- | --- |
| Owen Sound | 1831 |
| Municipality of Meaford and The Blue Mountains | 603 |
| Grey Highlands | 455 |

Assessing Achievement of Project Goals

Increase Capacity and Fill Service Gaps: TRIPSPARK scheduling software is used to determine the best service/route to meet a client’s needs either through the six MOVIN’GB vehicles or through an alternate service provider who may be better suited and/or have more capacity. This goal has been met through the use of the technology. Additional rides can be added and services are maximized utilizing the same vehicle when a pre-existing booking is in the location of a new request. The technology preselects the optimal vehicle/route based on the client’s needs and as a result, efficiencies due to the limiting of ‘deadheading’ of the vehicle are realized. In addition, more clients can be accommodated on a single vehicle.

Improved Service Coordination: By improving coordination between service providers, this goal was meant to bring together the existing transportation providers in Grey County and Bruce County, with access to the software through the licences and service agreements. Ultimately this should improve the levels of service across the geography served and lower costs by ensuring optimal use of human and capital resources. Conflicting program mandates and funder requirements have prevented the achievement of this goal. Good will among service providers exists to collaborate, however additional work and time is required to invest in the trusting relationships necessary to permit the lead agency to host the technology and to establish and oversight board. The limitations of the pilot project scope and one-time allocation are also significant barriers for large scale change.

Regional Transportation: This is a goal shared by Council and staff of both counties and will remain a goal into the future to provide equitable community transportation services for citizens. Technology permits improved scheduling opportunities, more accurate reporting and a decreased reliance on labour intensive manual administration. With two of the largest transportation operators in the area using the same scheduling system it may lead to achieving the goal of providing equitable community transportation services to the citizens of Grey County and Bruce County.

Unforeseen Changes to Project

Initially, TRIPSPARK licences were to be extended for Beaver Valley Outreach however they determined their clients would benefit by being directly referred to MOVIN’GB. Their internal transportation program was managed for decades by one or two dedicated individuals and this was not sustainable. They report the transition is seamless; their residents are receiving services in an improved and efficient manner.

The County’s two Ontario Works vans were delayed in being utilized as part of the available pool of transportation providers for a variety of reasons. TRIPSPARK licences are now being considered for OW staff to use in day to day scheduling for OW and ODSP clients and possibly expanding services to those not in receipt of social assistance.

Lessons to date:

1. Ridership numbers have not been overwhelming but they are new riders who did not have access previously and they report experiencing a significant and positive impact to their quality of life.
2. It takes time to engage community to understand that transportation services are for all; it is not limited to certain populations. Work must happen to convince community that this is not specialized transit but that it is important to all community members. It must also be communicated that transportation is not about big city buses; it can be smaller vehicles running around the county - a rural solution to a universal problem.
3. Pilot project funding is limited and considered one-time. Therefore there is hesitancy among service providers to commit time and resources to such projects. One example is Saugeen Mobility and Regional Transit (SMART) which has been in operation for decades, operating more than 20 vehicles and is a reliable and trusted transportation provider. Nine lower tier municipalities in both counties access gas tax funds to support this organization. SMART advises they too are investing in TRIPSPARK scheduling software and their own licences to automate their services. Currently there remain many opportunities for collaboration and improved customer service for clients who call MOVIN’GB but who live in communities served by SMART.
4. Impact of the trip that is not taken must be considered when determining the value of the service:
	* The trips can take people to work, education and training
	* The trips that take people to health care services so they can achieve improved health outcomes
	* Rural isolation is a challenge and although the program so far has been limited in its capacity to open up the rides to any and all who need it, people are better able to access services for mental health and well being
	* There are several connecting opportunities with existing service providers and these need to be explored to move the needle for not just vulnerable populations but for a more connected community as a whole.

Community Transportation Pilot Extension

On January 25, 2017, the Minister advised that funding for the Community Transportation Pilot Grant Program was being extended for another year to March 31, 2018. Grey County was approved for the requested $50,000 under the extended program and an Amending Agreement No. 1 has been provided for signature and the flow of funds. An additional municipal contribution of $50,000 was approved in the 2017 budget. The funding permits the MOVIN’GB pilot project to continue delivering services to underserviced populations in our community and for staff to explore linkages with the existing service providers that may lead to a more regional solution, improving quality of life in rural communities and removing barriers of isolation. A service agreement will be developed for Grey County and HCSS to continue the project.

Going Forward

* HCSS and County staff are in discussions with Bruce Peninsula Transit Company to determine how they can potentially serve the current MOVIN’GB clientele in and around Wiarton with their new routes from Owen Sound into Wiarton, north to Tobermory and back down the peninsula. This would allow MOVIN’GB to operate a fixed route expansion from Owen Sound along HWY 26 to Meaford and to Town of Blue Mountains, and from Owen Sound south to Markdale. To date scheduling has been as per demand. A fixed route provides a more regular schedule for clients and opportunities to connect with other transportation options.
* HCSS staff are in discussions with Meaford municipal staff to connect MOVIN’GB vehicles to the in-town only Meaford transportation program for connection through to town of Blue Mountains, possibly to connect to Collingwood. HCSS has confirmed with MTO and the Ontario Highway Transportation Board that since their organization falls under the Home Care and Community Services Act, it is exempt from the legislation governing the transporting of people for compensation. As such there is no issue with establishing a fixed route anywhere within Grey Bruce Counties.
* Staff will also work more closely with South East Grey Community Health Centre regarding the needs of their clientele.
* County staff met recently with the LaunchPad’s newly hired youth transportation project coordinator. This position is a joint project with the Saugeen Economic Development Corporation. Grey County is looking for ways to support the LaunchPad’s goal to forge a sustainable program that will enable youth to access to services and skills development for local youth – the first in Canada.
* For planning purposes the project will explore additional cost impact for every new community to engage with a regional strategy.

These discussions are in their early days but are worthy of development to explore a larger regional model of transportation in rural communities in both Grey County and Bruce County. Significant Initial start-up costs were incurred for Consultant support and other expenses for HCSS including software support and staffing. There will continue to be some consultant costs for this project however as the scope has changed, going forward expenses will include driver and operations costs for the fixed routes as well software licenses, training and IT support for new providers to the project (i.e. OW). Legal advice may be required for further service agreements and data sharing agreements. There will be a media campaign, including social media and other communications required to advise of the planned fixed route expansion from Owen Sound along HWY 26 to Meaford and to Town of Blue Mountains, and Owen Sound south to Markdale. For future regional expansion, currently provincial gas tax is used by a total of 9 Grey County and Bruce County municipalities. However there are additional gas tax funds available, should there be a desire to deliver a more robust collective regional service. Lower tier municipalities must commit to ongoing funding as proof of local support for the system; political commitment for an ongoing program is required. The gas tax calculation would be based on ridership and population and could potentially be for the larger region of Grey County and Bruce County. Given that MOVIN’GB uses TRIPSPARK and SMART is also pending implementation, there is opportunity for others to connect to the technology.

Financial/Staffing/Legal/Information Technology Considerations

| **Operating Budget for the Project for the Period of April 1, 2017 to March 31, 2018** |
| --- |
| **Item and Description** | **Cost** | **Funding Breakdown(Amount by Source)**  |
| **Province** | **Recipient** | **Other Sources (Identify Funding Source)** |
| IT Services | $ 1,000.00 |  | $ 1,000.00 |  |
| Technology | $ 7,500.00 |  | $ 7,500.00 |  |
| TripSpark Maintenance | $17,000.00 | $12,000.00 | $ 5,000.00 |  |
| Software Licenses | $30,000.00 |  | $30,000.00 |  |
| Salaries | $50,000.00 | $50,000.00 |  |  |
| Vehicle Maintenance | $17,899.00 | $17,899.00 |  |  |
| Consultations / event-related meetings | $22,000.00 |  | $22,000.00 |  |
| Legal Fees |  $5,400.00 | $ 5,400.00 |   |  |
| Communications Strategy, Advertising, Printing, Community Engagement  | $25,000.00 | $19,440.00 | $ 5,560.00 |  |
| **Total** | $175,799.00 | **$104,739.00** | $71,060.00 |  |
| **2017-18 Funding Year Total** | **$104,739.00** |  |  |

A portion of the initial pilot funding received from the Ministry of Transportation was allocated in 2016 to support the coordination of the service providers and also to purchase additional TRIPSPARK licenses and training for HCSS staff and other service providers who joined the intended collective. There were also communications and media expenses and legal costs for agreements, etc. Given the changed nature and scope of the project, expenses became much more operational in nature for the lead operator. Wages and benefits were the highest expense however HCSS uses a combination of paid and volunteer drivers so these expenses were offset by the volunteer component. HCSS programs are funded through the Ministry of Health and various LHIN funding allocations. MOVIN’GB was already established prior to the pilot project inception and with the existing infrastructure in place, this resulted in savings in start-up costs.

In total, expenditures allocated to the pilot project from July 15, 2015-March 31, 2017 total $71,091. $45,041 of these expenditures were funded by Ministry of Transportation funding and the remaining $26,050.00 was municipal contribution by the County of Grey. The Ministry has approved an extension of the original agreement to allow the unspent $54,039.00 of provincial funding to be expensed by March 31, 2018. The total April 1, 2017 to March 31, 2018 budget is $175,799.00 and includes $104,739.00 in provincial funding and a $71,060.00 municipal contribution.

Link to Strategic Goals/Priorities

Continuing to coordinate existing transportation services to realize unused capacity enables service providers to expand services to underserved populations within Grey and Bruce Counties. In doing so, Corporate Strategic Goal number 2: Support Healthy, Connected Communities can be achieved. The improved physical connections between communities through a network of coordinated transportation services enables citizens to access health, education, and employment services thereby improving their overall health and wellbeing. This commitment ensures that county services and programs are inclusive, accessible and reflective of the diversity of the population.

Attachments

[Amendment to Grey County Community Transportation Pilot Grant agreement L14](https://docs.grey.ca/share/s/l9znj7GGS2qg41fGj1Sv9g)

Respectfully submitted by,

Barb Fedy, B.A.
Director of Social Services