

To:	Warden Matrosovs and Members of Grey County Council
Committee Date:	March 13, 2025
Subject / Report No:	CAOR-CW-01-25
Title:	Community Transportation Update
Prepared by:	Stephanie Stewart
Reviewed by:	Kim Wingrove
Lower Tier(s) Affected:	All

Recommendation

- 1. THAT Report CAOR-CW-01-25 regarding a Community Transit update be received for information.**

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update on the planned end of service for the Grey Transit Route (GTR).

The provincial funding program for the GTR will expire on Monday, March 31, 2025. This report outlines the impact on GTR services, the routes affected, and the steps Grey County is taking to address the situation. Service between Dundalk and Orangeville will temporarily continue. All other routes will end after March 31, 2025.

Grey County staff continue to pursue other funding opportunities to support rural transportation. A Community Transportation Grant Application was submitted in January 2025 with other partners in the region. As of writing this report no decision has been received from the province.

Background and Discussion

The Grey Transit Route is an established intercommunity transit system that provides Grey County residents with an affordable transportation option to several destinations within Grey County. The GTR also offers service between Dundalk and Orangeville. The GTR connects with neighbouring transit services to help passengers reach other destinations such as the GTA, Collingwood, Barrie, and Guelph.

Grey County pursued the Ontario Community Transportation Program funding in 2018 in response to requests from the public and community support agencies for an affordable, reliable

intercommunity transportation option for residents. The terms of the funding program required the County to operate a Conventional Transit System with set fares.

Despite the challenges posed by pandemic regulations, which significantly impacted ridership, the GTR emerged as a leader among its peers in the Community Transportation Program. Ridership grew throughout the program and the service was enhanced beyond grant requirements through the Grey County levy. The GTR was highlighted by the Provincial Government in their Community Transportation Newsletter and was recognized as an expert and was often called upon for advice by peers.

Since its inception, the GTR has been used for employment, shopping, medical appointments, and socializing. Many GTR passengers tend to have fewer alternatives to public transit due to barriers to vehicle ownership. Alternatives to the GTR include carpooling, taxi services, specialized transit services, walking, cycling, or using a mobility device. Public transit offers numerous benefits, including cost savings, environmental conservation, and the ability to work or relax while riding.

Since announcing the end of GTR service on February 24, the community has expressed disappointment. Several comments have been made on social media and staff have been receiving a number of calls and emails from passengers and community members who are concerned. Staff have been consistently communicating back to individuals advising them that the service is unable to continue once provincial funding expires but Grey County will continue to explore new funding opportunities and advocate for rural transit.

Late in the fall of 2024, the province announced a new rural transit funding stream. The program is limited to \$5 million a year for all of Ontario. Grey County has submitted a joint funding application with regional partners to explore further transit solutions. The application is currently under review, and there is no specified timeframe for a decision.

Partnerships

Through this project, the Grey Transit Route has collaborated with local business owners to establish community bus stops. Additionally, partnerships have been formed with organizations such as YMCA Grey Bruce, Launch Pad, Georgian College (Owen Sound and Orangeville campuses), and the Southwest Community Transit Association.

As part of Grey County’s Community Transportation Grant Application, the County received provincial funding to support Launch Pad Youth Activity Centre in Hanover. The funding supported transporting youth enrolled in Launch Pad programming attending a high school within 35 km distance from Launch Pad. Each year Launch Pad received \$43,604 in funding to support this program.

The GTR and Georgian College collaborated to offer post-secondary students an adult bus pass with unlimited rides, benefiting over 1,000 students. According to Georgian College staff, this initiative helped alleviate the financial burden on students, supported them in securing part-time jobs and placements, and enabled them to explore the local community and stay connected with family and friends in the GTA, ultimately enriching their overall student experience.

In 2020, Grey County partnered with South Central Ontario Region Economic Development Corporation to be a part of the [Southwest Community Transit \(SCT\)](#) association. SCT’s mandate is to coordinate:

- the delivery of inter-community public transportation services in southwest Ontario
- share information and develop best practices
- identify economies of scale through shared purchasing and operating agreements,
- act as a common voice to support long-term sustainable transit funding.

The following municipalities make up SCT: Brant County, Huron Shores, Middlesex County, Norfolk County, Oxford County, Perth County, City of Sarnia, Township of Strathroy-Caradoc, City of London, and the Town of Tillsonburg.

Additionally Grey County received financial support from municipal partners to expand days and hours of service and routes. The following municipalities contributed financially:

Other Municipal Contributions to GTR	
Town of Shelburne	\$ 140,247.19
Dufferin County	\$ 54,938.10
Town of South Bruce Peninsula	\$ 203,186.07
Bruce County	\$ 130,981.64

	\$ 529,353.00
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As an expansion of service beyond grant funding, Grey County trialed an additional service route between the communities of Flesherton and Walkerton along Grey Road 4. Consistent ridership was not generated, and a decision was made to end the levy-funded route in 2023.

Lastly, Grey County and the Township of Southgate have received \$2,774,000 in operating funding from the Province of Ontario through the Ontario Community Transportation Program. This funding was crucial in launching and maintaining the GTR service since 2020.

When Grey County looks to the future we must focus on:

Environmental Sustainability

- There must be a focus on environmental dimensions as they can provide evidence for continued support of public transportation. "[Environmental sustainability](#) is focused on eliminating negative outputs of public transportation services, including reductions in GHG emissions, air pollution, noise pollution, and waste, while encouraging the use of renewable resources, and efficiency in material and energy use, for example, need be addressed. In addition, emissions per passenger ought to be applied as an indicator, allowing for just understanding of emissions in relation to passenger volumes.
- In 2018, the population of Grey County was 99,100, and employment was 42,700. Grey County encompasses an area of 4,500km² with nine member municipalities, which together have a 47 percent urban population and 53 percent rural population. Due to the vast expanse of Grey County and the large rural population, transportation throughout the community has unique characteristics and priorities. Private vehicle use, both on and off-road, accounts for 99 percent of the vehicle kilometers travelled, less than 1 percent of all trips are made by active modes (walking and cycling) and transit.
- In 2018, the average person in Grey County spent \$2,000 on fuel for private vehicles and generated 3.8 tonnes of CO₂e.

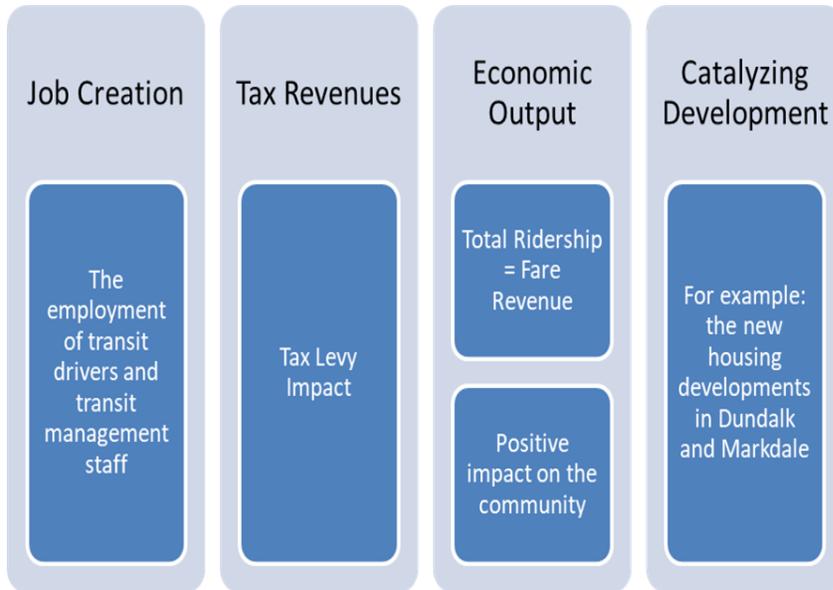
Economic Sustainability

The impact of transit on the economy cannot be understated; transit access supports economic competitiveness. According to industry experts there are seven elements of economic sustainability.

1. volume of transportation
2. ridership
3. costs to service provider
4. fare revenue

- 5. financial stability
- 6. infrastructure capacity
- 7. operational efficiency

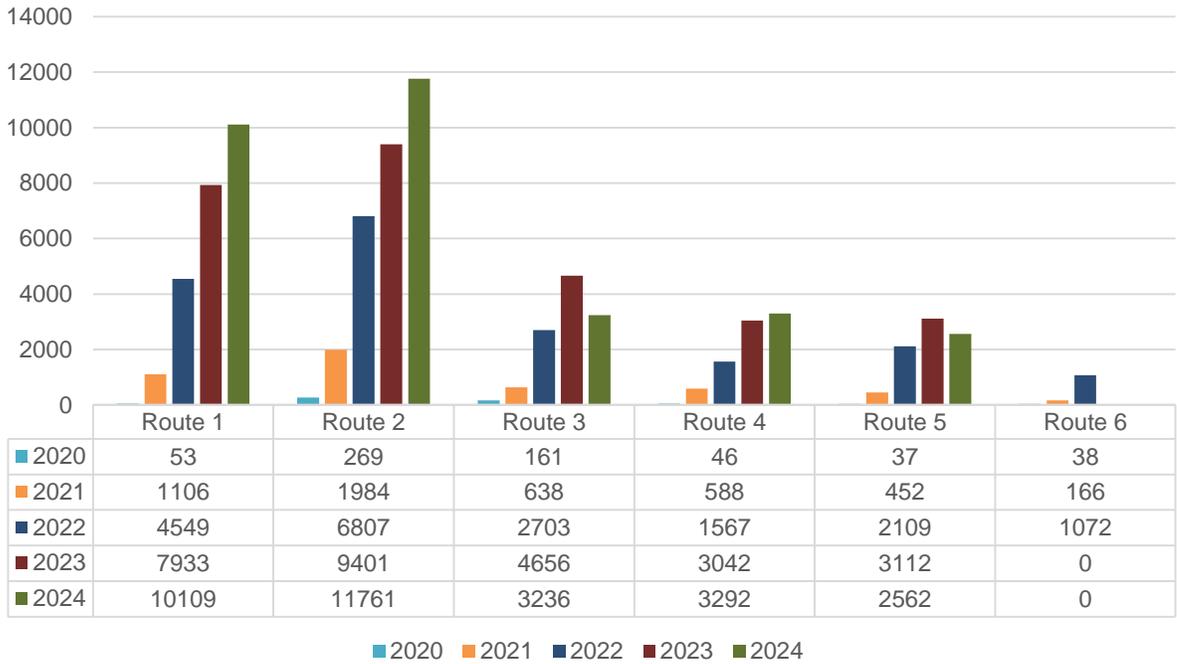
Additionally, the value of transit is significant in terms of job creation, tax revenues, economic output, and catalyzing development. The chart below outlines how the GTR impacts each aspect.



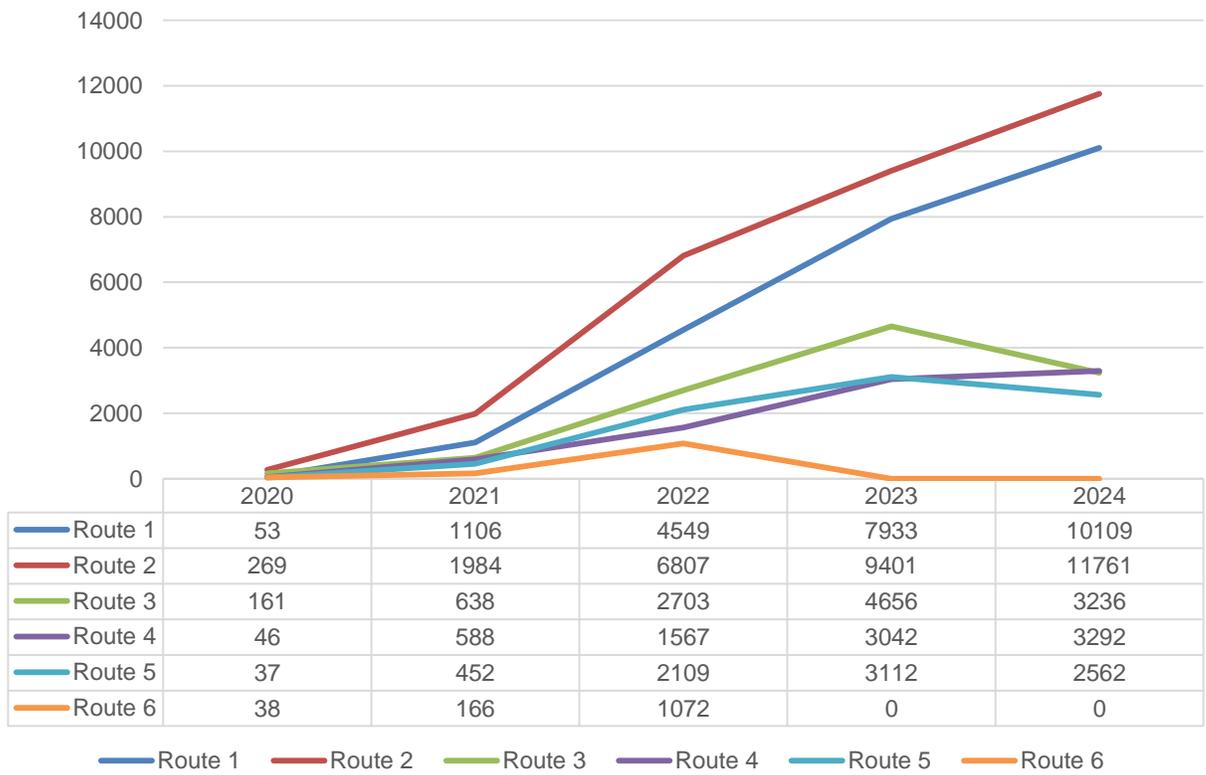
Ridership Statistics

In September 2020, the GTR ridership was low due to pandemic regulations and residents learning about the service. As the system continued to operate and improve, residents became more confident in the reliability and efficiency of the GTR. This early success encouraged additional financial contributions from local municipalities and positively impacted ridership.

Annual Ridership by Route



Annual Ridership by Year



Conclusion

Grey County remains committed to addressing the transportation needs of its residents and will continue to seek funding opportunities and explore alternative solutions to ensure the availability of public transit services. However, effective March 31, 2025, the following GTR routes will cease operations:

Route 1: Between Owen Sound and Dundalk (Highways 6 & 10)

Routes 3 and 4: Between Owen Sound and the Town of The Blue Mountains (Highway 26)

Service for **Route 2** between Dundalk and Orangeville will continue temporarily due to consistently high ridership. Grey County is committed to providing at least 30 days' notice prior to any changes to this route. This route is receiving consistently high ridership and, in partnership with Dufferin County, has been essential to connecting residents of the two counties with employment in the greater Toronto area.

We understand that the discontinuation of these services will be disappointing to many people and continue to encourage any questions or concerns to be sent to gtr@grey.ca.

When the province communicates a decision on Grey County's application to Ontario Transit Investment Fund Application, staff will inform County Council and partners and provide an updated report to Council on next steps if the application is successful.

Financial and Resource Implications

To continue Route 2, Grey Counties portion will come from one time funding, and the remaining amount will come from Dufferin County

Dufferin County Portion	
Month	Costs
April 2025	\$ 16,667.00 plus HST and Fuel Surcharge
May 2025	\$ 16,667.00 plus HST and Fuel Surcharge
June 2025	\$ 16,666.00 plus HST and Fuel Surcharge

Total estimated cost to continue Route 2 until June 30, 2025 is \$50,000.00 plus HST for Dufferin County's portion.

Grey County Portion	
Month	Costs
April 2025	\$ 16,667.00 plus HST and Fuel Surcharge
May 2025	\$ 16,667.00 plus HST and Fuel Surcharge

June 2025	\$ 16,666.00 plus HST and Fuel Surcharge
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Total estimated cost to continue Route 2 until June 30, 2025 is \$50,000.00 plus HST for Grey County's portion.

Relevant Consultation

Finance Department

Clerk's Department

Communication Department

Appendices and Attachments

None.