

# ***SAUGEEN MOBILITY***

**and REGIONAL TRANSIT**

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## **Report to Brockton Council**

Saugeen Mobility and Regional Transit (SMART) is your local specialized public transit partnership serving the mentally and physically challenged residents of Arran-Elderslie, Brockton, Chatsworth, Hanover, Huron-Kinloss, Kincardine, Saugeen Shores, Southgate and West Grey.

SMART provides safe, dependable transportation solutions to individuals and groups for medical appointments, employment opportunities, shopping and social outings.

Ridership in 2018 totaled 36020, up 10.88% from 32486 in 2017 and 33556 rides in 2016. There were 26551 individual rides and 9469 group excursion rides.

User fees in 2018 totaled \$432,149, up 13.12% from \$382,020 in 2017 and \$383,712 in 2016.

Audited operating expenses in 2018 were \$1,764,516 compared to \$1,491,536 in 2017 with a 2018 net operating deficit of \$693,393 compared with \$493,210 the year before.

The gross operating deficit for 2018 (total operating expenses less total user fees) was \$1,311,947 or \$36.42 per ride compared to \$1,109,516 or \$34.15 per ride in 2017. This deficit was funded by municipal contributions of \$630,000 (\$17.49 per ride) and MTO Gas Tax for Transit funding of \$672,973 (\$18.68 per ride). Donations and miscellaneous revenue account for the remainder.

SMART currently has a fleet of 27 vehicles and 30 drivers. Three adapted minivans were added to the fleet in 2018 and two 9-passenger buses were added in 2017.

Individual user fees are currently \$2.00 plus \$.50/km with a \$7.50 minimum per ride. The first hour of waiting time is free; after that waiting time is charged at \$20.00 per hour. Out of area rides or where

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a vehicle and driver are deemed to be 'chartered' are charged at \$.50/km plus \$20.00 per hour from the time the vehicle arrives at the client's pick-up until the client is done with the vehicle. There are no 'deadhead' charges.

SMART's minimum individual user fee of \$7.50 is one of the highest in the province.

A 'ride' is defined as one person going from point 'A' to point 'B'. A 'return trip' is 2 'rides'. As per AODA, each client may have a companion or attendant ride free of charge. Attendant/companion rides are counted as rides along with the client. As well, extra stops between destination points are counted as rides since there is a charge for them.

Please note that as a public transit service SMART is barred by legislation from restricting rides to clients for any reason including purpose, destination or number. As well, SMART has no authority to 'means test' its clients.

SMART is a registered Canadian charity. Donations are gratefully received and tax receipts are issued for all donations.

In the view of the Ontario Ministry of Transportation, public transit services are a municipal responsibility. The Government of Ontario, however, provides considerable funding to all transit systems in the province to support their operations through the Ministry of Transportation's Dedicated Gas Tax Funds for Public Transportation Program. Funds under this program are paid early in the year based on population and ridership data from two calendar years previous (March 2018 funding was based on 2016 statistics).

The Town of Hanover acts as SMART's 'Host Municipality' for the purpose of receiving and holding 'in trust' this dedicated Gas Tax funding until such time as it is used for capital purchases, operational deficits or other projects deemed to be improvements to the transit service in accordance with MTO guidelines and criteria - the most fundamental of which is exceeding the 'baseline' local revenue number.

Like all transit systems, SMART has a 'baseline revenue' amount that must be exceeded by 'local revenue' in order to have access to the MTO Gas Tax Reserve Account. This revenue number was established in 2004 based on the average of expenditures over the three-year period

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2001-03 and is increased by 2% annually. For 2018, this 'baseline' amount is \$486,278 and will increase to \$496,004 for 2019.

In 2018, SMART received \$709,844 from the MTO Gas Tax for Transit Program. Approximately \$719,000 is expected in 2019.

MTO funding under the Gas Tax for Transit Program is subject to a cap of 75% of local revenue – municipal funding, user fees, donations, etc.

For each funding cycle, the MTO makes two calculations for each transit service – the amount a service is eligible for (based on population and ridership) and the amount represented by the 75% local revenue cap. Each service then receives the LOWER of these two amounts.

SMART is no longer limited by the 75% local revenue cap. It is only limited by its ridership.

SMART received \$98,205 in federal Public Transit Infrastructure Funding, which was used primarily to purchase Novus scheduling software from TripSpark Group. This software is allowing SMART to schedule rides more efficiently and track those rides more accurately.

The federal government has stated there will be a Phase 2 of this funding but details have yet to be announced.

SMART is far more dependent on MTO Gas Tax funding for operational expenses than other comparable transit services. This is leaving fewer and fewer dollars available to replace vehicles. As the vehicle fleet ages it requires more frequent and more expensive repairs and becomes more prone to 'in service' breakdowns which affect both service to our clients and our reputation for being dependable.

Currently, Brockton has 195 registered clients.

In 2018, clients from Brockton took 4836 rides compared to 3672 rides in 2017, an increase of 31.70%.

SMART's 2019 local revenue is budgeted to be \$1,060,000 of which \$660,000 is to be provided by the 9 partner municipalities, \$394,000 by users through user fees and \$6,000 by donations and other miscellaneous revenue sources.

Operational expenses are budgeted to be \$1,760,000.

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The net operating deficit of \$700,000 will be fully funded by the Gas Tax Reserve account. This will fully deplete the account leaving no money for badly needed new vehicles.

In keeping with MTO methodology, municipal contributions are calculated annually with a 30% weighting applied to population and a 70% weighting applied to ridership. This overall contribution percentage or 'share' is then applied to the total municipal contribution to give the amount due from each municipality.

Brockton's share of the 2019 municipal contribution is \$86,385.28, up from \$74,592.74 in 2018 and up from \$74,613.36 in 2017.

Brockton's 'share' increased to 13.09% from 11.84% in 2018 and 12.23% in 2017.

For local taxpayers, SMART represents a tremendous value when compared to other specialized public transit services. SMART serves a population of more than 82,000 which makes it one of 22 services in Ontario serving populations of 50,000 to 150,000.

In 2017, the other 21 services had average reported operational expenses of \$115,350 per vehicle while SMART had operational expenses of \$62,147 per vehicle – about 46% below the average.

On average, these 21 peer services received municipal funding for more than 77% of their 2017 operating expenses while SMART received about 41%.

Municipal funding for these 21 peer services in 2017 amounted to \$10.52 per capita on average compared to SMART's municipal funding of \$7.59 per capita.

Compared to its peer group, SMART continues to be chronically underfunded by its municipal partners. This underfunding means that SMART is far more dependent on the Gas Tax for Transit Program for operational costs than its peers. The effect of this is that SMART will very soon have difficulty purchasing new vehicles since all MTO funding will be spent on operational expenses.

For those who use and depend on SMART, this is a service that is highly valued. The service you provide through SMART helps to keep the most vulnerable members of your community independent, mobile and

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involved. Many studies have shown a direct link between mobility and good health, both physical and mental.

Medically related rides constitute an estimated 60% of the rides supplied by SMART. The remaining rides are for social outings, shopping and work related transportation.

Municipal services like SMART are not simply expenditures. They are investments in building communities. People no longer just live where they were raised or 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 they want (or need) are not available in a particular community, they will choose (or perhaps be forced) to live somewhere else where those services are available.

The population of Canada, especially in rural areas, is aging (as you no doubt know). There will only be increasing demand for this type of service over the next few decades. Luckily, the provincial government recognizes this fact and appears very interested in transportation issues, especially in rural areas.

According to statistics from the 2011 census, Bruce County had 20% of its population aged 65 or older. In Grey County, that percentage is about 21%. This compares to 14.6% for the Province of Ontario as a whole. The median age of the population is 47 years in Bruce and 47.3 years in Grey compared to 40.4 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.

If you have further questions or comments regarding SMART, I can be reached at 519-881-2589 or by e-mail at [roger@saugeenmobility.ca](mailto:roger@saugeenmobility.ca).