

# The Road Ahead

A study of transportation needs across  
Huron and Perth Counties



A report for the  
Social Research &  
Planning Council

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Personal details provided by those interviewed during this study have been omitted, in order to protect the privacy of study participants.





# Introduction

How do people manage without a car in Perth and Huron Counties? Extensive interviews and research show they face many difficulties, not only in travelling outside their own communities, but in the activities of everyday life. This is particularly true for those who are disadvantaged by reason of health, employment, or family circumstance. Rural residents worry that services may not be there when they need them. They are being asked to adapt to rapid changes that are often difficult to understand. This is particularly hard for those who face economic challenges, as many in rural Ontario do:

**“In rural areas, even if the necessary social services are in place, they can be virtually unreachable if you lack the means to get there. In many regions, affordable public transit is only a dream. If a family can afford a vehicle, it is often used to transport the breadwinner to work. Eliminating the [lack of basic infrastructure] plaguing Ontario municipalities can allow them to deliver the types of services that can alleviate poverty and stimulate new opportunities”.<sup>1</sup>**

Transportation in rural communities is a major social and health issue. Services available in Stratford or Goderich, for example, may be completely inaccessible to someone who lives only a few miles outside town, but has no means of transport. While many residents rely on their own vehicle, or friends and family for transportation, this option is not available to everyone. The range of some services available in small towns and villages has diminished in recent years, meaning that residents in those communities are forced to travel further afield in order to conduct the activities of daily living. Many of those without their own transportation risk social isolation and some are unable to visit their families in other communities.

1 Rural Poverty: AMO/ROMA submission to the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, March 27, 2007 (Association of Municipalities of Ontario/Rural Ontario Municipal Association)



In early 2011, the Social Research & Planning Council of Perth-Huron called for proposals to provide a review of existing services, and an analysis of available information and statistics relating to personal transportation in Perth and Huron Counties. From this research, potential solutions to transportation challenges have been suggested.

This report describes the demographics of Huron and Perth Counties and outlines existing transportation services. Recent research is reviewed and areas of greatest need are identified. The report concludes with suggested directions for the future of transportation in Huron and Perth Counties and a recommendation toward their implementation.

Particular attention is paid to the needs of outlying rural areas and potentially marginalized populations such as those living on low incomes, those living with disabilities, youth, women, seniors, and distinct cultural groups. Lynn Bowering Consulting was contracted to conduct the project.

## Methodology

Between February and June of 2011, the following process was undertaken:

1. Data from Statistics Canada and from the Planning Departments of the Counties of Huron and Perth was obtained and reviewed.
2. Recent reports conducted in both Counties, as well as in other parts of Ontario, were reviewed and analyzed. See pages 13 and 26.
3. A consultation plan was developed, particularly targeting agencies working with disadvantaged individuals and groups, and their clients.
4. Results of recent consultations that took place in Huron <sup>2</sup> and Perth <sup>3</sup> County were augmented by personal and group interviews, and incorporated into the study.
5. Interviews were conducted with many local agencies, as listed in the Acknowledgements (on page 31).

2 The Transportation Task Force in 2008 and the Demand Management Plan in 2010/11

3 The Vision 2013 project conducted by the Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance.



# Demographics

The two Counties cover a large geographic area and are adjacent to each other. Perth County covers about 2,200 square kilometres and is about 50% rural. Urban populations are situated in the small towns of Listowel, Mitchell and Milverton. The City of Stratford and the Town of St. Marys, while located within Perth County, are separate municipalities. Huron County covers about 3,400 square kilometres and is more than 60% rural, with small urban populations in Clinton, Goderich, Wingham, Exeter and Seaforth. The combined area covers a total of about 5,600 square kilometres. Population density varies from 34 people per square kilometre in Perth to 18 people per square kilometre in Huron, the latter being one of the most rural counties in Ontario. <sup>4</sup>

## Perth County Population

Table 1

Municipality	2011 Population	2006 to 2011 Increase
Stratford	30,886	1.2%
St. Marys	6,655	0.6%
Perth County	75,112	1.0%

## Huron County Population

Table 2

Municipality	2011 Population	2006 to 2011 Increase
Goderich	7,521	-0.6%
Huron County	59,100	-0.4%

<sup>4</sup> Population information is from the Statistics Canada 2011 Census. All other demographic information is from the Statistics Canada 2006 Census, unless otherwise noted.



## Population Characteristics

As in most rural communities, the population is largely stable, if not declining in some areas. The median age in Perth County is 39.3, slightly higher than the Ontario median age of 39 years. However, in Huron County, the median age is 42.3 years. The percentage of seniors (over the age of 64 years) in both Counties is higher than in the Province as a whole (19% in Huron, 16% in Perth and 13% for Ontario). A high ratio of dependent family members is expected as a result of an aging population. Changing family composition may result in additional pressures for drivers.

Both Perth and Huron Counties are relatively homogenous in terms of ethnocultural diversity when compared to the Province as a whole, with the notable exception of the small Anabaptist populations.<sup>5</sup> The most common languages, apart from English and French, are German and Dutch which are spoken by approximately 10% of the population.

## Income

Median family income in 2005 was \$62,446 in Huron County and \$68,713 in Perth County. Both of these figures are below the Ontario median family income of \$69,156.<sup>6</sup> Social and health problems that may accompany poverty can be compounded by a lack of transportation as it restricts access to services.



- 5 The Anabaptist community is comprised of several local communities which share their historical and religious roots in the Anabaptist movement of the 1500s. The term Anabaptist means “another baptism” and refers to the practice of baptising adults upon confession of faith rather than baptizing infants. Some communities include Old Order Mennonites, Old Order Amish, Conservative Mennonite, Independent Old Order Mennonite, Amish, and Low-German speaking Mennonites from Mexico. The cultural traditions of the Mennonite and Amish vary on a scale of very conservative, with few modern amenities, to fully modern, indistinguishable from mainstream society. (Perth District Health Unit, 2011)
- 6 Median family income since 2005 has likely decreased due to the global economic recession and rising unemployment rates. For more details relating to the impact of the recession on Perth County, please refer to Facing the Future: The Socio-economic impact of the global recession on Stratford, St. Marys, and Perth County, Social Research & Planning Council (2009).



## Service Utilization

Most residents access primary and secondary health services locally.<sup>7</sup> There are hospitals in Stratford, St. Mary's, Seaforth, Clinton,<sup>8</sup> Wingham, Goderich and Exeter. Huron and Perth Counties are within the South West Local Health Integration Network (South West LHIN). Residents must travel into London for specialized tertiary services, although this has improved in recent years with the advent of more specialized services in the larger hospitals. For those without their own vehicle – or a willing friend or relative – options are very limited. In recent years, some agencies have replaced local offices with online services in an effort to achieve greater efficiency. Unfortunately, that makes life much more difficult for those who must travel to a central location for services or to check in on a regular basis. Social services are usually located in larger city centres – those living in smaller communities or in rural areas must find some way to reach those services.

## Existing Transportation Services

Due largely to the geographic size and sparse population density of Huron and Perth Counties, providing a sufficient transportation system is logistically and financially challenging. The following section will provide an overview of transportation systems that provide service within Huron and Perth County. The City of Stratford operates a public transit system that includes services for people with physical challenges. EasyRide is a shared service that operates throughout Perth and Huron Counties and provides transportation to seniors, people with disabilities, and those in low-served areas. The transportation solution created by Community Living in South Huron is highlighted. This section also outlines train, bus, and taxi services, and touches on the Huron Perth Student Transportation Service, an amalgamation of the public and Catholic school bus systems to reduce service duplication.

### Public Transit

The only community within the two Counties operating public transit is the City of Stratford, operating six bus routes within the City, six days a week: from 6 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. on weekdays and from 6 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. on Saturdays. There is no service on Sundays.

Fares are \$2.50 for adults, \$2.25 for seniors, students and “special” riders (those on Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Benefit, who show required identification). Monthly passes are \$55 for adults and \$45 for the second category.

<sup>7</sup> Source: South West LHIN

<sup>8</sup> Members of the Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance



On May 18, 2011, 70 people attended a lively public meeting to discuss a proposal to reduce evening bus service from half-hourly to hourly service. Many of those in attendance stated they were on low incomes. Women outlined their fear of waiting in the dark in wintertime. Although it had been suggested that this proposal would be a cost-saving measure, it was rejected at the public meeting due to concerns about safety, long waiting times and fear of missing a bus. More than 70% of those who responded to a survey conducted by the City, indicated they would be willing to pay another \$0.50 in fares to keep service as is.

The report that followed the City's public consultation recommended that the City of Stratford maintain the status quo. This was reviewed and rejected by the Council on a tie vote. Some questions were raised as to whether the City needed a transit system at all, given low ridership – particularly in evening hours. It was noted that some other cities (such as Pembroke, Ontario) had eliminated publicly-funded transit in favour of a private system, though that had encountered many problems – private systems in some Ontario communities had failed over the years. The Mayor of Stratford was quoted as saying “the City will never park the buses”<sup>9</sup> and an editorial in the Stratford Beacon Herald supported him:

**“It is logical to assume that ... some of the people who take the bus do so not because of environmental awareness but because of certain challenges they may face whether they be physical, mental or financial. In our city and our society, that's just as important”<sup>10</sup>**

At the time of writing, the City of Stratford had not determined whether evening bus service would be reduced.

## Stratford Parallel Transit

This service, usually known as the “Mobility Bus” operates only within the City of Stratford (except for paid charter trips). Its clients are physically challenged individuals, who cannot use regular transit due to disability. Stratford Parallel Transit has five buses, two of which are on the road at any one time. They operate 7 days/week from approximately 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., with extended hours on Friday.<sup>11</sup>

9 *Stratford Beacon Herald*, Tuesday, July 19, 2011

10 “Publicly funded transit hallmark of caring society”, in *Stratford Beacon Herald*, Wednesday, July 20, 2011

11 From 8:20 a.m. to 4:40 p.m. Monday to Thursday, 8:20 a.m. to 10:40 p.m. on Friday, and from 8:30 a.m. to 4:20 p.m. on weekends.



The service takes people to medical appointments, hockey games, shopping malls and other destinations. The buses are equipped with assistive devices and can accommodate up to three wheelchairs and five clients with walkers. The current fare is \$2.75 per trip (booklets of 10 tickets available), though this will be aligned with the same fare as the regular transit service (currently \$2.50) when the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) is fully in force.

The following are statistics for 2010:

<b>Total Trips</b>	<b>Wheelchairs</b>	<b>Walk-on</b>	<b>Work/School</b>	<b>Medical</b>	<b>Other</b>
15,605	7,704	7,901	5,587	1,123	8,895

Out-of-town trips cost \$1.00/km with a waiting fee of \$25. Stratford Parallel Transit also offers flat rates and charters out-of-town trips. The service is funded by the City, and through Provincial grants, Gas Tax funding, and revenue from fares.

## EasyRide

EasyRide is collaborative network of transportation services, made up of six agencies from Huron and Perth Counties:

- OneCare<sup>12</sup>
- Community Outreach & Perth East Transportation
- Mitchell & Area Community Outreach & Mobility Bus
- St. Marys & Area Home Support Services
- St. Marys & Area Mobility Services
- VON Perth-Huron

In June 2009, EasyRide began offering a coordinated booking service that provides “one number to call” to access transportation.<sup>13</sup> This booking system was provided by the South West LHIN through their Aging at Home Strategy which also provided financial support for the purchase of some vehicles.

EasyRide offers service for registered clients including seniors, people without access to transportation, those with physical or cognitive limitations, and those who do not have family and friends who can assist. Trips are for medical appointments, shopping, errands and social occasions.

<sup>12</sup> A recent amalgamation of Stratford Meals On Wheels & Neighbourly Services, Town & Country Support Services and Midwestern Adult Day Services. The latter two were based in Huron County.

<sup>13</sup> While all the partners share EasyRide booking service, Perth East Transportation does its own scheduling, largely because the Anabaptist population (80% of their clients) find this easier and their service demands are different (source: personal interview)



Each EasyRide organization has unique costs, clients, governance, transportation demands, challenges, and funders, which effectively determine the fare structure of each partner's service. For example, if a rural agency most often provides service locally on rough roads, fewer vehicles are required, but the lifespan of each vehicle may be shorter. In an urban area like Stratford, the presence of a public transportation system and taxi service will determine the appropriate rates. In future, one of the goals of the EasyRide partnership is a standardized fare structure, which must be phased in gradually in order for agencies to keep services affordable and to maintain ridership. Funding, while unique for each partner, is provided largely through municipal and Gas Tax dollars, the South West LHIN, the United Way of Perth-Huron, and other contributors.

At present, the most significant barrier to widespread use of EasyRide is cost. For example, a trip from Stratford to London for a medical appointment (a 120 km round trip), could cost \$54 (at \$0.45/km) – with 2 hours of waiting time (not unusual for appointments with specialists), the client could incur an additional \$30, making the total cost of the trip \$84.00. For a senior living on a basic pension, or an individual receiving Ontario Disability Support Program benefit (maximum around \$1,000/month including rent), this would be a prohibitive cost. Despite its challenges, EasyRide has become one of the best examples of collaborative transportation services in Huron and Perth Counties.

In June 2011, it was announced that Perth County municipalities would receive \$254,000 for accessible bus services, based on increased ridership.<sup>14</sup> There is also the possibility to expand services in Huron County through the Gas Tax revenue, although the expansion is dependent on an increase in funding from the County or Municipalities. For more information, please refer to the Future Directions section.

## Community Living - South Huron

Community Living - South Huron, who provide support to people with a physical or developmental disability, operate a business called Dashwood Wood Products where clients build wooden crates and pallets. They are a successful small business and social enterprise that teaches on-the-job skills, and creates an inclusive environment where individuals can contribute to their community, develop confidence, and achieve their potential.

Recognizing the difficulty that their employees may face in finding reliable transportation in a rural area, Community Living South Huron invested in buses to transport people to and from work on a daily basis. This has proven to be an effective solution for the small Huron based company and provides an example of a viable response to rural transportation challenges.

14 Stratford Beacon Herald, June 15, 2011



## Train Service

At one time, there was extensive rail service to both Perth and Huron County communities, including those on the Lake Huron shore. One gentleman from Blyth reported that, as a youth, he had often visited a relative in Hamilton by train, changing in Guelph.<sup>15</sup> Most of those services ended during the 1970s. Today, there is no passenger rail service in Huron County; someone wishing to take the train would have to find a way to reach London or Stratford. Stratford and St. Marys are served by Via Rail on the Toronto/Sarnia line, with three trips daily Monday to Friday, and reduced services on weekends. This can be very limiting for the residents of the two counties.

## Bus Service

In April, 2011, Greyhound Bus announced that it was discontinuing its service on the Kitchener to London route, which had stops in Stratford and St. Marys. It cited “low ridership” as the reason. This took effect in July, 2011. In the meantime, Aboutown Transportation agreed to take over these routes. Aboutown Northlink operates several routes passing through Huron and Perth Counties (part of its service from Owen Sound to London and St. Thomas):

- Wingham-Listowel-Stratford: operates Monday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday. There are 5 buses daily and trip time from Wingham to Stratford is 2 hours (total of 10 stops en route) Fares are:
  - o Wingham to Stratford: \$27.50 adult
  - o Listowel to Stratford: \$18.00 adult
- Stratford to Kitchener: 2 evening buses daily
- Goderich-Clinton-Stratford: a change of route is required at Lucknow and there are a variety of schedules

As can be seen, travelling time is lengthy and fares are probably out of the reach of low-income families and individuals.

15 Personal communication



## Taxi Services

These are particularly important in rural areas and small towns where there are few alternatives for residents with no vehicle. The Huron County Transportation Task Force identified a total of six taxi companies providing services to various parts of Huron County (Goderich, Exeter, Wingham, Seaforth, Clinton as well as to the County as a whole). Their hours of service vary considerably and their services are usually limited to a specific geographic area, although one company does offer service outside the County as far as Toronto.

In Perth County, there are taxi companies operating in Stratford, Mitchell, Listowel and St. Marys. Service in Stratford and Listowel is available 24 hours daily. In Mitchell and St. Marys, service is available 7 a.m. to midnight Sunday to Thursday and from 7 a.m. to 3 a.m. on Fridays and Saturdays. None of the Perth County taxi companies have a restricted area of service.

On the whole, taxi fares are expensive, even with a flat rate system in place such as the one used in Stratford. The use of a taxi service can be out of reach for people who are living with low income.

## Huron Perth Student Transportation Services

This is a consortium formed by the Huron Perth Catholic District School Board and the Avon Maitland District School Board. The amalgamation was mandated by the Province throughout Ontario to reduce the duplication of student bus services among school Boards. There are 357 routes and buses provided by 8 independent contractors from 11 different sites. Vehicles range from a minivan to 72 passenger buses, some of which have been modified to take wheelchairs and other assistive devices.

In order to provide optimal service for students, Huron Perth Student Transportation Service maintains a sophisticated database that is used daily and imported into their Bus Planner GeoRef system, based in Waterloo. The information is available to operators and schools through a query program, allowing access to maps and student transport information.

Buses are often chartered for other purposes, when they are not being used for transporting students or are undergoing maintenance.



# Recent Research Initiatives

The following section will outline the most recent investigations into transportation within Perth and Huron Counties. At present, there is extensive information relating to Huron County while little exists pertaining to Perth.<sup>16</sup> Consultations by the Social Research and Planning Council, the City of Stratford Transportation Master Plan, and the Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance – Vision 2013 report have been included.

## Social Research & Planning Council Community Forums

The Social Research & Planning Council (SRPC)<sup>17</sup>, a division of the United Way of Perth-Huron, conducts research and generates reports that are specific to Perth and Huron Counties.<sup>18</sup> Past reports have been written on Elder Abuse (2009), the Impact of the Global Economic Recession (2009), Mental Health (2008), Literacy (2008), Youth (2007-2008), Minimum Wage (2007), and Poverty (2006). In addition, the SRPC releases a Quality of Life report every four years (2004, 2008) to monitor changes in community conditions.

In 2010, the SRPC held three community forums – in Stratford, Listowel and Clinton. The purpose of the forums was to gain community input regarding social issues and potential next topics for research in Perth and Huron Counties. Through a facilitated process, the groups developed five top issues for their communities. Transportation was identified as one of those top five issues. Lack of affordable and accessible transportation was believed to cause social isolation and restrict individuals from accessing healthcare services, social services, and other resources. The commissioning of this report was a result of the data and opinions gathered at these forums.

## City of Stratford Transportation Master Plan

In January 2009, the City began work on a 20 year Transportation Master Plan to update and replace the 1992 Transportation Plan. The report explores the feasibility of truck routes and a Highway 7/8 bypass route, prepares an improvement program for projected population and employment growth, and explores and develops strategies for cycling and other active modes of travel.

<sup>16</sup> The most recent study conducted by the County of Perth was undertaken by the former Huron-Perth District Health Council in the late 90s.

<sup>17</sup> Formerly the Perth County Social Research and Planning Council.

<sup>18</sup> The Transportation Report is the first to include both Perth and Huron Counties..



## Huron County Transportation Task Force

The Huron Transportation Task Force Study was conducted in 2008 and focuses on transportation users. The Task Force prepared an inventory of transportation services by surveying existing providers and agencies that serve seniors and people with disabilities including youth and those living with mental illness. The report noted that:

**“Lack of transportation is a barrier in Huron County to providing services to people who need them. Getting to the grocery store, medical appointments, to work, job interviews and daily activities [that] can seem trivial to people that own a car”.<sup>19</sup>**

Most rural residents report that they use an automobile for transportation. However, information collected from client interviews showed that car owners are limiting vehicle use due to the 30% increase in gas prices over the past year. In addition, particularly in rural areas, those without access to a vehicle can be severely disadvantaged. The report identified the priority groups as seniors, youth, people with disabilities, women, and low income families. The report showed that transportation was the second-highest ranked community issue.

## Transportation Demand Management Study

The Transportation Demand Management Study, which focuses on transportation systems, was conducted for the County of Huron in 2010 and 2011 and at time of writing, was still in draft form. This study will include a review of expansion possibilities for the EasyRide program in Huron County based on consultations conducted by Dillon Consulting in 2010. Those studies<sup>20</sup> were reviewed and analyzed for inclusion in this report. Transportation Demand Management is defined as:

**“... a multi-faceted and multi modal approach used to reduce or redistribute transportation demand. This increases the efficiency and use of the available transportation infrastructure, through the implementation of strategies which influence travel behaviour and reduce reliance on the single-occupant vehicle. In many situations,**

<sup>19</sup> Huron Transportation Task Force Report, 2008

<sup>20</sup> Huron Transportation Task Force Report, Huron Community Matters, 2008; Transportation Demand Management Plan, MMM Group for Huron County, 2010 and 2011; Assessment of Community Transportation Service Expansion in Huron County, Dillon Consulting, 2010.



**these goals can be accomplished by encouraging a shift in travel mode to carpooling or active transportation which will facilitate a reduction in vehicle trips.”<sup>21</sup>**

While the report does incorporate the 2008 Task Force Report and deals briefly with public transportation, its focus is largely on encouraging changes in current transportation patterns (i.e. increased use of hiking and walking trails, bicycle use, etc. – “active” transportation), rather than in expanding accessibility overall.

## EasyRide in Huron County

The 2010 review of the EasyRide program in Huron County, conducted by Dillon Consulting, showed that of the 73,000 annual trips coordinated by EasyRide, 17% originated in Huron County, with the remainder beginning in Perth. While no comparable study has been done on EasyRide Perth, the Huron report attributed this large difference to the level of transportation service available. Since the agencies in Perth County had entered into partnerships with the municipalities they service, it enabled them to receive not only municipal financing, but provincial Gas Tax contributions. This has allowed them to expand their services and provide greater accessibility. The report concluded:

**“The EasyRide Huron County transportation providers have the experience and desire to service the needs of seniors and persons with disabilities within the County. However, to meet existing unmet and future latent demand, additional secure funding is required. The provincial gas tax provides a good opportunity to tap into funding sources that will benefit the residents of the County. This would require entering into a service agreement with Huron County to provide additional funds to service this need and benefit the residents of the County.”<sup>22</sup>**

The Ontario dedicated Gas Tax Program was initiated in 2004, as a means of investing a portion of the provincial gas tax in public transit. In 2009/10, \$316 million was allocated among the participating Ontario municipalities based on two cents per litre of the provincial gas tax. These funds are dedicated to transit uses and cannot be used for any other purpose.

21      Transportation Demand Management Plan, p. 1-2

22      *Assessment of Community Transportation Service Expansion in Huron County*, Dillon Consulting, 2010, p. 19



They cannot be used to reduce or replace current levels of municipal provincial transportation funding. They can be spent on:

- Expenditures to promote increased transit ridership
- Transit operating expenditures
- Replacement of public transportation vehicles
- Improvements to transit security and passenger safety; and
- Major refurbishments on any fully accessible, or to be made fully accessible, public transportation vehicle

The allocation of funds received by municipalities is dependent on the total funding envelope available, their ridership and the municipal population. To be eligible to receive dedicated gas tax funds, a municipality must support and contribute financially towards their public transportation services. The Ministry of Transportation estimated in 2010 that the maximum provincial allocation for which the County of Huron would be eligible was approximately \$250,000, assuming a County funding commitment of \$333,000 or higher. If the County's funding commitment were lower, the Gas Tax allocation would be 75% of that commitment.<sup>23</sup> At the beginning of the program, many rural areas were ineligible to receive funding, as few had a system in place. Despite a policy change in 2006, the majority of funds are allocated to urban centres, with smaller, rural communities receiving much smaller amounts.<sup>24</sup>

As is made clear by these reports, making use of the Gas Tax to expand transportation options depends on municipalities agreeing to provide the core funding. In a time of increasing financial pressures on municipal governments, that agreement is often extremely difficult to achieve.

## Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance – Vision 2013

Although the Vision 2013 report focuses on proposed changes to hospital services, it implicitly raises transportation issues. The Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance was formed in 2003 and consists of four hospitals: two in Perth County - Stratford General Hospital and St. Marys Memorial - and two in Huron County - Seaforth Community Hospital and Clinton General Hospital. Of the four, Stratford General is the largest, and has recently undergone extensive expansion and renovation. It acts as the referral hospital for its surrounding area, and includes some tertiary services, such as dialysis, chemotherapy (satellite of the London Regional Cancer Centre), critical care and telemetry.

23 *Ibid*, p. 13. This report also provides a detailed description of process and reporting requirements for the Gas Tax program.

24 *Rural Women & Transportation in Ontario: Rural Women Making Change*, 2009



In 2011, the HPHA received approval from the Ministry of Health & Long-term care to install a Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) machine. Presently, 3,100 scans a year take place in London – a total travel distance of 307,520 km. The new MRI is scheduled to operate 40 hours/week, thus avoiding lengthy travel and ambulance trips. <sup>25</sup>

In 2010, the Alliance embarked on a strategic planning exercise – Vision 2013 – to address some significant challenges:

- Shortage of healthcare professionals
- Disproportionate distribution of services across four sites
- Increased quality and patient standards expectations

The Vision is based on four principles, one of which is to retain four viable sites. The strategy involves the realignment of services across the four sites, the redistribution of beds in order to create a “critical mass” at each site and the adjustment of emergency coverage (two 24/7 emergency departments and two 16/7 emergency departments across the four sites). Target date for implementation of the Vision is September, 2012. <sup>26</sup>

As the Vision 2013 Project Charter indicates, <sup>27</sup> the four hospitals are within relatively close proximity to each other:

- St. Marys to Stratford: 19 km
- Stratford to Seaforth: 39 km
- Seaforth to Clinton: 14 km

The Alliance conducted an extensive consultation process, involving public meetings in Mitchell and Clinton, wide distribution of newsletters and information packages, as well as a telephone survey of 650 residents. Not surprisingly, there was vocal community reaction. Despite repeated assertions that no hospital was slated for closure, many in the smaller communities perceived a strong threat to “their” hospital. In St. Marys, for example, signs appeared all over the town urging a fight to “save our hospital”.

The proposed reduction in hours in the emergency room was the most contentious issue in the rural areas. While changes to emergency department hours and redistribution of beds may make perfect sense to health planners, “critical mass” and “quality of care” are not well understood by the general public. In Stratford, there was considerable concern at the proposal to move rehabilitation beds to Seaforth. Consultation results showed a high level of satisfaction with hospital services and a close identification with the local hospital. While many

25 Stratford General Hospital Foundation flyer, May 2011

26 Note the final resolution of the ER issue is dependent upon the outcome of current policy discussions at the Ontario Ministry of Health & Long-term Care.

27 Vision 2013 Project Charter, South West LHIN, 2010.



understood the need to travel for various services, and were willing to do that, the more rural areas showed greater concern.

Redistribution of beds generated a mixed response. Interestingly, those with a higher income were more supportive of the development of “centres of excellence” at specific hospitals, while those with lower income were less supportive. This suggests that those who are less able to travel for services are more worried about this proposal.

The most negative results in the telephone survey were to the question: “I’d be prepared to give up 24 hour emergency services at smaller hospitals in the region if that meant that a high-quality and well-staffed 24-hour emergency service was available at another site of the Alliance”. Only 35% of respondents agreed with this statement, an indication of the community’s concerns about travelling for care. Results were most striking in the areas around St. Marys, Clinton and Seaforth,<sup>28</sup> demonstrating the higher level of concern in those more rural areas.

## Living with Transportation Challenges

Demographic data has shown us that there are a large number of seniors and youth in both Perth and Huron Counties. Family income is below the Provincial average and likely to be further negatively affected by the current financial situation in Ontario.<sup>29</sup> This as well as the research reviewed above demonstrates that the following groups have the most acute transportation needs:

- Those living on low income
- Those living with disabilities
- Youth
- Women
- Seniors

### Those Living on Low Income

Transportation options in Perth and Huron are limited. There are significant costs involved in using taxis or inter-community buses and these are particularly challenging for those living on restricted incomes. This would include seniors living on a basic pension, those living on Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support Program benefits and others living on low incomes, at or below the poverty line. During the interviews conducted as part of this project, we heard the stories of many who are struggling to deal with this challenge.

28 *Report on Attitudes & Assessment of Health Care Issues & Vision 2013 Activity in Huron Perth: The Strategic Counsel* (for HPHA), January 2010

29 For more details relating to the impact of the recession on Perth County, please refer to *Facing the Future: The Socio-economic impact of the global recession on Stratford, St. Marys, and Perth County*, Social Research & Planning Council (2009).



## The Unemployed and Those Seeking Employment

The government-funded organization Partners in Employment works with people to help them find jobs in the Stratford area. They report that even the available public transit in Stratford presents affordability challenges. Many people try to car pool with fellow workers or friends. Some employers in small communities have considered hiring buses to transport employees to and from work– such as Community Living South Huron. A suggestion was made by one interviewee at Partners in Employment, that bus service could be provided to new work sites as they are constructed. The need for affordable and sustainable transportation speaks to the economic well-being of the community for which the service is being provided.

## Those on Ontario Works

People who are on Ontario Works (OW) are either in temporary financial need, looking for work, or both. The income of Ontario Works recipients is well below the national poverty line. As such, transportation realities for a person living on OW can be very challenging. OW will reimburse \$0.30/km for medical appointments or for trips to seek employment. At present, the program is often forced to pay for expensive taxi rides in order to accommodate the schedules and hours of operation for employment or counselling services. Until about 2004/5, Huron County had OW staff scattered in communities across the County. This presented problems for staff that often had to work alone. Technology has now enabled them to centralize their operations, but this makes it hard for people to reach them and often results in high taxi bills. In Perth County, one young woman described her difficulties in getting the services she needs:

**“I’m on OW and they’ll pay for me to take a taxi from Mitchell to Stratford to attend meetings at Choices for Change. They also pay for me to come in for school. But they won’t pay for me to come in to Stratford to go to Narcotics Anonymous. That’s a really important meeting but I just can’t get there, and it isn’t available in Mitchell”**

Other unemployed people rely on walking as much as they can, though that is only possible within an urban area, such as Stratford, Seaforth or Goderich. Another talked about his dream of getting a better education:

**“I’d really like to go to school in London or Kitchener. If I could get there, I could get some help from OSAP [the Ontario Student Assistance Program] but without some transport it’s impossible. I’m stuck”**



Everyone recognizes the benefits of physical activities for children, but these can be out of reach without transportation:

**“I’m looking for work and walk everywhere right now in Stratford – at least it keeps me healthy. But I’d really like my son to play hockey. The only affordable program I can get him into is in Mitchell and with no transportation, I can’t do it. The programs in Stratford are simply too expensive for me”**

For many on OW, local bus service can be too expensive. Although they can get a bus pass when they are on the program, once they come off, they lose that benefit. Most walk everywhere when the weather is amenable.

Some of those on OW do have their own vehicle, but most reported they use it sparingly because of the steeply rising price of fuel. Others worry about how to maintain the vehicle on their limited resources:

**“I live in fear of something going wrong with the car there’s no way I can afford to get it fixed. So I’m pretty careful about how I use it and how much. Sometimes I give my friends a lift and they help me with the gas. And sometimes they gift me a lift, too”**

## Those living with disabilities and special needs

Peer facilitators working with the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) of Huron-Perth are themselves consumer/survivors of mental illness. They reported a high level of need in rural communities. One who lived in a small community in Huron County described the difficulties where there are no local doctors or local pharmacies. While pharmacies in urban areas usually deliver prescriptions free, pharmacies in small towns are unable to do this due to their smaller volume, and the patient must pay for delivery. CMHA, like many other agencies, is encountering difficulties getting volunteer drivers, particularly due to the steep rise in gasoline prices over the past year. The cost of providing transportation for clients is becoming prohibitive.

Most interviewees on ODSP complained of uneven application of very bureaucratic rules: some transportation costs are reimbursed, while others are not. Medical transportation forms cause a great deal of anxiety among clients, who otherwise try to rely on each other for a ride.



EasyRide is out of reach financially for most of them. As they put it, “we rely on the goodness of others”. In addition, the increasing difficulty in finding a local physician forces some of them to take drastic measures:

**“I had to orphan myself <sup>30</sup> so I could get service at the hospital. Otherwise, they kept telling me to see my own doctor, who is based in another town and I can’t get to him without spending money I need for food”**

Everyday tasks like getting groceries become an ordeal. In Goderich, for example, both supermarkets are on highways on the edge of town, and this causes difficulties:

**“In good weather, I try to walk there, but I have to get a taxi back with my groceries. In bad weather, I have to get a taxi both ways and that’s a big expense”**

Those living in very small towns experience other problems: small town convenience and grocery stores charge higher prices and often charge for delivery. <sup>31</sup> Even family connections suffer:

**“It’s really hard to get to Christmas concerts at local churches or schools, especially when the weather’s bad. I miss my brother, but I can only afford to visit him once a year on the bus, because it costs too much money”**

When asked why they continue to live in those communities, several interviewees reported that their location is determined by where they can find affordable housing.

Community Living of Stratford & Area (CLSA) reports that EasyRide is too expensive for their clients. As they note, “where you live limits what services you can receive,” people have no choice but to see someone in their own community, even if their preference is for another person elsewhere (e.g. a female physician). CLSA has 8 vehicles, 2 of which are fully accessible units. They provide transportation for medical appointments, recreational, evening and other activities.

30 An “orphan patient” refers to someone who has no family doctor.

31 Source: personal interview



CLSA supports about 120 people and operates 12 to 14 homes for independent living, where the staff support depends on the needs of the residents. The agency estimates it spends about \$125,000 per year on transportation – that does not include the cost of vehicles or staff wages, though it does include use of the Mobility Bus, taxis and volunteer costs. They do receive some help from the City of Stratford to offset the cost of the Mobility Bus.

Agency staff report that many of their clients on ODSP experience difficulties in getting payment for transportation, which has to be pre-approved. The Perth District Health Unit's Healthy Babies Healthy Children staff also noted the difficulties for families where children needed special services:

**“Many low-income families rely [on] begging a ride. If the child needs services that are only available in another community, they may not get them if they can't get a ride that day. It's really hit or miss. That means the child isn't getting the services they need and that can become a vicious circle. There aren't many options in rural areas”**

Many of these individuals are also regular users of the food banks, and report they cannot get back with their groceries without a ride. Some even have difficulties getting a ride to church. The social isolation experienced by those living with disabilities is exacerbated by the lack of transportation.

## Youth and Young Parents

Young parents with small children face considerable hardship in receiving services. We met with a group at the Young Parents' Place in Listowel. Only one of the participants had their own vehicle, and they were struggling with the rising cost of fuel. All the others had no transportation of their own and relied on friends, family or expensive taxis when needed. Most of the time, they walked everywhere but even that can pose problems:

**“There are no sidewalks on the main street by the grocery stores, so I have to try and manage the stroller with my kids and it's dangerous as that is part of the highway. I often have to pay \$60 in taxi fares on grocery shopping days.”**

Many of those interviewed spoke about their social isolation. While they can get assistance with transportation for some services and medical appointments, there is no assistance available for social occasions. Most of them relied heavily on friends or family where those were available. Many social and recreational activities, even if they are affordable, are not accessible without transportation. Some suggested that sports organizations should consider developing volunteer transportation services, to make their programs more accessible.



One mother in Listowel talked about her problems in taking her daughter to hospital in Stratford:

**“My daughter has some chronic health problems and I’ve had to take her many times to the Stratford hospital. If it isn’t a real emergency I have to call a taxi, it’s the only way to get there. I don’t always know when she really needs an ambulance”**

Youth wanting to travel between communities face similar difficulties if they have no access to a vehicle. Some reported cycling 12 to 20 km into the nearest town, though clearly this is not feasible during severe weather. Most rely on family and friends for transportation. Youth have also noted that lack of transportation limits their ability to get and keep part-time employment. Hitchhiking is often favoured by young people, despite the safety risks.<sup>32</sup>

## Women

Many women in rural areas are consistently without access to transportation. Even more are without full access to a personal vehicle.<sup>33</sup> Women’s access to personal vehicles may be affected by their status in the household and by their income level. In many cases, men control the use of the household vehicle, making women dependent on alternative forms of transport, if available. Women are often at a disadvantage in securing personal transportation because they generally earn less than men, making vehicle ownership difficult. Women’s transportation needs are also different, because they are often responsible for maintaining the household and spend more time in caring roles, requiring them to travel to different places at different times than men. Without reliable, affordable transportation, finding and keeping a job in rural areas is beyond the means of many women.<sup>34</sup>

Women in Huron Second Stage Housing (Goderich) reported that their greatest needs are doctors’ appointments. Most are living on OW or ODSP and try to shop in Goderich where they can take advantage of cheaper prices. For those who live out of town, this can present significant difficulties:

**“I live in [a town] but my doctor is in [another town]. Right now, OW pays for my gas but trying to get a new one locally is just about impossible. I have children who are in kinship**

32 *Listening for Change: Identifying Community Priorities*. United Way Perth County, 2005

33 *Rural Women & Transportation*, Rural Women Making Change, 2009

34 *Ibid*



**care [being looked after by family members]. The CAS will pay for my son to visit me, but won't pay for me to visit him. I have no social life, it's just impossible. I can't afford the cost of the bus from [my home] to [my son's] and back"**

A federally-sponsored study on woman abuse highlighted the isolation experienced by abused women in rural areas and noted that access to transportation can mean the difference between life and death:

**"What happens if you don't have a vehicle and you have to wait for a taxi? That's at least an hour. By that time it might be too late ... If you're stuck on a farm, or even in small areas, you don't have a car and you don't have any way to these places to get the help you need ... you're stuck" <sup>35</sup>**

Abused women face added risks in rural areas, where neighbours may be quite distant, there are more registered and unregistered long guns and other firearms in homes, and emergency response times are often much longer. <sup>36</sup>

## Seniors

Seniors face difficulties living in rural areas, particularly when they have limited or no access to a vehicle. <sup>37</sup> For seniors, EasyRide can be the best-organized transportation program in the area, but those who cannot afford it may rely on family, friends, volunteer drivers (such as those from the Cancer Society or from their church) or other limited services. Those who do not, risk cancelled appointments and reduced access to services. Seniors living in rural areas are often forced to move into town when they can no longer drive. <sup>38</sup> Most retirement residences and long-term care facilities in both Counties provide limited transportation for medical appointments, shopping trips, etc and the EasyRide partnership fills in many gaps.

The United Way of Perth County (now United Way Perth-Huron) found similar results in its 2005 Community Matters Report. Across the County, lack of affordable transportation for seniors, people with disabilities and people on fixed incomes was the primary transportation concern. <sup>39</sup>

35 *Ontario Rural Woman Abuse Study: Final Report*, Government of Canada Department of Justice, 2000

36 Government of Ontario, Neighbours Friends & Families initiative to end violence against women

37 For information about Elder Abuse see, *Breaking the Silence: A Report on Elder Abuse in Perth County*, Perth County Social Research & Planning Council, 2009.

38 *Huron Transportation Task Force*, 2008

39 *Listening for Change: Identifying Community Priorities*, United Way Perth County, 2005



## Anabaptist and Low-German Speaking Mennonite Communities

Some of the Anabaptist <sup>40</sup> communities in North Perth and Perth East rely largely on horse and buggy for transportation. Children in these communities either walk, use a scooter, bicycle or their parents drive them to school in the buggy. While members of the community can use the buggy to travel into Milverton to do their shopping, for example, this option is impossible in Stratford, where there are no places to tie the horse. Travelling by horse and buggy is a time-consuming activity and it can take an hour to travel from Poole, for instance, into Milverton.

For any trip they cannot make by horse and buggy, these families hire a driver either from the “English” community or from other Anabaptist communities nearby. A round trip to London can cost from \$100 to \$175. Even a relatively short trip to a local centre can cost \$25. Some residents require extensive and specialized medical services that are only available in London. Repeat visits can be very costly and present a significant hardship for these families. Families report <sup>41</sup> their greatest needs are for medical appointments. While some horse and buggy Anabaptist families have phones on their property, they are located 100 feet from the house. This can pose problems, particularly in the winter.

The Perth District Health Unit Nurse Practitioner provides care to Anabaptist women and children in Millbank, Milverton, Hesson and Poole but sustainable funding is an issue. Other Health Unit programs provide service to this community and this help is clearly valued. Many Anabaptist families in North Perth and Perth East use the Perth East Transportation service based in Milverton, and find it particularly helpful for visiting friends on other farms. This is a very resourceful and efficient community who rely on each other for support. Their greatest need is for an available driver at an affordable price.

There are smaller Anabaptist communities in northern Huron County, who pay English neighbours and family for transportation when needed. Local agencies <sup>42</sup> report that community members also look to their church for help when needed.

The Low German-speaking Mennonite community in Perth (largely Perth East) is a mainly transient community, moving back and forth between Ontario and Mexico. Many members (particularly women) speak little English and local churches offer English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. These classes are also supported by the Avon Maitland District School Board (some offer limited transportation). Unlike some of their neighbours, they do use cars and trucks. Typically, there is one vehicle and the mother is left at home with several children while

40 “Anabaptist” refers to those who are baptized as adults. For a more detailed explanation, see footnote 5.

41 Personal interview

42 Such as the Huron County Health Unit (personal interview)



the father works long hours. Getting a child to a medical appointment, for instance, would require him to take a day off work. Many families don't have enough car seats for the children and some of the women do not have a driver's license. Coupled with the linguistic and cultural barriers in accessing health care services, it is clear these communities face formidable transportation challenges.<sup>43</sup>

## What's Been Done Elsewhere?

There have been many rural transportation initiatives across Canada and the United States. A few are considered below:

### Wellington Transportation Services

This service is operated by the Community Resource Centre of North and Centre Wellington and is a volunteer-based collaborative venture of community service providers serving the people of Centre, North and East Wellington. Rides (fully accessible) can be arranged for medical, legal and social service appointments, social events and family visiting, as well as the errands of daily life such as shopping and banking. The service also provides transportation to outside centres such as London and Hamilton.

Participating service providers include Community Resource Centre, East Wellington Community Services, Fergus Elora Senior Transportation, Family & Children's Service, VON Canada, North Wellington Senior Council and Seniors for Excellence, Drayton. Target populations include seniors, those with disabilities, those on low income and individuals who do not have access to transport. There are also eligibility requirements relating to the agency providing the service, place of residence, etc. Clients are assessed at an initial intake interview to determine eligibility. The service operates 7 days a week; rides must be arranged during office hours Monday to Friday, and require at least 48 hours' notice.

Fees are charged on a sliding scale, based on client's income, and some would pay no fee at all. Individual service providers may charge a fee based on client assessment criteria. For fee-paying clients, a basic fee of \$0.45/km is payable.<sup>44</sup> This service is quite similar to the EasyRide program, although it requires longer notice for bookings.

43 A Descriptive Profile of Amish & Mennonite Communities in Perth County. Perth District Health Unit, 2006

44 Interview with Community Resource Centre



## Bancroft Community Transit

This service is a non-profit organization providing a door-to-door transportation service by volunteer drivers. It is provided only to clients of defined health and social services agencies, who are under 55 years of age, as well as those on Ontario Works. (Those over 55 are referred to Senior Support Services).

Bancroft Community Transit provides service for medical, legal, counselling, daycare, work placements and activities of daily life, although rules explicitly state it “will not provide service to the liquor store, beer store or to hotels”.<sup>45</sup> It is not available to the general public. Once an agency has registered a client as eligible for transportation, that client is assessed and thereafter, can book trips on-line, by phone or e-mail. Fares are based on the distance travelled and must be paid to the driver before the trip, unless pre-arranged by the referring agency. Fares charged are kept confidential.<sup>46</sup> Pick-up and cancellation requires 24 hours’ notice.

## Ride Haldimand-Norfolk Initiative

This initiative is the latest in a succession of community efforts dating back to 1991. The current committee (composed of representatives of many health and social service agencies) has worked since 2006 to identify and quantify the need for public transportation, as well as to develop a proposal for a transit system crossing both Counties, which have close ties and were formerly a regional government. Feasibility studies in 2009 and 2010 were completed with funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The study found that local agencies were spending more than \$1 million a year collectively on transportation for a population of around 108,000. It initially approached both Haldimand and Norfolk Counties for funding, but Haldimand County declined to participate.

In early 2011, the committee approached Norfolk County, who at first rejected a request for seed funding. However, in March of this year, the County reversed its decision, voting \$20,700 in the 2011 operating budget to help organize the transit system for a two-year pilot program.<sup>47</sup> Next year’s contribution is estimated at \$124,500, although that may be offset by contributions from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the Norfolk District Business Development Corporation, and others. County funding would also qualify for the provincial Gas Tax subsidy. At the outset, the plan would have Simcoe as the hub, on shuttle lines to Waterford, Delhi, Port Dover and Port Rowan. Norfolk County plans to invite Haldimand County to revisit its decision not to participate.<sup>48</sup> At the time of writing, a local bus company has been selected, though not yet publicly announced, and the service is set to commence in October, 2011.<sup>49</sup>

45 Bancroft Community Transit website [www.bancroftcommunitytransit.com](http://www.bancroftcommunitytransit.com)

46 Telephone conversation with Bancroft Community Transit

47 “Simcoe to be hub of bus line”, *Simcoe Reformer*, March 18, 2011

48 For detailed information, see *Public Transportation Systems in Haldimand and Norfolk Counties – Feasibility Study*, Entra Consultants for the Haldimand-Norfolk Rural Transportation Initiative. September 2010

49 Telephone conversation with Haldimand-Norfolk Social Services, August 23, 2011



# Future Directions

This report has outlined the need for improved transportation services in the two Counties, as well as some of the services currently available. It has also reviewed the research that has been done in recent years. Most existing services are limited to specific groups – seniors and those with disabilities, for example – and are not available to others, particularly those in greatest need (women, youth, and others on low income, etc.) Collectively, agencies in Perth and Huron spend a great deal of money providing transportation for their clients. This is in addition to the Provincial and Municipal funding spent on transportation costs for those on Ontario Works and ODSP. Can a better way be found through greater collaboration and coordination?

As was noted in the review of EasyRide in Huron County, further expansion rests on the willingness of municipal governments at either the County or local municipality level to make a significant financial contribution. Neither County has contributed funding to date, although the lower-tier municipalities have provided funding to EasyRide. Additional funding is not easy to achieve at a time of economic restraint at all government levels. Perhaps greater efficiency and improved service can be achieved by other means. The following suggestions offer ways to overcome transportation barriers.

## **1. Expand existing transportation services by making use of gas tax and/or municipal funding**

Perth and Huron Counties to work with local agencies to develop and expand municipal funding for existing transportation services, thereby enabling the Counties to take advantage of the Provincial/Federal Gas Tax funding. Since many municipalities in the two counties do not have public transportation, gas tax is currently unavailable to them. By working in partnership, smaller towns could solve some of the issues around affordable transportation by utilizing Gas Tax funding, thereby helping to reduce the current EasyRide fare structure which is not affordable for people living in poverty.

## **2. Expanding Rail Service**

A collaboration between the City of Stratford, the University of Waterloo, GO transit and Via Rail in conjunction with the Province of Ontario to advocate for the increase and expansion of rail services to and from Stratford. This, in addition to expanded bus services through Perth and Huron Counties, would greatly enhance affordability for travel.



**3. Create a new rural transportation service running between Goderich and Stratford in the Hwy 8 corridor**

Huron and Perth Counties and local agencies to work together to investigate the feasibility of a shuttle bus service on the Highway 8 corridor from Goderich to Stratford at regular intervals throughout the day on a fixed route (similar to the new service in Haldimand-Norfolk). Municipal participation would enable access to Gas Tax funding (see pp. 11 & 12). Fares to be set at an affordable level to encourage ridership and the service could be initiated on a pilot basis.

**4. Improve access to health services by way of a shuttle bus between hospital sites**

The Counties of Huron and Perth and the Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance should work with the South West LHIN to explore the possibility of funding a shuttle bus between hospital sites. Since programs at the Huron-Perth Healthcare Alliance are being realigned and redistributed to improve quality of care and efficiency, this would enable families to visit their relatives who may be in a hospital in another community and also meet a Provincial goal to provide care close to home, as efficiently as possible. (The South West LHIN already provides funding to EasyRide for coordination)

**5. Explore alternative modes of transit like employer subsidized buses, the use of buses during off hours, and a coordinated taxi service**

Local municipalities, in conjunction with interested community partners, to investigate employer-subsidized buses to bring employees to work. This could be done in collaboration with agencies such as Partners in Employment, and the Provincial government.

The real demand may be for assistance for the working poor - those living on a working income at or below the national poverty line. A suggestion for the future is for bus service to be provided to new work sites as they are constructed. While this would require an agreement between the employer and the City, it would provide a viable and sustainable solution to employees facing transportation challenges. United Way Perth-Huron to work with the Huron Perth Student Transportation Service, the Avon Maitland District School Board and the Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board or Community Living South Huron to investigate the possibility of using buses in hours when they are not needed to transport students or clients.<sup>50</sup>

Huron and Perth Counties, as well as their lower tier municipalities, could investigate the possibility of a coordinated and collaborative taxi service at a subsidized cost. This to be done in conjunction with social service agencies that are already using financial resources to provide taxi service for their clients. Taxi services already operate across the two Counties, but the existing services would require a subsidized fare for those clients who qualify.

<sup>50</sup> The provisions of the new Access for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) may affect this recommendation, since many school buses are not fully accessible.



# Recommendation

It is recommended that the United Way of Perth Huron initiate a dual county Transportation Improvement Task Force made up of representatives from municipal governments, and relevant organizations from sectors including health, social services, and education.

The initial mandate of the Task Force will be:

- To review the Future Directions identified in this report; and,
- To initiate action towards implementing the Future Directions; and,
- To review findings from existing reports and from studies underway in both counties.



# Acknowledgements

This project owes much to the participation of the many individuals and agencies in Huron and Perth who gave freely of their time to provide their own insights into this issue. Our thanks to all of them for their participation:

## **Agencies serving communities in Perth County:**

- County of Perth Planning Department
- City of Stratford Planning Department
- Stratford Public Transit/Parallel Transit
- Perth District Health Unit
- Perth East Transportation
- Stratford Tourism Alliance
- Community Living Stratford & Area
- Conestoga College (Stratford) ESL Program
- Ontario Early Years Centre of Perth-Middlesex

## **Agencies serving communities in Huron County:**

- County of Huron Planning Department
- Huron County Transportation Task Force
- County of Huron Social Services
- Huron County Health Unit
- Women's Shelter Second Stage Housing & Counselling Services of Huron
- Community Living – South Huron

## **Agencies serving communities in both Perth and Huron:**

- Huron-Perth Healthcare Alliance
- Huron-Perth Student Transportation Services
- CMHA Huron-Perth
- Canadian Cancer Society Huron-Perth
- Choices for Change: Alcohol, Drug and Gambling Counselling Centre
- Partners in Employment
- OneCare (EasyRide)

## **Agencies serving communities outside Perth and Huron:**

- Haldimand Norfolk Social Services
- Bancroft Community Transit
- Wellington Transportation Services



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