

SAUGEEN MOBILITY

and REGIONAL TRANSIT

GENERAL BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Friday, November 17, 2023, 9:00 a.m.

Boardroom, 603 Bruce Rd 19, Walkerton, ON & via Zoom

Board Members Present: Ed McGugan, Councillor, Huron-Kinloss, President
Warren Dickert, Deputy Mayor, Hanover, Past President
Cheryl Grace, Councillor, Saugeen Shores (via Zoom)
Doug Kennedy, Councillor, Kincardine (to 12:15 p.m., via Zoom)
Joel Loughead, Councillor, Grey Highlands (9:55 a.m. – noon, via Zoom)
Scott Mackey, Mayor, Chatsworth
Jennifer Shaw, Deputy Mayor, Arran-Elderslie
Monica Singh-Soares, Councillor, Southgate (via Zoom)
Doug Townsend, Councillor, West Grey, Vice-President

Board Members Absent: Kym Hutcheon, Councillor, Brockton

Others Present: Stephan Labelle, SMART Manager
Catherine McKay, Recording Secretary

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:02 a.m.

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

None declared.

3. Approval of the Agenda

Motion Moved by Doug Townsend; Seconded by Monica Singh-Soares
That the agenda be accepted as circulated.

Carried

4. Delegations

There were no delegations.

5. Minutes of Previous Meeting – October 20, 2023

Motion Moved by Cheryl Grace; Seconded by Doug Kennedy

That the minutes from October 20, 2023 be amended to show that alternatives to the NOVUS system are to be presented before March 31, 2024 rather than 2023, and that the minutes be accepted as so amended.

Carried

The Manager introduced the new Accounts Receivable/Invoicing Clerk who was welcomed by the Board.

6. Business Arising from the Minutes

A. Salary Survey

The Manager presented rates for jobs comparable to the SMART driver, noting the living wage in Grey Bruce of \$22.75 and that outside of the GTA, Grey-Bruce has the highest cost of living in Ontario. He proposed changes to the current ten step salary grid for drivers which would increase rates over two years and be cost neutral since the increase would cost \$22,440 in year one and \$23,113 in year two but be covered by an increase of \$0.05 per kilometre which would generate \$27,000 in revenue based on 21,527 rides. In discussion, it was noted that the recent Manager salary grid has five steps as is common practice.

The issue of driver availability and pay arose since if a driver is not available, the vehicle is unavailable. The ability to have a flexible schedule may be an incentive for drivers to remain at SMART, and the Manager indicated that some have specific preferences driving, such as avoiding late evening and early morning, which he will address through one-on-one discussions. The average age of drivers is 60 and 62 without the youngest and average tenure is about eight years. The Manager confirmed that SMART is able to attract applicants and has resumes on file. It was suggested that funds to cover wage increase should be recovered from clients through an increase in the rate per kilometre or the minimum charge, to ensure funds for capital investment. To ensure vehicle availability, vehicles could be stored in a central location rather than at drivers' homes, although this would increase "deadhead" costs. A different rate for part-time work was raised and it was agreed that SMART can change terms and conditions of employment with appropriate notice. All drivers work part-time with no guarantee of hours since rides depend on demand. In the past, there were employment agreements which guaranteed 40 hours of work per week, but these are no longer in place. On average, there are about 160 rides denied every month for lack of a driver and a vehicle, and about 30% of rides are booked the same day, which risks a vehicle not being available. Drivers will be placed on the new salary grid and due to their tenure, most will be at the top of the range.

The Manager proposed a new salary grid for office staff who are full time non-union employees working 37.5 hours per week. The Office Manager provides work direction to the Scheduler/Dispatcher and the Accounts Receivable/Invoicing Clerk, although the Manager is responsible for performance review, hiring and termination decisions. The question of relative equity vis-à-vis drivers was discussed. The Manager is to communicate the pay changes to the staff prior to the next Board meeting.

Motion Moved by Scott Mackey; Seconded by Warren Dickert
That SMART adopt a five step salary grid for drivers effective January 1, 2024 starting at \$20.38 per hour at Step 1 and moving up to \$24.45 at Step 5.

Carried

Motion Moved by Scott Mackey; Seconded by Warren Dickert
That SMART adopt a five step salary grid for Scheduler/Dispatcher and Accounts Receivable/Invoicing Clerk effective January 1, 2024 starting at \$22.14 per hour at Step 1 and moving up to \$27.35 at Step 5.

Carried

Motion Moved by Warren Dickert; Seconded by Jen Shaw
That SMART adopt a five step salary grid for Office Administrator effective January 1, 2024 starting at \$46,392 annually at Step 1 and moving up to \$61,223 annually at step 5.

Carried

B. Dashcam Policy

The Manager reviewed the policy highlighting changes from the last meeting. He was commended on a well drafted policy and will ensure that employees are informed in advance about the cameras. The existing disciplinary policy will apply in case of violations of the policy. The Manager was directed to amend the policy to require complaints to be made in writing and to remove the Manager's email address.

Motion Moved by Jen Shaw; Seconded by Doug Townsend
That the Dashcam Policy be approved as amended.

Carried

C. New Vehicle

The Manager advised that the new vehicle does not have GPS which is not included in new vehicles. SMART drivers use an app on their SMART provided phone or tablet rather than GPS and have hands-free equipment.

D. Photocopier

Discussion turned to the \$2.00 fee and the President noted that the User Fee Policy says that rates are \$2.00 plus \$0.55 per kilometer with a minimum charge of \$7.50. It was suggested that the Board should discuss the \$2,00 fee and consider increases to cover administrative costs. Home and Community Support Services costs more than SMART, charging \$0.50 per kilometre. A comparison with HCSS is not “apples to apples” since it receives provincial funding, uses volunteer drivers and receives more in donations. SMART should be increasing donations and since the Canada Revenue Agency rate per kilometre is \$0.68, SMART has room to adjust its rate.

The President proposed a pilot project for Chatsworth which would be evaluated to decide future contribution rates. Measures for success should be set for a pilot project and other variables need to be taken into account such as operational costs, revenue, and donations.. It was noted that there has been no consultation with affected clients in Chatsworth and it is important to consider the client side. Scott Mackey said that he has been looking at the client side and wants to ensure that they continue to have the service, and if there is no decrease in Chatsworth’s contribution, there will likely be no service. He would like information from the Manager to present to Chatsworth Council the opportunity to reduce its contribution and continue to provide service and would like to report to the next SMART meeting that Chatsworth has agreed to continue in the partnership at a specific contribution level. He suggested an implementation date of April 1, 2024 for a pilot project to allow sufficient notice to clients of a rate change. The Manager was directed to draft terms for the pilot, including consideration of the number of rides.

It was agreed that nothing should be sent to the media about any user fee increase, although the Manager should have talking points in case he receives calls. A letter will be sent to Chatsworth clients about the new rates, and a statement added to the web site about the pilot project in Chatsworth.

There was discussion about the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) which prohibits charging more for service to those with disabilities than to other clients but applies only if there is an existing transit service.

Motion Moved by Cheryl Grace; Seconded by Doug Kennedy

That the SMART Board offer to the Township of Chatsworth the opportunity to participate in a one year pilot project beginning April 1, 2024 based on Chatsworth making a specific financial contribution to the SMART partnership with an appropriately calculated rate per kilometre for Chatsworth clients.

Carried

7. New Business

A. Fil-A-Van Charity

SMART staff proposed requesting non-perishable food items from local businesses to donate to foodbanks. It was agreed that the staff should do what is manageable in 2023.

Motion Moved by Jen Shaw; Seconded by Monica Singh-Soares

That one of Saugeen Mobility’s vehicles be used to solicit non-perishable food items for the Grey Bruce Food Share food distribution hub..

Carried

B. Explanation of the Gas Tax Funding Model

The Manager explained that the gas tax was introduced in 2004 at \$0.01 per litre to support municipal transit systems. It was raised to \$0.015 per litre in 2005 and to \$0.02 in 2006. In 2013, it was legislated at \$0.02 per litre and in 2017, the province promised to raise it to \$0.04 per litre in light of rising transit costs, although it remains at \$0.02. There are 108 public transit systems in 144 municipalities in Ontario including SMART’s 9 partners (not including Grey Highlands which has not signed an official agreement). The gas tax funds given out are based on 70% rides and 30% population over five years and industry associations are pushing for more. The total gas tax provided to SMART last year was \$748,000 and \$350 million was distributed in total.

The photocopier costs \$2,532 annually including the cost of copies. To rent over 6 years including the cost of copies would be \$15,192 and to purchase over the same time would be more than \$18,940. If SMART purchased a copier to replace its two year old machine, there would be additional costs for supplies such as toners, and a drum. Copiers typically last about 8 years and a new machine would cost \$9,000. Leasing involves no maintenance or unforeseen costs and since technology changes quickly, a purchased machine could become out of date.

Motion Moved by Warren Dickert; Seconded by Scott Mackey
That SMART continue to rent its photocopier.
Carried

E. Emergency Plans

SMART has plans with long-term care homes in Grey and Bruce including Grey Gables, Rockwood Terrace and BruceLea Haven. These facilities are required to have emergency plans and approached SMART to help in evacuations. The Manager has contacted hospitals and is waiting to hear back. There are plans in place with Lee Manor and Gateway Haven on a “grandfathered” basis. The Board discussed whether SMART should be involved in emergency plans only with facilities in its member municipalities or with any facility in Grey-Bruce including those privately owned and other types of seniors’ residences, although it would not want to refuse to help to evacuate residents in an emergency. Discussion turned to whether an agreement is required with each facility or a policy could cover the terms and conditions for assistance. It was suggested that individual plans with each facility are not required and SMART could let facilities know that they can reach out in an emergency and SMART would decide if it is in a position to help. The Manager confirmed that staff has been notified that they might be called upon to volunteer in an emergency requiring evacuation.

F. Decreased Contribution for Chatsworth Pilot Project

The Manager reviewed the following options for Chatsworth:

- A zero contribution would require a user fee of \$1.65 per kilometre compared to the \$0.55 current rate;
- A \$20,000 contribution (a 55% reduction) would result in a user fee of \$0.91 per kilometre
- A \$15,000 contribution would result in a user fee of \$1.09 per kilometre
- A \$10,000 contribution (a 77% reduction) would result in a user fee of \$1.27 per kilometre.

A municipality participating in SMART must contribute to the organization so a zero contribution is not an option. The Ministry of Transportation confirmed that a municipality can decrease its contributions since the rates are negotiated amongst the municipalities and SMART, and are not set by the Ministry. The Manager noted that reductions in user fees will result in reductions in gas tax funds and the above options do not take into account a reduction in gas tax. Scott Mackey thanked the Board for exploring options for Chatsworth and noted that if the number of rides does not change, the gas tax will not change.

The average ride in Chatsworth is 25 kilometres and at the current rate of \$7.50 plus \$0.55 per kilometer would cost \$13.75 plus an additional fee of \$2.00 that has historically been applied for a total of \$15.75. A round trip from Chatsworth to Owen Sound by taxi would cost \$50.00. The gas tax formula is 70% rides and 30% population, so a decrease in rides will impact the gas tax since ridership carries a weight of 70% in the formula. The Manager said the gas tax is not calculated for each municipality and agreed to ask the Ministry for a breakdown. The maximum amount of gas tax is 75% of the total of donations, user fees and municipal contributions. Warren Dickert raised the issue of the overall impact and the effect on ridership if every SMART municipality wanted to reduce its contribution. Some clients might still use the service rather than drive or use other options, but it would likely reduce rides, but not significantly since people will still need the service. Reducing the municipal contribution ensures that municipalities under budget pressures can stay in the partnership and still provide the service but it would only affect the gas tax if rides go down. A pilot project involving Chatsworth would allow an opportunity to determine the impact on rides and make necessary adjustments. The Manager noted that in 2022, 373,542 billed kilometers generated \$339,652.05 in user fees and municipal contributions amounted to \$694,500.

It was proposed that the SMART Board make a delegation to the Minister of Transportation at the upcoming Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) on January 21 – 23, 2024. It was suggested that contact also be made with the transportation critic for the official opposition. Delegations must be requested by November 20, 2023. Board Members Ed McGugan, Jen Shaw and Scott Mackey plan to attend ROMA.

Direction was provided to the President to request that the CAO of Huron-Kinloss make a request for a delegation by SMART at ROMA and Warren Dickert contacted the CAO and the Director of Corporate Services/Treasurer for the Town of Hanover on the same matter.

8. Correspondence

There was no correspondence.

9. Reports and Recommendations

A. Report on October 2023 Operations

The Manager presented the report, noting that October 2023 saw 2440 rides with \$37,286.40 in user fees and 36,884 billed kilometers, an increase of 15% in rides and 5% in both fees and billed kilometers over last year. It would cost \$6,000 to change the current system to generate a report for each trip by municipality. A new system to replace TripSpark, which currently costs \$22,000 per year, would cost \$24,000 to start, and \$120,000 in annual licensing fees. The Manager is working on this issue and will contact other system providers. There was discussion about other ways to track mileage and the Manager said that SMART has software to calculate distances driven, and the issue is how to calculate “deadheads” and trips for each municipality. The Manager agreed to explore the capabilities of the existing software and other ways to generate reports by municipality.

Direction was provided to the Manager to provide options with respect to the amount of the user fee at the Board’s next meeting.

Motion Moved by Scott Mackey; seconded by Doug Townsend
That the report on October 2023 operations be accepted as presented.
Carried

10. Committee Reports

There were no Committee Reports.

11. Closed Session

Motion Moved by Scott Mackey; seconded by Warren Dickert
That the Board of Directors of SMART move into Closed Session at 12.20 p.m. in order to address personal matters about an identifiable individual.

Carried

The Manager and the Recording Secretary remained for the closed session.

The Board of Directors of SMART reconvened in open session at 12:40 p.m. and the President confirmed that the Board had gone in closed session and discussed personal matters about an identifiable individual, and that no other matters were discussed.

Motion Moved by Scott Mackey; seconded by Doug Townsend
That the Manager be directed to obtain information for the Board on the requirements for meetings in a not-for-profit corporation.

Carried

12. Adjournment & Upcoming Meeting Dates

Upcoming Meeting Dates

Friday, December 22, 2023, 10:00 a.m. Regular Monthly Board Meeting, SMART Office, 603 Bruce Rd 19, Walkerton, ON

Motion Moved by Jen Shaw; Seconded by Warren Dickert
That the Board of Directors of SMART adjourn at 12:50 p.m.

Carried



Ed McGugan, President



Catherine McKay, Recording Secretary