

SAUGEEN MOBILITY **and Regional Transit**

Background

Founded in 1977 as Bruce, Grey and Huron Disability Transportation Corporation, Saugeen Mobility and Regional Transit is the local municipal specialized public transit partnership dedicated to providing door to door mobility solutions to improve the quality of life for disabled residents of Arran-Elderslie, Brockton, Chatsworth, Hanover, Huron-Kinloss, Kincardine, Saugeen Shores, Southgate and West Grey

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Benefits

SMART provides transportation solutions to community members who because of their disabilities cannot use conventional transit or local taxi services.

SMART also provides group excursion charter services to local nursing homes and seniors residences.

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Funding

SMART's 2021 'local revenue' is budgeted at \$900,000 of which \$650,000 is to be provided by the 9 partner municipalities, \$244,000 by users through user fees and \$6,000 by donations and other revenue sources. Operational expenses are budgeted at \$1,400,000. Provincial Gas Tax funding will cover the budgeted \$500,000 operational deficit.

Like all municipal transit systems, SMART receives annual funding through the Ontario Ministry of Transportation's Dedicated Gas Tax Funds for Public Transportation Program.

Under the Ontario Gas Tax for Transit program, SMART received \$710,540 in 2020 (based on 2018 statistics) and should receive about the same in 2021 based on 2019 statistics.

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Infrastructure

SMART is an 'up and running' transit service with a fully operational infrastructure including a toll-free telephone number, e-mail, high-speed internet link and a web-site that offers information, on-line registration, feedback and secure payments.

SMART has a fleet of well maintained vehicles including large adapted buses for group outings with 34" lifts and capacity up to 30 passengers, 9-passenger/4 wheelchair adapted buses with 34" lifts and adapted small vans with 30" ramps.

Drivers are dispatched through Novus scheduling software and DriverMate mobile app.

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Looking Forward

The population of Canada, especially in rural areas, is aging. There will only be increasing demand for specialized transit services such as this over the next few decades.

According to statistics from the 2011 census, Bruce County had 20% of its population aged 65 or older. In Grey County, that percentage is about 21%. This compares to 14.6% for the Province of Ontario as a whole. The median age of the population is 47 years in Bruce and 47.3 years in Grey compared to 40.4 years provincially.

Transportation is the largest single barrier to healthcare in rural areas.

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Strategic Plan

A Strategic Plan was completed in 2019.

Vision – Providing specialized transit to member municipalities in Grey and Bruce.

Mission – Provide a door to door specialized transit service to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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Strategic Priorities

1. Business Plan Development
2. Identify Scope of Service
3. Quality of Service
 - Vehicles
 - Staff
 - Client Feedback
4. Quality of Governance

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HR Policies and Procedures

SMART's HR Committee has completed writing formal job descriptions.

An HR professional has been retained to review and rewrite SMART's HR policies and procedures.

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Weekend Service

Sunday service was eliminated in May 2020.

As well, live weekend dispatch was eliminated saving SMART about \$20,000 per year. Saturday rides must be booked by noon Friday.

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COVID 19

COVID 19 created many challenges and reduced ridership by 90% in spring of 2020. Ridership has since recovered to about 60% of pre-COVID levels although group excursion ridership is still down more than 80%.

Board meetings were transferred to tele-conference and Zoom.

Extensive cleaning, capacity limits and other safety protocols were introduced which increased the labour component of each ride and reduced efficiency.

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2021 Budget

Due to lower expected ridership and costs, 2021 municipal contributions have been reduced by \$100,000 resulting to lower contributions for 7 out of 9 SMART partners.

Budgeted expenses for 2021 have been reduced by \$336,000.

Operational savings from 2020 and expected savings in 2021 will allow SMART to rebuild it's MTO Gas Tax account for future capital investments.

It is quite possible that ridership will begin returning to pre-COVID levels in the second half of 2021.

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Capital Investments

Under ICIP, SMART purchased 5 adapted Dodge Caravans in 2020.

SMART has 3 9-passenger buses on order for delivery in April 2021 and is planning to purchase an additional 3 9-passenger buses in 2022.

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Bruce County

In the spring of 2020, a presentation was made to Bruce County and a request was made to form a Transportation Advisory Committee with an eye to Bruce County funding service for the entire county in place of the five lower-tier municipalities currently partners in SMART.

Bruce County is currently working on a transportation master plan and SMART anticipates being actively involved. A decision on county involvement is expected in the second half of 2021.

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Grey County

SMART has invited Stephanie Stewart, Manager of Community Transportation to the January 22 board meeting to provide an update on Grey County's transportation initiatives.