

# SMART

## GREY AND BRUCE COUNTIES

### ACCELERATING RURAL TRANSPORTATION SOLUTIONS



Information for this case study was provided by  
Roger Cook, Manager, Saugeen Mobility and Regional Transit (SMART):

## A. Overview of Transportation Initiative

Saugeen Mobility and Regional Transit (SMART) is an Ontario corporation without share capital owned by the participating partner municipalities in Bruce and Grey counties. The goal of SMART is “to provide a safe, dependable and affordable transportation service to any eligible client who wants service when they want it.”

The service provides non-emergency medical, employment and social transportation to individuals and groups in eight municipalities in the Counties of Bruce and Grey. The service is provided for residents with physical and/or mental challenges (including visual and cognitive challenges).<sup>1</sup>

Individual fares to destinations within the service area are \$2.00 plus \$.30/km, subject to a \$5.00 minimum. Fares to destinations outside the service area are \$.30/km plus \$18.00 per hour.

## B. Context

### Location

Grey Bruce is located in the South West Region of Ontario. It is bordered by water on the west by Lake Huron and by Georgian Bay on the north. Simcoe and Dufferin Counties border on the east, and Huron and Wellington Counties border it on the south.<sup>2</sup>

The total land area of the two counties is 8,587 square kilometres, with Grey County accounting for 4,508 square kilometres and Bruce accounting for 4,079 square kilometres.

### Demographics/Density

A total of 157,760 people live within Grey Bruce. Fifty-four percent of the population lives in a rural setting, while 46% lives in urban centres. Owen Sound is the only city in Grey Bruce, with a population of 22,000, while the other urban settings have populations of fewer than 10,000 people.



According to the Grey Bruce Health Unit’s Healthy Communities Picture (2011), the combined population in the two counties has grown by approximately 1,100 people each year since 2001. The two age groups that have grown the most are those between 45 and 54 years and those between 55 and 64 years.

With 18% of the population over the age of 65 years, Grey Bruce has a higher percentage of seniors compared to the provincial average. The two areas with the highest percentage of seniors are the Northern Bruce Peninsula (28%) and The Blue Mountains (25%).

Children and youth still represent a significant portion of the population in Grey Bruce with 22% of the population aged 0-18 years. Areas with the largest proportion of their population under the age of 15 years are Saugeen First Nation (27.8%), Chippewas of Nawash First Nation (22.9%), Southgate (21.8%) and South Bruce (20.6%).

<sup>1</sup> As referenced on the Bruce County Seniors’ Portal/Transportation Services: [www.bruceseniors.com/index.php?page=listing&municipality=6&category=18&sub\\_cat=109](http://www.bruceseniors.com/index.php?page=listing&municipality=6&category=18&sub_cat=109), accessed May 17, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> L. Wonnacott, and C. Ferguson (2011). *Grey Bruce Healthy Communities Picture*. Grey Bruce Health Unit: Owen Sound, Ontario.

Compared with the province as a whole, Grey Bruce is not very diverse ethnically. Less than 2% of the population is comprised of visible minorities, and the immigration rate is only 8% compared with 28% for the province.

The two counties have a combined Aboriginal population of 3,655, which represents 2.4% of the total population. There are two First Nation Reserves within Bruce County: The Chippewas of Nawasah Unceded First Nation and the Chippewas of Saugeen First Nation.<sup>3</sup>

### **Political and Governance Structures**

Within the two Counties (upper-tier municipalities), there are 17 lower-tier municipalities.

#### **Bruce County<sup>4</sup>**

- Municipality of Arran-Elderslie
- Municipality of Brockton
- Township of Huron-Kinloss
- Municipality of Kincardine
- Municipality of Northern Bruce Peninsula
- Town of Saugeen Shores
- Municipality of South Bruce
- Township of South Bruce Peninsula

#### **Grey County<sup>5</sup>**

- Township of Chatsworth
- Township of Georgian Bluffs
- Township of Grey Highlands
- Town of Hanover
- Town of Meaford
- City of Owen Sound
- Township of Southgate
- Town of The Blue Mountains
- Township of West Grey



### **Major Industries**

The Invest in Grey Bruce website highlights five major economic sectors in the region:

1. Agriculture, including traditional agri-businesses as well as newer areas such as bio-products, agri-tourism and commercial aquaculture
2. Manufacturing, including food, furniture and wood products, transportation equipment, machinery manufacturing and printing operations
3. Tourism, capitalizing on numerous events and festivals, natural attractions and the popular destination of Blue Mountain
4. Energy and Environment, including the Bruce Nuclear Power Plant in Tiverton and a growing green energy component
5. Retail, second only to manufacturing for employment opportunities, with over 12% of the population employed in this growing sector.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> [www.brucecounty.on.ca](http://www.brucecounty.on.ca)

<sup>5</sup> [www.grey.ca](http://www.grey.ca)

<sup>6</sup> [www.investingreybruce.com](http://www.investingreybruce.com)

## C. Background

### Initiative Background

Started in 1977 as the Bruce, Grey and Huron Disability Transportation Corporation, SMART has a long history of providing transportation services to residents of Grey and Bruce with mental and physical challenges.<sup>7</sup>

In the latter part of 2009, the organization went through a restructuring and name change that placed an emphasis on mobility versus disability. A new board of directors was also established.

According to Roger Cook, Manager of SMART:

*“These are outings that would have been difficult or impossible if this service were not in place. Many of these residents have no family members nearby to assist with their mobility needs and for those who do have family members nearby, very often those family members are unavailable to provide assistance because of employment or lack of appropriate accessible vehicle.”*<sup>8</sup>

*The rides provided by SMART are, therefore, a vital lifeline for these community members to keep medical appointments, attend to employment obligations, enjoy social outings and generally maintain a sense of personal independence.”*<sup>8</sup>

## D. Current Operations

In 2013, the SMART program provided a total of 21,052 rides. As per the organization’s mandate, the ridership is comprised of people with mental or physical challenges. According to the SMART website:

*“Generally, service is provided to residents who cannot, because of their physical or mental challenges, travel by conventional transit or taxi. These challenges include the required use of crutches, a cane, a walker or wheelchair; visual impairments; cognitive impairments such as Alzheimer’s*

*and/or developmental challenges. Challenges need not be permanent; they can be temporary and/or seasonal.”*

### Schedules and Fares

The service is available only for residents of participating municipalities. However, the SMART website also indicates that rides will be provided to non-permanent residents and visitors, provided they meet the eligibility criteria.<sup>9</sup>

The service is considered “door-to-door”, which means that the drivers can assist clients from their place of residence to the vehicle, including the handling of packages and bags.

Residents wanting to use the program are encouraged to call the dispatch office a minimum of one business day in advance of the planned trip. However, they do indicate that they will accommodate notices of less than one day if possible.

Riders are required to complete a Client Registration Form (which can be completed online or obtained from the drivers) prior to receiving their rides, and they are encouraged to have their complete travel itinerary ahead of their ride and be ready to give the itinerary to their driver.<sup>10</sup>

Within the service area, local destination rides for individuals are \$2.00 plus \$.30/km and are subject to a \$5.00 minimum. Fares for destinations outside the service area are \$.30/km plus \$18.00 per hour from the time the driver picks up the client until he/she is finished with the driver and vehicle. However, riders are only charged for the actual driver time and mileage.

Clients are not charged additional fares when accompanied by an attendant or companion.

<sup>7</sup> Saugeen Mobility and Regional Transit: Specialty Transportation for the Mentally and Physically Challenged summary report (July 11, 2011); accessed May 1, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> [www.saugeenmobility.ca](http://www.saugeenmobility.ca)

<sup>10</sup> [www.saugeenmobility.ca/getting-started](http://www.saugeenmobility.ca/getting-started)



### Resources Available

SMART has a fleet of 22 vehicles, including:

- Two large, adapted buses for group outings
- Nine mid-sized adapted buses
- One conventional minivan, and
- 10 adapted minivans.<sup>11</sup>

Drivers are also equipped with smartphones, and ride information is dispatched to the drivers through their smartphones.

The most current financial statements (2013) indicate that the SMART program had \$1.51 million in revenues, including \$375,000 in Municipal contributions, approximately \$186,000 in user fees and \$253,000 in an operating grant from the provincial gas tax funds. An additional \$336,000 was allocated through the gas tax funds for capital purchases for upgrading the fleet.

Operating expenses totaled almost \$963,000 with almost 50% of that going to wages.

Currently, the Town of Hanover acts as “Host Municipality” for the purpose of “receiving and holding” the Gas Tax funding. According to the Manager’s summary report from 2011, “This funding is paid annually and is held in trust 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.”<sup>12</sup>

### Organizational Structure

SMART is a registered charity and government not-for-profit organization (GNPO) incorporated without share capital. The organization is owned by the participating municipal partners and is governed under the terms of the Partnership Agreement signed by each municipality.<sup>13</sup>

As an incorporated not-for-profit, there is a Board of Directors, which is comprised of representatives from each partner municipality. Each municipality is entitled to send one representative as a member, from which the Board of Directors is elected. The Board meets once monthly unless otherwise required.

The organization has a staff of three: Manager, Secretary-Treasurer and Dispatcher, and Accounting Clerk.

<sup>11</sup> Saugeen Mobility and Regional Transit: Specialty Transportation for the Mentally and Physically Challenged summary report (July 11, 2011); accessed May 1, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> As referenced in the Saugeen Mobility and Regional Transit Financial Statements for the year ended December 31, 2013 (March 27, 2014). Received electronically from Roger Cook, May 1, 2014.

In keeping with the Ministry of Transportation approach, the municipal contributions are calculated annually with 30% of each municipality's amount determined by the population size, and 70% determined by ridership numbers.<sup>14</sup>

New municipalities interested in becoming part of the program can participate on a trial basis for one year. Because ridership numbers are unknown, first-year trial rates are based solely on the population figures.<sup>15</sup>

### Impacts

According to the most recent ridership numbers (2013), over 21,000 rides were provided through the SMART program. Although a formal evaluation of the program has not been conducted, the Manager reported that the most obvious impact is reflected in the ridership numbers over the years and the fact that the program has been able to provide a service to people with mental and physical challenges who otherwise would not be able to afford the transportation.

He also indicated that there have been numerous anecdotal comments speaking to the benefits, including reduced isolation and increased opportunities for social interaction.

### E. Future Plans

With an aging population in Grey and Bruce Counties, there will likely be an increase in the number of housing units built for this demographic. If this happens, there will be an even greater opportunity for the SMART program: "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."<sup>16</sup>

There are currently eight partner municipalities with at least one actively involved with the trial program. According to the Manager, a goal is to continue attracting and involving other municipalities in the Grey Bruce region.

Another longer-term possibility for the program is to expand its mandate beyond those with mental and physical challenges and have the SMART program become the central organization for all specialized transportation in the Grey Bruce area and bring together the various transportation services offered by various Ministries in the different corners of the two counties.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Saugeen Mobility and Regional Transit: Specialty Transportation for the Mentally and Physically Challenged summary report (July 11, 2011); accessed May 1, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Telephone interview with Roger Cook, Manager, April 28, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Saugeen Mobility and Regional Transit: Specialty Transportation for the Mentally and Physically Challenged summary report (July 11, 2011); accessed May 1, 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.