

Scott Pegg, Director
Transportation Policy Branch
Ministry of Transportation, Policy and Planning
777 Bay Street, 30th Flr, Ste. 3000
Toronto ON M7A 2J8
Scott.Pegg@ontario.ca

22 August 2016

Re: Intercommunity Bus Modernization Engagement

The Bruce Grey Poverty Task Force brings over 34 organizations to a planning table focused on reducing poverty in Grey and Bruce Counties. Access to and the ability to afford community-based transportation services is a key issue for both our counties.

While the Ontario government's discussion document outlines a number of reasons that transportation is important it stops short of identifying that **transportation is important in rural communities for overall health and wellbeing**. The need goes beyond medical transportation to access to activities of daily living (e.g. social appointments, recreation and leisure which is important for physical and mental health) and to access basic needs such as employment, groceries, community food programs, adult and alternative education; and basic supplies i.e. clothing (not available in every community) just to name a few examples.

We also recommend that the definition of inter-community transportation be understood in the context of rural communities. One municipality may have several communities that are up to 30 minutes apart with no provision for transportation and another municipality may offer transportation within their boundary lines but not across them.

Additionally, the Ministry of Transportation has categorized Grey and Bruce Counties as being part of Southwestern Ontario but our lack of transportation services, low population density and large geographic coverage is closer to the realities of Northern and Remote Ontario.

A 2014 Grey County Transportation Study (Lough Barnes Consulting Group) identified:

- Four vulnerable population groups are in highest need of transportation services in Grey County: lone seniors 65+, people living with disability, people living in poverty and youth.
- Only 10% of the potential population that would use transportation services is currently served by existing community transportation services.
- There is a heavy reliance on volunteers from both official programs (Canadian Cancer Society, Beaver Valley Outreach, Home and Community Support Services) and unofficial (neighbours and friends) to meet some of the transportation needs within the county.

- When the majority of current volunteers are seniors in an aging community, volunteerism capacity is decreasing. Currently 1 in 5 Grey County residents are seniors. By 2017, this will be 1 in 4.
- A narrow eligibility criteria leaves many youth and people living in poverty underserved by existing services. When youth lack transportation to access employment opportunities, we experience out-migration to urban areas or youth remain in rural areas but with limited resources; putting financial strain on families and support systems.
- Youth at Grey Highlands Secondary School identified lack of transportation as the number one barrier prohibiting participation in health promoting programs and said transportation was the number one issue that needs to be addressed within the community. (South East Grey Community Health Centre, 2011)

Challenges exist to provide a cost effective model with a low rural population and the Bruce Grey Poverty Task Forces and its Transportation Action Group remain committed to advocating for affordable public transportation in Grey and Bruce Counties.

Please find our response to your questions in the following pages. We welcome continuous and open dialogue.

Yours Sincerely,

Jill Umbach
Planning Network Coordinator
Bruce Grey Poverty Task Force
Jill.umbach@gmail.com

Poverty Task Force response to questions posed by the Ministry of Transportation:

- 1. Do you support the removal of market entry controls of the intercity bus industry? Why or why not?*

It is really important to look at the regulatory barriers to increase transportation access in Grey and Bruce counties. Small, northern and rural communities that do not have intercommunity passenger transportation services need provincial leadership and assistance to create such systems.

We request the Ontario government and its Ministries to be more flexible in their resource allocation, eligibility, and reporting requirements to allow communities to pool resources across various Ministries so that transportation services can be planned and delivered to meet community needs.

- 2. What are the benefits of removing market entry controls? What are the drawbacks?*

Currently there is no legislation preventing a carrier from dropping a less profitable route and keeping profitable ones. This poses a challenge in Grey and Bruce Counties where we have experienced losses of intercommunity private bus routes i.e. Greyhound Bus Lines.

We request the Ontario government to consider changes in policies that may reduce services to rural communities due to losses in profit and find ways to ensure standards are set for public transportation across rural communities.

- 3. A system needs to be in place to ensure that all vehicles, including those carrying less than 10 passengers, are safe and properly insured when being used to transport people between municipalities for a fee. What do you think the minimum safety and insurance requirements should be for these vehicles?*

We support all necessary safety procedures, however we want to ensure the Ontario government recognizes the cost associated with insurance and the barriers that present in paying for insurance within a rural context with low rider volumes and often more vulnerable passengers (ie. Youth, seniors and people with disabilities). We encourage the Ontario government to provide appropriate mechanisms to make safety and insurance feasible in small communities.

- 4. How much of your business is currently attributed to non-urgent medical transfer (patients, supplies, etc.)?*

We are not a transportation service provider.

5. *Could municipalities and social and health organizations better partner with transportation providers to serve the public? If so, how?*

Across Grey Bruce Counties, transportation service provision is funded by different ministries which have different eligible criteria/mandates attached to funding. Currently the Ontario government provides funding for some municipalities with public transportation systems, such as Meaford, Hanover and Owen Sound. However, not all municipalities direct funding towards public transportation and more leadership is needed to create a system that provides public transportation between communities.

We would welcome the Ontario government to examine whether incentives being provided to companies would fill gaps in the service.

“In Grey and Bruce Counties we can bus a child to school from a small community but we can’t get a parent from the same household to work.”

Jill Umbach, Coordinator
Bruce Grey Poverty Task Force

We know that other rural communities have created shared transportation partnerships. We would welcome the Ontario government to take the lead in facilitating and setting a standard for shared transportation (or at least some partnership or collaboration) across age groups similar to public transportation in the urban centres.

“[You can get a] free ride to gamble, but not to [your] doctor.”

Advisory Group Member
South East Grey Community Health Centre

We recommend that the Ministry of Transportation should adopt a “Health in All Policies” approach when implementing any new or revised strategies, especially at a time when the Health Minister is calling for a system reform to put “patients first”.

The Ministry of Transportation should utilize a tool such as the Ministry of Health & Long Terms Care’s “Health Equity Impact Assessment” to ensure equity in the revised approach to inter-community transportation.

Various barriers need to be considered in building a viable community transportation model.

- The barriers in regards to eligibility criteria have been mentioned, but the intake process itself can sometimes present barriers and could be reduced with more coordinated and streamlined “systems & funding streams”.
- Community members have clearly indicated the need for destination focused transportation – for employment, education, and for example shopping but basic needs not available in every community.

- Health and social service providers have also identified that the effectiveness and efficiency of community based services could be improved with reliable and affordable public transportation.
- The definition of affordability needs to be paid close attention to and keeping in mind the most economically disadvantaged community members who could benefit most from public transportation.
- Hours of service when exploring transportation needs, also needs to be examined as the job market often requires evening or weekend shifts.

6. *Are there any innovative services or policies currently in operation in Ontario or in other jurisdictions that you think provide a good model for how transportation networks can develop in the future?*

We are grateful that Grey County has received funding from the Ministry of Transportation to undertake a pilot project to coordinate existing transportation services and to improve access for residents of Grey County. We look to various models of central coordination through a single agency models across Ontario and understand it takes years to build up partnerships and expand services to meet a wide variety of community needs.

We welcome the engagement of the Ministry of Transportation and request that ongoing funds be made available in the future after pilot partnerships are established and strengthened to provide ongoing services.

Recognizing that public transportation in rural areas may not be a profit-making business venture, innovative services should be considered that combine social enterprises.

For example, several Ontario communities have established economic tourism and school board partnerships to provide co-funding and build rider numbers.

- Corridor 11 bus (<http://www.muskoka.on.ca/en/community-and-social-services/Corridor-11-Bus.aspx>)
- Trout (<http://catchthetrout.ca/>).

7. *Is there any other feedback you would like to provide on the issues and/or proposal outlined in this discussion paper?*

