

# Community Care Northumberland

## ACCELERATING RURAL TRANSPORTATION SOLUTIONS



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## A. Overview of Transportation Initiative

Established in 1988, Community Care Northumberland (CCN) is a multi-service, volunteer-based community support organization in Northumberland County. Over 850 regional volunteers enable clients to experience a higher quality of life by strengthening their connections with the community. They accomplish this through the delivery of essential community support services:

- Community Diners
- Friendly Visiting
- Home at Last
- Home Help and Maintenance Programs
- Hospice Palliative Care Programs
- Meals on Wheels Programs
- Supports for Caregivers
- Telephone Security Checks
- Transportation Services including accessible transportation options
- Wellness, Social and Recreational Programs

One of the programs offered through Community Care Northumberland is the recently reorganized Specialized Transportation program, which provides an Accessible Service and a Rural Service.

Rural Service: Working with the County of Northumberland and several local municipalities, the goal of this service is to offer rural transportation within our County that is affordable, accessible, and sustainable for all residents

of Northumberland County. Services are pre-booked and clients are driven in agency vehicles. Wheelchairs, walkers, child car seats, etc. can be accommodated. The rural service is currently operating in Cramahe & Alnwick/Haldimand Townships as well as the Municipality of Trent Hills, with limited transportation to/from the Municipality of Brighton. Riders must be registered to use this service by completing a CCN client registration form prior to riding, and those under 16 years of age must be accompanied by an adult. Bookings are handled through a centralized scheduling office that serves all residents across the County. The scheduling office has information on each registered client's needs and appropriate resources are booked to ensure each individual client's needs are met (e.g., whether they require an accessible vehicle.)

## B. Context

### **Location**

Northumberland County is located in south-eastern Ontario along Highway 401 between Toronto and Kingston. It covers a land area of 1,905 square km., bordered on the south by Lake Ontario, and on the north by Rice Lake.<sup>1</sup>

Northumberland County offers a range of living experiences from historic towns to scenic rolling rural areas to spectacular water settings on Rice Lake, the Trent River and Lake Ontario.<sup>2</sup>

### **Demographics**

The population of Northumberland County is 85,390, with market access to 9 million people within 50 minute by

<sup>1</sup> Northumberland County Economic Development: <http://www.investnorthumberland.ca/en/siteselectors/transportation.asp>

<sup>2</sup> Northumberland County; <http://www.northumberlandcounty.ca/en/>

<sup>3</sup> Environics Analytics 2012, quoted in <http://www.investnorthumberland.ca/en/siteselectors/siteselectiondata.asp>

<sup>4</sup> Statistics Canada 2011, quoted in <http://www.investnorthumberland.ca/en/siteselectors/siteselectiondata.asp>

car.<sup>3</sup> Its population density is - low, at 43.1 per square kilometre.<sup>4</sup> Census figures indicate that Northumberland experienced a 1.4% growth in population from 2006 to 2011, and has a median age five years higher than the provincial average.<sup>5</sup> The County is characterized by a relatively high home ownership rate, and has employment rates comparable to, or better than, the province as a whole. The majority of residents work either in their home municipality or in other municipalities within the County, and travel is highly car-dependent. Education and income levels are below those for Ontario, both for two-parent and single-parent families. Almost 10% of children in Northumberland County live in poverty.<sup>6</sup> About 11% of Northumberland County residents are immigrants, with over 70% of them having originated in the U.K. and Western Europe. Approximately 2% of the population are visible minorities.<sup>7</sup>

### **Local Governance Structures**

The County of Northumberland is the upper-tier level of municipal government for seven municipalities:

- Township of Alnwick/Haldimand
- Municipality of Brighton
- Town of Cobourg
- Township of Cramahe
- Township of Hamilton
- Municipality of Port Hope
- Municipality of Trent Hills

### **Economy**

Northumberland is a relatively prosperous county, with a strong tourism industry and a vibrant agri-business sector, in which dairy is the main commodity. There is a mix of other industries, including finance, insurance and real estate, wholesale and retail sales, transportation, plastics, energy, food and paper processing, and communications.<sup>8</sup>

### **Culture**

History and culture are a strong presence in Northumberland County through architectural preservation, performance venues, festivals and galleries. Native culture is celebrated through the Alderville First Nation festivals. There is also a rich history of community action and volunteerism. Northumberland County offers historic walking tours and natural heritage areas such as the Trent-Severn Waterway and the Trans Canada Trail.<sup>9</sup>

### **Major Travel Destinations**

Northumberland is one of the top five regional tourism destinations in Ontario, offering “*natural beauty, pristine waterfront and beaches, unique accommodations, diverse restaurants and a vibrant array of unique cultural festivals and events. It has 2 provincial parks, 11 golf courses, 15 conservation areas and 37 trails that total over 1,000 km. Both Cobourg and Port Hope offer live performances in heritage buildings*”.<sup>10</sup>

Cobourg and Port Hope are main travel destinations for medical appointments, shopping and entertainment.

<sup>5</sup> Northumberland County 2013 Business Plan & Budget, p. 7. [http://www.northumberlandcounty.ca/en/departments\\_countyadministration\\_corpservices/resources/2013Econ\\_Tourism\\_Business\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.northumberlandcounty.ca/en/departments_countyadministration_corpservices/resources/2013Econ_Tourism_Business_Plan.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Northumberland County Community Picture 2011. Prime Times Strategies Inc. March 14, 2011 <http://www.hkpr.on.ca/Portals/0/PDF%20Files%20-%20CDIP/Northumberland%20County%20Community%20Picture%202011.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Northumberland County Economic Development Demographics Report Generator: <http://www.investnorthumberland.ca/en/dtool/demographicstool.aspx>

<sup>8</sup> Northumberland County eBook; Northumberland County Economic Development; p.5 <http://www.investnorthumberland.ca/eBook/index.html#/1/>

<sup>9</sup> Northumberland Tourism. [http://northumberlandtourism.com/en/cultureHeritage/Culture\\_Heritage.asp](http://northumberlandtourism.com/en/cultureHeritage/Culture_Heritage.asp)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

## Local Transportation Context

Northumberland is a mix of rural and urban communities, and is “comprised of small villages, century old farms, heritage buildings as well as new homes, industries, businesses and a new state-of-the-art hospital.”<sup>11</sup> Two largely urban municipalities are in the southern part of the County: the Town of Cobourg and the Municipality of Port Hope. The Townships of Alwicks/Haldimand, Cramahe and Hamilton and the Municipalities of Brighton and Trent Hills are predominantly rural communities.

Highway 401 runs through the 52-kilometre width of Northumberland County near its southern border, forming its main transportation corridor.<sup>12</sup> Other major roads connect the towns in the county, the four largest of which are spread out along the southern boundary of the county, on Lake Ontario.

The County of Northumberland is currently developing a Transportation Master Plan (TMP) which will assist County Council and staff in establishing and prioritizing the future needs of their transportation infrastructure.<sup>13</sup>

## C. Background

### Local Transportation Issues

Discussions of rural transportation in Northumberland County date back many years. In July 1999, a committee of community partners including municipal representatives, members of non-profit organizations working with children, teens, adults, the disabled and the elderly, the local health unit and hospital put together the Northumberland Community Transportation Action Plan (CTAP). The plan “encouraged co-operation of all community organizations; the joint sharing of both physical and human resources

such as vehicles, volunteers, maintenance, training and dispatch; consolidation of transportation planning and service delivery into a single existing or new organization”.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, although the development of the plan was financed by the Ontario government, no funds were available to implement the plan.

In 2004, more than 30 people including representatives from area municipalities and various non-profit health and social service agencies attended an information session on rural transportation issues and ways to tackle them. The session was hosted by the Haliburton Kawartha Pine Ridge District Health Unit and featured Harry Gow, an advocate of rural transportation and co-founder of Transport Action Canada (formerly Transport 2000), a non-government organization that advocates for sustainable transportation. Mr. Gow spoke about the rural transportation planning that was undertaken in western Quebec, noting that “*lack of an adequate transportation system affects quality of life and determines a person’s ability to access housing, jobs, health services and leisure programs...the problem was compounded in rural areas where lack of transportation resulted in missed medical appointments and even in difficulty in eating well because of lack of transportation to a grocery store.*”<sup>15</sup>

The Northumberland United Way released its Community Matters Report in 2006. In phase 1 of the community consultation process, community leaders, volunteers and elected officials had been invited to consultation sessions held in each of the seven municipalities within Northumberland County to identify priority community issues. The results showed that transportation was cited as one of the three top issues by participants in six of the seven locations.

<sup>11</sup> Northumberland United Way. Northumberland Matters: Community Consultation Final Report. 2006. p.6 <http://www.northumberlandunitedway.ca/Portals/0/CM%20-%20Final%20copy%20%20Sept.%2019th,%202006.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Northumberland County eBook; Northumberland County Economic Development <http://www.investnorthumberland.ca/eBook/index.html#/1/>; p.1.

<sup>13</sup> County of Northumberland: Transportation Master Plan [http://www.northumberlandcounty.ca/en/departments\\_publicworks/TMP\\_master\\_plan.asp](http://www.northumberlandcounty.ca/en/departments_publicworks/TMP_master_plan.asp)

<sup>14</sup> Northumberland News. May 26, 2004. <http://www.northumberlandnews.com/news-story/3770165-county-groups-told-to-go-after-funding-to-meet-rural-transportation-ne/>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid



Phase 2 involved an extensive community survey, which was launched in February 2006 along with a strong outreach strategy. Over 1,064 surveys were received and over 1,200 written comments. For the county overall, more than a third of the respondents identified transportation as one of the top three issues they would like to see addressed. In four townships; i.e. Alnwick/Halldimand, Cramahe, Trent Hills, and Brighton it was listed as a top priority by 37%-46% of respondents. Cobourg and Port Hope are the only areas in Northumberland County with public transportation systems. In the survey report it was noted that between 17-32% of respondents indicated that “access to public transportation” was “not applicable”, leading the researchers to wonder if the number of respondents who see it as a major issue is understated. Some residents may have interpreted the question as not applicable to them because they lived in areas without public transportation. The report also revealed that youth are strongly affected by access to transportation. “Availability of Transportation to Activities for Youth” was reported by 34% of Northumberland respondents as a major issue for their community.

### **Background of Current Initiative**

In response to the community studies that indicated that public transportation was a major issue throughout most of the county. In 2008 CCN along with a small group of community agency partners that formed the Northumberland Transportation Initiative (NTI). Community Care Northumberland took on the lead agency role, and with funding from Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) - Employment Supports to hire a Project Coordinator.

The NTI was one of four individual transportation programs operated by CCN, the purpose of which was to transport clients to destinations within Northumberland County as well as outside the County for medical, social, banking, recreational purposes and activities of daily living requirements. The other three programs were:

1. **Venture Van** – operating primarily in Trent Hills to service the transportation needs of adults with disabilities

2. **Aging at Home program** – operating primarily along the Lakeshore area of Northumberland County to service the transportation needs of seniors and adults with disabilities
3. **Volunteer Transportation Program** – operating with volunteer drivers who provided transportation to seniors and adults using their personal vehicle.

An NTI steering committee was formed and a review was conducted of transportation studies and reports that had been completed in Northumberland County. The Coordinator researched and spoke with other surrounding transportation services to learn how they operate, including Durham Specialized Transit, Kawartha Lakes & Peterborough Community Care, Quinte Access, Deseronto Transit, North Central Hastings Transit, Cobourg and Port Hope Transit. They learned early in their development process that collaboration and support from organizations and municipalities and sustainability of the service are the keys to success.

The Coordinator met with key informants from organizations and service providers throughout Northumberland County as well as the Northumberland Poverty Reduction Action Committee (NPRAC). They observed that many of their clients living in the rural areas had few or no affordable transportation options. To get a sense of where there was the greatest need for transportation services, organizations were asked which municipality had the highest requirements for this transportation. Cramahe and Trent Hills were at the top of the list, so these were among the first communities to receive service from NTI, with the pilot starting in Cramahe Township in November 2008 and operating two days per week.

Recently, CCN staff recognized that, with the immense growth in demand for these services throughout Northumberland County, they must change the way they operated their transportation programs. Consequently, they consolidated operations into new categories to better service Northumberland County as a whole.

With a regional approach in mind, CCN now has two programs within its portfolio of services under the transportation program.

## 1. Volunteer Driving Program

This program has remained unchanged in its operation. A volunteer driver provides transportation using their personal vehicle. They transport clients to destinations within Northumberland County as well as outside the County for medical, social, banking, and recreational purposes and to meet the requirements of daily living. Volunteers provide door-to-door service as needed. This service is available to adults who are aging, have special needs or are recovering from illness or injury, with priority given based on assessed need. To access the service, clients contact their local CCN office to book a ride. The local CCN office organizes all scheduling related to this program and requests that clients provide advance notice to book their rides.

## 2. Specialized Transportation

This program has been consolidated into two components and includes transportation for both accessible and rural needs.

**a) Accessible Service:** This program transports clients to destinations within Northumberland County as well as outside the County for medical, social, banking, recreational purposes and activities of daily living requirements. Clients are driven by trained staff in agency vehicles which can accommodate wheelchairs, walkers and child car seats. One attendant can ride free. This service is available to clients who are unable to walk a distance of 175m (575 ft.) and climb three or more steps, have physical challenges or condition(s) of functional impairment that severely limit their mobility or are unable to use conventional transit because they carry oxygen or require escort accompaniment.

**b) Rural Service:** Working with the County of Northumberland and several local municipalities, the goal of this service is to offer rural transportation within the County that is affordable, accessible, and sustainable for all residents of

Northumberland County. Services are pre-booked and clients are driven by trained staff in agency vehicles. Wheelchairs, walkers, child car seats, etc. can be accommodated. The rural service is currently operating in Cramahe & Alnwick/Haldimand Townships as well as the Municipality of Trent Hills, with limited transportation to/from the Municipality of Brighton. Riders must be registered to use this service and those under 16 years of age must be accompanied by an adult. Bookings are handled through a centralized scheduling office that serves all residents across the County. The scheduling office has information on each registered client's needs and appropriate resources are booked to ensure each individual client's needs are met (e.g., whether they require an accessible vehicle.)

Focusing on the rural component of CCN's Specialized Transportation Program, the Rural Service program goal remains unchanged from its former NTI incarnation. It continues to implement an affordable and coordinated rural transit service in Northumberland County, in which each municipality participates and contributes to a single, integrated rural transit service. The service is available to anyone who resides in the county, as well as visitors to the county, but pre-registration is required. Currently six vans with paid drivers provide a service in Cramahe Township, Alnwick/Haldimand Township and the Municipality of Trent Hills. The service operates four days a week between 8:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m. <sup>16</sup>

### Initial Funding Sources

Community Care Northumberland, with funding from ODSP, initiated a pilot rural transportation project in November 2008 in Cramahe and provided the use of one of their vans. The cost of running the van was mostly operational (i.e., gas, insurance, maintenance), and these costs were paid from funds received from the Local Health Integration Network (LHIN), which funds 50% of Community Care's budget.

<sup>16</sup> Community Care: <http://www.commcare.ca/node/19>

In 2010, an \$80,000 grant was received from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, of which \$20,000 was spent on a wheelchair-accessible van and \$60,000 was spent on operating costs for an expansion of their services. They also received a \$20,000 grant from Northumberland Community Futures Development Corporation and a \$5,000 contribution from Northumberland United Way. This helped them to purchase a van that could be dedicated to the rural program.<sup>17</sup>

The NTI Coordinator also approached both the Townships of Cramahe and Alnwick/Haldimand to request financial support for the program, and suggested that they apply for Gas Tax funding from the provincial government. The Gas Tax funding allowed the program to continue past the pilot stage and is critical to its ongoing operation.

## D. Current Operations

### **Fleet**

The Specialized Transportation Program has six vans, four of which are accessible. Vans travel about 90,000 kilometres on one route in one year. All of the vans have travelled over 300,000 kilometres and are projected to last five years. The Community Care Northumberland Transportation Coordinator stated that there is a substantial difference in capital and operating costs of accessible versus non-accessible vans.

Specialized Transportation staff are always thinking about whether they have the right vans to run the service efficiently. At the time this case study was written it had just been announced that Community Care Northumberland had the use of a Kia van for two years, which will be used primarily to transport people for dialysis treatments.

### **Routes**

Rural service began under the Northumberland Transportation Initiative, piloted in 2008 in the Townships of Cramahe and Alnwick/Haldimand, running two days per week. Trent Hills was added in 2010 and another two days of service were added; the service now runs four days per week. They are planning to add the fifth day, but



their philosophy has been not to grow too big too fast, and to maintain a focus on sustainability.

Because so much of the county is rural, it was decided that having set routes would be impractical. Many people live quite a distance from even a side road, and many others would not be able to walk to the main highway to be picked up by the bus. Those with children need to bring car seats and strollers, and would not be able to walk very far to catch the bus. Thus, they designed a pre-booked service, with advance notice required, and the daily schedule is derived from the bookings. Some of the riders have made regular bookings, so that some of the routes are now fairly predictable. This allows additional flexibility in that people will sometimes call the same day to check if the van is coming around anyway, and, if so, will ask for it to pick them up too.

Community Care Northumberland has been careful not to duplicate existing transportation services but to connect with them. Some cooperative arrangements have been developed; for example, Cobourg Transit provides free passes to CCN rural riders. Riders use the service to get to:

- Appointments (medical, social services, physiotherapy, dentist, dialysis, mental health)
- Educational programs (e.g., upgrading programs at a Resource Centre, Cobourg Fleming College)
- Community Living - recreation and leisure activities
- Shopping/banking
- Job search seminars

<sup>17</sup> Northumberland Transportation Initiative Media Release, June 4, 2010: <http://cramahe.civicwebcms.com/sites/cramahe.civicwebcms.com/files/media/Northumberland%20Transportation%20Initiative%20-%20Media%20release.pdf>

- Other transportation systems (e.g. VIA train, Cobourg Transit)
- Family, friends and tourist destinations
- Work
- Recreational activities

### **Ridership**

Transportation is provided for families, youth, seniors and adults. Riders use the service to attend appointments, meetings, work, school, social activities, shopping and recreation programs. Most of the riders on the rural route that do not require an accessible vehicle are individuals with low incomes who do not own a car. The majority of those who use the accessible vans are individuals who use wheelchairs.

Pre-registration is required to use all the transportation programs including the rural service. Registration forms are available at most service agencies, local libraries, post offices and arenas in the service area, and online at [www.commcare.ca](http://www.commcare.ca) as well as the Cramahe Township, Alnwick/Haldimand & Trent Hills websites. The application asks for information about the purpose of their travel, medical conditions, if mobility aids are used, whether an attendant is required, the ages of any children and whether or not a car or booster seat will be required. No financial information is requested. This information is needed to ensure that the appropriate van is booked, that the driver is informed about the needs of the riders, for insurance purposes and to collect statistics to report to funders. The information in the registration form is confidential.

Once they are registered, people call the office to book a ride. Advance notice is required. If no one has booked a ride the van is not used. Rides can be provided to up to 10 people at a time.

### **Rural Transportation**

Fares are paid when the rider boards the van, or the rider may obtain a pass from an agency that has purchased a block of passes for its clients. Employment agencies, Ontario Works, schools, Children's Aid Society and Training and Development Centres have purchased passes

from Community Care Northumberland's Specialized Transportation Service.

A one-way fare within a route is \$5.00 per person. If a rider crosses over to another route, she/he would pay the additional fee of \$5.00 each way per person. For example, a ride from the Trent Hills area to Cobourg is \$10.00 each way. Children under 16 are only charged \$2.50 one way, and family rates are negotiable.

### **Accessible Transportation**

Fares are either paid directly to the driver, or the local Community Care office bills the third party organization (e.g., ODSP, Ontario Works or insurance companies). Some clients are invoiced directly.

The fee is based on \$0.37 per kilometre, and the client is to pay for parking if applicable because the vehicle stays with the client. If a rider is attending an appointment that takes longer than an hour (e.g., a specialist appointment in Toronto), she/he is charged an additional \$15.00 per hour to cover drivers costs as these drivers are paid staff.

### **Volunteer Transportation Program**

For this program, fares can also be paid either directly to the driver, or the local Community Care office bills the third party organization (e.g., ODSP, Ontario Works or insurance companies). Some clients are invoiced directly.

The fee is based on the rate of \$0.37 per kilometre, and the client is responsible for paying for parking if applicable.

### **Organizational Structure**

Approximately 50% of the operating costs of Community Care are funded by the Central East Local Health Integration Network (LHIN). Other sources of funding include fees for some of the programs and fundraising, and the provincial Gas Tax fund for the Specialized Transportation Rural Service. Monthly reports are submitted to Community Care and the participating municipalities, and annual reports to the Canadian Urban Transit Association and the Ministry of Transportation of Ontario.

The Specialized Transportation Program works in partnership with:



- Northumberland United Way
- YMCA Early Years
- The Help Centre
- Haliburton Kawartha Pine Ridge District Health Unit
- ODSP Employment Supports
- Northumberland Community & Social Services
- Port Hope Community Health Centre

The Specialized Transportation program has a centralized scheduling office located in Campbellford. The former NTI, Venture Van and Aging at Home transportation programs were merged into one specialized transportation program with the goal of increasing overall efficiency. Previously, scheduling was done in three different locations; now a centralized system allows the staff to get the right vans on the right routes with the right people.

The fact that the service is being offered by CCN is a factor in its success. The organization is sensitive to a wide range of needs, and provides professional drivers and a service that is open to anyone.

The staff composition consists of:

- 1 full time scheduler working 35 hrs/week
- 1 part time scheduler working 7hrs/week
- 2 full time coordinators each working 35 hrs/week
- 1 lead driver working 35 hrs/ week
- 7 part time/casual drivers (hours vary)

The merger of the three Community Care transportation programs, led to a re-branding as the Community Care Northumberland's Specialized Transportation Program. This rebranding is an ongoing communications project for Community Care Northumberland as staff continue to educate residents of Northumberland County that the goals of the former NTI service still exist under this new program name.

### **Operating Costs and Revenues**

Operating costs for the specialized transportation program include wages and benefits for staff and drivers as well as the cost of fuel, insurance, licenses and maintenance.

For example, an average trip of 25 minutes is estimated to cost \$28.00/per rider.

The bulk of the revenue for the operation of the specialized transportation program is obtained from the three participating municipalities (Township of Cramahe, Township of Alnwick/Haldimand and the Municipality of Trent Hills). Each municipality combines allocations from their municipal budgets with funds received from their portions of the provincial gas tax fund. The specialized transportation program issues invoices to the municipalities for their portion of the service monthly, along with a report on ridership statistics.

The participating municipalities have been very supportive as they see the value of transportation services to their residents. Although they have expressed some concern about residents shopping in other communities rather than spending their money locally, they also recognize that the transportation service increases the quality of life in their communities.

In addition to the Ministry of Transportation Gas Tax funding through the municipalities, Community Care Northumberland relies on financial support from a number of sources for its Specialized Transportation Program, including:

- Central East LHIN
- Northumberland United Way
- Northumberland County and local municipalities
- Ridership
- Fundraising and donations

### **Impacts**

The main impacts of the Specialized Transportation Program can be found in health, employment, education and social areas. The program enables many people to live healthier and more independent lives. It also creates more opportunities for socializing with other community members, which generally has a positive effect on mental health.

The environmental impacts of the Specialized Transportation Program are minimal, but there is a significant economic impact to individuals with low incomes that use the service. The program not only provides affordable transportation, it also enables them to seek employment and upgrade their skills and qualifications, which may lead to enhanced employment opportunities. In turn, increased rates of employment benefit the local economy.

### **Community Support**

The Specialized Transportation Program has garnered a relatively high degree of support within the county. There seems to be a broad understanding that without transportation services, people will have to move to be closer to medical and other services when they become older, disabled or otherwise unable to drive. While it is costly to operate, a transportation service provides access to many things that are critical to a high quality of life, such as employment, medical and other professional services, groceries, educational programs and leisure activities.

The Coordinator speaks at least once a year with County Council to update them on the service and its benefits. Clients have also spoken at Council meetings so the Councillors can hear about the impact it has had on their lives. For example, one woman spoke about how the rural service has enabled her to continue to live in her own home in the country.

## **E. Future Considerations**

Community Care Northumberland has incorporated a variety of strategies to become more efficient and diversify its funding sources, yet concerns about their future sustainability remain. Also, the demand for service has steadily increased over the past few years. Additional funding sources will be required just to maintain the specialized transportation program's current operations, but they would also like to respond to increasing demand by adding routes in other areas of the county.