

# APPENDIX B

Assessment of Community Transportation Service  
Expansion in Huron County Final Report  
(October 2010)





# **Assessment of Community Transportation Service Expansion in Huron County**

*Final Report*

*October 2010*

**EasyRide in Huron County**

10-3284

*Submitted by*

**Dillon Consulting  
Limited**



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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Ontario's population, and indeed that of Huron County, is aging. Recent estimates project the seniors' population will double over the next 16 years, putting a strain on health services in the province. As such, it is imperative that seniors are able to remain in their homes for as long as possible for their well-being and to reduce pressures on hospitals and long-term care facilities. Transportation is a key factor in achieving this objective and is especially important in Huron County where there is no transit service.

EasyRide is a new partnership that coordinates transportation in Huron and Perth Counties and is uniquely positioned in Huron County to address the needs of the aging population. The partnership is made up of seven community support service agencies that provide transportation services within and originating from the two counties. While the number of trips provided has been growing, there is a growing recognition of the need to expand services provided to seniors and persons with disabilities within Huron County.

Several Huron County councillors have expressed a concern about the lack of transportation in their communities resulting in seniors leaving the County. In addition, the South West Local Health Integration Network (SW LHIN) has expressed their expectation that EasyRide continue to show ongoing growth in transportation service coordination to seniors and persons with disabilities. An essential part of expanding transportation services to Huron County is the means and resources to do so. Service expansion would require the need for additional and secure funding.

Dillon Consulting was retained by three of the seven agencies that form a part of the EasyRide network (Town and Country Support Services (TCSS), Midwestern Adult Day Services (MWADS) and Stratford Meals on Wheels and Neighbourly Services) to conduct an assessment of expanding EasyRide services within Huron County and the potential for provincial gas tax funding to support this objective. This involved two distinct tasks:

1. Review the resources and capacity of the two EasyRide partner agencies that provide service in Huron County (Town and Country Support Services and Midwestern Adult Day Services) and determine the capacity available to provide additional service in Huron County.
2. Assess the opportunity to enter into a contract with the County (or its lower tier municipalities) to receive sustainable funding through the Provincial Gas Tax to expand services. This includes an assessment of requirements, barriers and opportunities and next steps for TCSS, MWADS and EasyRide to build a business case and establish an agreement with Huron County to receive funding.

Not included in this project scope was a more thorough assessment of demand within the County. This is a task that could enhance the business case of expanding service to both EasyRide and Huron County.

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## 2.0 BACKGROUND

Huron County is located along the shores of Lake Huron and north of the City of London. It is dominated by agricultural lands which act as an important economic base for the region. Residents live in nine municipalities. **Table 1** lists the 2006 and 2001 national Census populations and number of seniors (age 65 and older) of these communities. The largest population centre is just over 10,000 residents (South Huron) and more than half of Huron’s residents live in non-urban areas, making the county one of Ontario’s most rural regions. This dispersed population makes it difficult to address accessibility needs of residents without access to a private automobile.

**Table 1: Population of Communities within Huron County**

Community	2006 Census Population	2006 Senior Population	% Seniors	2001 Census Population	% Change
Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh	5,409	900	16.6	5,411	0.0
Bluewater	7,120	1,345	18.9	6,919	2.9
Central Huron	7,641	1,370	17.9	7,806	-2.1
Goderich	7,563	1,635	21.6	7,604	-0.5
Howick	3,882	455	11.7	3,779	2.7
Huron East	9,310	1,450	15.6	9,680	-3.8
Morris-Turnberry	3,403	580	17.0	3,499	-2.7
North Huron	5,015	840	16.7	4,984	0.6
South Huron	9,982	2,035	20.3	10,019	-0.4

Huron is also one of Canada’s “oldest” populations with 10,620 persons aged 65 or older out of a total population of 59,325. This number of seniors represents 18 percent of the total population, compared to the provincial average of 14 percent.<sup>1</sup> Within some communities such as Goderich and South Huron, as shown in **Table 1**, seniors compose more than one-fifth of the total population.

As the population ages, the incidence of disability becomes greater. The relationship between the incidence of disability and age can be demonstrated using data from the Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS) data collected by Statistics Canada every 5 years. The PALS surveys define a disability as a condition that limits everyday activities because of a condition or health problem. It is recognized that this is a broad definition of disability and would include many individuals who do not require specialized transit for travel. Nonetheless, it provides a brief glimpse of future needs.

**Table 2** illustrates the incidence of disability for different age groups. The data clearly indicates the increasing incidence of disability among older population groups, with the incidence of disability among persons 75 and older being over four times that of the total population.

<sup>1</sup> Source: The State of the Huron County Economy.

**Table 2: Incident of Disability by Age Group (2006)**

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Percent of Total Population with Disabilities</b>
0 – 14 years	3.7%
15 – 64 years	11.5%
65 – 74 years	33.0%
75+ years	56.3%
Total Population	14.3%

The growing number of seniors and incidence of disabilities is an important consideration for EasyRide, TCSS, MWADS and Huron County. In surveys conducted with seniors, transportation is often identified as one of the top three issues that prevent them from leading active and healthy lives in their communities. Without an effective and supportive transportation network, many seniors are required to rely on internal support networks (family and friends) or leave their homes prematurely to live in nursing homes or long-term care facilities or move to communities with better access to transportation (i.e. transit systems).

### 3.0 EXISTING TRANSPORTATION SERVICES AND DEMAND

Huron County and its lower tier municipalities currently do not own or operate a transit service. Recently, a not-for-profit agency called Huron Bruce Transit (formerly Wheels Away) operated out of Wingham to support residents in North Huron and South Bruce areas. The organization received financial support from the municipality of Morris-Turnberry and was thus eligible for an additional increase of approximately \$12,000 in provincial contributions (the Ontario dedicated gas tax fund). The organization made 1,370 trips in 2008 within North Huron and to adjacent municipalities using one vehicle.<sup>2</sup> Huron Bruce Transit ceased operation on May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2010 and has not been replaced by a viable municipal transportation alternative within the County. These clients continue to be eligible for EasyRide transportation delivered by TCSS.

Lambton Elderly Outreach is a not-for-profit agency that provides some transportation in Huron County. This agency provides limited transportation to clients of Midwestern Adult Day Centre’s Grand Bend site. However, the majority of services are focused in Sarnia and Lambton County for seniors and adults with disabilities.

The major transportation provider in the County is Town and Country Support Services, an EasyRide partner. EasyRide is a coordinated transportation framework developed by seven community support agencies in Huron and Perth Counties that provide transportation services to residents in need (primarily seniors and persons with disabilities). The framework was developed to better coordinate resources among the agencies and increase capacity and cost-effectiveness of service delivery. EasyRide provides a central dispatch function with one number to call, with services delivered by each local agency. This has resulted in an improvement in overall coordination and the ability to expand the market. EasyRide provides rides at a per distance fare for trips within Huron County, within Perth County, between both counties, and for long-distance trips to adjacent municipalities (i.e. London Hospital). EasyRide’s member agencies are included in **Table 3** below.

**Table 3: EasyRide Huron and Perth County Transportation Providers**

Perth County	Huron County
Community Outreach and Perth East Transportation Mitchell and Area Community Outreach and Mobility Bus St. Marys and Area Home Support and Mobility Services Stratford Meals on Wheels and Neighbourly Services VON Perth-Huron	Midwestern Adult Day Services Town and Country Support Services

The two agencies within the EasyRide partnership that are based out of Huron County are Town and Country Support Services and Midwestern Adult Day Services (herein called the EasyRide Huron County Transportation Providers).

Of the two, the primary provider of transportation service in Huron County is Town and Country Support Services. In 2009/10, the agency provided over 12,160 trips to seniors and persons with disabilities living in the county.

<sup>2</sup> 2008 Ontario Specialized Transit Services Fact Book.

Midwestern Adult Day Services owns four vehicles which are primarily used to provide transportation for seniors and those with disabilities to their five day centre sites in Huron County. One vehicle is also used to operate a small transit service for seniors in Goderich on Mondays and Fridays. While the vehicles are available, there is a lack of funding and drivers to expand out into the community and provide additional trips.

EasyRide member agencies in Perth County are also available to deliver transportation services in Huron County when the trip cannot be accommodated by EasyRide’s Huron County transportation providers.

For the EasyRide Huron County transportation providers and the entire EasyRide partnership, there is a desire to expand service to meet the needs of a large unmet demand within Huron County, and an opportunity to use provincial gas tax dollars to facilitate this need.

### 3.1 Town and Country Support Services

Town and Country Support Services (Town and Country) is a not-for-profit agency which provides services to seniors and persons with disabilities in Huron County and surrounding areas. Services offered include personal support/homemaking as well as the complete range of community programs such as diner’s club, wellness for seniors program, meals on wheels, home help, and telephone reassurance.

Mobility Van Transportation provides transportation to wheelchair bound clients or those who have mobility difficulties getting to medical appointments, personal errands and social activities. Transportation is typically available during the day and during evening hours, but is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for emergencies (based on driver availability). The five accessible vans are utilized Huron County wide and are stationed in Wingham, Exeter, Clinton and Goderich. There is also one fully accessible mobility bus for programs in the Zurich area and for the Bluewater Rest Home, as well as one passenger van stationed in Clinton. The accessible vans provide services in their community, and also long-distance trips throughout southwestern Ontario. The service is operated by paid casual drivers, who are called on when trips are booked. The capacity of all the agency vehicles is shown in **Table 4**.

**Table 4: Town and Country Vehicle Capacities**

Vehicle	Capacity
2 Full Size Accessible Vans with Stretcher Capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 wheelchair &amp; 3 ambulatory; or</li> <li>• 1 stretcher &amp; 2 ambulatory</li> </ul>
3 Full Size Accessible Vans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 wheelchair &amp; 3 ambulatory</li> </ul>
1 Accessible Bus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 wheelchair &amp; 8 ambulatory; or</li> <li>• 3 wheelchair &amp; 10 ambulatory; or</li> <li>• 2 wheelchair &amp; 12 ambulatory</li> </ul>
1 Dodge Caravan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7 ambulatory</li> </ul>

Volunteer Transportation services are offered for clients who are without access to transportation and when friends and family are not available. Besides seniors and persons with disabilities, TCSS also provides the occasional transportation service to the Mennonite community in North Huron. Volunteer transportation represents approximately 70 percent of all trips provided by TCSS and is provided by approximately 60 volunteers using their own vehicles. One of the challenges is a declining volunteer base, which may place added pressure on the use of the Mobility Van Transportation service.

TCSS also provides non-emergency transportation to Wingham Hospital and three nursing homes in North Huron. This service is provided to medically stable individuals who require transportation from one facility to another. Wheelchair and stretcher services are available. Drivers for these services have CPR and first aid training but do not have paramedic or other enhanced training.

TCSS also provides transportation to Home Help clients whereby paid staff take clients grocery shopping and out on errands. Home Help transportation is not coordinated by EasyRide.

The table below summarizes the trips provided by Town and Country Support Services for their fiscal year (April 1, 2009 to March 31, 2010).

**Table 5: Town and Country Trip Information 2009-2010**

	<b>Mobility Transportation</b>	<b>Volunteer Transportation</b>	<b>Home Help Transportation</b>
Registered Clients	368	476	41
Local/In Town Trips	1,058	3,123	633
Out of Town Trips	1,897	5,406	47

A local trip is considered a trip within Huron County that is less than ten kilometres. The average out of town trip distance is approximately 28 kilometres, but has at least one trip end within Huron County.

In terms of vehicle occupancy, only a small percentage of regular trips by Town and Country are delivered with more than one client per vehicle (plus an escort/companion when required). Town and Country only reported 17 denied trips for the first half of 2010.

### **3.2 Midwestern Adult Day Services**

Midwestern Adult Day Services provides services for seniors and adults with special needs to assist them in maintaining independence in Huron County, North Lambton and South Bruce. All of Midwestern’s services are offered in its five Adult Day Centres. Services offered focus mainly on therapeutic programs, such as exercising, bathing, foot care and hair dressing.

Midwestern owns a fleet of 2 accessible buses and 2 vans used primarily to transport clients to and from one of the five Adult Day Centres located in Clinton, Wingham, Exeter, Grand Bend and Goderich. The two buses and one of the vans are used between 8:30am and 10:00am to deliver clients to the Day Centres and between 3:00pm and 4:30pm to return clients home. Since the drivers are also the day centre program assistants, the vehicles remain unused between 10:00am and

2:45pm and after 4:30pm. Midwestern serves 239 clients and provides 23,500 trips yearly for their Adult Day Programs.

The other van (Grand Caravan) is used as a 'Seniors Transit' fixed route service in Goderich. The service includes 38 bus stops and operates on Mondays and Fridays; seven times a day between 9:00am and 4:30pm. The fare for this service is \$4.00 for unlimited access throughout the day. Clients must be able to get in and out of the vehicle on their own as the van is not wheelchair accessible and the driver only stops at designated bus stops. In 2009-2010 this service had 31 registered clients and 842 trips were delivered. The van is also used occasionally for day centre transportation. The service itself is currently being reviewed and may be modified to better suit the needs of the seniors population.

Volunteers drive other Day Centre participants using their own vehicles, primarily for participants that are not "on route" of the van/bus service. Agency vehicles are also used occasionally on Saturdays.

It should be noted that the two EasyRide Huron County transportation providers and a third agency in the EasyRide network located in Perth County (Stratford Meals on Wheels and Neighbourly Services) are in discussions to formally amalgamate. This provides an opportunity to incorporate the Midwestern fleet into the EasyRide network and use them for general purpose trips within Huron County when not being operated for day centre participants. Funding may be required to hire drivers to operate the service.

## 4.0 THE OPPORTUNITY FOR TRANSPORTION SERVICES IN HURON COUNTY

Transportation services provided by the EasyRide Huron County transportation providers have been successful in serving the needs of residents in Huron County. Each of TCSS's vehicles averages about three trips a day providing trips within as well as out of Huron County. There is potential to make better use of existing capacity within each vehicle (increasing the number of passengers per trip, and staffing vehicles for allotted shifts rather than by trip so that additional trips could be delivered each day). This could increase the service provided without additional capital. However, the nature of trips provided, particularly long distance trips, makes this difficult to do without additional vehicles in place.

There is also available capacity on Midwestern's vehicles to better service Huron County residents. However, a lack of drivers is the biggest constraint in getting these vehicles on the road and serving seniors and persons with disabilities within Huron.

While there is some capacity to accommodate additional trips, it should also be noted that there is a significant untapped demand within the county that could be better serviced. To better understand the unmet demand, a comparison of transportation services provided by EasyRide's transportation providers in both Huron and Perth Counties was made.

Of the 73,000 annual trips that EasyRide coordinates, approximately 12,326 or 17 percent originate in Huron County with the remainder of the trips beginning in Perth County. **Table 6** summarizes the rides per capita in both Counties. What becomes clear is the difference in number of people serviced (0.21 trips per capita within Huron County compared to 0.81 within Perth County). This represents the theoretical demand for transportation services within Huron County.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 6: County Trip Demand**

	Huron County	Perth County
Trips	12,326	59,984
Population Served	59,325	74,344
Trips per Capita	0.21	0.81

One of the reasons for the higher number of trips delivered in Perth County is the level of service available. Within Perth County, a number of agencies have entered into partnerships with the municipalities they service. This has allowed them to receive not only municipal contributions, but also provincial gas tax contributions. Four examples are VON Perth-Huron, Community Outreach and Perth East Transportation, St. Marys and Area Mobility Service and Mitchell and Area Community Outreach and Mobility Bus. Municipal and provincial (gas tax) contributions provided to these agencies have allowed each to expand their service offering and provide greater accessibility to residents in their communities. This is illustrated in **Table 7**; trip numbers in the table are those reported in the 2008 CUTA Ontario Specialized Transit Services Fact Book which does not include

<sup>3</sup> More background research is required to specifically quantify the demand, gaps and potential growth within Huron County.

volunteer transportation trips. As such, only trips executed by EasyRide Huron County transportation provider staff and agency vehicles are included in **Table 7**.

**Table 7: Trip Demand for Agencies with Gas Tax Dollars<sup>4</sup>**

	Huron County	VON	Perth East	St. Marys	Mitchell
Trips	3,797	6,799	7,775	7,988	6,900
Population Served	59,325	12,275	12,000	10,749	9,129
Trips per Capita	0.06	0.55	0.65	0.74	0.76

As the population continues to age and the instance of persons with disabilities becomes more frequent, the number of trips required will also increase, adding future latent demand to the existing unmet demand.

To better service this unmet and future latent demand, there is a need to expand services, purchase additional vehicles, hire new drivers, and promote coordination efforts. This would require new and sustainable funding sources to achieve this next level of growth.

EasyRide Huron County transportation providers have the capability and experience to expand services and fulfil the existing need left by the closure of Huron Bruce Transit (Wheels Away) and the future need that will occur with an aging population. To accomplish this, a partnership between EasyRide, TCSS, MWADS (or the new amalgamated agency) and Huron County or its lower tier municipalities is recommended to support the expansion of transportation services for seniors and persons with disabilities and tap into provincial gas tax funding to help finance the operation.

<sup>4</sup> Representative of non-volunteer trips as provided by EasyRide Huron County transportation providers and the CUTA Ontario Specialized Transit Services Fact Book (2008)

## 5.0 ONTARIO DEDICATED GAS TAX PROGRAM

A number of community support agencies in other areas of Ontario that provide transportation services have been able to avail themselves to the provincial gas tax by way of agreements with the municipalities they serve. Huron County has also had recent experience with this, providing (through the province) gas tax funding (via North Huron and Morris-Turnberry) to Wheels Away.

Dillon met with Ontario Ministry of Transportation (MTO) staff in early August, 2010 to discuss the potential for Huron County (or one of the lower tier municipalities) to partner with TCSS and MWADS and receive gas tax funding.

### 5.1 Background

In October 2004, the Province of Ontario announced that it would invest a portion of the provincial gas tax in public transit in order to ensure that local public transportation services continue to operate and that transit ridership is increased through the expansion of public transportation capital infrastructure and levels of service. The program's goal is to improve municipal sustainability by increasing public transit ridership and reducing the impact of transportation activities on the environment.

Since the beginning of the program, more than \$1.6 billion in gas tax funding has been committed to Ontario's municipalities. In 2009/2010, \$316 million was allocated amongst the participating Ontario municipalities based on two cents per litre of the provincial gas tax.

Gas tax funds are dedicated to transit use and cannot be used for any other purpose. Unless otherwise approved by MTO, gas tax revenues are only used to support municipal public transportation expenditures above a municipality's baseline spending and not to reduce or replace current levels of municipal public transportation funding. The gas tax funds are permitted to be spent on the following public transportation items provided the expenditures are above the municipalities baseline spending:

- Expenditures that 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.

For municipalities that provide only specialized transit, transit strategies that may not initially result in ridership growth but will provide increased accessibility can be considered as eligible expenditures if approved in writing by the MTO prior to implementation.

All new public transit vehicles procured with gas tax funding must be fully accessible (in accordance with the requirements set out under the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (2001) and the *Vehicles for the Transportation of Physically Disabled Passengers* (1990)). In addition, acquisition of new transit vehicles must comply with the Canadian content policy requirements.

The allocation of funds that the participating municipalities receive depends on the total funding envelope available, their ridership and the municipal population. To calculate potential gas tax dollars, 70 percent of the funding formula is based on the transit system's ridership compared to the provincial total. The remaining 30 percent is based on the population of the municipality relative to the provincial total (of all participating municipalities) as estimated by the Ministry of Finance. This provides an incentive for ridership growth and provides more support for growing municipalities. Year one gas tax funding is based solely on the population served; ridership is included and considered for year 2 and all subsequent years.

Ridership calculations are based on data included in the Canadian Urban Transit Association (CUTA) fact books. CUTA annually collects and reproduces, on behalf of the Ministry of Transportation, transit ridership data in its Ontario Urban Transit Fact Book and its Ontario Specialized Transit Services Fact Book. Transit ridership is defined as a one-way linked trip in which the passenger pays a fare, delivered using an agency owned vehicle. Volunteer transportation is not included as part of the funding formula. Also, only trips that originate out of the municipality that has the gas tax agreement are counted.

The municipality must commit to sustained financing of the local transit system. The gas tax funds provided to the municipality do not exceed 75 percent of the municipality's own spending on transit. The municipality can change their level of commitment in their bylaw and the provincial funds would adjust accordingly.

## **5.2 Program Requirements and Process**

To be eligible to receive dedicated gas tax funds, a municipality must support and contribute financially towards their public transportation services. Public transportation that is supported includes any service where a fare is charged for transporting the public by way of vehicles operated by or on behalf of a municipality (or under agreement between the municipality and a person, firm or corporation). This includes specialized public transportation but does not include pilot projects or special purpose facilities such as school buses, tourist services or ambulance. There are no rules in place regarding the fare structure, so long as the public/customer pays a fare.

The EasyRide Huron County transportation providers are not able to directly apply for the gas tax funding but do have the opportunity to receive the funding from the County or a municipality within the County by way of a service agreement (where specialized services are delivered on their behalf).

The preference would be for EasyRide Huron County transportation providers to approach Huron County so that all trips and the total County population are included in the gas tax calculation. However, more than one municipality is permitted to jointly participate in the gas tax program, as long as a lead municipality is identified. In this case, an agreement would be put in place to have one 'host' municipality that takes care of administrative tasks and reporting. The dedicated gas tax funds would flow directly to this host. All of the municipalities would have to agree to provide financial support and develop municipal bylaws stating their commitment.

Should the EasyRide Huron County transportation providers establish commitments with one/some of the lower tier municipalities rather than the County, only the trips/ridership that either begin or end within the partner municipalities would be included in the funding calculation.

Following the establishment of a formal agreement, the County would subsequently notify the MTO of their intent to support the specialized public transportation services provided by the EasyRide Huron County transportation providers and outline a specific annual financial commitment that will be made to these services, provided in the form of a municipal bylaw. The MTO then provides the County with a gas tax package that includes a letter of agreement, program guidelines and reporting forms. To receive funding payments, the County must provide two signed letters of agreement (signed by the head of municipal council and the Chief Financial Officer) and a copy of the authorizing municipal bylaw. The MTO will then gain approval from the Minister and determine the allocation for the municipality.

The County must provide annual reporting forms, submit annual ridership statistics to CUTA and may undergo audits by the MTO to ensure program compliance (that funds are used for public transportation and program guidelines and requirements are met). Once approved, the funds are received electronically and held in a dedicated reserve account to be dispersed toward eligible expenditures.

As mentioned earlier, if the EasyRide Huron County transportation providers can establish an agreement with Huron County, the base (first year) funding received would be based on population alone and would not include ridership until it is reported to CUTA the following year.

The MTO provided an estimate of the possible gas tax funds Huron County could be eligible to receive. Based on the 2009-2010 program year, the County's population of 60,000 would generate a Year 1 gas tax allocation of approximately \$250,000. The Year 2 allocation would only increase by \$1,000 if the ridership remains below 4,000. These estimates are the maximum allocations the County would be eligible for only if Huron County's funding commitment to support the transit system is \$333,000 or higher. If the County's funding commitment is less than this value, the Gas Tax allocation would be 75 percent of that commitment value.

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## **6.0 OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

### **6.1 Additional Funding Sources**

There are also other funding opportunities available to EasyRide that could be explored. The Ontario Trillium Foundation is an agency of the Ontario Government that provides funding grants to charitable and not-for-profit organizations with the mission to build healthy communities. Applicable priorities of the foundation related to EasyRide include creating healthier, more active Ontarians and having more people engaged within their community.

It should be noted that SMOW&NS, TCSS and MWADS have just had an Ontario Trillium Foundation grant approved for over two years to assist with the amalgamation of the three agencies. Therefore, they are not eligible to apply until that grant has ended.

Secure funding will also assist the EasyRide Huron County transportation providers in meeting their mandate to provide transportation to seniors and persons in need. However, to determine the capital and operating costs required to meet latent demand, a more fulsome demand analysis is needed, beyond the scope contained herein.

### **6.2 Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)**

An important consideration the agencies must make when considering the Gas Tax agreement with the County or any of its municipalities is the impact of the upcoming AODA legislation. The AODA received Royal Assent on June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2005 and is now law. There are two basic components to the process of standard development. The first deals with establishing common accessibility standards that address barriers that are common to all sectors and apply to all persons and organizations in Ontario. The second component deals with development of “sector specific accessibility standards”, such as transportation. All five standards (Customer Service, Built Environment, Employment, Information & Communications and Transportation) will have a direct impact upon transportation.

No matter what, all EasyRide transportation providers will have to meet all applicable AODA requirements, including those within the Transportation Standard. However, if the County or any of the municipalities enter into an agreement with the EasyRide Huron County transportation providers to provide transportation services on their behalf, there may be some unique circumstances as related to AODA that needs to be understood. These are outlined below:

#### **Customer Service Standard**

On January 1, 2008 the Customer Service standard became law. This standard requires all front line public sector employees to have been fully “accessibility sensitivity trained” by January 1, 2010, and all other sectors to have their front line employees trained by January 1, 2012.

This standard will directly affect drivers who must have sensitivity training. Additionally, any other front line employees, such as dispatchers, must have also received this training. The key impact is that EasyRide employees will have to receive this training earlier than the January 1, 2012 deadline.

### **Employment Standard**

This draft standard is expected to impact:

- Developing accessible employment policies;
- Providing information about a job, such as applications, in accessible formats;
- Giving disability awareness training to all employees and volunteers; and
- Preparing accommodation plans to help employees and volunteers perform their job.

Under contract with the County or any lower-tier municipalities the EasyRide Huron County transportation providers will need to comply to any standards or timelines that impact municipal governments.

### **Information & Communications Standard**

This draft standard is expected to impact all communications materials in terms of visibility, readability, comprehensibility and access to those with visual, hearing and/or cognitive disabilities.

It is expected that communications materials will be available in formats that are fully accessible. Printed materials, such as brochures, newsletters, signs, bus tickets, training materials, etc, will be available in larger fonts, using strong contrasts and developed in “plain language”. Electronic materials, such as information on web sites, must be in formats that are accessible to people with visual disabilities. Callers (booking trips) that have hearing disabilities must also have options which work for them. The details of exactly how and what elements (e.g. font type and size) are expected to be in the Standard remain uncertain at this time.

EasyRide may need to install TDD or TTY phones for the hearing impaired to meet legislative requirements. This would impose increased operating costs to EasyRide.

### **Transportation Standard**

This draft standard is expected to impact:

- Service areas;
- Fares;
- Service hours;
- Customer eligibility;
- Dispatch; and
- Vehicle accessibility.

The AODA requires equality between municipal conventional and specialized public transportation systems. Since there are no public transportation systems that currently operate in Huron County, the EasyRide Huron County transportation can maintain existing operating conditions such as fares, service hours and service coverage. However, if the County were to implement a conventional public transit service, a number of implications would result that would need to be incorporated into the service agreement.

Some of these items are further detailed below.

### **Eligibility**

The eligibility criterion for EasyRide is quite flexible, reflecting close alignment with the AODA legislation. Generally, EasyRide accepts anyone with physical or cognitive disabilities or who require specialized transit (i.e. wheelchair access).

The AODA legislation is expected to require that client eligibility be expanded to cover the Ontario Human Rights Code definition of a disability or handicap, as follows:

*“The Code provides a basic definition of “handicap” to include conditions that have developed over time, those that result from an accident, or have been present from birth. It includes physical, mental, and learning disabilities and it does not matter whether the condition is visible. For example, persons with mental disorders, sensory disabilities (such as hearing or vision limitations) and epilepsy are all protected under the Code.”*

Since the eligibility criteria of the two EasyRide Huron County transportation providers is fairly inclusive, this component of the legislation would likely not impact them.

### **Booking Times**

If the current draft Transportation Standard is approved by the province, it is expected that the minimum reservation time for booking a ride will be set at 24 hours (i.e. riders will be able to book trips one day prior to taking the trip). This has been a contentious element of the draft standard (from the perspective of the service providers). Therefore, it is possible that even if this element is accepted into the Standard, the timeline for complying to it may be pushed into the future as much as possible.

EasyRide transportation providers currently request a minimum reservation time of one day in advance although same day bookings are accommodated when possible. As such, this requirement is not expected to have a significant impact of EasyRide’s transportation providers.

### **Vehicles**

Currently, to obtain provincial funding, all vehicles purchased with this funding must be accessible to patrons with wheelchairs and other mobility devices.

### **Service Area**

It is expected that service areas covered by conventional transit must also be covered by fully accessible transit.

### **Service Hours**

The timing of the service hours for the door-to-door service must be equal to the conventional (stop-to-stop) service.

### **Fares**

Under the AODA, for public transit providers, fares must be equal, but not identical, for conventional and specialized services. The cost of an average ride must be the same, but the format for the fare on each service can be different (e.g. passes versus tickets, pre-paid fares versus cash).

The requirements for system equality could potentially have a significant impact to EasyRide’s Huron County transportation providers if the County, or any of the lower tier municipalities they receive gas tax funding through, establish a conventional transit system. The transportation providers would be

required to have an equivalent fare system, service hours and coverage to match that of the conventional public transportation system which could result in financial implications to the agencies.

It is recommended that the EasyRide Huron County transportation providers include, within any formal agreement with the County, a provision or Memorandum of Understanding that considers the AODA legislation and possible implications to the specialized transportation service provided.

## 7.0 CONCLUSIONS

The aging population and increasing incidence of disabilities in Huron County will see an increasing need for transportation services. The County has one of the highest percentage of senior's in Ontario and access to transportation is cited by polls of the seniors population as a top three priority in keeping them healthy at home and active and engaged in their communities.

The EasyRide Huron County transportation providers have been providing transportation services to County residents for a number of decades. The recent coordination of agencies through the EasyRide network has increased the overall capacity and level of service to residents. However, with a growing senior's population and the declining mobility of this population group, there is a need to expand transportation services provided to meet the needs of this growing clientele within the County.

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.



# APPENDIX B

2010 EasyRide Report  
Dillon Consulting Ltd.



D16-010-76



# **Assessment of Community Transportation Service Expansion in Huron County**

*Final Report*

*October 2010*

**EasyRide in Huron County**

10-3284

*Submitted by*

**Dillon Consulting  
Limited**



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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Ontario's population, and indeed that of Huron County, is aging. Recent estimates project the seniors' population will double over the next 16 years, putting a strain on health services in the province. As such, it is imperative that seniors are able to remain in their homes for as long as possible for their well-being and to reduce pressures on hospitals and long-term care facilities. Transportation is a key factor in achieving this objective and is especially important in Huron County where there is no transit service.

EasyRide is a new partnership that coordinates transportation in Huron and Perth Counties and is uniquely positioned in Huron County to address the needs of the aging population. The partnership is made up of seven community support service agencies that provide transportation services within and originating from the two counties. While the number of trips provided has been growing, there is a growing recognition of the need to expand services provided to seniors and persons with disabilities within Huron County.

Several Huron County councillors have expressed a concern about the lack of transportation in their communities resulting in seniors leaving the County. In addition, the South West Local Health Integration Network (SW LHIN) has expressed their expectation that EasyRide continue to show ongoing growth in transportation service coordination to seniors and persons with disabilities. An essential part of expanding transportation services to Huron County is the means and resources to do so. Service expansion would require the need for additional and secure funding.

Dillon Consulting was retained by three of the seven agencies that form a part of the EasyRide network (Town and Country Support Services (TCSS), Midwestern Adult Day Services (MWADS) and Stratford Meals on Wheels and Neighbourly Services) to conduct an assessment of expanding EasyRide services within Huron County and the potential for provincial gas tax funding to support this objective. This involved two distinct tasks:

1. Review the resources and capacity of the two EasyRide partner agencies that provide service in Huron County (Town and Country Support Services and Midwestern Adult Day Services) and determine the capacity available to provide additional service in Huron County.
2. Assess the opportunity to enter into a contract with the County (or its lower tier municipalities) to receive sustainable funding through the Provincial Gas Tax to expand services. This includes an assessment of requirements, barriers and opportunities and next steps for TCSS, MWADS and EasyRide to build a business case and establish an agreement with Huron County to receive funding.

Not included in this project scope was a more thorough assessment of demand within the County. This is a task that could enhance the business case of expanding service to both EasyRide and Huron County.

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## 2.0 BACKGROUND

Huron County is located along the shores of Lake Huron and north of the City of London. It is dominated by agricultural lands which act as an important economic base for the region. Residents live in nine municipalities. **Table 1** lists the 2006 and 2001 national Census populations and number of seniors (age 65 and older) of these communities. The largest population centre is just over 10,000 residents (South Huron) and more than half of Huron’s residents live in non-urban areas, making the county one of Ontario’s most rural regions. This dispersed population makes it difficult to address accessibility needs of residents without access to a private automobile.

**Table 1: Population of Communities within Huron County**

Community	2006 Census Population	2006 Senior Population	% Seniors	2001 Census Population	% Change
Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh	5,409	900	16.6	5,411	0.0
Bluewater	7,120	1,345	18.9	6,919	2.9
Central Huron	7,641	1,370	17.9	7,806	-2.1
Goderich	7,563	1,635	21.6	7,604	-0.5
Howick	3,882	455	11.7	3,779	2.7
Huron East	9,310	1,450	15.6	9,680	-3.8
Morris-Turnberry	3,403	580	17.0	3,499	-2.7
North Huron	5,015	840	16.7	4,984	0.6
South Huron	9,982	2,035	20.3	10,019	-0.4

Huron is also one of Canada’s “oldest” populations with 10,620 persons aged 65 or older out of a total population of 59,325. This number of seniors represents 18 percent of the total population, compared to the provincial average of 14 percent.<sup>1</sup> Within some communities such as Goderich and South Huron, as shown in **Table 1**, seniors compose more than one-fifth of the total population.

As the population ages, the incidence of disability becomes greater. The relationship between the incidence of disability and age can be demonstrated using data from the Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS) data collected by Statistics Canada every 5 years. The PALS surveys define a disability as a condition that limits everyday activities because of a condition or health problem. It is recognized that this is a broad definition of disability and would include many individuals who do not require specialized transit for travel. Nonetheless, it provides a brief glimpse of future needs.

**Table 2** illustrates the incidence of disability for different age groups. The data clearly indicates the increasing incidence of disability among older population groups, with the incidence of disability among persons 75 and older being over four times that of the total population.

<sup>1</sup> Source: The State of the Huron County Economy.

**Table 2: Incident of Disability by Age Group (2006)**

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Percent of Total Population with Disabilities</b>
0 – 14 years	3.7%
15 – 64 years	11.5%
65 – 74 years	33.0%
75+ years	56.3%
Total Population	14.3%

The growing number of seniors and incidence of disabilities is an important consideration for EasyRide, TCSS, MWADS and Huron County. In surveys conducted with seniors, transportation is often identified as one of the top three issues that prevent them from leading active and healthy lives in their communities. Without an effective and supportive transportation network, many seniors are required to rely on internal support networks (family and friends) or leave their homes prematurely to live in nursing homes or long-term care facilities or move to communities with better access to transportation (i.e. transit systems).

### 3.0 EXISTING TRANSPORTATION SERVICES AND DEMAND

Huron County and its lower tier municipalities currently do not own or operate a transit service. Recently, a not-for-profit agency called Huron Bruce Transit (formerly Wheels Away) operated out of Wingham to support residents in North Huron and South Bruce areas. The organization received financial support from the municipality of Morris-Turnberry and was thus eligible for an additional increase of approximately \$12,000 in provincial contributions (the Ontario dedicated gas tax fund). The organization made 1,370 trips in 2008 within North Huron and to adjacent municipalities using one vehicle.<sup>2</sup> Huron Bruce Transit ceased operation on May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2010 and has not been replaced by a viable municipal transportation alternative within the County. These clients continue to be eligible for EasyRide transportation delivered by TCSS.

Lambton Elderly Outreach is a not-for-profit agency that provides some transportation in Huron County. This agency provides limited transportation to clients of Midwestern Adult Day Centre’s Grand Bend site. However, the majority of services are focused in Sarnia and Lambton County for seniors and adults with disabilities.

The major transportation provider in the County is Town and Country Support Services, an EasyRide partner. EasyRide is a coordinated transportation framework developed by seven community support agencies in Huron and Perth Counties that provide transportation services to residents in need (primarily seniors and persons with disabilities). The framework was developed to better coordinate resources among the agencies and increase capacity and cost-effectiveness of service delivery. EasyRide provides a central dispatch function with one number to call, with services delivered by each local agency. This has resulted in an improvement in overall coordination and the ability to expand the market. EasyRide provides rides at a per distance fare for trips within Huron County, within Perth County, between both counties, and for long-distance trips to adjacent municipalities (i.e. London Hospital). EasyRide’s member agencies are included in **Table 3** below.

**Table 3: EasyRide Huron and Perth County Transportation Providers**

Perth County	Huron County
Community Outreach and Perth East Transportation Mitchell and Area Community Outreach and Mobility Bus St. Marys and Area Home Support and Mobility Services Stratford Meals on Wheels and Neighbourly Services VON Perth-Huron	Midwestern Adult Day Services Town and Country Support Services

The two agencies within the EasyRide partnership that are based out of Huron County are Town and Country Support Services and Midwestern Adult Day Services (herein called the EasyRide Huron County Transportation Providers).

Of the two, the primary provider of transportation service in Huron County is Town and Country Support Services. In 2009/10, the agency provided over 12,160 trips to seniors and persons with disabilities living in the county.

<sup>2</sup> 2008 Ontario Specialized Transit Services Fact Book.

Midwestern Adult Day Services owns four vehicles which are primarily used to provide transportation for seniors and those with disabilities to their five day centre sites in Huron County. One vehicle is also used to operate a small transit service for seniors in Goderich on Mondays and Fridays. While the vehicles are available, there is a lack of funding and drivers to expand out into the community and provide additional trips.

EasyRide member agencies in Perth County are also available to deliver transportation services in Huron County when the trip cannot be accommodated by EasyRide’s Huron County transportation providers.

For the EasyRide Huron County transportation providers and the entire EasyRide partnership, there is a desire to expand service to meet the needs of a large unmet demand within Huron County, and an opportunity to use provincial gas tax dollars to facilitate this need.

### 3.1 Town and Country Support Services

Town and Country Support Services (Town and Country) is a not-for-profit agency which provides services to seniors and persons with disabilities in Huron County and surrounding areas. Services offered include personal support/homemaking as well as the complete range of community programs such as diner’s club, wellness for seniors program, meals on wheels, home help, and telephone reassurance.

Mobility Van Transportation provides transportation to wheelchair bound clients or those who have mobility difficulties getting to medical appointments, personal errands and social activities. Transportation is typically available during the day and during evening hours, but is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for emergencies (based on driver availability). The five accessible vans are utilized Huron County wide and are stationed in Wingham, Exeter, Clinton and Goderich. There is also one fully accessible mobility bus for programs in the Zurich area and for the Bluewater Rest Home, as well as one passenger van stationed in Clinton. The accessible vans provide services in their community, and also long-distance trips throughout southwestern Ontario. The service is operated by paid casual drivers, who are called on when trips are booked. The capacity of all the agency vehicles is shown in **Table 4**.

**Table 4: Town and Country Vehicle Capacities**

Vehicle	Capacity
2 Full Size Accessible Vans with Stretcher Capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 wheelchair &amp; 3 ambulatory; or</li> <li>• 1 stretcher &amp; 2 ambulatory</li> </ul>
3 Full Size Accessible Vans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 wheelchair &amp; 3 ambulatory</li> </ul>
1 Accessible Bus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 wheelchair &amp; 8 ambulatory; or</li> <li>• 3 wheelchair &amp; 10 ambulatory; or</li> <li>• 2 wheelchair &amp; 12 ambulatory</li> </ul>
1 Dodge Caravan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7 ambulatory</li> </ul>

Volunteer Transportation services are offered for clients who are without access to transportation and when friends and family are not available. Besides seniors and persons with disabilities, TCSS also provides the occasional transportation service to the Mennonite community in North Huron. Volunteer transportation represents approximately 70 percent of all trips provided by TCSS and is provided by approximately 60 volunteers using their own vehicles. One of the challenges is a declining volunteer base, which may place added pressure on the use of the Mobility Van Transportation service.

TCSS also provides non-emergency transportation to Wingham Hospital and three nursing homes in North Huron. This service is provided to medically stable individuals who require transportation from one facility to another. Wheelchair and stretcher services are available. Drivers for these services have CPR and first aid training but do not have paramedic or other enhanced training.

TCSS also provides transportation to Home Help clients whereby paid staff take clients grocery shopping and out on errands. Home Help transportation is not coordinated by EasyRide.

The table below summarizes the trips provided by Town and Country Support Services for their fiscal year (April 1, 2009 to March 31, 2010).

**Table 5: Town and Country Trip Information 2009-2010**

	<b>Mobility Transportation</b>	<b>Volunteer Transportation</b>	<b>Home Help Transportation</b>
Registered Clients	368	476	41
Local/In Town Trips	1,058	3,123	633
Out of Town Trips	1,897	5,406	47

A local trip is considered a trip within Huron County that is less than ten kilometres. The average out of town trip distance is approximately 28 kilometres, but has at least one trip end within Huron County.

In terms of vehicle occupancy, only a small percentage of regular trips by Town and Country are delivered with more than one client per vehicle (plus an escort/companion when required). Town and Country only reported 17 denied trips for the first half of 2010.

### **3.2 Midwestern Adult Day Services**

Midwestern Adult Day Services provides services for seniors and adults with special needs to assist them in maintaining independence in Huron County, North Lambton and South Bruce. All of Midwestern’s services are offered in its five Adult Day Centres. Services offered focus mainly on therapeutic programs, such as exercising, bathing, foot care and hair dressing.

Midwestern owns a fleet of 2 accessible buses and 2 vans used primarily to transport clients to and from one of the five Adult Day Centres located in Clinton, Wingham, Exeter, Grand Bend and Goderich. The two buses and one of the vans are used between 8:30am and 10:00am to deliver clients to the Day Centres and between 3:00pm and 4:30pm to return clients home. Since the drivers are also the day centre program assistants, the vehicles remain unused between 10:00am and

2:45pm and after 4:30pm. Midwestern serves 239 clients and provides 23,500 trips yearly for their Adult Day Programs.

The other van (Grand Caravan) is used as a 'Seniors Transit' fixed route service in Goderich. The service includes 38 bus stops and operates on Mondays and Fridays; seven times a day between 9:00am and 4:30pm. The fare for this service is \$4.00 for unlimited access throughout the day. Clients must be able to get in and out of the vehicle on their own as the van is not wheelchair accessible and the driver only stops at designated bus stops. In 2009-2010 this service had 31 registered clients and 842 trips were delivered. The van is also used occasionally for day centre transportation. The service itself is currently being reviewed and may be modified to better suit the needs of the seniors population.

Volunteers drive other Day Centre participants using their own vehicles, primarily for participants that are not "on route" of the van/bus service. Agency vehicles are also used occasionally on Saturdays.

It should be noted that the two EasyRide Huron County transportation providers and a third agency in the EasyRide network located in Perth County (Stratford Meals on Wheels and Neighbourly Services) are in discussions to formally amalgamate. This provides an opportunity to incorporate the Midwestern fleet into the EasyRide network and use them for general purpose trips within Huron County when not being operated for day centre participants. Funding may be required to hire drivers to operate the service.

## 4.0 THE OPPORTUNITY FOR TRANSPORTION SERVICES IN HURON COUNTY

Transportation services provided by the EasyRide Huron County transportation providers have been successful in serving the needs of residents in Huron County. Each of TCSS's vehicles averages about three trips a day providing trips within as well as out of Huron County. There is potential to make better use of existing capacity within each vehicle (increasing the number of passengers per trip, and staffing vehicles for allotted shifts rather than by trip so that additional trips could be delivered each day). This could increase the service provided without additional capital. However, the nature of trips provided, particularly long distance trips, makes this difficult to do without additional vehicles in place.

There is also available capacity on Midwestern's vehicles to better service Huron County residents. However, a lack of drivers is the biggest constraint in getting these vehicles on the road and serving seniors and persons with disabilities within Huron.

While there is some capacity to accommodate additional trips, it should also be noted that there is a significant untapped demand within the county that could be better serviced. To better understand the unmet demand, a comparison of transportation services provided by EasyRide's transportation providers in both Huron and Perth Counties was made.

Of the 73,000 annual trips that EasyRide coordinates, approximately 12,326 or 17 percent originate in Huron County with the remainder of the trips beginning in Perth County. **Table 6** summarizes the rides per capita in both Counties. What becomes clear is the difference in number of people serviced (0.21 trips per capita within Huron County compared to 0.81 within Perth County). This represents the theoretical demand for transportation services within Huron County.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 6: County Trip Demand**

	Huron County	Perth County
Trips	12,326	59,984
Population Served	59,325	74,344
Trips per Capita	0.21	0.81

One of the reasons for the higher number of trips delivered in Perth County is the level of service available. Within Perth County, a number of agencies have entered into partnerships with the municipalities they service. This has allowed them to receive not only municipal contributions, but also provincial gas tax contributions. Four examples are VON Perth-Huron, Community Outreach and Perth East Transportation, St. Marys and Area Mobility Service and Mitchell and Area Community Outreach and Mobility Bus. Municipal and provincial (gas tax) contributions provided to these agencies have allowed each to expand their service offering and provide greater accessibility to residents in their communities. This is illustrated in **Table 7**; trip numbers in the table are those reported in the 2008 CUTA Ontario Specialized Transit Services Fact Book which does not include

<sup>3</sup> More background research is required to specifically quantify the demand, gaps and potential growth within Huron County.

volunteer transportation trips. As such, only trips executed by EasyRide Huron County transportation provider staff and agency vehicles are included in **Table 7**.

**Table 7: Trip Demand for Agencies with Gas Tax Dollars<sup>4</sup>**

	Huron County	VON	Perth East	St. Marys	Mitchell
Trips	3,797	6,799	7,775	7,988	6,900
Population Served	59,325	12,275	12,000	10,749	9,129
Trips per Capita	0.06	0.55	0.65	0.74	0.76

As the population continues to age and the instance of persons with disabilities becomes more frequent, the number of trips required will also increase, adding future latent demand to the existing unmet demand.

To better service this unmet and future latent demand, there is a need to expand services, purchase additional vehicles, hire new drivers, and promote coordination efforts. This would require new and sustainable funding sources to achieve this next level of growth.

EasyRide Huron County transportation providers have the capability and experience to expand services and fulfil the existing need left by the closure of Huron Bruce Transit (Wheels Away) and the future need that will occur with an aging population. To accomplish this, a partnership between EasyRide, TCSS, MWADS (or the new amalgamated agency) and Huron County or its lower tier municipalities is recommended to support the expansion of transportation services for seniors and persons with disabilities and tap into provincial gas tax funding to help finance the operation.

<sup>4</sup> Representative of non-volunteer trips as provided by EasyRide Huron County transportation providers and the CUTA Ontario Specialized Transit Services Fact Book (2008)

## 5.0 ONTARIO DEDICATED GAS TAX PROGRAM

A number of community support agencies in other areas of Ontario that provide transportation services have been able to avail themselves to the provincial gas tax by way of agreements with the municipalities they serve. Huron County has also had recent experience with this, providing (through the province) gas tax funding (via North Huron and Morris-Turnberry) to Wheels Away.

Dillon met with Ontario Ministry of Transportation (MTO) staff in early August, 2010 to discuss the potential for Huron County (or one of the lower tier municipalities) to partner with TCSS and MWADS and receive gas tax funding.

### 5.1 Background

In October 2004, the Province of Ontario announced that it would invest a portion of the provincial gas tax in public transit in order to ensure that local public transportation services continue to operate and that transit ridership is increased through the expansion of public transportation capital infrastructure and levels of service. The program's goal is to improve municipal sustainability by increasing public transit ridership and reducing the impact of transportation activities on the environment.

Since the beginning of the program, more than \$1.6 billion in gas tax funding has been committed to Ontario's municipalities. In 2009/2010, \$316 million was allocated amongst the participating Ontario municipalities based on two cents per litre of the provincial gas tax.

Gas tax funds are dedicated to transit use and cannot be used for any other purpose. Unless otherwise approved by MTO, gas tax revenues are only used to support municipal public transportation expenditures above a municipality's baseline spending and not to reduce or replace current levels of municipal public transportation funding. The gas tax funds are permitted to be spent on the following public transportation items provided the expenditures are above the municipalities baseline spending:

- Expenditures that 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.

For municipalities that provide only specialized transit, transit strategies that may not initially result in ridership growth but will provide increased accessibility can be considered as eligible expenditures if approved in writing by the MTO prior to implementation.

All new public transit vehicles procured with gas tax funding must be fully accessible (in accordance with the requirements set out under the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (2001) and the *Vehicles for the Transportation of Physically Disabled Passengers* (1990)). In addition, acquisition of new transit vehicles must comply with the Canadian content policy requirements.

The allocation of funds that the participating municipalities receive depends on the total funding envelope available, their ridership and the municipal population. To calculate potential gas tax dollars, 70 percent of the funding formula is based on the transit system's ridership compared to the provincial total. The remaining 30 percent is based on the population of the municipality relative to the provincial total (of all participating municipalities) as estimated by the Ministry of Finance. This provides an incentive for ridership growth and provides more support for growing municipalities. Year one gas tax funding is based solely on the population served; ridership is included and considered for year 2 and all subsequent years.

Ridership calculations are based on data included in the Canadian Urban Transit Association (CUTA) fact books. CUTA annually collects and reproduces, on behalf of the Ministry of Transportation, transit ridership data in its Ontario Urban Transit Fact Book and its Ontario Specialized Transit Services Fact Book. Transit ridership is defined as a one-way linked trip in which the passenger pays a fare, delivered using an agency owned vehicle. Volunteer transportation is not included as part of the funding formula. Also, only trips that originate out of the municipality that has the gas tax agreement are counted.

The municipality must commit to sustained financing of the local transit system. The gas tax funds provided to the municipality do not exceed 75 percent of the municipality's own spending on transit. The municipality can change their level of commitment in their bylaw and the provincial funds would adjust accordingly.

## **5.2 Program Requirements and Process**

To be eligible to receive dedicated gas tax funds, a municipality must support and contribute financially towards their public transportation services. Public transportation that is supported includes any service where a fare is charged for transporting the public by way of vehicles operated by or on behalf of a municipality (or under agreement between the municipality and a person, firm or corporation). This includes specialized public transportation but does not include pilot projects or special purpose facilities such as school buses, tourist services or ambulance. There are no rules in place regarding the fare structure, so long as the public/customer pays a fare.

The EasyRide Huron County transportation providers are not able to directly apply for the gas tax funding but do have the opportunity to receive the funding from the County or a municipality within the County by way of a service agreement (where specialized services are delivered on their behalf).

The preference would be for EasyRide Huron County transportation providers to approach Huron County so that all trips and the total County population are included in the gas tax calculation. However, more than one municipality is permitted to jointly participate in the gas tax program, as long as a lead municipality is identified. In this case, an agreement would be put in place to have one 'host' municipality that takes care of administrative tasks and reporting. The dedicated gas tax funds would flow directly to this host. All of the municipalities would have to agree to provide financial support and develop municipal bylaws stating their commitment.

Should the EasyRide Huron County transportation providers establish commitments with one/some of the lower tier municipalities rather than the County, only the trips/ridership that either begin or end within the partner municipalities would be included in the funding calculation.

Following the establishment of a formal agreement, the County would subsequently notify the MTO of their intent to support the specialized public transportation services provided by the EasyRide Huron County transportation providers and outline a specific annual financial commitment that will be made to these services, provided in the form of a municipal bylaw. The MTO then provides the County with a gas tax package that includes a letter of agreement, program guidelines and reporting forms. To receive funding payments, the County must provide two signed letters of agreement (signed by the head of municipal council and the Chief Financial Officer) and a copy of the authorizing municipal bylaw. The MTO will then gain approval from the Minister and determine the allocation for the municipality.

The County must provide annual reporting forms, submit annual ridership statistics to CUTA and may undergo audits by the MTO to ensure program compliance (that funds are used for public transportation and program guidelines and requirements are met). Once approved, the funds are received electronically and held in a dedicated reserve account to be dispersed toward eligible expenditures.

As mentioned earlier, if the EasyRide Huron County transportation providers can establish an agreement with Huron County, the base (first year) funding received would be based on population alone and would not include ridership until it is reported to CUTA the following year.

The MTO provided an estimate of the possible gas tax funds Huron County could be eligible to receive. Based on the 2009-2010 program year, the County's population of 60,000 would generate a Year 1 gas tax allocation of approximately \$250,000. The Year 2 allocation would only increase by \$1,000 if the ridership remains below 4,000. These estimates are the maximum allocations the County would be eligible for only if Huron County's funding commitment to support the transit system is \$333,000 or higher. If the County's funding commitment is less than this value, the Gas Tax allocation would be 75 percent of that commitment value.

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## **6.0 OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

### **6.1 Additional Funding Sources**

There are also other funding opportunities available to EasyRide that could be explored. The Ontario Trillium Foundation is an agency of the Ontario Government that provides funding grants to charitable and not-for-profit organizations with the mission to build healthy communities. Applicable priorities of the foundation related to EasyRide include creating healthier, more active Ontarians and having more people engaged within their community.

It should be noted that SMOW&NS, TCSS and MWADS have just had an Ontario Trillium Foundation grant approved for over two years to assist with the amalgamation of the three agencies. Therefore, they are not eligible to apply until that grant has ended.

Secure funding will also assist the EasyRide Huron County transportation providers in meeting their mandate to provide transportation to seniors and persons in need. However, to determine the capital and operating costs required to meet latent demand, a more fulsome demand analysis is needed, beyond the scope contained herein.

### **6.2 Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)**

An important consideration the agencies must make when considering the Gas Tax agreement with the County or any of its municipalities is the impact of the upcoming AODA legislation. The AODA received Royal Assent on June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2005 and is now law. There are two basic components to the process of standard development. The first deals with establishing common accessibility standards that address barriers that are common to all sectors and apply to all persons and organizations in Ontario. The second component deals with development of “sector specific accessibility standards”, such as transportation. All five standards (Customer Service, Built Environment, Employment, Information & Communications and Transportation) will have a direct impact upon transportation.

No matter what, all EasyRide transportation providers will have to meet all applicable AODA requirements, including those within the Transportation Standard. However, if the County or any of the municipalities enter into an agreement with the EasyRide Huron County transportation providers to provide transportation services on their behalf, there may be some unique circumstances as related to AODA that needs to be understood. These are outlined below:

#### **Customer Service Standard**

On January 1, 2008 the Customer Service standard became law. This standard requires all front line public sector employees to have been fully “accessibility sensitivity trained” by January 1, 2010, and all other sectors to have their front line employees trained by January 1, 2012.

This standard will directly affect drivers who must have sensitivity training. Additionally, any other front line employees, such as dispatchers, must have also received this training. The key impact is that EasyRide employees will have to receive this training earlier than the January 1, 2012 deadline.

### **Employment Standard**

This draft standard is expected to impact:

- Developing accessible employment policies;
- Providing information about a job, such as applications, in accessible formats;
- Giving disability awareness training to all employees and volunteers; and
- Preparing accommodation plans to help employees and volunteers perform their job.

Under contract with the County or any lower-tier municipalities the EasyRide Huron County transportation providers will need to comply to any standards or timelines that impact municipal governments.

### **Information & Communications Standard**

This draft standard is expected to impact all communications materials in terms of visibility, readability, comprehensibility and access to those with visual, hearing and/or cognitive disabilities.

It is expected that communications materials will be available in formats that are fully accessible. Printed materials, such as brochures, newsletters, signs, bus tickets, training materials, etc, will be available in larger fonts, using strong contrasts and developed in “plain language”. Electronic materials, such as information on web sites, must be in formats that are accessible to people with visual disabilities. Callers (booking trips) that have hearing disabilities must also have options which work for them. The details of exactly how and what elements (e.g. font type and size) are expected to be in the Standard remain uncertain at this time.

EasyRide may need to install TDD or TTY phones for the hearing impaired to meet legislative requirements. This would impose increased operating costs to EasyRide.

### **Transportation Standard**

This draft standard is expected to impact:

- Service areas;
- Fares;
- Service hours;
- Customer eligibility;
- Dispatch; and
- Vehicle accessibility.

The AODA requires equality between municipal conventional and specialized public transportation systems. Since there are no public transportation systems that currently operate in Huron County, the EasyRide Huron County transportation can maintain existing operating conditions such as fares, service hours and service coverage. However, if the County were to implement a conventional public transit service, a number of implications would result that would need to be incorporated into the service agreement.

Some of these items are further detailed below.

### **Eligibility**

The eligibility criterion for EasyRide is quite flexible, reflecting close alignment with the AODA legislation. Generally, EasyRide accepts anyone with physical or cognitive disabilities or who require specialized transit (i.e. wheelchair access).

The AODA legislation is expected to require that client eligibility be expanded to cover the Ontario Human Rights Code definition of a disability or handicap, as follows:

*“The Code provides a basic definition of “handicap” to include conditions that have developed over time, those that result from an accident, or have been present from birth. It includes physical, mental, and learning disabilities and it does not matter whether the condition is visible. For example, persons with mental disorders, sensory disabilities (such as hearing or vision limitations) and epilepsy are all protected under the Code.”*

Since the eligibility criteria of the two EasyRide Huron County transportation providers is fairly inclusive, this component of the legislation would likely not impact them.

### **Booking Times**

If the current draft Transportation Standard is approved by the province, it is expected that the minimum reservation time for booking a ride will be set at 24 hours (i.e. riders will be able to book trips one day prior to taking the trip). This has been a contentious element of the draft standard (from the perspective of the service providers). Therefore, it is possible that even if this element is accepted into the Standard, the timeline for complying to it may be pushed into the future as much as possible.

EasyRide transportation providers currently request a minimum reservation time of one day in advance although same day bookings are accommodated when possible. As such, this requirement is not expected to have a significant impact of EasyRide’s transportation providers.

### **Vehicles**

Currently, to obtain provincial funding, all vehicles purchased with this funding must be accessible to patrons with wheelchairs and other mobility devices.

### **Service Area**

It is expected that service areas covered by conventional transit must also be covered by fully accessible transit.

### **Service Hours**

The timing of the service hours for the door-to-door service must be equal to the conventional (stop-to-stop) service.

### **Fares**

Under the AODA, for public transit providers, fares must be equal, but not identical, for conventional and specialized services. The cost of an average ride must be the same, but the format for the fare on each service can be different (e.g. passes versus tickets, pre-paid fares versus cash).

The requirements for system equality could potentially have a significant impact to EasyRide’s Huron County transportation providers if the County, or any of the lower tier municipalities they receive gas tax funding through, establish a conventional transit system. The transportation providers would be

required to have an equivalent fare system, service hours and coverage to match that of the conventional public transportation system which could result in financial implications to the agencies.

It is recommended that the EasyRide Huron County transportation providers include, within any formal agreement with the County, a provision or Memorandum of Understanding that considers the AODA legislation and possible implications to the specialized transportation service provided.

## 7.0 CONCLUSIONS

The aging population and increasing incidence of disabilities in Huron County will see an increasing need for transportation services. The County has one of the highest percentage of senior's in Ontario and access to transportation is cited by polls of the seniors population as a top three priority in keeping them healthy at home and active and engaged in their communities.

The EasyRide Huron County transportation providers have been providing transportation services to County residents for a number of decades. The recent coordination of agencies through the EasyRide network has increased the overall capacity and level of service to residents. However, with a growing senior's population and the declining mobility of this population group, there is a need to expand transportation services provided to meet the needs of this growing clientele within the County.

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.

