



Committee Report

To:	Chair Nielsen and Members of Grey County Community Services Committee
Committee Date:	April 25, 2023
Subject / Report No:	CAOR-CS-12-23
Title:	Grey Transit Route Initiative
Prepared by:	Stephanie Stewart, Manager of Community Transportation
Reviewed by:	Kim Wingrove, CAO
Lower Tier(s) Affected:	County-wide
Status:	Recommendation adopted by Committee as presented per Resolution CW81-23; Endorsed by County Council June 8, 2023, per Resolution CC38-23.

Recommendation

1. That report CAOR-CS-12-23, regarding the Grey Transit Route Initiative, be received for information.

Executive Summary

The Grey Transit Route has provincial and county funding to provide reliable and affordable public transit within Grey, Bruce, and Dufferin County. The provincial grant is scheduled to end March 31, 2025, and Grey County is required to prepare a service sustainability plan for how the system might operate past that date. In an effort to further promote the Grey Transit Route, staff would like to offer fare-free transit on weekends from May 20 to September 4, 2023.

Background and Discussion

Grey County pursued Community Transportation Program funding in 2018 in response to requests from the public and community support agencies for an affordable, reliable intercommunity transportation option for residents. The terms of the funding program required the county to operate a conventional transit system. All passengers are picked up and dropped off at scheduled stops and at scheduled times. The County and Southgate have received just over \$3,500,000 in provincial funding to operate the system until March 31, 2025.

The GTR travels between Owen Sound and Wiarton, Owen Sound and Orangeville and Owen Sound and The Blue Mountains. The GTR has partnered with the Town of Shelburne to offer weekend service between Dundalk and Shelburne from April 29th, 2023 – January 28th, 2024,

and with South Bruce Peninsula and Bruce County to offer service to Sauble Beach from May 20th – September 4, 2023. This summer there will be service 7 days per week on all routes.

The GTR, like all transit agencies, experienced a tough few years due to pandemic regulations. Transit agencies were asked to reduce seating capacities, enforce social distance requirements, and promote essential travel only. These regulations significantly impacted ridership as capacities were reduced and marketing was put on hold. Additionally, ridership was impacted because many people worked from home, were avoiding public places and key destinations were closed. The GTR passively promoted the service during the pandemic, but since May of 2021 the GTR has been actively promoting the service through newspaper ads, digital display ads, radio commercials, in person promotions and on social media.

The GTR's success comes from being seen as an affordable and reliable service. Throughout the years the GTR enhanced service by accepting cash on all routes, modified stop locations and stop times and added bike racks to all buses.

Over the past few years, the GTR received feedback through driver interactions, community outreach, community stakeholders, phone calls, emails, and surveys. While residents appreciate the service, they expressed a need for more days of service and additional stop locations. While the \$5.00 adult fare has not consistently come up as a barrier to service, staff do know that some residents cannot afford to travel as a family within our communities as the roundtrip fares do add up (the roundtrip cost for two adults and two students is \$38).

Staff would like to offer fare-free public transit on Saturdays and Sunday from May 20 – September 4, 2023. Offering fare-free transit will:

- encourage residents to stay, play and explore their own backyard
- be an investment in developing future riders
- encourage economic growth
- reduce barriers to employment
- increase access to services
- promote public transit vs single vehicle use

Grey County would not be the first municipal transit system to offer fare-free transit, The Town of Orangeville has recently begun a two-year pilot project offering fare-free transit to all residents. Grey County staff will connect with Town of Orangeville staff to learn about the success and challenges of the pilot project.

Legal and Legislated Requirements

None.

Financial and Resource Implications

A loss of approximately \$7,300 or 9% of the GTR's annual revenue may occur, as a result of this pilot.

Relevant Consultation

Internal

External

Appendices and Attachments

[Town of Orangeville's Pilot Project.](#)