

SAUGEEN MOBILITY

and REGIONAL TRANSIT

GENERAL BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Friday, July 23, 2021, 1:30 p.m.

Board Members Present: Councillor Doug Bell, Municipality of Arran-Elderslie
Councillor Warren Dickert, Town of Hanover Councillor
Dean Leifso, Municipality of Brockton
Councillor Beth Hamilton, Municipality of West Grey
Mayor Scott Mackey, Township of Chatsworth
Councillor Ed McGugan, Township of Huron-Kinloss
Vice Deputy Mayor Mike Myatt, Town of Saugeen Shores
Mayor John Woodbury, Township of Southgate

Board Members Absent: Councillor Dave Cuyler, Municipality of Kincardine

Others Present: Roger Cook, Manager
Catherine McKay, Recording Secretary

The meeting was conducted by videoconference in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. Call to Order

President Warren Dickert called the meeting order at 1:31 p.m..

2. Disclosure of Pecuniary Interest and Declaration of Conflict of Interest

None declared.

3. Approval of the Agenda

Motion #2021-046

Moved by Mike Myatt; Seconded by Beth Hamilton

That the agenda for July 23, 2021 be amended to add items 9. A., Grey Bruce Health Unit Statement on Business and Vaccine, and 9.B., Insurance, and that the agenda be accepted as amended.

Carried

4. Minutes of the June 25, 2021 General Board Meeting

Motion #2021-047

Moved by Scott Mackey; Seconded by Ed McGugan

That the Board approve and adopt the minutes of the June 25, 2021 General Board Meeting as circulated.

Carried

5. Business Arising from the Minutes

Following up on item 5 from Business Arising from the June 25, 2021 minutes, the President noted that some responses have been received from the mailing campaign. Grey Highlands has invited the Manager to its September 15, 2021 Council meeting, with the President to attend if he is available. The Town of Blue Mountains has requested an information package, and no response has yet been received from Bruce County.

The Manager provided an update on item 6.A., Email from a Client, noting that SMART does not track whether a client is visually impaired, but tracks clients by the type of vehicle they require. Anecdotally however, staff is aware of clients' needs. Visually impaired clients generally have mechanisms to ensure that they get information that is provided in written form.

With respect to the Proposed Incident Reporting Policy, the President noted that the item is on the current agenda, along with the Return of the Dispatcher/Scheduler.

With respect to the Partnership Agreement, no comments have been received on the proposed revisions and the next step is to work on a revised agreement with the Board's lawyer.

Ed McGugan referred to the statement in the minutes that changes to service levels were posted on SMART's web site, noting that he had been unable to find this information. The Manager noted that the information is included in a bright red band at the top of the home page, but there had been some trouble with the web site. He agreed to look into what happened to the information.

6. Correspondence

There were no current items of correspondence.

7. Manager's Reports and Recommendations

A. Report 2021-18 June 2021 Operational

The Manager presented the report noting that rides and user fees are increasing and group excursions are coming back.

The President asked about that each ride taking at least two phone calls, which could be onerous. The Manager said that this is the nature of the business, and some clients do not always have all the required information when they book and so have to call back, and some call to find out the driver's name, or to confirm details of their ride. These calls are in addition to the large number of calls coming in, many of which in turn generate outgoing calls. The President asked if there is an application that might reduce the number of calls and the Manager said he did not believe so. Dean Leifso said that in his business, some clients prefer to call to clarify issues or obtain additional details following a first contact. The President noted that this may present an opportunity to educate clients.

With respect to group excursions, the President asked if the costs of these are tracked. The Manager responded that they are often short runs, to the grocery store for example, and the cost is not a lot more than the \$804 in fees, and once gas tax is taken into account, these trips make a profit.

Motion #2021-048

Moved by Beth Hamilton; Seconded by Ed McGugan

That Report 2021-18 June 2021 Operational be approved as presented.

Carried

B. Report 2021-19 2021 First Half Operational

The Manager presented the report, noting that the situation is as solid as it can be given COVID-19 and there is a substantial amount in the gas tax account, although it is unknown what will happen with the gas tax in 2022, as there have been suggestions that it may be reduced by 25%. So this is a question, along with how quickly ridership will come back to previous levels.

With respect to the Municipal Transit Enhanced Cleaning Program (MTEC), SMART has received the full \$30,995 which is a onetime payment and the funds are shown on the balance sheet. The Manager added that incidental expenses for cleaning such as a package of disinfectant wipes, are not necessarily tracked.

Motion #2021-049

Moved by Mike Myatt; Seconded by Dean Leifso

That Report 2021-19 2021 First Half Operational be approved as presented.

Carried

C. 2021-20 Automation Potential with Novus

The Manager presented the report, explaining that Novus can schedule rides, but only if they have a set return time, which is not always the case with SMART clients. He outlined additional potential uses as outlined in the report, explaining that very few clients would likely use the automatic features, and there would be no benefit to adding them at this point.

Beth Hamilton asked if Novus is doing what was hoped for. The Manager said that when it was purchased, everything was done manually by one person, but now, any staff member can use Novus. This system allows some data to be extracted, but it is only as good as the information input into it. The main advantage is having a central location where any staff member can log in and see rides on the screen, and where vehicles are, for example. Novus also allows effective communication with drivers through their phones. Overall, Novus does what was hoped it would do, although there are other things that could be done. This system was originally developed for the school bus industry which is a structured ride environment, versus SMART which is unstructured.

Mike Myatt recalled that Novus cost \$120,000 and he asked if SMART was getting value for the money spent. The Manager said that the system is highly regarded and SMART did not overspend in purchasing it. Home and Community Support Services and KTransit both use it and it cost less than \$100,000 which was funded by the federal government. He believes that it is a good system that will last a long time. The maintenance fees for Novus are \$18,000/year.

Beth Hamilton suggested that there are likely people in the SMART system who could book their own rides in the same way that people can book COVID vaccinations, and that this is something that people such as family members of clients, might expect. She suggested a phased in implementation might be the way to go and would like to hear from Novus about this.

Ed McGugan said that he has experience purchasing expensive software, and it is common to use only a portion of a system as such systems are written for a large audience. He asked if there is a way to educate SMART clients so that they can book their own rides online and raised the issue of whether it would be worthwhile to spend additional funds on more automation.

The Manager said that there is a “book a ride” function on SMART’s web site which is electronic but not automated, so if people use it, the information then has to be input into Novus. He said that many of SMART’s clients prefer to talk to a person to book a ride, some do not have a cell phone and have no interest in getting one, and some do not have a computer. Many client registrations are done by phone, some clients do not have credit cards, and in some cases cash is given to drivers, and even sometimes sent in the mail. He is more than willing to use a ride booking app, but believes that clients like to speak to a person and if there was an app to book rides, only a small number would use it. The Novus system had to be purchased as a whole, and it is not possible to purchase only some modules. Updates to the system cost \$40,000, and it cannot be tried on a trial basis without spending that amount.

John Woodbury suggested keeping an eye on the industry as a lot of things in the IT world change quickly, as was seen as a result of COVID. He suggested a mixed system given the clientele, adding that more people are now accustomed to using technology due to COVID, as was seen in Southgate where more people attend virtual Council meetings than attended in person prior to the pandemic. He suggested that it may be a matter of education and active monitoring of the situation to see what will work. Dean Leifso agreed with John Woodbury, noting that he had a client who was paying their SMART bill by dropping off a cheque because they preferred the personal touch, but reported having difficulty finding SMART due to the signage not being obvious. He suggested looking for a hybrid solution that would allow both the personal touch and use of technology.

The President noted that the Board received the report for information and would monitor the situation for developments.

D. 2021-21 Incident Reporting Policy Revised

The Manager presented the report noting that the changes as requested at the last meeting had been incorporated, along with a form. Mike Myatt said he likes the form and asked about documenting near misses. It was pointed out that the form does provide for documenting near misses. Scott Mackey said that he is satisfied with the form and suggested that there should be space for the driver to sign and date it, as well as space for the Manager to sign and date it, a suggestion that was endorsed by the President.

Beth Hamilton asked if there are ever circumstances where drivers have to call a client's next of kin and asked if SMART collects this kind of information. The Manager said that in case of a collision, the driver would call the office, and on the weekend, would call the Manager. He added that there is a policy to cover emergencies that outlines how to proceed and in serious cases, the Manager would call the President, if, for example there was media interest.

Motion #2021-050

Moved by Ed McGugan; Seconded by Scott Mackey

That the Board approve the Incident Reporting Policy and that the form be amended to incorporate spaces for the driver to sign and date the form, and for the Manager, or other reviewer, to also sign and date the form.

Carried

E. 2021-22 Return of Dispatcher/Scheduler Revised

This report was referred to the closed session of the meeting.

F. 2021-23 Lifting Load Restrictions

The Manager presented the report, noting that it seems pointless to restrict loads if the riders are all from the same congregate setting. He suggested that lifting the load restrictions would apply only to group excursions from a single location, not individual rides from different locations. Scott Mackey suggested that this might be worth considering but not at the present time given the COVID counts in Grey Bruce.

Beth Hamilton said it seems logical but that the Manager should check with the Grey Bruce Public Health Unit. She suggested the Board could support it in principle, depending on the position of Public Health. The Manager was directed to contact the Public Health Unit and report back to the Board by email. The President noted that if Public Health gives the green light, the Board can approve the report electronically without having to call a meeting.

Later in the meeting, the information from the Public Health Unit was located and circulated. A statement sent to long term care licensees and retirement homes says that there are to be no excursions for long term care residents. It was agreed that if there are requests for excursions for long term care residents, the appropriate response is that SMART cannot provide such a service based on direction from the Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Arra.

The President noted that as a result, SMART should suspend group rides until further notice from the Medical Officer of Health.

8. Annual Wage & Salary Review Policy

Motion #2021-051

Moved by Scott Mackey; Seconded by John Woodbury

That the Board of Directors of SMART approve the Annual Wage & Salary Review Policy as presented.

Carried

9. Other Business

A. Grey Bruce Health Unit Statement on Business and Vaccine

Beth Hamilton brought to the Board's attention a recent statement from the Grey Bruce Public Health Unit on employees and COVID vaccinations which stated that businesses should strongly encourage their employees to get vaccinated and suggested providing time off to get the vaccine. She forwarded the statement by email to Board members and the Manager and said that she is in favour of having a policy to demonstrate support for vaccinations.

The Manager said that SMART does not have a vaccination policy and does strongly encourage staff to get vaccinated, although some staff are hesitant. He explained that if staff who are currently not vaccinated are provided with paid time off to get the vaccine, this would be unfair to those who have already gotten the vaccination on their own time.

John Woodbury noted that a presentation to County Council showed that 95% of the COVID cases that arose in the first two weeks of July were in people who were not vaccinated and that herd immunity with the Delta variant is 95%, compared to 75% prior to the appearance of the variant.

Scott Mackey suggested following up with Dr. Arra who has changed his position on vaccine passports and now agrees with them. According to the province's Science Table, the COVID situation is evolving, and as a result there may be changes to come since the unvaccinated are getting sick, and proof of vaccination may become mandatory in order to access services. The Manager asked whether a vaccination policy would apply only to COVID or to other vaccines. It was suggested that he ask this question when following up with Public Health on the question of lifting load restrictions.

The President noted that this issue is to be followed up at the next Board meeting.

B. Insurance

The Manager explained that the recent bill for fleet insurance showed an increase of 38%. The companies providing the insurance have been purchased by another insurance company. The Manager checked with a different company which declined the insurance and with another which would charge more than the current rate. A similar service to SMART operating in the Kitchener area with fewer vehicles pays more than SMART for its insurance, although the driving environment there is quite different. If the deductible were increased to \$5,000 for all perils, there may be a reduction in the premium. It is rare, however, for losses to exceed \$3,000 to \$4,000, and in such cases SMART pays for the repairs rather than making an insurance claim. Losses over the last 10 years have been about \$20,000 and the largest claims in the last 10 years have been where other drivers hit SMART vehicles.

SMART has in the past paid \$60,000 for fleet insurance and the recent renewal is \$85,000. The newly purchased vehicles have been added to the policy, older vehicles are not covered for all perils, and for those older than 6 years, all perils are dropped because they are fully depreciated. An increase in the deductible to \$5,000 would result in a \$2,400 savings. There are 31 vehicles on the policy, with the four to be sold having been removed.

Motion #2021-052

Moved by John Woodbury; Seconded by Scott Mackey

That the Board of Directors of SMART approve renewing the fleet insurance with an increase in the deductible on all perils to \$5,000.

Carried

Closed Session

Motion #2021-IC011

Moved by Scott Mackey; Seconded by Mike Myatt

That the Board of Directors of SMART move into Closed Session at 2:50 p.m. to discuss issues regarding identifiable individuals.

Carried

Reconvene in Open Session

Motion #2021-IC012

Moved by Ed McGugan; Seconded by John Woodbury

That the Board of Directors of SMART reconvene in Open Session at 2:58 p.m..

Carried

Motion #2021-053

Moved by Mike Myatt; Seconded by John Woodbury

That the Board of Directors of SMART authorize the Manager to bring SMART's Dispatcher/Scheduler back to work full-time on Monday, August 30, 2021.

Carried

10. Adjournment

It was agreed that the meeting scheduled for August 27 is to be rescheduled to October 1, 2021.

Moved by Scott Mackey; Seconded by Ed McGugan

That the Board of Directors of SMART adjourn at 2:59 p.m.

Carried

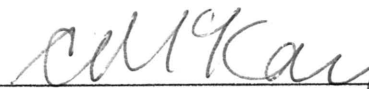
Recording Secretary Meeting Attendance

The Recording Secretary attended the following meetings in the third quarter of 2021:

- July 23, 2021



Warren Dickert, President



Catherine McKay, Recording Secretary