



HURON SHORES AREA PROGRESS REPORT – October 2023

RIDERSHIP – will exceed goal

- 2023 goal is to double ridership to 16,000 trips/boardings; by September 30, we had **14,032 boardings**.
- Year-over-year growth is 136%
- We are 87.7% to goal
- Expect to hit ridership goal in October and exceed goal by @ 3,000 boardings by December 31

OPERATIONS – increased costs to meet demand

1. Summer Bus

- Summer Bus ran weekends in July and August until September 3
- Ran non-stop from London Transit stop #705 (Masonville Mall) to Sobeys Plaza, Grand Bend
- Four return trips daily
- 560 boardings over ten weekends
- Fare box revenue was \$5,430
- Net cost to run was \$6,744 (bus & driver cost \$12,174 minus revenue)

2. Employee Shuttle - Ridership demand outstrips capacity

- Route 1 Sarnia to Grand Bend ridership increased dramatically in July. Bus was full leaving Sarnia with workers heading into this area (Forest, Kettle Point, Port Franks, Grand Bend, Exeter).
- Unable to obtain consensus from local employers in developing Employee Shuttle, so approached the challenge from the student worker side of the problem.
- In July, used Grace Taxi to run Employee Shuttles Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, diverting six students from the regular bus. As demand increased, ran two runs every morning and one night run.
- By mid to end of July, needed to divert more workers from regular bus. Voyago stated they had “no bus available that was not already tied to a contract.” Voyago suggested buying a new bus would require a long-term commitment from us outside current contract and would cost \$1,300 per day plus fuel. Full 11.25 hour day costs \$845.55+Fuel under current contract.
- By August, contracted with Lambton Elderly Outreach (LEO) for two vehicles, each able to transport eight workers. Used LEO buses and Grace Taxi throughout September.

- October - Employee Shuttles operating on weekends – one from LEO and Grace Taxi, diverting 14 workers from regular bus (regular bus holds 20 people). Situation will be monitored month by month.
- Unbudgeted cost for Employee Shuttles July to end of August @ \$27k. Working with LEO and Grace Taxi more budget friendly than Voyago. LEO charged \$165 per day for bus, driver and fuel (Grace Taxi similar).
- Planning for summer 2024 will focus on working closely with Lambton College student employment office so we know how many students working in this area and where. LEO is open to helping us next summer as well. Voyago notes that using the Lambton College bus may be an option.
- Businesses that used Sarnia workers: Forest Golf Club, Forest Foodland, Arkona Appliances, Grog's Restaurant, MacPherson's Restaurant, Mike & Terri's NoFrills, Tim Horton's (Grand Bend), Oakwood Resort, The Colonial Hotel, Big Kahuna Riverbar, Sobeys, MacDonald's (Grand Bend, Exeter), Wendys (Exeter), Libro Credit Union (Exeter), and Hayter's Turkey Farms.

3. Smart Cards Dominate

- Launched 2021; first Smart Card use October 2021.
- To date in 2023, 5,833 trips paid for using a Smart Card or 43% of trips.
- Of those, 3,914 Smart Cards were Monthly Passes.

4. Federal Transportation Infrastructure Grant Submitted October 4

- Grant request of **\$374,336** submitted for transit shelters, benches, solar lighting kits, bike racks, and concrete pads.
- Infrastructure part of ridership building and advertising revenue generation strategies.
- Grant pays 80% (\$299,468).
- Hoping our 20% share will come from Ontario Rural Transit Grant (i.e. \$74,867).
- Letters of support received from Bluewater, South Huron, North Middlesex and Kettle & Stony Point First Nation.

5. CT Program Grant – Additional Funding Request Submitted September 29

- Many rural transit systems on CT Program grants experienced rise in costs since pre-pandemic budgets set and have asked for additional money and time.
- CT Program provided "Additional Funding Request".
- Submitted request for \$318,168: Local - \$64,349, Intercommunity - \$253,819.
- Money will be used for:
 - maintaining regular service levels and hours (fuel costs and contractor service rate increased)
 - maintaining forecast passenger trips (i.e. employee shuttles and summer bus),
 - support our Federal Grant submission (20% = \$74,867),
 - marketing (\$28,075).

6. Route 4 – Report: “Making Route 4 of More Value to North Middlesex Residents”

- At request of North Middlesex Council (March 15) to investigate if current route and schedule meeting resident needs, developed and published survey for riders and non-riders in April (ran April to mid-September).
- Held two public transit meetings September 12 and 13 (Parkhill and Ailsa Craig).
- Developed report with recommendations and next steps for consideration organized by implementation timelines to North Middlesex Council (October 12)
- October to December:
 - add bus stop at Craigweil Gardens Senior Apartments in Ailsa Craig,
 - add a third return trip to enable passengers stay longer in Strathroy and Grand Bend,
 - lower bus stop signs to “eye-level” to make them easier to see and read,
 - provide paper brochures at bus stops,
 - provide instructions on how to read a schedule.

7. Transit Shelters from Stratford – Picked up September 29

- Purchased eight used transit shelters from Stratford (\$500 per shelter)
- Two promised to Kettle & Stony Point First Nation (they hope to install before year end).
- One slated for the Legacy Centre, Thedford (hope to install before year end).

MARKETING

1. Bus Advertising Package (revenue) – \$1,500 of revenue

- Framework installed on both buses to accommodate “headliner ads”
- Advertising package distributed to local businesses.

2. Advertising / Promotion

- Current marketing activity minimal due to lack of funds.
- Marketing budget reduced in favour of other budget lines – i.e. Transportation Costs.
- Running social media ads (Facebook / Google Adwords)
- Marketing budget request part of CT Program “Additional Funds Request”