

# Corridor 11 Bus

**ACCELERATING RURAL  
TRANSPORTATION SOLUTIONS**



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## A. Overview of Transportation Initiative

The Corridor 11 Bus serves the 125-kilometre stretch of Highway 11 that runs between Huntsville at the north end and Barrie at the south end. The purpose of the bus is to provide a coordinated transportation option for Muskoka residents, specifically along the Highway 11 Corridor. It is operated by Hammond Transportation, under contract with the District Municipality of Muskoka. It operates Monday to Friday, making stops along the way in Bracebridge, Gravenhurst, Washago and Orillia.

## B. Community Profile

The District Municipality of Muskoka, located in Central Ontario, was established as an upper-tier municipality on January 1, 1971.

### Geography

The District Municipality of Muskoka is 4,761 square kilometres in size. It extends from Georgian Bay in the west to the western border of Algonquin Provincial Park in the east, and from the Severn River in the south to Novar in the north.<sup>1</sup>

Located on the southern edge of the Canadian Shield, Muskoka is comprised of diverse ecosystems, including approximately 1,600 lakes, numerous rivers, wetlands,

forests and barrens. For over 100 years, Muskoka has been a popular destination, drawing over 2.1 million visitors annually.

### Political Structure

The regional government seat is Bracebridge, and the largest population centre is Huntsville. There are six municipalities in Muskoka: the Towns of Bracebridge, Gravenhurst, and Huntsville; and the Townships of Georgian Bay, Lake of Bays, and Muskoka Lakes. The Wahta Mohawk Territory and Moose Deer Point are also in the district.<sup>2</sup>

### Demographics

Approximately 60% of Muskoka's population of 142,423 is considered seasonal, while the remaining 40% is permanent. The seasonal population is generally much more affluent than the permanent population, who face many of the same day-to-day cost of living challenges that others in northern and rural Ontario face.

Authors of *Dispelling the Myth and Closing the Gap* report that, between 2007 and 2012, the Ontario Works caseload increased by 95%, the highest caseload growth "in any of the 47 upper-tier service providers in Ontario." They also report an above-average number of cases in the Ontario Disabilities Support Program caseload.<sup>3</sup> They further note

<sup>1</sup> The District Municipality of Muskoka. *Dispelling the Myth and Closing the Gap: The District Municipality of Muskoka Submission to the Province of Ontario*. March 2013.

<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/District\\_Municipality\\_of\\_Muskoka](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/District_Municipality_of_Muskoka)

<sup>3</sup> The District Municipality of Muskoka. *Dispelling the Myth and Closing the Gap: The District Municipality of Muskoka Submission to the Province of Ontario*. March 2013.

Municipality	Permanent Population	Estimated Seasonal Population	Estimated Total Population	% Seasonal
Bracebridge	15,414	7,500	22,914	32.7%
Georgian Bay	2,482	15,958	18,440	86.5%
Gravenhurst	12,055	12,551	24,606	51.0%
Huntsville	19,056	6,833	25,889	26.4%
Lake of Bays	3,506	12,801	16,307	78.5%
Muskoka Lakes	6,707	27,561	34,268	80.4%
District of Muskoka	59,220	83,203	142,423	58.4%

From: The District Municipality of Muskoka Growth Strategy, January 2014.<sup>5</sup>

that, “Year-round residents struggle to make ends meet on lower than average incomes and high housing costs.”<sup>4</sup>

Muskoka’s population is older than the provincial average. For example, 38% of Muskoka’s permanent population is over the age of 55, compared with the Ontario average of 27%. Similarly, 22% is over the age of 65, compared with the provincial average of 15%.<sup>6,7</sup>

### Major industries

Given the natural assets, numerous resorts, parks and abundant recreational opportunities, it is not surprising that the main driver of the local economy is tourism. This, in turn, is helping to fuel growth in residential and commercial developments as more and more people are visiting year-round as well as building year-round vacation homes and cottages. On its own, the tourism sector was

responsible for employing 57% of the labour force in 2001. Next to tourism, light manufacturing and a growing service sector are helping drive the local economy.<sup>8</sup>

Although the tourism sector has been a boon to the local economy, officials have also identified that the jobs associated with tourism are relatively low-paying. The median earnings in Muskoka are 78% of the provincial average, and the unemployment rates have been among the highest in Ontario.<sup>9</sup>

Additional economic development challenges reported for the region include a “lack of diversification, rising assessment values, labour shortages, lack of affordable housing, lack of telecommunications infrastructure in rural areas and the high costs of developing road, water and sewer infrastructure.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Watson & Associates Economists Ltd. The District Municipality of Muskoka Growth Strategy: 2013 Phase 2 Update. January 10, 2014. <https://muskoka.civicweb.net/Documents/DocumentDisplay.aspx?ID=22901>; Accessed July 28, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> The District of Muskoka Demographic Profiles, p. 16: <https://muskoka.civicweb.net/Documents/DocumentDisplay.aspx?ID=17449>

<sup>7</sup> Lura Consulting Transportation in the District of Muskoka: Current Conditions, Gaps and Opportunities. October 2011.

<sup>8</sup> The District Municipality of Muskoka. Dispelling the Myth and Closing the Gap: The District Municipality of Muskoka Submission to the Province of Ontario. March 2013.

<sup>9,10</sup> Ibid.

## C. Background

### Local Transportation Issues

In June 2011, the District of Muskoka engaged the community in a visioning exercise to help identify priority areas for planning purposes. Of the eight priority areas reported, transportation was identified as one with the recommendation to “Provide options for everyone to move around Muskoka that are efficient and safe, including public transit.”<sup>11</sup>

In October 2011, a report outlining the transportation needs and opportunities in Muskoka was released. Research for the report consisted of a transportation services inventory, results from community service provider interviews and a survey, and a gap analysis. The inventory identified a number of transportation services within four main categories:

1. Public/Municipal, including Huntsville Transit’s fixed-route system that operates Monday to Friday; the Bracebridge Trolley (aka Santa’s Trolley), which operates between Victoria Day and Labour Day and is a partnership between the Town of Bracebridge and Santa’s Village; Ontario Northland, which is a coach bus service operating year-round along the major corridors of Highway 69 and Highway 11; and Go Transit, which operates a train service between Toronto and Barrie.
2. Private, including Hammond Transportation, which operates a number of services in Muskoka; eight private taxi companies; the Muskoka Water Taxi, which operates from springtime to November; First Student Canada Bus; and employer-employee services offered through Deerhurst Resort and Taboo Resort.
3. Health Care, which is limited to volunteer driver services for The Pines Long-Term Care

Residence; and chartered vehicles from Hammond Transportation for Leisureworld Caregiving Centre.

4. Community Service-based, including volunteer-based services offered through Canadian Cancer Society – Simcoe Muskoka Unit, Canadian Red Cross Society – Simcoe Muskoka Branch, the District of Muskoka Community Services, Muskoka Family Focus, Muskoka Parry Sound Community Mental Health Services and Muskoka Seniors. Additionally, Community Living South Muskoka provides transportation as part of core support services, with staff being licensed to drive vehicles within the agency’s fleet.

### Transportation Issues in Muskoka

Researchers identified a number of population groups as well as geographic areas that were under-served in the Muskoka region. Among the priority populations requiring greater service were:

- Low-income individuals, including those who are eligible for support from Ontario Works
- Seniors
- People with disabilities
- Women (notably sole support)
- Youth

Key among the geographic areas underserved was Georgian Bay. The researchers note, “The Georgian Bay region is particularly lacking in transportation services with only one taxi company operating out of Midland, Ontario Northlands stopping only in Port Severn, and a fixed mini-bus route from Honey Harbour to Midland once a week.”<sup>12</sup> They also note the limited service to more remote communities such as Dwight, Dorset, MacTier, Severn and Novar; and the limitations for the larger centre of Gravenhurst.

<sup>11</sup> District Municipality of Muskoka Planning and Economic Development. Muskoka Moving Forward: Visioning for the Future – Community Engagement Report. June 2011. Accessed June 20, 2014: <https://muskoka.civicweb.net/Documents/DocumentDisplay.aspx?ID=16873>; also, Muskoka Moving Forward: Visioning for the Future Summary Document. Accessed June 20, 2014: <https://muskoka.civicweb.net/Documents/DocumentDisplay.aspx?ID=16872>

<sup>12</sup> District Municipality of Muskoka Planning and Economic Development. Muskoka Moving Forward: Visioning for the Future – Community Engagement Report. June 2011. Accessed June 20, 2014: <https://muskoka.civicweb.net/Documents/DocumentDisplay.aspx?ID=16873>

The researchers also report the daily challenges that limited transportation presents to residents, including difficulty in searching for and maintaining a job, staying physically and mentally healthy, supporting children's healthy development, improving standards of living, maintaining independence and volunteering in the community. They note, "It was evident [from the research] that transportation is an important social determinant of health and well-being for Muskoka residents, and the impacts from lack of transportation can cascade through many facets of life."<sup>13</sup>

Additionally, the research pointed to gaps related to awareness of existing transportation services provided by agencies, both by the general public and by agencies and service providers themselves. Volunteer-driver recruitment and training for the various volunteer-based transportation programs was also identified as an issue.<sup>14</sup>

### **Opportunities and Assets**

Service providers were asked to comment on strengths and opportunities that could be leveraged for developing a coordinated transportation program in Muskoka. Among the opportunities and assets reported were the following:

- Commitment on the part of agencies involved with the regional transportation committee to finding a solution to the shared transportation challenges
- Geographic proximity of the different agencies to each other, which could help facilitate sharing and pooling of resources
- A sense of momentum related to the work already completed to address the challenges
- A strong volunteer base

- Potential funding opportunities, particularly through the Local Health Integration Network.<sup>15</sup>

The researchers identified the most frequently traveled routes as reported by the service providers. The greatest concentration of trips was along Highway 11 as far south as Barrie, with occasional trips to Toronto for medical appointments.<sup>16</sup> Key among the travel needs along this corridor were trips to Barrie and Orillia for students to attend Georgian College, employment opportunities and medical appointments.<sup>17</sup>

### **Initiative Background**

The final report prepared by Lura was presented to the Inter-Agency Transportation Committee in October 2011.<sup>18</sup> Among the recommendations from the research were three possible initiatives:

1. Expansion of the volunteer driver program among agencies, the funds for which would be ideally obtained through an Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) grant
2. Sharing of agency vans, also part of the OTF application
3. Developing an inter-town/city bus to address the various travel needs, including medical, social, training and employment.<sup>19</sup>

According to Rick Williams, Commissioner of Community Services, in a report to the Community Services Committee of the District Municipality of Muskoka, Hammond Transportation had submitted a proposal to the Municipality for introducing the inter-town bus service on a trial basis between September and December of 2012. The proposal was to have one bus making two trips daily

<sup>13-16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Telephone interview with Shonna Caldwell, Program Information Manager, Muskoka Community Services. June 17, 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Among the organizations involved with the Committee were Red Cross; Muskoka Seniors; Family, Youth and Child Services of Muskoka; Muskoka Family Focus; Community Living Huntsville; Community Living South Muskoka; Hammons; the Township of Georgian Bay; and the District Municipality of Muskoka.

<sup>19</sup> Rick Williams, Commissioner of Community Services, staff memo to Chair and Members of the Community Services Committee. July 9, 2012 (Report No: CS-7-2012-7). Accessed electronically, June 25, 2014.

between Huntsville and Barrie, Monday to Friday. It was estimated that the break-even number of travellers would be approximately 25 per day, depending on ticket prices and distances travelled. Williams noted, “Hammonds suggest that, given industry experience, they would have a good sense of viability and sustainability of the route after 10-12 weeks.”<sup>20</sup>

### Initial Challenges

The Corridor 11 Bus debuted on September 24, 2012. However, the service had to be suspended on October 17, following what Hammond Transportation referred to as “opposition by a current existing licensed carrier.”<sup>21</sup> They suspended operations “until an application for a permanent license could be submitted and reviewed by the Ontario Highway Transport Board (OHTB).”<sup>22</sup> The Bus resumed its twice-daily route on December 3, 2012.

## D. Current Operations

The Corridor 11 Bus has now been operating for almost two years in a three-year pilot project. In April 2013, the service was expanded. In a media release from March 27, 2013, Hammond Transportation reported the following:

*“Starting on Tuesday, April 2, 2013, the last Corridor 11 Bus will now leave from Barrie, heading north, at 4 pm and there will be an additional late afternoon run going south between Bracebridge and Gravenhurst. An additional stop has been added to take riders to the South Muskoka Memorial Hospital in Bracebridge and there is a new, more central, drop-off and pick-up point in Huntsville at 1 King William Street.”<sup>23</sup>*

Currently, the Corridor 11 Bus runs Monday to Friday. The bus first leaves Huntsville at 6:30 a.m., heading south with stops in Bracebridge, Gravenhurst, Washago, and Orillia, finally arriving at the Georgian College campus in

Barrie at 8:45 a.m. From there, it heads north, travelling the same route with additional stops in Bracebridge, arriving in Huntsville at 11:10 a.m. Another southbound trip begins at 11:15 a.m., arriving at the Georgian College campus in Barrie at 1:40 p.m. An additional southbound trip leaves Bracebridge at 4:20 p.m. with two stops – one in Bracebridge and one in Gravenhurst at 4:45 p.m. The final northbound trip of the day leaves Barrie at 4:00 p.m. and arrives in Huntsville at 6:20 p.m.

One-way fares range from \$4.00 between Orillia and Washago to \$22.00 for a trip between Huntsville and Barrie. Round-trip fares range from \$7.00 to \$43.00.

Seats on the bus can be reserved in advance through Hammond Transportation, and tickets can also be purchased directly from the bus driver.

### Ownership and Funding Model

The Corridor 11 Bus is owned and operated by Hammond Transportation. The initiative was developed to help address the overspending in transportation costs by Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Supports Program (ODSP) clients needing access to transportation (i.e. taxis and gas reimbursement). With the number of clients expected to increase and the costs of transportation to grow significantly, the Corridor 11 pilot project was developed. To support the pilot phase of the initiative, Hammond has received \$15,000 per year from the District of Muskoka for the three years of the pilot, which includes the purchasing of 1,000 tickets per year as a means of providing alternative methods of transportation as well as providing other municipalities with the option to explore similar agreements with Hammond Transportation in the future. These tickets help offset the transportation costs of OW and ODSP clients “who need to get to training, school, medical appointments and job interviews.”<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Hammond Transportation media release, “Corridor 11 Bus Back on the Road with Temporary Complimentary Rides within Muskoka”. November 26, 2012. Accessed June 25, 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Hammond Transportation media release, “Corridor 11 Bus Expands Schedule to Meet Rider Needs”. March 27, 2013. Accessed June 25, 2014.

<sup>24</sup> Telephone interview with Shonna Caldwell, Program Information Manager, Muskoka Community Services. June 17, 2014.



### Current Ridership

It is estimated that 100 passengers are using the Corridor 11 Bus each week.<sup>25</sup> According to Rick Williams, this is the desired goal for making the operation sustainable.<sup>26</sup>

In a media release in December of 2013, Hammond Transportation reported being pleased with the increased ridership over the first year of operation. They identified “some very noticeable trends,” including the following:

- Almost three-quarters of all southbound riders were originating from either Huntsville or Bracebridge.
- The majority of riders were travelling to either Barrie or Orillia, with “almost equal emphasis on travel to one of the Georgian College campuses or a hospital.”
- They also found that the majority of northbound travellers were originating from Soldiers Memorial Hospital in Orillia.

Scott Hammond, Director of Operations, also reported something unexpected: “Although the original intention of the Corridor 11 Bus was to move riders out of Muskoka to select locations in Orillia and Barrie, we found that over a quarter of all riders are using the service to move between locations within Muskoka, such as between Huntsville and Bracebridge or between Bracebridge and Gravenhurst.”<sup>28</sup>

Rick Williams also reported a number of trends, including the following:

- The District of Muskoka has committed to an average of 10 ticket purchases per week based on current client usage requirements and costs.
- Actual District of Muskoka usage is above projection and is helping to reduce the cost pressures on transportation within the OW budget.
- Usage by the general public is the key to the success of the program. It seems that college student usage has been a good market area.
- Medical appointment usage has been less than anticipated but is growing.
- Promotion for the Corridor 11 Bus continues and with growing awareness it is anticipated that sustainability can be maintained.<sup>29</sup>

### Impacts

Still within the pilot phase of the initiative, an evaluation of the Corridor 11 Bus has not yet been completed; however, one is planned for later in the project to help assess its sustainability. Nonetheless, there are a number of benefits that have been identified to date, including the following comment from Shonna Caldwell, Program Information Manager with Muskoka Community Services about the economic and social benefits:

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Rick Williams, Commissioner of Community Services, staff memo to Chair and Members of the Community Services Committee. January 22, 2014 (Report No: CS-1-2014-4). Accessed electronically, June 25, 2014.

<sup>27</sup> Hammond Transportation media release, “Corridor 11 Bus Celebrates One Full Year of Service”. December 23, 2013.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Rick Williams, Commissioner of Community Services, staff memo to Chair and Members of the Community Services Committee. January 22, 2014 (Report No: CS-1-2014-4). Accessed electronically, June 25, 2014.

*“Being in Community Services and social assistance being a big part of our caseload, I can see [the Corridor 11 Bus] has impacted vulnerable people in Muskoka significantly, especially for clients that need to get to appointments or to work. We see it even, for example, people living here in Huntsville and needing to see their case managers in Bracebridge. It has made a significant impact on those that do not have transportation.”<sup>30</sup>*

An additional and somewhat unanticipated community economic benefit is related to employment opportunities. Prior to the Corridor 11 Bus, people without their own means of transportation looking for work would be limited in their options: either they had to find work within a limited geographic proximity to where they live or they would have to leave the Muskoka area. With the introduction of the Bus, officials have found an increasing percentage of riders using the service to search for and take jobs south of the Muskoka region. According to Shonna, “The impact on employability has been significant, and it isn’t something we were expecting, both with general public and our clients. It has motivated people to look outside of Muskoka for work and has opened up the doors of commuting.”<sup>31</sup>

The program has also demonstrated environmental benefits. In addition to the reduction of vehicles on the road, Muskoka Community Services and Hammond have partnered to create reusable tickets. These plastic tickets have an embossed pattern so they cannot be duplicated, but instead of being discarded, they are returned to Community Services from Hammond for reuse. This process also saves the program money.<sup>32</sup>

## E. Future Considerations

Given that the project is still in its pilot phase, there are no definite plans to implement any changes to the schedule or routes. However, from the ridership analysis, officials have identified a couple of limitations that they would like to consider in the future. The first is addressing the issue of getting people from the outlying areas to corridor stops. “There is an accessibility issue that way. That could be where some of our agencies with volunteer drivers can help get people to the Corridor 11 bus stops. That’s perhaps something for us to look at with partners; developing a Muskoka wide transportation program.”<sup>33</sup>

A second limitation with the current schedule is the lack of weekend service. Although the service has been designed to meet the needs of Muskoka residents (hence the Monday to Friday schedule), there is an economic development opportunity for shuttling tourists and visitors to the region on the weekends.

The pilot evaluation to be completed towards the end of 2014 will examine the long-term sustainability of the initiative and explore ways for improving the service.

<sup>30</sup> Telephone interview with Shonna Caldwell, Program Information Manager, Muskoka Community Services. June 17, 2014.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.