

# ***SAUGEEN MOBILITY***

## **and REGIONAL TRANSIT**



## **SPECIALIZED PUBLIC TRANSIT**

Transportation solutions for the Mentally and Physically Challenged

Serving the residents of  
Arran-Elderslie, Brockton, Chatsworth, Grey Highlands, Hanover, Huron-  
Kinloss, Kincardine, Saugeen Shores, Southgate and West Grey

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## OVERVIEW

Founded in 1977 as Bruce, Grey and Huron Disability Transportation Corporation, Saugeen Mobility and Regional Transit is the local municipal specialized public transit partnership dedicated to providing mobility solutions to the physically and mentally challenged residents of Arran-Elderslie, Brockton, Chatsworth, Grey Highlands, Hanover, Huron-Kinloss, Kincardine, Saugeen Shores, Southgate and West Grey.

In the second half of 2009, Bruce, Grey and Huron Disability Transportation was re-structured and re-named to emphasize 'mobility' rather than 'disability'. Part of this re-structuring was the naming of a new board of directors, established to bring a renewed commitment and energy to the company.

SMART is an independent non-profit entity incorporated in the Province of Ontario and governed and operated under a membership agreement between the member municipalities. It is a highly utilized service in the 10 municipalities in which it operates. SMART currently serves a population of more than 99,914 over an area of 5000 square kilometers in Bruce and Grey Counties – the largest geographic service area in the province.

SMART provides transportation solutions to community members who because of their physical and/or mental challenges cannot use conventional transit or local taxi services. SMART also provides group excursion charter services to local nursing homes and seniors residences.

From October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021 to September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022, SMART provided 18,630 rides to individuals and groups. These are outings that would have been difficult or impossible if this service were not in place. Many of these residents have no family members nearby to assist with their mobility needs and for those who do have family members nearby, very often those family members are unavailable to provide assistance because of employment or lack of appropriate accessible vehicle. The rides provided by SMART are, therefore, a vital lifeline for these community members to keep medical appointments, get their place of employment, enjoy social outings and generally maintain a sense of personal independence.

Ridership during the period of October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021 to September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022 was down about 50% compared to 2019 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Specialized transportation can be expensive for people. The cost of adapted vehicles, in particular, means their individual ownership is impossible for the vast majority of those who need them. Many, if not most, people needing mobility assistance are already in difficult financial circumstances. This further complicates their individual ability to get 'out and about' in their communities. An inability to be mobile and connected with other people is a well-studied and documented contributing factor in depression and other medical and emotional problems.

Municipal services like SMART are not simply expenditures. They are investments in building livable and inviting communities. People no longer just live where they were raised or where they work; they live where they can find the 'life balance' they want. Public services, especially municipal services, are a large part of that equation. If the services people need or want are not available in a particular community, they will live somewhere else where those services are available.

## FUNDING AND BUDGET

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

Currently, the Town of Hanover acts as Host Municipality for the purpose of receiving and holding these funds. Gas Tax funds belong to the Province of Ontario and are held in trust until they are used for capital purchases, operational deficits or other projects deemed to be improvements to the transit service in accordance with MTO guidelines. In the event the service ceases, any remaining Gas Tax funds return to the MTO.

All transit services submit their local population numbers and annual ridership numbers. From these statistics, the MTO calculates how much funding each transit service is **eligible** to receive giving a 30% weighting to population and a 70% weighting to ridership.

This funding is, however, not bottomless and regardless of the amount a transit system is eligible for, is capped at 75% of total 'local revenue'. 'Local revenue' is made up of municipal contributions, service fees, donations and other miscellaneous revenue streams. Grants or contributions from other provincial ministries or agencies may be accepted but **cannot** be counted as 'local revenue'.

Under the Ontario Gas Tax for Transit program, SMART received \$740,828 in 2021 (based on 2019 statistics) and \$769,398 in 2022.

Given the lower expected ridership due to the Covid pandemic, SMART's 2021 total municipal contribution was lowered from \$750,000 in 2020 to \$650,000. It increased to \$682,500 in 2022 plus a \$24,000 trial contribution from Grey Highlands (for a trial period of one year) for a total of \$706,500.

In keeping with MTO methodology, municipal contributions are calculated annually (based on ridership Oct 1 to Sep 30) with a 30% weighting applied to population and a 70% weighting applied to ridership. This overall contribution percentage is then applied to the total municipal contribution to give the amount due from each municipality.

## INDIVIDUAL USER FEES

Effective March 1, 2021, individual clients travelling within the 'local service area' are charged a base rate of \$2.00 plus \$.55/km subject to a minimum charge of \$7.50 per ride. A client may have one attendant ride for free. If a driver and vehicle are considered dedicated to a client then the ride becomes a charter, which will be billed at a rate of \$.55/km plus \$22.00 per hour. Please refer to the Individual User Fee Policy for more detail.

A 'ride' is defined as 1 person going from point 'A' to point 'B'. Returning to point 'A' would be 2 rides.

Short additional stops where a client gets out of the vehicle are charged \$2.50 per stop. There is no extra charge for trips to 'drive thrus'.

Attendants and extra stops are considered rides for statistical purposes.

SMART also provides a group excursion charter service to long-term care facilities.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

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

SMART has a fleet of 18 well-maintained vehicles including one large adapted bus for group outings with a 34" lift and capacity up to 30 passengers. There are 9 x 9-passenger/4 wheelchair adapted buses with 34" lifts and 9 x adapted small vans with 30" ramps.

Drivers are dispatched through the Novus scheduling software and DriverMate mobile application accessible through the drivers' cell phones.

## GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

As an Ontario corporation, SMART is governed by its Corporate By-Laws as well as by the partnership agreement between the member municipalities.

Each partner is entitled to send one member and from those members, a President of the Board of Directors is elected. Currently, all municipal members are directors. The Board of Directors meets at least eight times per year unless otherwise required.

### 2023 Board of Directors

Deputy Major Jennifer Shaw, Municipality of Arran-Elderslie  
Councillor Kym Hutcheon, Municipality of Brockton  
Mayor Scott Mackey, Township of Chatsworth  
Councillor Warren Dickert, Town of Hanover (past President)  
Councillor Ed McGugan, Township of Huron-Kinloss (President)  
Councillor Doug Kennedy, Municipality of Kincardine  
Councillor Cheryl Grace, Town of Saugeen Shores  
Councillor Monica Singh-Soares, Township of Southgate  
Councillor Doug Townsend, Municipality of West Grey (Vice-President)

### Management

Stephan Labelle, Manager and Secretary of the Board  
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General Counsel - Peter Loucks, Loucks and Loucks, Chesley

Auditor - BDO Dunwoody, Hanover

## LOOKING FORWARD

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

According to statistics from the 2021 census, Bruce County had 26% of its population aged 65 or older. In Grey County, that percentage is 26.4%. This compares to 18.5% for the Province of Ontario as a whole. The average age of the population is 45.2 years in Bruce and 45.9 years in Grey compared to 41.8 years provincially.

In response to these demographics, communities in Grey and Bruce have been adding a considerable number of new housing units for their aging residents. A safe, dependable and affordable transportation service for those residents is going to be a critical part of their quality of life and their being able to remain independent for as long as possible.

SMART is the largest MTO supported specialized transit service in Ontario (possibly the second largest in Canada according to data from the Canadian Urban Transit Association).

SMART is also available to provide services beyond specialized transportation such as scheduled transit services and non-emergency medical transportation to medically stable ambulatory and wheelchair patients as a complimentary and parallel service to EMS (normal eligibility and registration requirements apply). SMART does not offer a 'stretcher' service.

We strongly believe that public services should be provided at the best, most efficient level possible. It is crucial that different government agencies, both local and provincial, make the best use of existing service infrastructure. Duplication of local services is a waste of financial resources, especially when there are areas going without service. Inter-Ministerial cooperation is critical to providing a quality, specialized transportation service on a cost-effective basis in rural areas where the low population density does not provide many opportunities for operational efficiency.

I would be pleased to meet with any council interested in exploring the affordable benefit Saugeen Mobility and Regional Transit can bring to their community.

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February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022