



**The District of Muskoka
5-Year Transportation Needs Assessment and Growth
and Sustainability Plan**

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As of the date of this report, Canada and the Global Community are experiencing unprecedented measures undertaken by various levels of government to curtail health-related impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The duration of this event is not known. While there is potential for negative impact with respect to micro- and macro-economic sectors, as well as upon various real estate markets, it is not fully possible to predict such impact at present, or the impact of current and future government countermeasures. There is some risk that the COVID-19 pandemic increases the likelihood of short, medium and possibly longer-term economic and social changes that could have an impact on the findings in this report, but it is not possible to predict those impacts at this point in time. Accordingly, this report does not address the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on recent, current, or future market conditions.

Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary	7
1.1 Introduction	7
1.1.1 Background	7
1.1.2 Best Practices in Rural Transportation	7
1.1.3 Review of Existing Transit Services	7
1.2 Community Engagement	7
1.3 Transportation Policy Framework	8
1.4 Transit Service Delivery Options	8
1.4.1 Short-Listed Options and Stakeholder Input	9
1.5 Short-Term Programming Recommendations	9
1.5.1 Corridor 11 Bus	9
1.5.2 Rural Service	10
1.5.2 Short-Term Pilot Program Budget 2020-2023	11
1.6 Ridership Growth Strategies	11
1.7 External Funding Opportunities	12
1.8 Program Enhancements and Long-Term Sustainability	12
1.9 Meeting Project Objectives	12
2. Introduction	14
2.1 Background	14
2.2 Project Scope	14
2.3 Best Practices in Rural Public Transportation	16
2.4 Description of Existing Transit Services	16
2.4.1 Corridor 11 Bus	17
2.4.2 Muskoka Extended Transit (MET)	18
2.4.3 Huntsville Transit	19
2.4.4 Bracebridge Transit	20
2.4.5 Simcoe LINX	21
2.4.5.1 Existing LINX Route #1	22
2.4.5.2 Existing LINX Route #3	22
2.4.5.3 Future LINX Services	22
2.4.6 Ontario Northland Transportation Commission (ONTC)	23
2.4.6.1 Route 200 North Bay – Toronto	23

2.4.6.2	Route 400 – Sudbury – Toronto	23
2.4.7	Taxi Services	23
2.4.8	Community Care / Volunteer Transportation	24
3.	Community Engagement	26
3.1	On-Board Customer Interviews	26
3.2	Transit Focus Groups	26
3.3	Community On-line Survey	28
3.3.1	Overview of Respondents	29
3.3.2	Transit Travel Characteristics	30
3.3.3	Transit Customer Service Improvement Priorities	31
3.3.4	Non-Transit Customer Priorities	32
3.3.5	Access to Internet and Mobile Transit App Access	33
3.3.6	Survey Comments	33
3.4	Transit Service Provider Consultation	34
3.4.1	Service Integration	35
3.4.2	Transit Fare Integration	35
3.4.3	Short-turn of Corridor 11 Bus	35
3.4.4	Rural East-West Transit	36
3.4.5	Enhanced Marketing of All Transit Services in Muskoka	36
3.4.6	Future Orillia to Washago LINX Route	36
3.4.7	Regional Transit Concept for District of Muskoka	36
3.5	Summary of Priorities Identified Through Community Engagement	37
4.	Public Transportation Policy Framework	38
5.	Rural Transit Service Delivery Options	39
5.1	Fixed Route Service	39
5.1.1	Fixed-Route Shared-Ride Taxi	39
5.2	On-Demand Transportation	39
5.2.1	Dial-a-Ride Service	40
5.2.2	Mobile App-Based On-Demand Service	40
5.2.3	Ridesharing Partnership	40
5.3	Fixed-Flex Route Service	41
5.4	Specialized Transit	42
5.5	Analysis of Recommended Service Types	42

Conclusions	44
5.6 Short-Listed Public Transportation Options	44
5.7 Community Input on Short-Listed Options	44
6. Short-Term Programming REcommendations	46
6.1 Overview of Short-Term Programming	46
6.2 Corridor 11 Bus	47
6.3 Rural Service	50
6.4 Mactier-Bracebridge-Baysville-Huntsville Fixed Flex-Route	51
6.5 Midland-Honey Harbour-Gravenhurst-Bracebridge Fixed-Flex Route	52
6.6 Short-Term Pilot Program Budget 2020-2023	53
7. Ridership Growth Strategies	54
7.1 Continued Inter Transit Agency Co-operation	54
7.2 Fare Integration and Smart Card Technology	55
7.3 Enhanced Marketing and Branding	56
7.4 Targeting Seniors – the ‘Grey’ Market	56
7.5 Travel Training	57
7.6 Bus Passes for Social Service Agency Clients	57
7.7 Integrating Volunteer-Based Services with Public Transportation Options	58
7.8 Community Transportation Brokerage Concept	58
7.9 Better Accommodating Employee Shifts	59
7.10 Bike Racks on Buses	59
7.11 Real-time Passenger Information	59
7.12 Regionalization of Community Transportation Services	60
7.13 On-Demand Service	60
7.14 Summary of Transit Ridership Growth Strategies	61
8. External Funding Opportunities	62
8.1 Dedicated Transit Two-cent Per Litre Gas Tax Funding	62
8.2 Federal-Provincial Transit Funding Initiative	63
8.3 The Federation of Canadian Municipalities	63
9. Program Enhancement and LONG-TERM sustainability	65
9.1 Service Enhancements	65
9.1.1 Corridor 11 Bus Service	65
9.1.2 East-West Rural Service	65

9.1.3	Future On-Demand Service Option	65
9.1.4	Recommended Service Enhancement Priorities	66
9.2	Operating and Capital Budgets	67
9.2.1	Revenue and Cost Assumptions	67
9.2.1	Pilot and Post-Pilot Operating Annual Budget Summary	68
9.2.2	Post-Pilot Program Capital Budget	70
10.	Meeting Project Objectives	72
10.1	Individual Transportation Solutions	72
10.2	Accessible Rural Transportation Solutions	73
10.3	East-West Connectivity	73
10.4	Expansion of Inter-Community Corridor 11 Bus	73
10.5	Seamless Transportation Network in Muskoka	73
10.6	Long-term Growth and Financial Sustainability	74

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Background

The District of Muskoka (the District) has received a Community Transportation Grant (CT grant) from the Ontario Ministry of Transportation. Funding in the amount of \$283,276 will support the continuation and expansion of the existing Corridor 11 Bus service, and a further \$391,106 is intended to address local transportation needs within the District including east-west connectivity, accessible and individual transportation options, and integration among services across the District.

The District of Muskoka 5-Year Transportation Needs Assessment and Growth and Sustainability Plan project was undertaken to solicit input from the community on transportation issues and opportunities and develop a Community Transportation Plan (CTP) that will meet community needs.

The project objectives were to address the following transportation issues:

1. Individual Transportation Solutions
2. Accessible Rural Transportation Solutions
3. Provision of East-West Connectivity
4. Expansion of Inter-Community Corridor 11 Bus
5. Creation of a Seamless Transportation Network in Muskoka
6. Planning for Long-Term Growth and Financial Sustainability

1.1.2 Best Practices in Rural Transportation

The project team reviewed transportation programs that have been implemented successfully in other rural areas and drew on their extensive industry experience to incorporate best practices into the final recommendations of this CTP.

1.1.3 Review of Existing Transit Services

Research was conducted to determine what transportation services are currently available to District residents. In addition to the District's Corridor 11 Bus service, there are two local transit services operated by the Towns of Bracebridge and Huntsville, several taxi companies, and various community service agencies which provide transportation in the District. The Ontario Northland Transportation Commission bus (ONTC) has two routes through the District. The District previously operated the rural Muskoka Extended Transit (MET) service, and lessons learned from that pilot project were reviewed as well. The Simcoe County LINX transit service was investigated, because although it does not operate within the District, there are opportunities for District services to connect with the LINX in Simcoe county which can provide additional destinations for District residents.

1.2 Community Engagement

The community engagement process was designed to reach a variety of community members, but focused on ensuring the needs of the District's most vulnerable residents would be identified. The

process included on-board transit customer interviews, focus groups with representatives from social service agencies and area municipalities, an on-line community-wide survey, and a meeting with transit service providers. Draft program recommendations were presented to the previous focus group participants as well as the District Community and Planning Services Committee (CPSC) for review and feedback prior to finalizing the recommendations in the CTP.

The community engagement process allowed the project team to identify community priorities, issues, and opportunities. Findings suggested that:

1. Stronger transit links are needed between communities both within and beyond the District.
2. Rural transit service should be flexible in terms of routing, have longer service hours than the MET, and can be offered during off-peak hours.
3. Helping the District's more vulnerable residents to access essential services should be the primary goal, but working with employers to provide commuting options should also be considered where possible.
4. Integration and ease of transfers between the various services that operate within the District is important.
5. The Corridor 11 Bus could terminate in Orillia in the short term and in Washago in the long term in order to reallocate resources to service within the District.
6. Increased public awareness of all transportation options in the District needed.
7. A more regional approach to the existing transit business models and governance should be explored.

1.3 Transportation Policy Framework

Due to the relative infancy of the District's transportation programs, the project team recommended that detailed policies and guidelines should not be developed at this time, but should be developed and refined as the community transportation programs evolve. Instead, the project team drew on best practices in rural transportation in combination with the results of the community engagement process to develop high level guiding principles and a set of criteria to be used to evaluate various program options. These criteria included coverage, accessibility, convenience, financial sustainability, ridership potential, regional and community connectivity, and ease of understanding.

1.4 Transit Service Delivery Options

Various options for community transportation programs and models that could be implemented in the District were explored. Service models that were evaluated based on the criteria noted above included:

- Fixed route service
- On-demand service
- Fixed-flex route service
- Specialized/accessible transit

1.4.1 Short-Listed Options and Stakeholder Input

After a thorough assessment of the various service models based on the criteria, community engagement process, and best practices, the project team drafted the following recommendations for community transportation programming in the District:

- Make improvements to the fixed route Corridor 11 Bus service;
- Implement an accessible, fixed-flex route that travels between Midland and Honey Harbour
- Implement an accessible, fixed-flex route that travels between Midland and Bracebridge
- Implement an accessible fixed-flex route that travel from Mactier to Huntsville

On-demand service was not recommended due to the high cost that would be associated with providing a sufficient level service with adequate coverage of the District's large geographic area.

In consultation with focus group participants and CPSC members, the following programming recommendations were supported for inclusion in the final CTP:

- Corridor 11 Bus
 - Eliminate the Orillia to Barrie service
 - Provide consistent weekday service with three round trips per day between Huntsville and Orillia
 - Connect with Simcoe LINX service in Orillia
 - Utilize common bus stops with ONTC
- East-west rural service
 - Two new routes, each operated one day per week, two roundtrips per day;
 - Fixed-flex route service linking Mactier, Port Carling, Bracebridge, Baysville, Huntsville
 - Connect with Corridor 11 Bus service in Bracebridge to Orillia
 - Fixed-flex route service linking Bracebridge, Gravenhurst, Bala, Honey Harbour, Port Severn, Waubaushene, and Midland
 - Connect westbound service to LINX service in Waubaushene for travel to Orillia
 - Connect eastbound service to Corridor 11 Bus or ONTC in Gravenhurst for service to Orillia

1.5 Short-Term Programming Recommendations

Programming recommendations that could be implemented in the short-term will be considered pilot programs to the end of the CT grant in March 2023. Their continuation beyond that date would be contingent upon their success, the introduction of adequate sustainability measures, and/or future grant opportunities. All short-term programming is deliverable within the CT grant budget.

1.5.1 Corridor 11 Bus

The Corridor 11 bus forms the backbone of the District's community transportation system, and is an important service between Huntsville and Barrie. Modifications to the service are recommended to try to grow ridership and improve sustainability. These modifications are summarized below.

Integrate with ONTC

This would involve marketing the ONTC as an alternative to the Corridor 11 bus to provide residents with additional travel options, since the ONTC operates a route along Highway 11 with stops in many of the same towns as the Corridor 11 bus service. Corridor 11 bus stops can be relocated so that they are consistent with ONTC stops in each town. The possibility of subsidizing ONTC fares for District residents could be explored, as ONTC fares are more expensive than the Corridor 11 fares.

Reduce Service Duplication with Simcoe LINX

Simcoe LINX provides service between Orillia and Barrie every 50 minutes. Rather than duplicating service on this section of Highway 11, the Corridor 11 bus should only travel as far south as Orillia, where it can connect with Simcoe LINX for riders wishing to travel to Barrie. The service hours saved by eliminating this portion of the route would allow the bus to make three daily roundtrips between Huntsville and Orillia. This is an improvement over the current schedule, which only provides two daily trips as far south as Orillia. In addition, this would allow the service to operate on the same schedule every day of the week, whereas currently the schedule for Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays is different than the schedule for Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Reorganize Stops

Currently there is only one Corridor 11 bus stop in each of Huntsville and Gravenhurst, but there are six stops in Bracebridge. One stop should be added in Huntsville. Two stops should be added in Gravenhurst. One stop should be eliminated in Bracebridge.

1.5.2 Rural Service

The following fixed-flex routes are recommended to operate one day a week (on alternate days):

- Mactier to Huntsville
 - Set stops in Mactier, Port Carling, Bracebridge, Baysville, and Huntsville
- Midland to Bracebridge
 - Set stops in Midland, Waubashene, Port Severn, Honey Harbour, Bala, Gravenhurst, and Bracebridge

These routes build on the most successful routes of the previous MET rural service and will provide east-west connectivity across the District. Two round trips per day should be offered on each route. Connections will be made to the Corridor 11 Bus service, and the Midland-Bracebridge route will also connect with the Simcoe LINX service in Waubashene and Midland.

The transit vehicle would travel along a set route between these communities, stopping at several set stops, but will also have the ability to travel off the route (i.e. to “flex”) to pick up or drop off passengers. This allows the vehicle to provide coverage in areas that would not be served by a simple fixed route, and the ability of the service to respond to pick up and drop off requests will help address individual transportation needs for those who cannot walk to bus stops. The vehicle used will be accessible, in order to help address the need for accessible transportation in the District. Each deviation off the route should not take more than five minutes, which limits coverage somewhat, but approximately 59% of permanent residences in the District are within two kilometers of the proposed fixed routes.

In the short-term, request for pick ups and drop offs can be managed manually, with residents requesting stops by calling in to a dispatcher. The dispatcher would then inform the driver of the requests. In the long-term, a software program with a mobile application could be considered to manage requests and develop routes for the vehicle driver, but the cost of this technology is currently quite high. Forecasted ridership on the fixed-flex rural service will likely not be high enough in the short term to justify this level of investment unless outside funding is available (e.g. Federation of Canadian Municipalities or Provincial grants).

1.5.2 Short-Term Pilot Program Budget 2020-2023

Below is a summary of the estimated total costs and funding for the District's community transportation services to the end of the CT grant in March 2023. All pilot programs will be deliverable with existing funding.

	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Net Operating Cost (Costs less Fare Revenue)	\$213,903	\$210,320	\$210,320
Funding*	\$216,123	\$207,421	\$210,867

* Includes CT grant and District levy contribution.

The District qualifies for Provincial Gas Tax funding, in addition to the funding being received from the CT grant. In order to be conservative and to abide by the parameters of the CT grant program (i.e. restrictions on how Gas Tax funding can be spent in relation to CT grant projects), this funding has not been included in the funding figures above, and Gas Tax funds should be set aside to accommodate unforeseen costs or revenue shortfalls, banked to support community transportation services beyond the end of the pilot programs, or used to expand services. The District can expect to receive approximately \$60,000-\$65,000 in Gas Tax funding for each year of the pilot programs.

1.6 Ridership Growth Strategies

A number of best practices to assist in growing ridership on District community transportation services have been identified. Many of these strategies are relatively low cost and can be employed during the pilot programs to help ensure program sustainability beyond the end of the CT grant. Others require more significant levels of investment and can be considered as resources allow. Ridership growth strategies, in their suggested order of implementation based on financial resources and time required include:

1. Continued inter-agency cooperation
2. Branding and marketing
3. Real-time passenger information
4. Travel training
5. Targeting seniors
6. Integrating with volunteer-based services
7. Bus passes for social service agency clients
8. Bike racks on buses
9. Better accommodating employee shifts
10. Community transportation brokerage
11. Regionalization of community transportation services

12. Fare integration and smart card technology
13. On-demand service

1.7 External Funding Opportunities

The District could seek additional funding opportunities to expand the pilot programs during the course of the CT grant or to help sustain the pilot programs after the CT grant funding ends. Grant and funding opportunities with the Federal and Provincial governments, along with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities are explored in this Plan.

1.8 Program Enhancements and Long-Term Sustainability

Should the District decide simply to extend the pilot programs beyond the CT grant time period, without adding services, the annual cost is estimated at \$300,864 while the net cost to the District is estimated at \$143,002, after factoring in estimated fare revenues and Provincial Gas Tax funding.

A variety of program enhancements and ideas for expanding community transportation services are provided, along with cost estimates, which could be implemented during the pilot programs or post-pilot, should the District wish to invest additional resources in community transportation programming at any point.

Detailed assumptions for costs and revenues are outlined to help assess and ensure long-term program sustainability. Budgets are provided for all community transportation programming and potential enhancements beyond the end of the CT grant.

1.9 Meeting Project Objectives

The following table summarizes how each of the project objectives can be met through the implementation of community transportation programs recommended in this CTP.

Objective	CTP Program Recommendation	Rationale
Individual Transportation Solutions	Fixed-flex rural routes	Vehicle can flex for door-to-door service.
	Collaborate with volunteer-based services	Volunteer agencies can fill in service gaps.
Accessible Rural Transportation	Fixed-flex rural routes	Vehicles will be accessible. Vehicle can flex for those who cannot walk to the bus stop.
East-West Connectivity	Fixed-flex rural routes	Provides connections between many rural communities and to larger town centres
Expansion of Corridor 11 Bus	Integrate with ONTC	Provides additional travel options for the public
	Eliminate trip between Orillia and Barrie	Covered by Simcoe LINX, re-invest hours within the District

	Reorganize stops in towns	Add stops in Huntsville and Gravenhurst, eliminate a stop in Bracebridge
Seamless Transportation Network	Timed connections between all services within the District	Rural routes connect with Corridor 11 Bus and Area Municipal services
	Timed connections with services beyond the District	Corridor 11 Bus and rural route to Midland connect with Simcoe LINX
Long-Term Growth and Sustainability	Ridership growth strategies	Increase ridership and revenue, and by extension, Gas Tax funding
	Additional grant/funding opportunities	To be explored as they become available

Table 1: Meeting Project Objectives

2. INTRODUCTION

Transit Consulting Network (TCN), in partnership with Dillon Consulting Limited (Dillon) worked with the District Municipality of Muskoka and community stakeholders to develop this 5-Year Transportation Needs Assessment and Growth and Sustainability Plan (herein referred to as the Community Transportation Plan, or CTP).

2.1 Background

In 2011, the District of Muskoka (the District) began developing a community transportation strategy with the goal of establishing an accessible and affordable transportation network. In 2012, in partnership with Hammond Transportation, a local transportation provider, the District launched the Corridor 11 Bus. This inter-community service has operated between Huntsville and Barrie via Highway 11 since then and continues to operate today. In 2015, the District was awarded a Community Transportation Grant, which contributed to the launch of the Muskoka Extended Transit (MET) Service in 2016. This was a local community transportation service that was designed to enable rural residents to access programs and services in the District's larger communities. The MET program ended in March 2017.

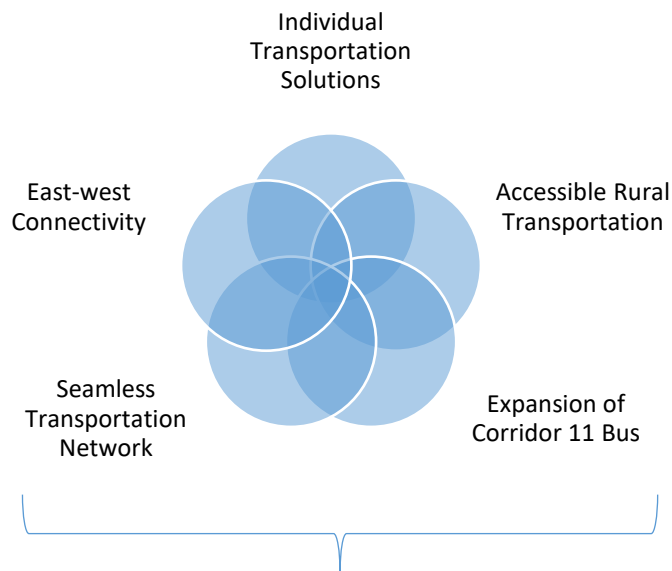
In 2018, the District was notified that an application for another Community Transportation Grant had been successful, and funding was awarded in the amount of \$674,382 to support the continuation and expansion of the Corridor 11 Bus service (\$283,276) and to address local transportation needs within Muskoka including east-west rural public transportation services to replace the former MET service, accessible transportation and individual options, and increase integration among transportation services across the District (\$391,106).

Lessons have been learned from the operation of both the Corridor 11 Bus and the MET service that, in combination with best practices, have been incorporated into the development of the District's CTP. The CTP is designed to address community needs with recommendations that span to the end of the Community Transportation Grant (CTG) program on March 31, 2023. Programs and services offered during the CTG timeframe will be viewed as pilot programs and will be deliverable within the CT grant program budget. Recommendations are also provided to guide sustainability and/or expansion of services beyond the end of the CTG pilot programs.

2.2 Project Scope

During the course of the project, the following objectives of the CTP were to be addressed:

- **Individual Transportation Solutions** to meet door to door resident needs;
- **Accessible Rural Transportation Solutions** to address those with mobility issues or other challenges that impact the ability to use personal vehicles or conventional transit;
- **Provision of East-West Connectivity** building on the former MET pilot program;
- **Expansion of Inter-Community Corridor 11 Bus** through changes that improve service within the existing funding framework;
- **Creation of a Seamless Transportation Network in Muskoka** by improving integration of existing services available within and beyond the District; and
- **Plan for Long-Term Growth and Financial Sustainability** through community partnerships and by maximizing ridership revenues and the dedicated Gas Tax funding from the Province of Ontario.



The project goal and objectives were to develop a CTP that outlines a seamless transportation network that is accessible and financially sustainable, considers the future of the Corridor 11 Bus, and provides strategies to better connect communities east and west across the District.

To meet the project goal and objectives, a work plan was developed that incorporated the following key steps:

- 1) Review of best practices in rural transportation and assessment of existing or planned public transportation services that operate within and beyond the District of Muskoka. This also included a more detailed review of the Corridor 11 Bus and former MET services relative to ridership demand.
- 2) Round 1 Community Engagement that included Transit Focus Group (TFG) consultations, a community-wide on-line survey, and an on-board Corridor 11 Bus rider survey.
- 3) Consultation with current transit service providers to obtain their input on issues and opportunities.
- 4) Development of a public transportation policy framework based on input from the community engagement process that would help guide the development of the CTP.
- 5) Development of preliminary recommendations and public transportation options that could address the District's transportation challenges and opportunities within the existing funding framework and beyond.
- 6) Round 2 Community Engagement with TFG participants that attended during Round 1 Community Engagement to determine the level of support for the proposed recommendations

(i.e. “Did we get it right?”). The project findings, preliminary options and recommendations, and TFG feedback were then presented to the Community and Planning Services Committee for their input.

- 7) Writing of final report/CTP and recommendations.

2.3 Best Practices in Rural Public Transportation

The project team reviewed transportation programs that have been implemented successfully in other rural areas, with a view to assessing which might be suitable for implementation in the District. Various relevant examples are included in the appropriate sections of this report. The project team also drew on lessons learned through their work with over 100 municipalities on research projects, studies of industry trends, and hands-on transportation program implementation. Based on this research and the project team’s experience working in the industry since 1975, best practices were incorporated into the recommendations contained throughout this Community Transportation Plan. Ultimately, the District of Muskoka will have a blueprint moving forward that is sufficiently flexible to be able to adapt as ridership patterns become more established and as technologies evolve.

2.4 Description of Existing Transit Services

Before moving forward with a Community Transportation Plan for the District, it is important to understand the existing transportation options for residents as well as potential partnership opportunities to create a more integrated network. This includes publicly funded transit services, taxi companies, and community support and social service agencies that provide transportation to their clientele. Figure 1 maps the current, planned and past transportation services in or proximal to the District.

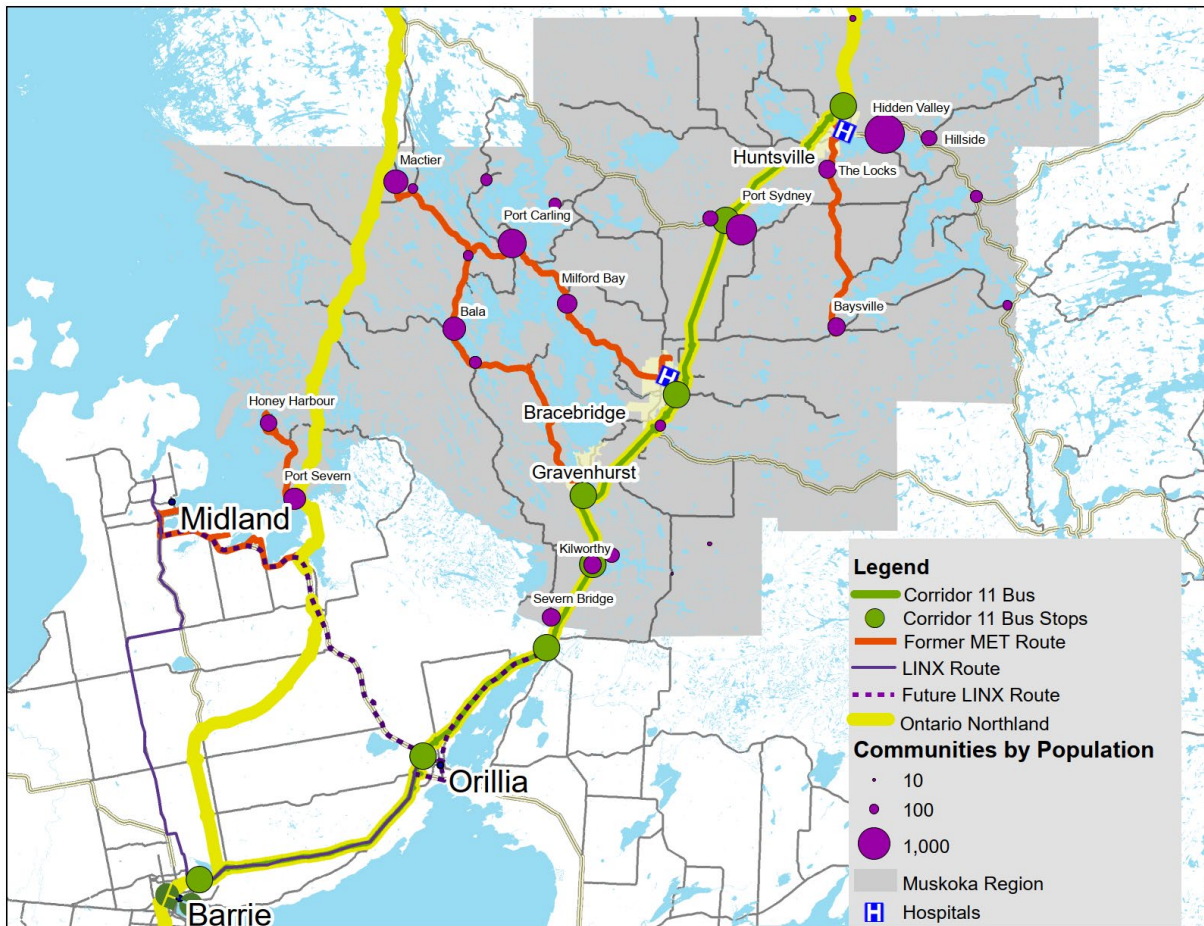


Figure 1: Past and Current Transit Services

2.4.1 Corridor 11 Bus

The Corridor 11 Bus is a weekday service that travels from Huntsville to Barrie with stops in Port Sydney, Bracebridge, Gravenhurst, Kilworthy, Washago, and Orillia.

The service is funded by the District of Muskoka, with assistance from the Provincial Ministry of Transportation, and is contracted to Hammond Transportation. It is provided using a community bus which seats 18. In accordance with funding requirements, the bus is to be replaced by an accessible vehicle.

There are two different daily schedules to serve different origins and destinations. One schedule is followed on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and a different schedule is followed for Tuesdays and Thursdays. Journey times from Huntsville to Georgian College in Barrie range from 1 hour 55 minutes to 2 hours 15 minutes depending on the schedule. There are three northbound and three southbound runs per day between 6:30am and 7:30pm, but the trip termini are not consistent. Two trips per day travel the full route to Barrie, while the third trip on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays is between Huntsville and Gravenhurst. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, the third trip is between Bracebridge and Gravenhurst.

In 2019, ridership averaged 13 trips daily with an average fare of \$3.92. The fares are distance based and vary from \$4 for a one-way trip between Washago and Orillia \$43 for a round trip between Huntsville and Barrie. Just over half of riders (54%) used complimentary tickets provided by the District through Community Services offices or programs. No passenger fare revenue is collected on these trips, which contributes to the low average fare. Corridor 11 Bus fares are not currently integrated with any other transit service providers.

Hammond Transportation charges approximately \$55 hourly to provide the service and operates under a guaranteed daily minimum model regardless of the number of riders. The District provides program oversight through in-house staff.

Connections are provided to local transit services along the route. In Huntsville and Bracebridge, passengers can connect to Huntsville Transit and Bracebridge Transit, respectively. However, the schedules are not currently aligned, so passengers may have to wait up to an hour to make their connection, depending on the day. In Orillia, passengers can transfer to Orillia Transit at Georgian College.

In Barrie, passengers can transfer to Barrie Transit and travel to Downtown Barrie, the Allandale Waterfront GO Station, and other destinations. Connections to Penetanguishene and Midland are available at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Barrie via Simcoe LINX. Again, the schedules are not currently aligned. Despite the available connections, fares are not integrated across the systems, so customers must pay a full fare for both the Corridor 11 service and the service to which they are transferring.

2.4.2 Muskoka Extended Transit (MET)

Muskoka Extended Transit (MET) was launched in January 2016 by the District as a pilot project using funding from the Provincial Community Transportation Pilot Grant. MET included six routes that each ran once or twice per week:

- Dorset to Huntsville (Tuesdays);
- Baysville to Huntsville (Tuesdays);
- Glen Orchard to Gravenhurst (Tuesdays);
- Mactier to Bracebridge (Thursdays);
- Honey Harbour to Midland (Tuesdays and Thursdays); and
- Ryde/Barkway to Gravenhurst (Thursdays) - added in spring 2016 in response to community need.

Fares were \$3 one way or \$5 for a return trip, with discounts available for youth and children.

The service was contracted to Hammond Transportation and made use of school buses that were underutilized during the mid-day (e.g. approximately 9:00am to 2:00 pm). However, the restrictive schedule, non-accessible vehicles, and difficulties residents faced in getting to the bus stops limited the ridership potential of the service. Overall, the following annual boardings were accommodated on each route:

Route	Annual Ridership
Dorset to Huntsville (Tuesdays)	58
Baysville to Huntsville (Tuesdays)	109
Glen Orchard to Gravenhurst (Tuesdays)	73

Mactier to Bracebridge (Thursdays)	222
Honey Harbour to Midland (Tuesdays and Thursdays)	165
Ryde/Barkway to Gravenhurst (Thursdays)	1*

Table 2: MET Ridership, *Route added in spring of 2016

When funding from the Provincial Community Transportation Grant ended, the service was put on hold due to limited ridership and concerns about financial sustainability.

2.4.3 Huntsville Transit

Huntsville Transit operates within the 12 square kilometres of the urban area of the Town of Huntsville, with service contracted to Campbell Bus Lines. There are approximately 25 designated bus stops in place where transit customers can board. Transit customers can also request to be picked up and dropped off in non-designated areas along the route where it is safe to do so; this is referred to as a 'flag stop'. Service is currently offered Monday through Saturday, excluding statutory holidays.

Huntsville Transit provides two types of public transit service described as follows:

Conventional Transit: A single bus travels between Bickley County Drive to the Huntsville District Memorial Hospital, with two hours scheduled for the return trip. The bus operates along a fixed route and schedule during the following hours:

- Weekdays 8:00am – 7:00pm
- Saturdays 10:00am – 5:30pm
- Sundays and statutory holidays – no service

Conventional Modified Transit (CMT): is a separate bus that operates as a dial-a-ride service by providing door-to-door and curb-to-curb service during the following hours:

- Weekdays 8:00am – 7:00pm
- Saturday 10:00am – 5:30pm
- Sundays and statutory holidays – no service

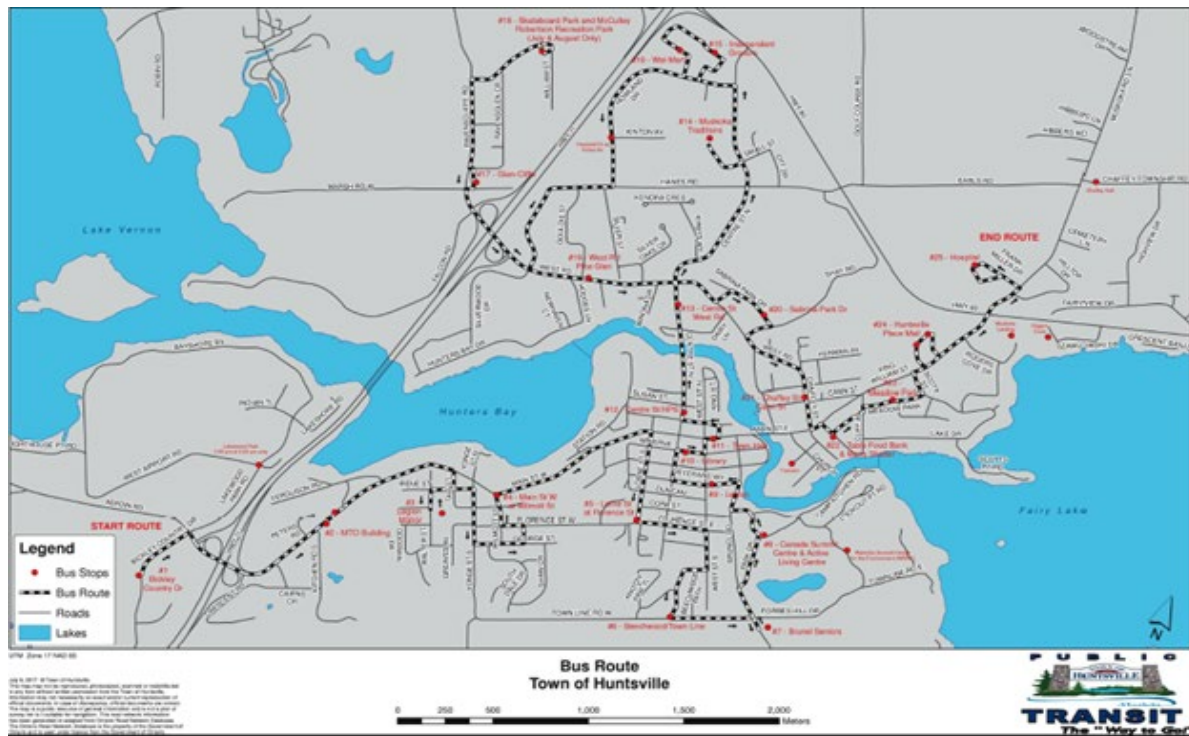


Figure 2: Town of Huntsville Conventional Transit Bus Route

In 2018, the Town of Huntsville supported the restructuring of its transit service. Improvements and expansions to the service were considered. Although no action to date has been taken, the service improvements and proposed routing could be used for future consideration, should the Town implement service changes, including proposed connectivity to Deerhurst and Hidden Valley resorts. The Corridor 11 Bus connects to Huntsville Transit at the food bank located at 1 William Street.

The regular adult single fare is \$2.25 while the 11-ride pass and unlimited ride monthly pass are \$22.50 and \$52.50, respectively. The regular student single fare is \$1.00 while the 11-ride pass and unlimited ride monthly pass are \$10 and \$25, respectively. Pre-school students, accompanied by an adult can board for free.

2.4.4 Bracebridge Transit

Bracebridge Transit operates two services. The first is a conventional fixed route bus (i.e. The Wave) that operates in a one-direction, 60-minute loop.



Figure 3: Bracebridge Transit Service Map

Bracebridge Transit also operates Bracebridge Mobility, a specialized transit service for those who are unable to use conventional transit and unable to walk a distance of 175 meters. Bracebridge Mobility is a shared-ride curb-to-curb service and trips must be booked the day before travel is required. Demand for the service has grown significantly and as such, additional resources may be needed in the future to ensure continuation of the service.

Both services operate on weekdays from 7:30am to 6:30pm and on Saturdays from 8:30am to 6:30pm. Fares for both are \$2.50 for adults (\$50 for a monthly pass) and \$2.00 for students and seniors (\$40 for a monthly pass).

2.4.5 Simcoe LINX

Simcoe LINX is a regional accessible transit service operated by Simcoe County. The service currently operates four routes within the County, two of which can connect to the Corridor 11 service in Barrie and Orillia. The routes originating in Barrie operate Monday to Friday from 6:00am to 6:30pm, including the bus between Barrie and Orillia. Fares for the service vary by distance between \$2 and \$6. Customers can pay with cash or with a reloadable LINX fare card. The conventional buses that are used are fully accessible, but for those who are unable to use conventional transit due to a physical or functional disability, Simcoe County provides specialized door-to-door and/or service to and from conventional transit for those who qualify.

Existing and planned services provided by Simcoe LINX are described below:

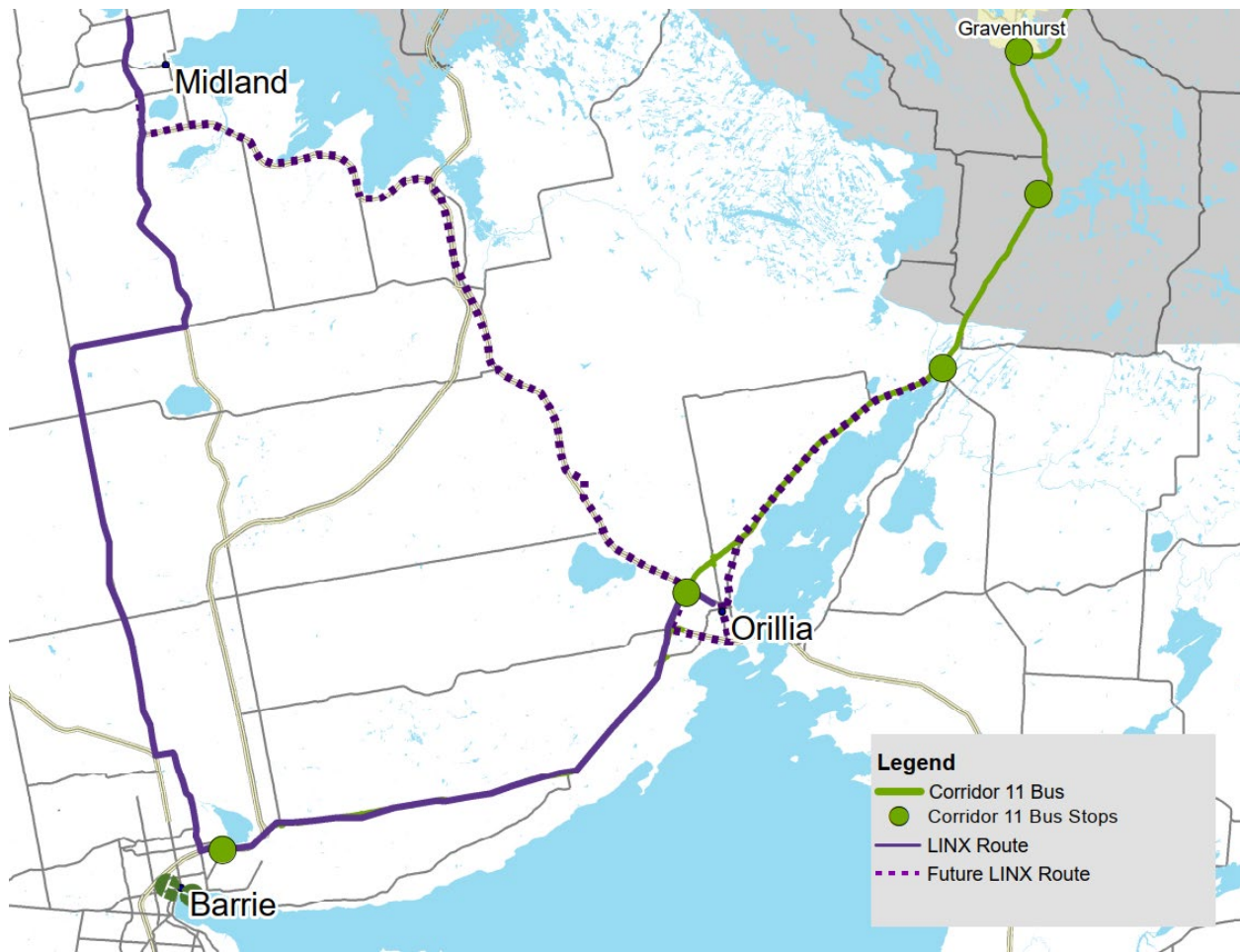


Figure 4: Partial Map of Simcoe LINX Service

2.4.5.1 Existing LINX Route #1

LINX Route #1 offers weekday service from Barrie to Midland and Penetanguishene hourly from 6:00am to 6:30pm.

2.4.5.2 Existing LINX Route #3

LINX Route #3 between Orillia and Barrie operates Monday to Friday from 5:55am to 7:00pm. The \$4.00 LINX zone fare is \$6.00 less than the Corridor 11 Bus fare charged for the same trip length.

2.4.5.3 Future LINX Services

Simcoe County has approved bus service between Orillia and Midland beginning September 2020. The route would run along Highway 12 with a stop in Waubaushene, approximately 8 kilometres from Port Severn along Highway 400 in the District of Muskoka.

There is also a planned link between Midland, Washago and Orillia in the future; however, County of Simcoe staff indicated the extension of LINX service to Washago is a long-term plan (i.e. up to 10 years or more).

2.4.6 Ontario Northland Transportation Commission (ONTC)

ONTC provides motor coach transportation throughout Northern Ontario, and operates two Toronto-bound routes through the District of Muskoka. ONTC uses a reservation-based system, similar to airlines. This enables ONTC to predict demand for any given date. Customers can present either a printed paper ticket or electronic ticket to the bus driver, along with government photo identification.

2.4.6.1 Route 200 North Bay – Toronto

Route 200 travels along Highway 11 with stops in Huntsville, Port Sydney, Bracebridge and Gravenhurst to Georgian College in Orillia before travelling to Toronto via Barrie, with four trips in each direction on weekdays, one trip in each direction on Saturdays and Sundays. Note, however, that one of the trips on each day occurs at night.

This route follows the same highway as the Corridor 11 Bus provided by the District. Opportunities for integration are discussed later in this document.

TORONTO - BARRIE - BRACEBRIDGE - HUNTSVILLE - NORTH BAY



Figure 5: ONTC Route 200

2.4.6.2 Route 400 – Sudbury – Toronto

Route 400 travels along Highway 400 with stops in Parry Sound, Mactier and Port Severn, Orillia, and Barrie before travelling to Toronto. There are three trips daily in each direction. Note, however, that one trip in each direction each day bypasses all stops between Parry Sound and Barrie.

TORONTO - BARRIE - PARRY SOUND - SUDBURY



Figure 6: ONTC Route 400

2.4.7 Taxi Services

There are numerous taxi companies available in the District that provide transportation options. Taxi services can fill the void where transit does not exist. Muskoka Taxi offers accessible vehicles on request.

Municipality	By-Law Maximum Rates	Other Limits
Town of Bracebridge	\$3.00 + \$0.26 per 1/10 kilometer	Waiting time \$0.50 per minute, \$5.00 minimum fare, \$1.00 deduction for students and seniors
Town of Huntsville	Taxi by-law does not include rates	
Town of Gravenhurst	\$3.60 + \$2.60 per kilometer	Waiting time \$30.00 per hour
Township of Muskoka Lakes	Taxi by-law does not include rates	
Township of Lake of Bays	Does not have a taxi by-law	
Township of Georgian Bay	Does not have a taxi by-law	

Table 3: Taxi By-Laws by Municipality

Taxis can become part of the transportation solution in the District by way of augmenting transit services, providing coverage in areas that are not on a community transportation route. Taxi companies can also be contracted to provide shared-ride transportation (i.e. fixed route, fixed-flex route, or on-demand service) at a fixed rate, when larger vehicles are not needed or available. Barriers to taxi providers becoming a more integrated part of the District's transportation solution are the lack of availability of drivers and the fact that taxis are licensed by the lower-tier municipalities with each municipality having the ability to regulate rates. The current taxi rates in Muskoka, combined with the large geography and disbursed population, mean that frequent taxi use as a transportation solution from individuals is often financially out of reach for vulnerable groups.

Rates are not consistent throughout the District, and in fact, most area municipalities in the District elect not to regulate taxi fares. Bracebridge and Gravenhurst are the only ones which legislate fares equating to \$2.60 per kilometre plus a charge of \$3.00 - \$3.60. Debit, credit and cash are accepted at all taxi companies. It should be pointed out that, based on best practices, taxi companies will generally agree to a fixed hourly or per trip rate that is below the regular taxi metre rate when contracted to complement transit services.

2.4.8 Community Care / Volunteer Transportation

District residents without regular access to a personal vehicle who meet the criteria established by volunteer and social service agencies are eligible to have at least some of their transportation needs met.

These types of services include:

- **District of Muskoka Volunteer Driver Program** - This program offers transportation for Ontario Works participants using volunteer drivers who are reimbursed for mileage.
- **Red Cross Simcoe Muskoka Branch Transportation** - The Red Cross provides transportation for those unable to use public transportation or drive a private vehicle, however fees do apply for users of the service. The service is operated by volunteer drivers for most trips, but they have also worked with Hammond Transportation to offer wheelchair accessible vehicles for groups.

Muskoka Seniors - Muskoka Seniors is a volunteer charitable organization that offers services for seniors in Muskoka, based in Huntsville. One service they offer is door to door transportation through vans operated by paid drivers and volunteers. The paid drivers operate two vans (not accessible); one for in-town trips and one for out of town trips. There is an extra third vehicle, in the event it is needed. Volunteer drivers are assigned to trips that cannot be fulfilled by paid drivers. Volunteers are reimbursed at \$0.45/km driven. Fees apply for users of this service.

- **Central Muskoka Legion** - The Central Muskoka Legion provides free volunteer transportation for senior veterans to attend medical appointments.

It is also worth noting that many seniors' residential centres in Ontario own and operate their own forms of transportation to transport residents periodically to attend weekly activities, shopping trips, etc.

3. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The community engagement process for this project consisted of undertaking on-board transit customer interviews and transit focus groups followed by an on-line community-wide survey, one-on-one consultations with members of the public and transit service providers, and a collective meeting with all transit service providers that either operate within, proximal to or travel through the District of Muskoka. When draft transportation options and recommendations addressing the objectives of this project were developed, focus group participants were again consulted to confirm the strategies developed were in line with their expectations. This initial plan was also presented to the District Community and Planning Services Committee (CPSC) for their review and input. The stakeholder and CPSC feedback on the draft options and recommendations is summarized in Section 5 of this report.

The purpose of gathering community input through multiple methods was to increase the opportunity for the voices of target populations to be heard. It is recognized that residents who have the potential to benefit the most from improved community transportation services in the District may not have been able to access the on-line survey or able to take the time to attend a focus group. However, the focus groups strategically included representatives from agencies that serve many of the District's most vulnerable residents and who have first hand knowledge of the transportation challenges that they face. Interviews with Corridor 11 passengers were also conducted to ensure input was gathered from current users of the District's service.

3.1 On-Board Customer Interviews

On-board Corridor 11 Bus Passenger Interviews were undertaken by District staff on October 4, 8 and 11, 2019 with transit customers boarding in Huntsville, Bracebridge, Gravenhurst, Orillia, and Barrie. In total 9 interviews were completed.

A summary of transit customer comments is provided as follows:

- Expand to weekend service;
- Earlier northbound Bus;
- More service between Bracebridge and Orillia and Port Sydney to Orillia;
- Offer on-demand bus stops for drop offs and flag stops for pick-ups;
- ONTC Bus would be used if no Corridor 11 Bus existed;
- Should make more people aware of the service and schedules;
- Wheelchair accessibility is needed; and
- Provide discount passes.

3.2 Transit Focus Groups

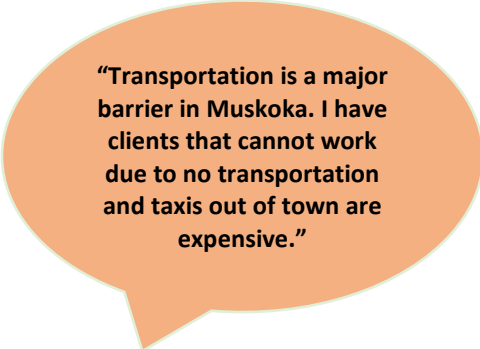
There were four Transit Focus Group (TFG) meetings held on October 7, 2019 that were attended by 34 individuals, excluding District and Consulting staff involved with the project. The purposes of the focus group format were to familiarize community stakeholders with the project, enable the project team to more fully understand the issues and opportunities, and identify community transportation priorities based on their respective needs.

The four TFGs consisted of representation from:

- District Program Staff (primarily Health and Community Services);
- Allied Agencies;
- Area Municipal Staff (primarily Economic Development and Transportation); and
- Tourism, Employment and Business Representatives, including large employers.

Each TFG meeting started off with a presentation by the Consultant, followed by informal discussions. The TFG input and detail on which agencies were represented is provided in [Appendix A](#) and summarized in the following:

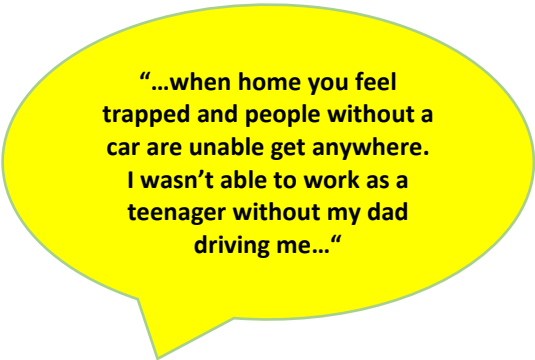
- District Program Staff
 - Better connections to Corridor 11 bus to better accommodate health-related trips;
 - Past MET service should have been more flexible to accommodate those that cannot walk to a bus stop;
 - Limited MET service in off-peak hours did not meet many needs;
 - Longer span of service (hours of operation) needed for Ontario Works clients; and
 - Transit could help attract needed labour force.
- Allied Agencies
 - Focus transit systems on the needs of vulnerable population;
 - Co-ordination between Red Cross and District Seniors programs already takes place (i.e. ride sharing);
 - Agencies indicated they would refer some clients to use public transit if service schedules were able to meet their needs;
 - Honey Harbour and Port Severn residents typically go to Midland to access amenities;
 - Fixed flex-route concept supported; and
 - Lack of public transit in Gravenhurst is an issue.
- Area Municipalities
 - Connectivity between smaller communities needed;
 - Taxis are currently being used by employers to transport employees (e.g. Tim Hortons uses Busy Bee taxi);
 - Students are carpooling;
 - Workforce shortage in Muskoka due to lack of affordable housing near jobs; and
 - Need to connect with Parry Sound.



“Transportation is a major barrier in Muskoka. I have clients that cannot work due to no transportation and taxis out of town are expensive.”

- Tourism, Employment, Business Owners, Large Employers

- Transit and housing availability are the largest barriers for businesses;
- Transit service needs to expand to all areas in Muskoka;
- Service between Bala and Port Carling is needed;
- Maximize timed connections between local transportation services with the Corridor 11 Bus and ONTC buses;
- Improve marketing of Corridor 11 Bus schedule;
- Weekends are high employment days for hospitality and tourism businesses so transit schedules that accommodate this reality are needed;
- Some employers provide shuttles;
- Marriott offers shuttles in Muskoka Lakes and employees pay for the service;
- Employers willing to having different shift times to accommodate bus schedules;
- Getting people to work is higher priority than getting them home after shifts;
- Taxi companies struggle with hiring and retaining drivers; and
- Construction workers need early service (e.g. 6:00am morning start time, job sites are often from long distances from homes) and the industry is also struggling to attract workers.



“...when home you feel trapped and people without a car are unable get anywhere. I wasn’t able to work as a teenager without my dad driving me...”

As a follow-up to the TFGs, an interview was undertaken with a representative of the 120-member Muskoka Home Builders Association (MHBA), who indicated that transportation is one of the challenges employees face and contributes to MHBA members’ employee shortage. Additional detail on this conversation is included in [Appendix A](#).

The input received from the TFGs pointed to a need to accommodate the more vulnerable population to access goods and services, including medical appointments, but there was equal emphasis placed on the business environment relative to accessing a larger pool of employees, many of whom live in the more remote communities due to the availability of affordable housing.

3.3 Community On-line Survey

An on-line public transit survey for both transit customers and non-customers was launched on October 8 and continued through to October 30, 2019. The survey was also made available in hard copy upon request. There were a total of 588 respondents. The survey consisted of 32 multiple choice questions and an open-ended question for comments and suggestions relative to improving rural transportation services. Although the on-line community-wide survey was not based on random sampling, it did provide the project team with the necessary information to help identify transportation improvement priorities by complementing the information from the other consultation processes. A complete compilation of survey results is found in [Appendix B](#).

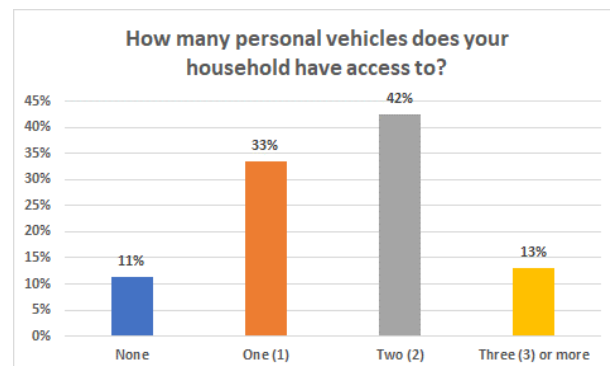
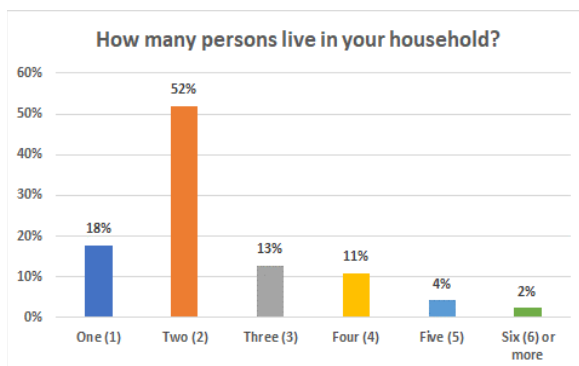
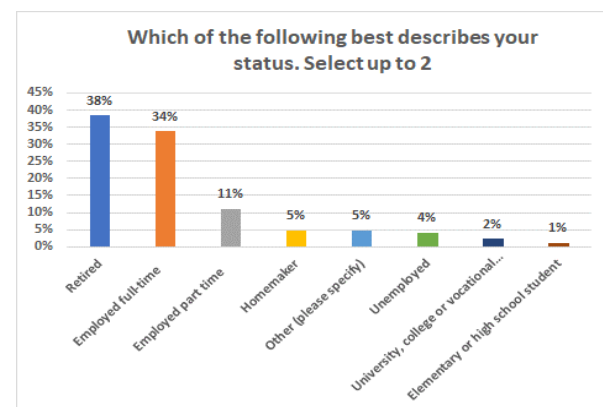
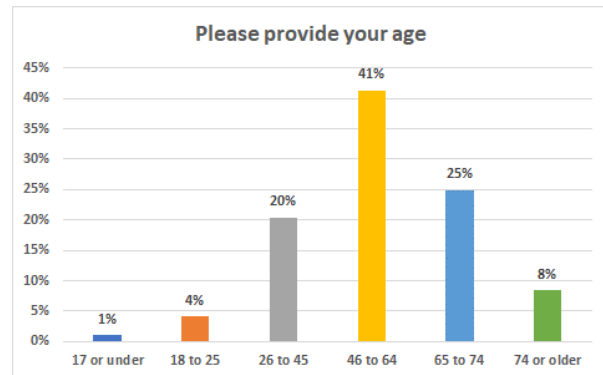
3.3.1 Overview of Respondents

When asked if the respondent used transit (i.e. local and/or inter-community services) in Muskoka over the last three months, 16% responded in the positive while the remaining 84% had not used transit. It is the latter group that represents the largest market potential to grow transit ridership.

A significant number of respondents (33%) were seniors over 64 years of age. Based on 2016 census data, 26% of the District of Muskoka population is over 64 years old; this is well above the Ontario average of 17%.

Forty-one (41) percent of the respondents were 46 to 64 years of age, while the 2016 census reported that 32% of the District's population is in this age cohort; this is also above the Ontario average of 28%. The population of Muskoka is aging, and combined with increasing life expectancies, this will add to the challenges associated with a larger proportion of residents that will no longer be able to drive.

When asked about employment status, 38% responded they were retired, which can be attributed to the large number of seniors that responded. It is this age group that is usually less sensitive to the need to travel during peak periods. 406 of the 583 respondents (70%) reported that they were in one- or two-person households, which can be partially explained by the higher proportion of seniors. Trips taken by seniors tend to be during the off-peak and for non-work or school-related trips, which will have a bearing on public transportation needs relative to the hours of operation and trip origins and destinations to be served.

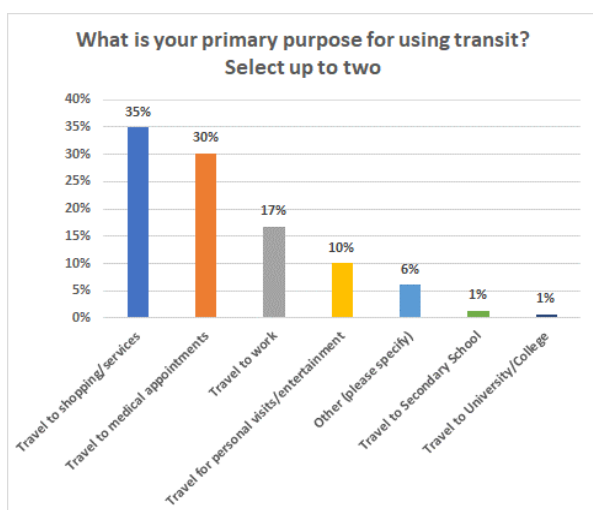
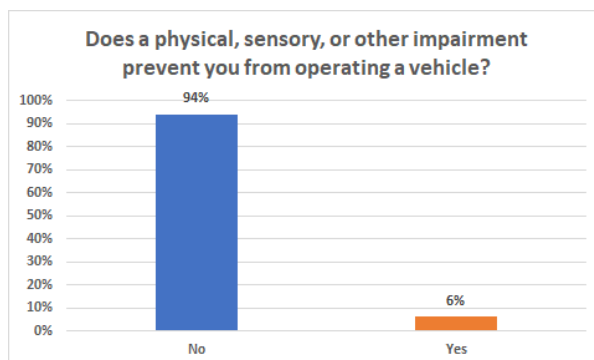


When asked about access to a private vehicle, 89% had access to one or more vehicles. The 11% that responded they did not have access to a vehicle represents the market that is most reliant on transit. It is worth noting that the number of households without a vehicle will likely increase as more of the expanding elderly population will be unable to drive due to age-related limitations. Further, many studies point to a growing number of transit-dependent millennials who are deferring auto ownership or delay obtaining a driver's license, which will potentially further increase the demand. Of the 33% of respondents from single-vehicle households, 68% have more than one person living in their household. In many cases, one person will use the vehicle for access to work while their spouse remains home and is unable to travel during the day due to lack of public transportation, which is in line in comments received.

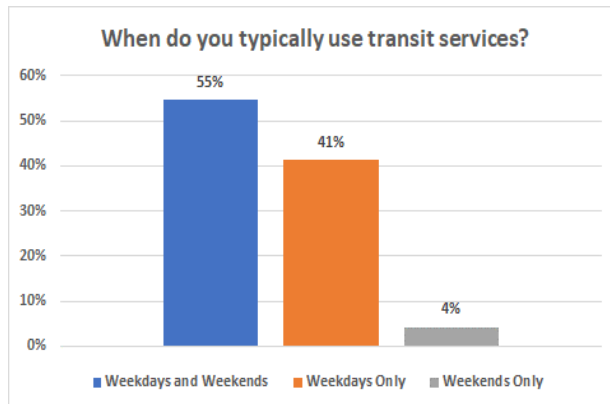
The 55% of the respondents that indicated they have multi-vehicle (2+ vehicles) households is also a significant potential market that would benefit from a public transportation service that could meet their needs. Although providing improved public transit service will not reduce car ownership overnight, it could influence ownership levels when vehicles are due for replacement.

Only 6% of the respondents indicated they are unable to operate a vehicle. This will likely increase as the population ages and will also build on the 44% of respondents that reported they either do not own a vehicle (11%) or those in single-vehicle households (33%) whose family members may not have access to a vehicle (usually) during normal weekday business hours as described above.

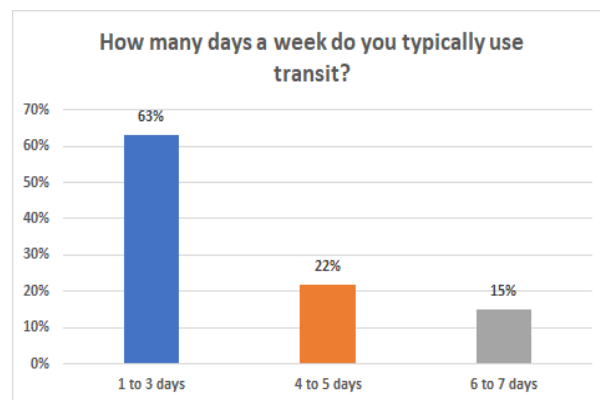
3.3.2 Transit Travel Characteristics



When asked why transit was used, travel for medical appointments, shopping, services, personal visits, and entertainment trip purposes represented 75% of responses while work trips represented only 17%. Only 2% of the responses identified secondary and post-secondary school trips as the primary reason for using transit. The low number of responses for work and school trips (a total of 19%) may be attributed to the fact that transit services do not adequately accommodate work hours and home to work destinations. These were identified as issues during the TFG meetings and subsequent one-on-one consultations.



Of the 95 respondents who have used transit in Muskoka in the last three months, over half (55%) used transit during weekdays and weekends, while 41% used transit on weekdays only. The lower weekend-only rate (4%) may partially be explained by the availability of vehicles for one-vehicle households on weekends. This is common throughout other municipalities. The low weekend use may also be due to the fact that transit services are more limited on weekends. ONTC runs on Saturdays and Sundays, but Huntsville and Bracebridge Transit only operate on Saturdays. The Corridor 11 Bus does not operate on weekends.



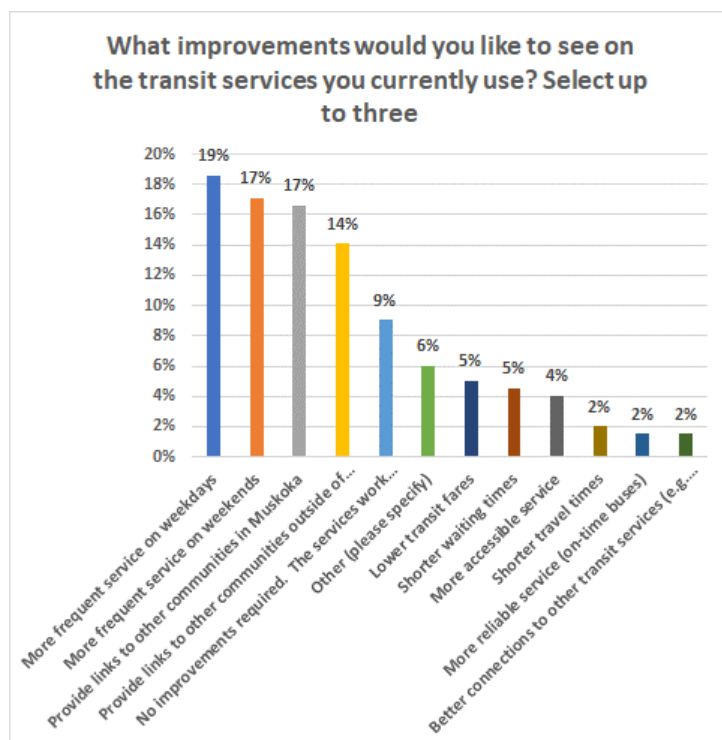
As expected, of those that used transit in the previous three months, 63% were infrequent customers while 37% were considered regular transit customers, using transit 4 to 7 days per week.

3.3.3 Transit Customer Service Improvement Priorities

When asked about what improvements transit customers would like to see, the top four responses were geared towards service coverage and more frequent service:

- 19% more frequent weekday service;
- 17% more frequent weekend service;
- 17% more links to other communities within Muskoka; and
- 14% more links to communities outside of Muskoka.

While 9% of the answers indicated that service was adequate, the remainder (20%) were geared towards service quality, accessibility, speed, and affordability. Having more frequent



service (38%) was a slight priority over having increased coverage (31%) to link communities within and beyond the District. This is in-line with comments obtained during the TFG process.

3.3.4 Non-Transit Customer Priorities

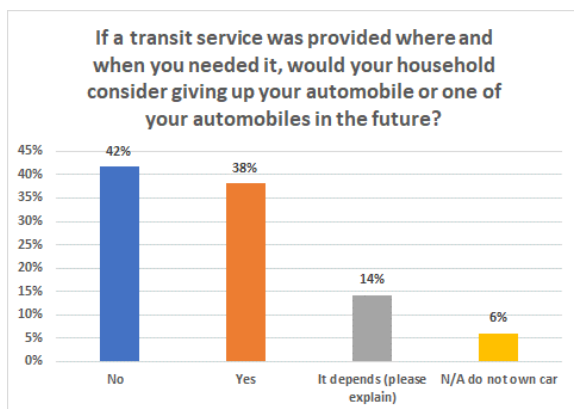
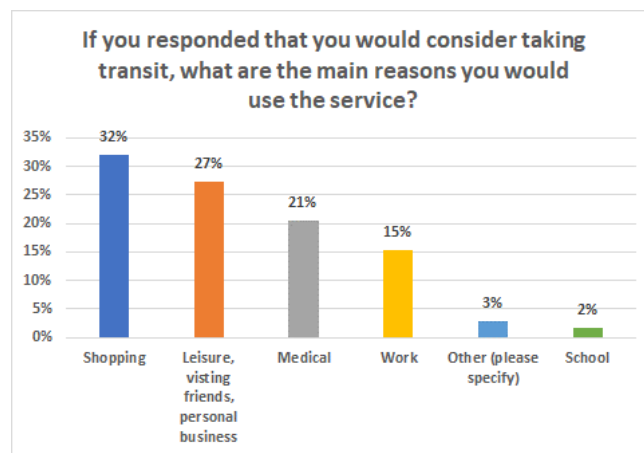
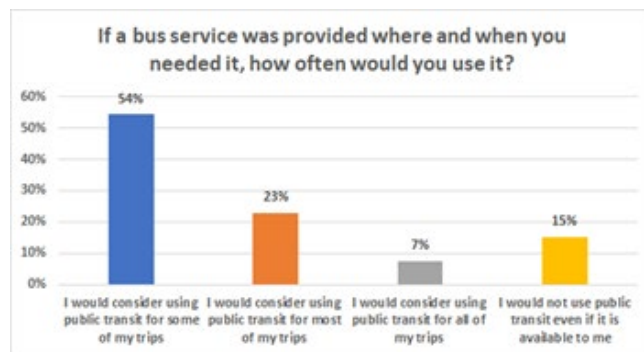
As mentioned earlier, the vast majority of survey respondents (84%) were not transit customers. It is this group of residents that represent the largest market potential.

When asked how often they would use a bus service if it was provided where and when they needed the service, 85% of the 500 respondents indicated they would use transit for some or all of their trips.

Of those that indicated they would switch to transit for some or all of their trips, the vast majority (80%) indicated they would use transit for trips that could typically be taken during off-peak periods, namely:

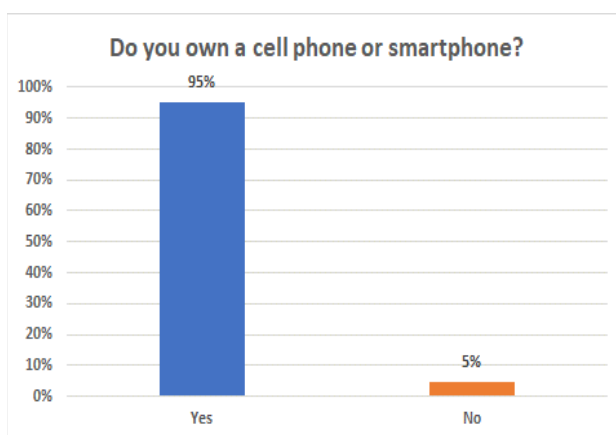
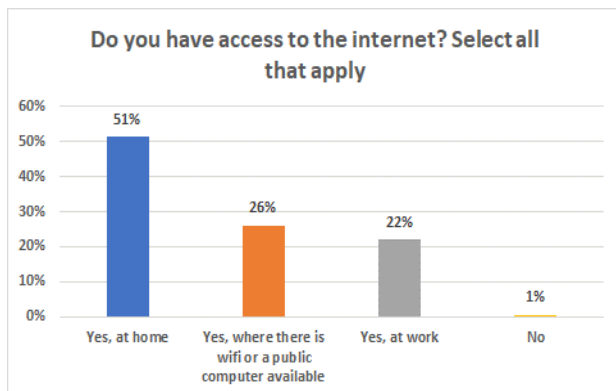
- 32% Shopping;
- 27% Leisure, Personal Business and Social;
- 21% Medical; and
- 3% Other.

The balance, 17%, would use transit for trips normally taken during the peak periods, which is normally before 9:00am and between 3:00pm and 6:00pm to accommodate work and school hours.



Of the 485 non-transit customers that responded to the question of whether or not the family household would give up one or more of their vehicles if transit met their needs, 38% responded in the affirmative. In this regard, it should be pointed out that most people will not give up a vehicle immediately, even if suitable transit were available.

3.3.5 Access to Internet and Mobile Transit App Access



Given the growth in app-based real-time access to transit information, the ability to book transit trips, and mobile payment systems, questions were asked about connectivity to the internet given the rural District environment.

Although only 51% of the respondents reported they had computer access to the internet from home, 99% had access from home, work or through public Wi-Fi. Computer access is important for ease of use when accessing public transportation information and, where needed, booking trips such as for the ONTC service. However, Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs), cell phones and smart phones provide alternatives, which were reported to be available to 95% of the respondents. To maximize access to transit information among residents, it is important to accommodate those without access to a computer at home, especially those with landlines or cell phones only, or those that are not as comfortable or experienced in using apps on their smartphones.

3.3.6 Survey Comments

There were 200 respondents that provided open-ended comments at the end of the survey. The detailed comments are provided in [Appendix C](#).

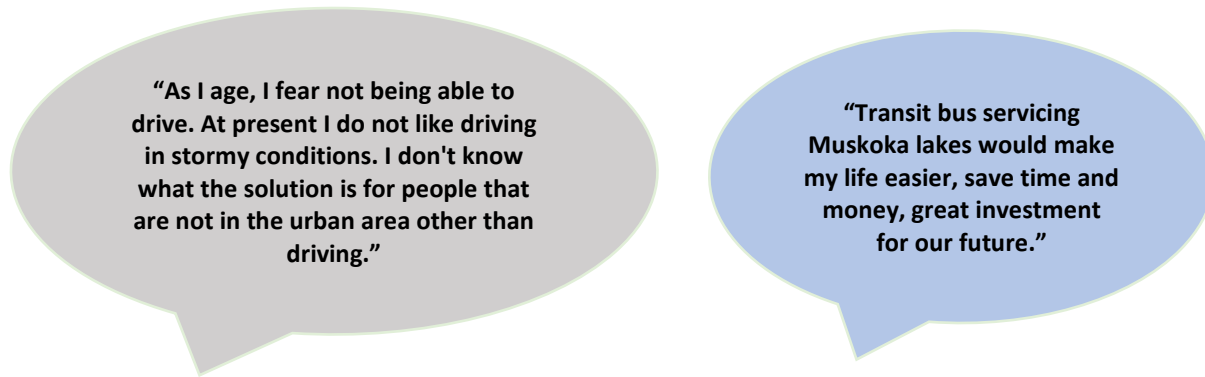
"...I have elder parents and if they lose the use of a car it would be great that they have options other than taxi to get around."

"More reliability, more often and in the outsidess of town. Many of our families and people are isolated due to poor bus service."

"Would be great to have a better mode of transport between Gravenhurst and Bracebridge as well as in Gravenhurst itself."

"I would like to have some kind of transportation here so I can do things without asking friends for a ride and do them by myself."

The comments and suggestions received covered a wide variety of subjects, but the vast majority of survey comments fell into one of several key themes:



1. Improved transportation within Muskoka is needed, including better service between communities, in rural areas, and greater coverage of the area overall.
2. Improved transportation beyond Muskoka is needed, with better service to the south and stronger links to neighbouring transit systems.
3. Frequency of service is important and should be improved for existing services and carefully considered for future services.
4. Many people mentioned the type of service they felt would work best in the area, which was commonly some type of door-to-door, ride sharing, or Uber-type service, and many respondents also mentioned that they would like to see the train service resume between Muskoka and Toronto.

The comments were comprehensive and echoed many of the concerns and suggestions brought forward during the TFG meetings.

3.4 Transit Service Provider Consultation

Following the community engagement process, a working meeting of most transit agencies operating within or through the District of Muskoka took place on November 28, 2019 and was attended by:

- District staff;
- Transit Consulting Network;
- Huntsville Transit;
- Bracebridge Transit;
- Hammond Transportation – Corridor 11 Bus; and
- ONTC - Highway 11 and Highway 400.

The purpose of the meeting was to identify issues and opportunities that could better address the concerns expressed by stakeholders during the community engagement process. The meeting was productive and considered a milestone since this was the first time all transit agencies that operate

within or through the District met collectively to discuss issues and identify potential solutions. The results are summarized below.

Simcoe LINX representatives were contacted both before and after the November 28 meeting. Their input has been incorporated.

3.4.1 Service Integration

In terms of service integration, there was consensus on the following strategies:

- Since the ONTC Highway 11 route has stops in Huntsville, Bracebridge and Gravenhurst and is also served by the Corridor 11 (C11) Bus, consideration could be given to marketing the ONTC route as another option for Muskoka residents. The higher ONTC bus fares could be subsidized by the District to match the Corridor 11 Bus fares.
- The Corridor 11 Bus should use the same bus stops as ONTC. Passengers could choose between the two services, which would allow more options without adding any transit operating costs.
- The previous MET service from Honey Harbour and Port Severn to Midland was one of the more successful MET routes. In 2020, Simcoe LINX will be introducing a transit route between Orillia and Midland with a stop in Waubaushene. If re-introduced, the Honey Harbour-Port Severn service could connect with the LINX service to accommodate transfers to Orillia.

3.4.2 Transit Fare Integration

When transferring between transit systems today within Muskoka, one must purchase separate bus fares. Fares charged on the Corridor 11 Bus are distance-based, while fares charged for Bracebridge Transit and Huntsville Transit are single cash fares, tickets, or passes. Most notable is the smart card system (i.e. pre-loaded tap and pay cards) used by Bracebridge Transit, which has the same technology used by the Simcoe LINX service, Wasaga Beach Transit and Collingwood Transit. Adopting the same technology for Huntsville Transit and the Corridor 11 Bus would enable transit customers to have a single card that can be used on all transit services within the District (plus potentially in Simcoe, Wasaga Beach and Collingwood), although some back-end software development will be required.

3.4.3 Short-turn of Corridor 11 Bus

The District reported that approximately 70% of Corridor 11 Bus trips are for travel within Muskoka while 30% go beyond the District to Orillia and Barrie. The Corridor 11 Bus travels to Georgian College campuses in both Orillia and Barrie and returns twice daily. Since Simcoe LINX provides service every 50 minutes between Barrie and Orillia, there was consensus that Corridor 11 Bus service could terminate at Georgian College in Orillia, without sacrificing service levels. Scheduled properly, there could be timed transfers between the Corridor 11 Bus and LINX service. It should be noted that the LINX fare is \$4.00 between Orillia and Barrie while the Corridor 11 Bus fare is \$10.00. This would not only save riders money, but the saved vehicle hours could be reallocated to enhance Corridor 11 Bus service within Muskoka.

There was also discussion regarding the elimination of Corridor 11 Bus service between Gravenhurst and Orillia since the ONTC Bus provides three trips daily. The higher bus fare of ONTC could be subsidized by the District of Muskoka to maintain the same affordability as the Corridor 11 Bus fares.

3.4.4 Rural East-West Transit

The past MET service had a limited service schedule to accommodate the use of school buses during a five-hour window each day, the vehicles were not accessible, and there were a limited number of bus stops with no flexibility for the bus to deviate from the route. All of these factors resulted in minimal demand. The transit providers agreed that longer service hours and greater flexibility in terms of routes and stops would be needed for a successful east-west rural transit system in Muskoka.

A number of rural transit options were discussed ranging from strictly demand-responsive curb-to-curb service to fixed-route and scheduled service. Further, it was recognized that the long distances between communities or individual residences would make frequent service costly and as such, consideration could be given to providing service on select days only. Regardless of the type of service, it would be important to ensure connectivity with the Corridor 11 Bus and the local systems in Bracebridge and Huntsville.

3.4.5 Enhanced Marketing of All Transit Services in Muskoka

There was consensus that a marketing strategy should be considered for transit customers wanting to travel both within and outside of the District. For example, the Corridor 11 Bus and ONTC schedules should be co-marketed to advise residents that two options exist for travel within and beyond the District. Using the same bus stops would help increase awareness.

3.4.6 Future Orillia to Washago LINX Route

The Corridor 11 Bus travels to Orillia via Washago. Both communities are in Simcoe County. Although there are future plans for Simcoe County to provide service along this section of Highway 11, they are long-term (e.g. 10 years or more). During the interim, consideration can be given to cost-sharing the Corridor 11 Bus costs with Simcoe County for the service if additional stops between Washago and Orillia were scheduled. In discussions with Simcoe County, staff indicated that this may not be a solution that would be desirable to pursue in the short term. However, it should, nonetheless, be considered in the future since it would be a low-cost option for Simcoe County if the Corridor 11 Bus continues to serve Washago and Orillia.

3.4.7 Regional Transit Concept for District of Muskoka

Many of the topics covered by the participants of transit service provider meeting addressed:

- Seamless transit service integration;
- Priority target markets that must be accommodated (e.g. rural seniors, stay at home parents and children, etc.);
- Fare integration;
- Governance;
- Maximizing the dedicated transit Gas Tax funding;
- Municipal fiscal challenges;
- Concern for a lack of local public transit in Gravenhurst; and
- Growth in specialized transit demand.

As a result of addressing the aforementioned topics, there was consensus among participants that a single Regional Transit agency governed and provided by the District should be explored to address the future of public transportation in the area.

Many of the benefits that could be realized include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- Opportunities to maximize the dedicated transit Gas Tax funds received;
- Having a single administration that deals with transit rather than three (or more), potentially leading to economies of scale and lower costs;
- Reduce transit service duplication between municipal providers;
- Consistency in transit policy and service standards;
- A single procurement department to address vehicle and other purchases;
- Common fare structure and seamless fare integration;
- A single marketing and branding program; and
- A single agency to deal with transit agencies beyond the District.

Additional issues that would need to be addressed are governance and how the area municipalities benefitting from a Regional Transit system would both contribute financially and provide input into transit service decisions. Although not within the project scope, regionalizing transit was deemed by the transit service providers group as worth pursuing in the future.

3.5 Summary of Priorities Identified Through Community Engagement

The community engagement process allowed the project team to identify community priorities, understand issues and opportunities, and obtain feedback on industry best practices that could be applied to the District's public transportation alternatives.

Overall, the feedback and information from the various community engagement opportunities demonstrated that:

1. Stronger transit links are needed between communities both within and beyond the District.
2. Rural transit service should be flexible in terms of routing and can focus on trips that help residents meet their basic needs, but should have significantly longer service hours than the MET.
3. Helping the District's more vulnerable residents access essential services should be the primary goal, but working with employers to provide commuting options can be considered concurrently or in future expansions of the pilot projects.
4. Integration (i.e. fares, schedules, stop locations, etc.) between the various services that operate within the District is important.
5. The Corridor 11 Bus could terminate in Orillia in the short term and in Washago in the long term in order to reallocate the resources to service within the District.
6. Increased public awareness of all the transit options is needed.
7. A more regional approach to the existing transit business models and governance should be explored.

4. PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION POLICY FRAMEWORK

Established public transportation systems generally have detailed policies and guidelines that help support route and service design to address days of operation, frequency of service, span of service, etc. Given the limited funding available within the Community Transportation funding envelopes, and that the District public transportation services are in their infancy, it was determined that detailed transit policies are not required at this time, but should be developed in the future once pilot projects associated with this Plan are completed. In the interim, a number of guiding principles based on best practices for a rural transportation environment and the goals and objectives outlined in this Plan would be more appropriate.

Considering the conclusions of the community engagement process in conjunction with best practices, the project team considered several guiding principles in designing the District's transportation services including the following:

- Service should reach as many areas as practical within the District, while recognizing that for many residents, a modest level of service will be sufficient to assist them in meeting their needs.
- Service should be integrated, allowing for efficient transfers, both with other services offered by the District, area municipal services, as well as regional services outside the District.
- Services should be accessible for those with mobility issues or other challenges that impact the ability to use personal vehicles or conventional transit.
- Transit information and booking should be available for customers with and without access to the internet.
- Transit should be as financially sustainable as possible, recognizing that most public transportation services in Ontario/Canada cannot operate without some level of taxpayer or grant subsidies. Investment should balance the objectives of growing ridership and offering as much coverage as possible.

It became clear that due to the limited financial resources available, the Community Transportation Plan should be designed to assist the most vulnerable residents in the District with accessing goods and services. The Plan can then be expanded to address employment-related needs.

Public transportation options to meet the needs of vulnerable residents should be evaluated on the following criteria. These criteria were also used in the formulation of the recommendations in this Plan:

- Coverage: How many destinations and residents are served?
- Accessibility: Is the service accessible to those with disabilities?
- Convenience: Does the service meet the travel needs of residents throughout the day?
- Financial Sustainability: Is the service achieving moderate to high value for investment?
- Ridership Potential: How much ridership could the service attract?
- Regional and Community Connectivity: Does the service allow customers to connect to other transit services and/or between communities in and outside of the project area?
- Easy to Understand: Are the schedules, services, and fares easy for customers to understand?

5. RURAL TRANSIT SERVICE DELIVERY OPTIONS

A brief description of rural public transit service options that could meet the objectives of this project are outlined below. A discussion of which services are and are not recommended for consideration in the District is provided in Section 5.5 below.

5.1 Fixed Route Service

Fixed-routes have transit vehicles follow a predetermined path on a regular schedule. Transit vehicles do not deviate from the route or schedule. Schedules can operate based on a set frequency (e.g. every hour) or based on a predetermined number of trips per day (e.g. one trip during the morning peak period and one during the afternoon peak period).

Fixed-route conventional transit vehicles operate along roadways typically with fixed stops in urban areas, whereas rural areas often use a 'flag stop' approach. A variety of different vehicles can be used ranging from smaller community buses or vans to heavy-duty transit buses.

5.1.1 Fixed-Route Shared-Ride Taxi

Where demand is minimal, the taxi industry can be used to offer a low-cost option where larger buses are not warranted or may not be available nearby. Rather than operating a conventional bus along a fixed route, a taxi vehicle is used instead in a share-ride format. The benefits are no or lower purchase and/or operating costs, extended reach for transportation, and the ability to familiarize residents with a dependable fixed-route service. Shared-ride taxis can be used until ridership grows to a point where larger public transit vehicles are warranted. No dedicated dispatch service is required for this option. Since the taxi vehicles would not offer a door-to-door service and are being shared, the service is not viewed as competing with regular taxis.

Contracted taxi service providers can be compensated based on a negotiated hourly or per trip rate. In order to attract a taxi operator(s), a minimum revenue guarantee in the contract is often necessary.

5.2 On-Demand Transportation

On-demand transit is a shared-ride, demand-responsive public transportation service typically used in lower demand areas. With this service model, the vehicles do not follow a fixed route or schedule. Instead, passengers pre-book trips and vehicles are routed dynamically to the passengers' pick-up and drop-off points.

On-demand transit has started to be implemented in rural areas across the country to introduce transportation service where it would be infeasible or inefficient to implement conventional fixed route transit. On-Demand transportation models vary widely. Municipalities can manage the service themselves or they can partner with private companies such as Uber. The following represents a few examples of different models that have been used in Canada.

5.2.1 Dial-a-Ride Service

Dial-a-ride service is a demand-responsive curb-to-curb bus or van service whereby residents call in to a dispatch centre or a driver cell phone. For regular trips (i.e. daily, weekly, etc.), service can be arranged on a subscription basis so that the customer is not required to call repetitively. Service can be solely in response to requests or can be structured to operate on a fixed frequency basis (e.g. every two hours). In the latter case, the requester is given the next available time the vehicle can arrive to pick him or her up, and an approximate arrival time at destination.

Dial-a-ride service is generally used in place of bus service in areas where the population is sparse and demand for service is very low. The need to request each trip and wait for the next available time can make it less convenient for the customer. The vehicles can be owned by the municipality, a private transit operator, or a taxi company contracted to provide service.

5.2.2 Mobile App-Based On-Demand Service

A mobile app-based on-demand service involves software purchased from a third party that allows customers to plan, book, track and pay for their ride in real time. Users book trips via a mobile app, and routes for transit vehicles are created by the software in response to trip bookings to optimize the number of shared rides that can be accommodated without sacrificing service quality. The cost of an on-demand technology platform, which varies depending on the provider, is generally \$50,000 to \$100,000 as a one-time cost, in addition to up to \$10,000 - \$15,000 annually for licensing per vehicle.

RideWell is such a service in Wellington County, with connections to the City of Guelph. It began operation as a four-year pilot in October 2019. The service operates two to four sedans within the County, with accessible trips contracted to Guelph Taxi. Customers can use a mobile app to book, pay for, and track their trip. Fares are charged by distance and range from \$5.00 to \$70.00 (\$0.60 per kilometer). Customers are requested to provide at least 90 minutes' notice when booking a ride. This is due to the large geographic area of the County and their desire to optimize rides through ride sharing.

At the time of this report, the service is delivering under one trip per revenue vehicle hour, likely due to the County's large geographic area and the relative newness of the service.

5.2.3 Ridesharing Partnership

This type of service is similar to a mobile-app based On Demand service, but uses an existing ride hailing company such as Uber or Lyft as an operator.

The demand-responsive Uber taxi pilot project operated in the Town of Innisfil is a unique service that takes the place of regular transit service. The Uber service requires customers to have a mobile app on their phone; however, a resident can also use a regular phone line to arrange service. Rides are shared with other people. The passenger pays the fare set by the Town, while the difference between the fare and the standard Uber charge is subsidized by the Town. Uber provides a discount for non-subsidized trips such as travel outside the normal transit hours established by the Town.

The experience was presented by Town of Innisfil staff at the Ontario Public Transit Association conference on April 23, 2018 with the following highlights given:

- The Innisfil communities, in proximity to the City of Barrie, are dispersed over a large geographic area;
- The program is in its infancy, but was well received and demand has grown to approximately four passengers per hour;
- Residents use the service predominantly for travel within the Town, to GO Transit stops and stations, and to link up with Barrie Transit;
- At some point it is expected that some fixed-route services could be implemented to replace some Uber service when there is a business case to do so;
- In order to have an Uber service option, there needs to be an adequate supply of Uber drivers available either in or close to the municipality, to avoid long, unpaid deadhead trips for drivers, and ensure that service is sufficiently prompt to meet Uber standards;
- Although Uber owns the data (i.e. individual information and trip origin-destinations, etc.), it is shared with the Town.

More recently, costs of the Uber service in Innisfil have escalated due to increased demand, and measures were taken to mitigate costs, including increasing the fare and reducing the number of subsidized trips that can be made by each resident per month.

5.3 Fixed-Flex Route Service

A fixed-flex route service combines some of the advantages of fixed route transit (i.e. predictable service, low cost per passenger) with those of demand-responsive transit services. A flex route vehicle would follow a normal scheduled route but has the ability to deviate off the route for a pick up or drop off in response to a request to do so. Deviations off the main route should usually be no more than five minutes. Pick-ups must be requested in advance by calling into a dispatch office, driver cell phone and/or requesting a deviation through a mobile app. Although drop-offs may be requested in advance, they can also be requested on-board. A variation of this type of service is to designate some transit stops as fixed, and some as flex. The fixed stops are always served, whereas the flex stops are visited only on request for a pick-up or drop off. Fixed-flex route services can also offer passengers the option of requesting “flag stops” along the fixed route whereby riders can wait for the vehicle anywhere along the fixed route and simply waive to the driver to indicate they would like to be picked up where it is safe to do so. Similarly, riders can request to be dropped off anywhere along the fixed route even if the drop off point is not a set stop.

The type of vehicle can vary based on anticipated ridership, and can be owned by the municipality or can be provided by a contracted operator or a taxi company. The benefits of using a taxi company for a fixed-flex route are similar to those of a fixed route shared ride taxi service discussed above.

Grand River Transit (GRT) in Waterloo Region operates a flex route service between Wilmot Township and a transit terminal in Kitchener, where passengers can connect to other GRT routes to complete their trip. The service was implemented to supply a public transportation option in an area that did not have it.

The route operates on a 60-minute round trip travel time to facilitate timed-transfers at the Kitchener bus terminal. The flex route model was implemented to extend the service area on a low-demand route while maintaining the 60-minute round-trip travel time. The route includes four fixed stops and 13 flex stops. Passengers looking to access one of the flex stops must call the customer service agent on the

same day of service and request the stop be made. The customer service agent informs the customer whether the driver is able to accommodate the request and informs the driver. If no request is made, the bus will not stop or detour to the flex stop. This allows GRT to expand the service area without increasing resources.

5.4 Specialized Transit

‘Specialized Transit’ or ‘Paratransit’ generally refers to separate, reservation-based public transportation service for people unable to use or access conventional transit. Ontario’s Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) regulations state that municipalities with public transit are not required to provide a separate specialized service but must provide an alternative service for people with disabilities unless it is impracticable to do so.¹

Since the advent of wheelchair accessible buses in Canada in 1992, conventional transit services have been able to meet many of the travel needs of residents who require accessible transportation. Some municipalities such as York Region have adopted a conditional eligibility policy under which registered users are required to make all or part of their trip on regular transit if they are able to do so. Relatively few people qualify for unlimited eligibility for specialized transit. This approach improves efficiencies, reduces costs, provides a return on the investment to make regular transit accessible, and better integrates community residents with disabilities.

5.5 Analysis of Recommended Service Types

The project team evaluated each of the public transit options discussed above based on the criteria outlined in Section 4 to arrive at recommendations for the types of service that could be considered in the District. The table below compares each of the above transportation models to the criteria and provides rationale as to why the model is recommended or not in the District.

Transportation Option	Criteria Met	Recommended?	Rationale
Fixed Route Service	Accessibility, Coverage (partial), Convenience, Connectivity, Easy to Understand	Yes	Fixed route service is applicable for long-distance trips connecting urban centres. Continue operation of successful fixed route Corridor 11 service. Would recommend adding some stops to improve coverage. Vehicle to be replaced so that it is accessible.

¹ AODA regulations state the obligation to provide alternative transportation as follows:

“Alternative accessible method of transportation

45. (1) Except where not practicable to do so, a conventional transportation service provider that does not provide specialized transportation services shall ensure that any person with a disability who, because of his or her disability, is unable to use conventional transportation services is provided with an alternative accessible method of transportation.” O. Reg. 191/11, s. 45 (1).

Fixed-Route Shared Ride Taxi	Coverage, Convenience, Connectivity	No	Taxi company could be contracted to operate the District's rural route, but this service should be fixed-flex service, not a fixed route. This would require an accessible taxi to meet AODA.
On-Demand Dial-a-Ride	Convenience, Ridership Potential, Connectivity	Not in short term	High cost to serve large geographic area with sufficient number of vehicles. A scaled-down version could be used in future to help transport people to other transportation services/routes. This would require accessible vehicles or an accessible alternative to meet AODA.
On-Demand Mobile App	Convenience, Ridership Potential, Connectivity	Not in short term	High start up cost associated with on-demand software. Costs will likely go down in future, making software more accessible for the District. Also, high cost to serve large geographic area with sufficient vehicles.
On-Demand Rideshare Partnership	Convenience, Ridership Potential, Connectivity, Easy to Understand	No	No partners currently available in the District. High cost to serve large geographic area.
Fixed-Flex Route	Coverage, Accessibility, Convenience, Connectivity, Easy to Understand	Yes	Fixed route provides predictable service and low cost per service hour, while ability to flex extends rural service area and provides curb to curb service which can assist seniors and those with disabilities who can't walk to a bus stop. It also has the benefits of the traditional and familiar fixed route service (i.e. easy to understand, marked stops, etc.) with added convenience of flexibility.
Specialized Transit	Coverage, Accessibility, Connectivity	Yes	Vehicle used for fixed-flex rural service and Corridor 11 should be accessible, and partnerships could be developed with volunteer-based service agencies in the region who can accommodate those who cannot use these services, though this option would not be as convenient as dedicated specialized transit such as those operated in Bracebridge and Huntsville.

Table 4: Evaluation of various transportation options

Due to the large, sparsely populated area the service is expected to cover, ridership and financial sustainability will likely be a challenge regardless of the service model used.

Conclusions

The Corridor 11 service is already a successful fixed route service in the District; the recommendation is to continue that service and consider improvements, which are discussed in detail later in this report.

On-demand service is typically very costly to operate in a large geographic area with low population densities, and is not recommended at this time. This is due to the number of vehicles that must be on the road at one time in order to provide sufficient coverage and convenience. A full on-demand service would require a minimum of four sedans or minivans to serve the entire District at one time, with at least one of these vehicles being accessible. An on-demand rideshare partnership with a ridesharing company such as Uber is not possible at this time, since no such company operates within the District.

The fixed flex-route concept should be considered for new services in the District. Given the large service area and relatively low ridership in the District, this is a feasible option for service delivery. This could be contracted to a private taxi operator if an accessible vehicle is available or a private transportation provider using a smaller accessible van or bus.

Regarding specialized transit, the District should accommodate the needs of people who require accessible transportation by using accessible vehicles for the local and inter-community services of the pilot programs. For those individuals who are unable to use these services, the District could consider partnerships with volunteer-based service agencies who already provide these services.

5.6 Short-Listed Public Transportation Options

The evaluation of the various transportation service models summarized in the previous section resulted in recommendations to continue the fixed route Corridor 11 service and consider fixed-flex routes for the rural services that would be accessible and have the ability to meet specialized and individual transportation needs. In order to further refine these recommendations and design services that meet the needs of the community, the project team carefully considered findings and priorities from the community engagement activities.

The project team supported the following short-listed public transportation concepts to be considered:

- Improvements to the Corridor 11 Bus service;
- Fixed-flex route Midland-Honey Harbour
- Fixed-flex route Midland-Bracebridge
- Fixed-flex route Mactier-Bracebridge-Baysville-Huntsville

These short-listed public transit options reflect best practices in rural areas such as the District and the community priorities identified during the project's community engagement process, and they meet the criteria recommended in this Plan.

5.7 Community Input on Short-Listed Options

A community stakeholder meeting was held on February 20, 2020 to solicit input on the short-listed public transportation concepts. Attendees included many of those who had attended the previous TFG

meetings, plus some additional individuals identified during the course of this project. A total of 34 people attended. The results of the full community engagement findings, applicable best practices, and the short-listed options for community transportation services that the project team was recommending were presented to participants.

The purpose of the meeting was to further refine and determine the level of support for the preliminary service options and recommendations made by the project team. Consensus was obtained based on the understanding that with limited resources, the District's transit systems cannot meet the needs of everyone.

Highlights of the recommendations that were supported are summarized as follows:

- Corridor 11 Bus
 - Eliminate the Orillia to Barrie service;
 - Provide consistent weekday service with three round trips per day between Huntsville and Orillia;
 - Connect with Simcoe LINX service in Orillia; and
 - Utilize common bus stops with ONTC.
- East-west rural service
 - Two new routes, each operated one day per week, two roundtrips per day;
 - Fixed-flex route service linking Mactier, Port Carling, Bracebridge, Baysville, Huntsville;
 - Connect with Corridor 11 Bus service in Bracebridge to Orillia;
 - Fixed-flex route service linking Bracebridge, Gravenhurst, Bala, Honey Harbour, Port Severn, Waubesaushene, and Midland
 - Connect westbound service to LINX service in Waubesaushene for travel to Orillia
 - Connect eastbound service to Corridor 11 Bus or ONTC in Gravenhurst for service to Orillia; and
 - The shorter version of this route with service only between Honey Harbour and Midland was rejected in favour of this longer route, which serves more communities.

Immediately following the meeting with community stakeholders, a similar presentation was made to the District's Community and Planning Services Committee (CPSC). Committee members supported the recommendations, and direction was provided to include options to enhance services beyond the recommended pilot programs, including a cost estimate for any further service level enhancements should additional municipal investment or grant funding become available.

The recommendations that were supported by community members and the CPSC are described in much more detail in the final recommendations that follow.

6. SHORT-TERM PROGRAMMING RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Overview of Short-Term Programming

Community transportation programming and service improvements that are recommended in the short-term would be considered pilot programs to the end of the CT grant in March 2023, and their continuation beyond that date would be contingent upon their success, the introduction of adequate sustainability measures, and/or additional sources of funding. These include:

- Improve the Corridor 11 service, and continue providing north-south connectivity within the District and to major population centres in Simcoe County; and
- Introduce a rural service to provide east-west connectivity within the District and to the Corridor 11 Bus service. The recommended rural routes are:
 - A fixed-flex route serving connecting Mactier, Port Carling, Bracebridge, Baysville, and Huntsville; and
 - A fixed-flex route service connecting Bracebridge, Gravenhurst, Bala, Honey Harbour, Port Severn, Waubaushene, and Midland.

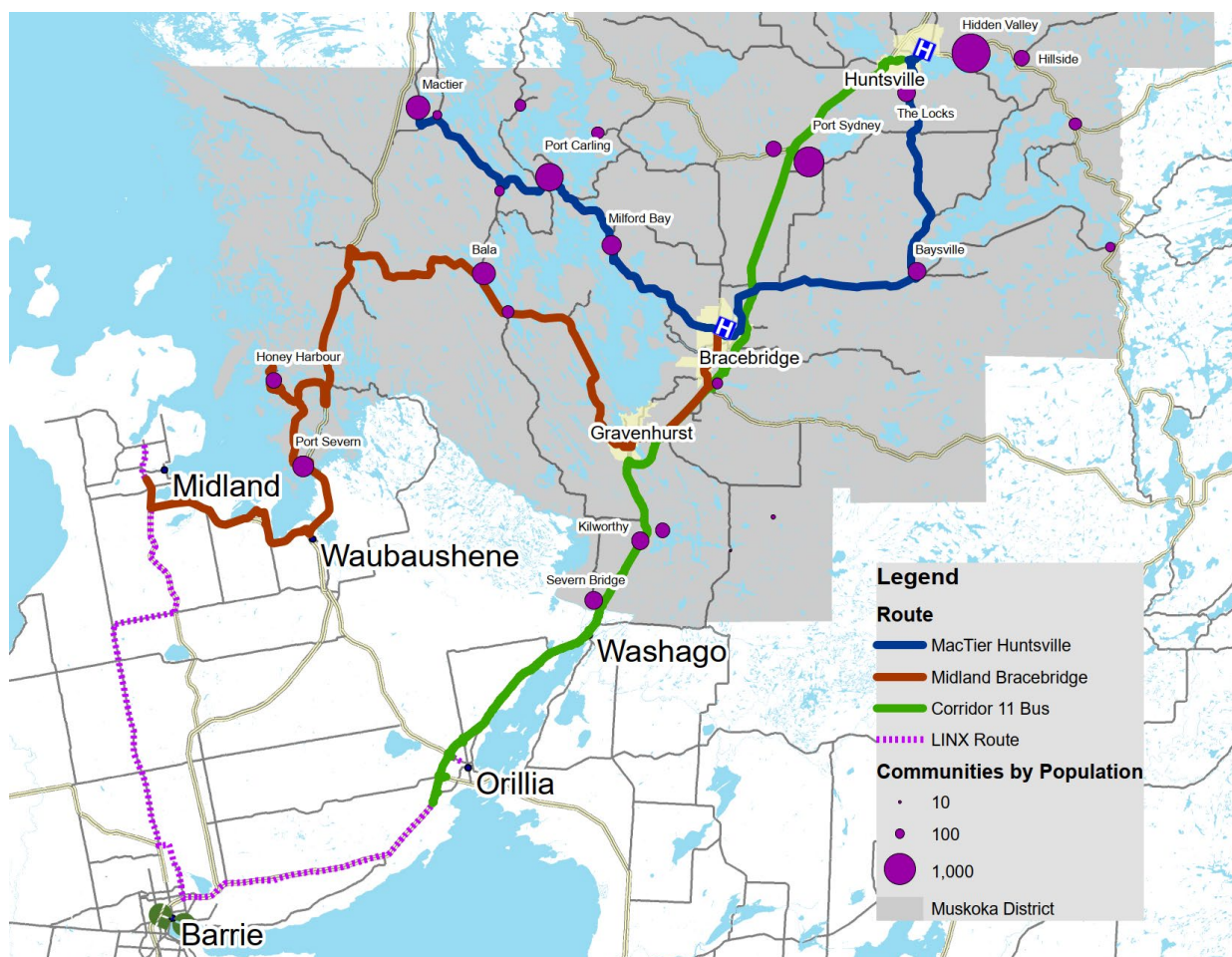


Figure 7: Recommended Future Transit Network

The implementation of these services would serve most of the population centres in the District with populations above 100 people. A total of 14,056 out of 23,640 permanent residences (59%) are within two kilometers of the rural routes, as shown in [Appendix D](#).

6.2 Corridor 11 Bus

Highway 11 is the highest volume travel corridor in the District and serves as an important transit route for the Corridor 11 Bus. Ridership on this service is fairly low, averaging approximately 14 boardings per day. Challenges include limited and/or inconvenient local transit connections within each of the urban areas, infrequent service, and limited coverage.

Several modifications are recommended to grow ridership, make the service easier to understand, and allocate resources to where they are most beneficial to community members. The following key changes are recommended for the Corridor 11 Bus:

- Improved integration with ONTC service;
- Remove Orillia to Barrie segment and enhance service within the District; and
- Reorganize stops to offer better coverage within urban areas.

The current fare structure should remain in place.

6.2.1 Integration with ONTC

In Port Sydney, Bracebridge, Gravenhurst, Kilworthy, Washago, and Orillia, the ONTC Bus stops at the same stop or within walking distance of a Corridor 11 Bus stop. In Huntsville the stops are 3 kilometers apart.

One of the challenges with the Corridor 11 Bus is that it only operates three times daily in each direction. The existing budget limits the possibility of improving the frequency to make the route more frequent and flexible to meet customer needs.

However, increased frequency can be simulated by improving integration with the ONTC route, which travels on a similar route as the Corridor 11 Bus. This involves two key short-term actions:

1. Modify Corridor 11 Bus stops so they are in the same location as ONTC stops. This would involve the following:
 - a. Huntsville: Adding a stop at 234 Main Street;
 - b. Bracebridge: Moving the 345 Ecclestone Drive stop to 300 Ecclestone Drive;
 - c. Gravenhurst: Moving 141 Main Street stop to 141 Philip Street; and
 - d. Washago: Moving Washago Hotel stop to 3384 Muskoka Street.
2. Advertise the ONTC schedule and fares on the Corridor 11 Bus website and schedule. Providing ONTC schedule and fare data on the Corridor 11 Bus schedule may help identify additional travel options for customers, particularly when the existing Corridor 11 Bus may not meet their travel needs. This provides customers with more flexibility, even though the ONTC charges a higher fare. This is unlikely to result in a significant loss in fares for the Corridor 11 Bus service, as some customers would use the Corridor 11 Bus for one trip end and ONTC for the other.

6.2.2 Reduce Service Duplication with Simcoe LINX and Reinvest in Frequency within the District

Currently, the Corridor 11 Bus serves stops beyond the District as far as Barrie. However, boardings and alightings in Barrie account for only 7% of all activity. Furthermore, the Orillia to Barrie segment is also served by Simcoe LINX every 50 minutes.

Engagement with the community identified a stronger need to enhance service within the District. Based on this analysis, it is recommended that the Orillia to Barrie portion of the Corridor 11 Bus route be removed. Customers that want to continue to Barrie can transfer to the Simcoe LINX service in Orillia. The removal of service to Barrie will save approximately two daily revenue vehicle hours, which should be reinvested back into the Corridor 11 Bus service. Two service delivery options were evaluated to reinvest these hours and improve the Corridor 11 Bus:

1. A consistent schedule featuring three roundtrips between Huntsville and Orillia daily.
2. A schedule with two round trips between Huntsville and Orillia and two round trips between Huntsville and Gravenhurst.

The current Corridor 11 service averages 10.5 service hours daily. Option 1 adds another round trip to Orillia providing a consistent schedule of three round trips, five days a week, using nearly identical number of service hours to the current service. This is an improvement over the current schedule, which only provides service to Orillia on two trips each day. Since service hours are similar, there would be no significant increase in cost over current operations.

Option 2 maximizes service on the busiest part of the route between Huntsville and Gravenhurst, adding another run to this portion of the route for added convenience. The challenge with this option is that the schedule is less consistent than Option 1, and is similar to the current operation in this sense. It would also require a slight increase in service hours beyond what is saved by cutting the Orillia to Barrie service.

While it is also possible to simply cut the Orillia to Barrie portion of the route, without adding service hours elsewhere on the route, this would not be recommended.

Table 5 compares the Corridor 11 options on several different metrics.

Service Assumption	Coverage	Accessibility	Financial Sustainability	Ridership Potential	Regional Connectivity	Easy to Understand
Option 1	●	●	●	●	●	●
Option 2	●	●	●	●	●	●

Table 5: Evaluation of Corridor 11 Options

Based on this evaluation, Option 1 is recommended. This is due to a number of factors including a consistent schedule, making it easier to understand and to coordinate with local and rural transit

services (i.e. since the bus will leave its terminus at the same time after the hour on each trip). Furthermore, it offers more frequent connections to Orillia.

A sample schedule is included in [Appendix E](#) and illustrates the removal of service to Barrie and the reinvestment of service to provide three consistent trips between Huntsville and Orillia. This service would also be able to connect within 15 minutes to a Simcoe LINX service to or from Barrie at the Georgian College Orillia Campus. The ONTC schedule is also overlaid on the Corridor 11 service schedule to show the combined frequency available to passengers. Ultimately, this schedule would cost roughly the same amount as the current Corridor 11 service to operate as it has a near identical number of service hours.

6.2.3 Improve Proximity by Adding Stops

There are currently 13 stops on the Corridor 11 Bus service between Huntsville and Orillia. One of the challenges with inter-municipal services in rural environments is the limited ability for passengers to access the stops, particularly where local transit connections are infrequent or nonexistent.

Huntsville has one Corridor 11 Bus stop located at 1 King William Street. While the stop is located on a local transit route, the local route is a one-way, hour-long loop, which may add significant travel time for a passenger connecting to this service on one portion of their trip. It is recommended that a stop be added in Huntsville at 234 Main Street to improve coverage and consistency with ONTC service. The potential of adding a stop at the hospital was explored as well, however it would add additional service hours, increasing costs. Customers are still able to access the hospital via Huntsville Transit.

Bracebridge has six Corridor 11 Bus stops in the community along with a local transit system. While this provides good coverage and access to a number of local destinations, having too many stops on an inter-municipal route can also slow down the service. The schedule allows for 25 minutes to travel from one end of Bracebridge to the other. It is recommended that the Dollarama stop be removed to improve the directness of the service and reduce travel time.

Gravenhurst only has one stop within the community located at 141 Main Street. Since Gravenhurst does not have a local transit service, the single stop limits the ability for passengers to access the bus or to reach their final destination within the Town. Therefore, it is recommended that two stops be added in Gravenhurst, one on the north end and one on the south end of town. The recommended stops do not require a detour, and would provide better access to retail destinations for both shopping and employment.

The proposed service plan would contain 14 stops. An outline of stop changes can be found in [Appendix E](#), including which stops should be moved to the same locations as ONTC stops. The new stops can be added without adding significant driving time to the route.

Before implementing these stop modifications, it is recommended that a more detailed passenger count be taken at each stop along the corridor for a two-week period. Existing data only shows boardings and alightings in each community and not for each specific stop. This will confirm whether the stop being removed is heavily utilized and whether further modifications should be made to this plan based on passenger activity.

A preliminary action plan to help guide the implementation of all recommended improvements is included in [Appendix F](#).

6.3 Rural Service

Funding from the CT grant is also available to provide a rural service to improve east-west connectivity in the District and address accessible and individual transportation needs. The budget available for this service is approximately \$55,700 annually for operating costs during the pilot program.

The rural service is designed to build on the MET routes that were previously operated in the District. The most utilized MET routes were:

- Bracebridge to Mactier;
- Baysville to Huntsville; and
- Honey Harbour to Midland.

One of the challenges with these routes was the difficulty in accessing passengers within each local community since they do not all have local transit. Therefore, flex options were explored for the new service. Based on an analysis of each of the communities, stakeholder feedback, and a review of the available funding to operate service through the CT grant, the following fixed-flex routes are recommended to operate one day a week (on alternate days) using an accessible van or small mini-bus:

- Mactier-Bracebridge-Baysville-Huntsville
- Midland-Honey Harbour-Gravenhurst-Bracebridge

The vehicle will travel a set route between these communities and would have some set stops, but will “flex” off the route in response to pick-up or drop-off requests. Each community should have several set stops where they make sense, such as near grocery stores, medical facilities, seniors’ centres, etc. Riders can also request “flag stops” along the fixed route in rural areas where there are long distances between set stops.

The budget for both routes is presented in Table 6 below. The total cost to operate both services one day per week is \$62,000 per year, but is anticipated be less than the \$55,700 annual funding provided in the CT grant budget after fare revenues, providing some contingency in case there is an increased cost or added time required for the flex route.

Option	Annual Cost for one Weekday of Service
Mactier-Bracebridge-Baysville-Huntsville	\$30,000
Midland-Honey Harbour-Gravenhurst-Bracebridge	\$32,000
TOTAL	\$62,000

Table 1: East-West Route Costs

While some flex routes use technology such as a mobile app to book trips and optimize routing, that technology comes at a high cost. Forecasted ridership on this route is not high enough to justify this level of investment during the pilot unless additional grant funding is acquired (e.g. through FCM). Therefore, it is recommended that manual booking by phone would be adequate to take customer pick-up and drop-off requests. This would ideally be done through the service operator, but could also be administered by a District staff member. These requests would be forwarded to the driver. Customers would need to consult the schedule and request a pick up at their location the day before they intend to travel to accommodate a flex stop. For customers that are uncomfortable with such a service, there

would still be timed stops in each community similar to the Corridor 11 Bus service. The maximum recommended duration of a flex would be 5 minutes off of the normal route. The flex option also addresses individual transportation needs as the route could vary according to the needs of passengers

Fares on the former MET routes were \$3 one-way or \$5 roundtrip for adults. While the service must remain affordable for customers, fares should reflect the distance traveled and the cost of running the service. Therefore, a zone fare system similar to the Corridor 11 Bus is recommended. Each route should be divided into two or three roughly equal sections, creating two or three zones. The fare to travel within a zone could be \$5, while the fare to travel between two zones could be \$10, and to travel between three zones (if applicable) could be \$15. For the purposes of this report, budgets assume an average fare of \$7.50 to reflect these numbers.

Both routes are discussed in more detail below, and a preliminary action plan to help guide the implementation of these services is included in [Appendix F](#).

6.4 Mactier-Bracebridge-Baysville-Huntsville Fixed Flex-Route

This route would service Mactier, Port Carling, Bracebridge, Baysville, and Huntsville and communities in between. **Figure 8** illustrates the proposed route. A sample schedule is provided in [Appendix G](#) and would result in a one-way travel time between Mactier and Huntsville, including flex-route deviations, of two hours and fifteen minutes. While the entire route can be driven in 90 minutes, the additional run time will ensure the majority of flex trips can be accommodated. Two eastbound and two westbound trips could be scheduled, providing customers with two travel options, including the opportunity for a short-duration trip and a longer duration trip. In total, the sample schedule represents nine daily revenue service hours.

This route was selected as it links many of the larger communities in the District that are not served by the Corridor 11 Bus to destinations in Bracebridge and Huntsville. Furthermore, it offers another trip (via Baysville) between Bracebridge and Huntsville when the Corridor 11 Bus is not operating (e.g. providing northbound service when the Corridor 11 Bus is operating southbound). This adds to the frequency along the Highway 11 corridor one day a week.

Based on the sample schedule, both eastbound routes from Mactier connect to the Corridor 11 Bus in Bracebridge for travel further south. The later afternoon westbound route back to Mactier also connects to a northbound Corridor 11 Bus in Bracebridge to accommodate residents returning from a more southern destination.

The route includes two of the three most productive segments of the previous MET network. Ridership on the former MET routes in these areas was approximately 330 boardings annually, based on a schedule that ran once weekly. With the additional of the flex route, it is expected that this route can achieve higher ridership than the former MET service.

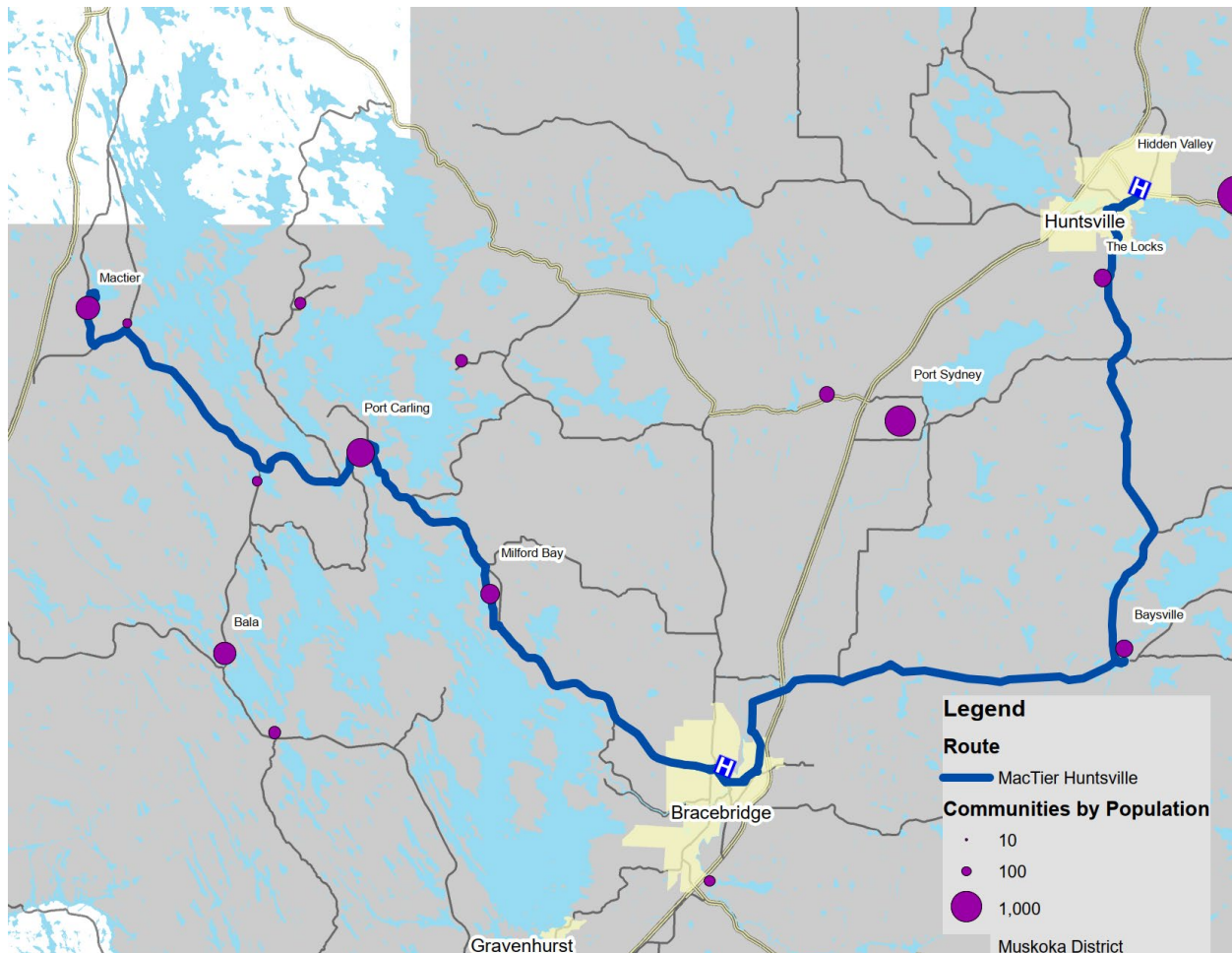


Figure 8: Mactier-Huntsville Route

6.5 Midland-Honey Harbour-Gravenhurst-Bracebridge Fixed-Flex Route

The Honey Harbour-Midland MET route was one of the most well used routes from the MET program. Given the closer proximity to Midland and Barrie than the larger population centres in the District (e.g. Gravenhurst and Bracebridge), it makes sense to link Port Severn and other communities along Highway 400 to the LINX service in Midland.

The new route would offer this same connection, along with connections to Bala, Gravenhurst, and Bracebridge. Furthermore, it adds an additional trip between Bracebridge and Gravenhurst to supplement Corridor 11 Bus service.

Figure 9 illustrates the proposed route.

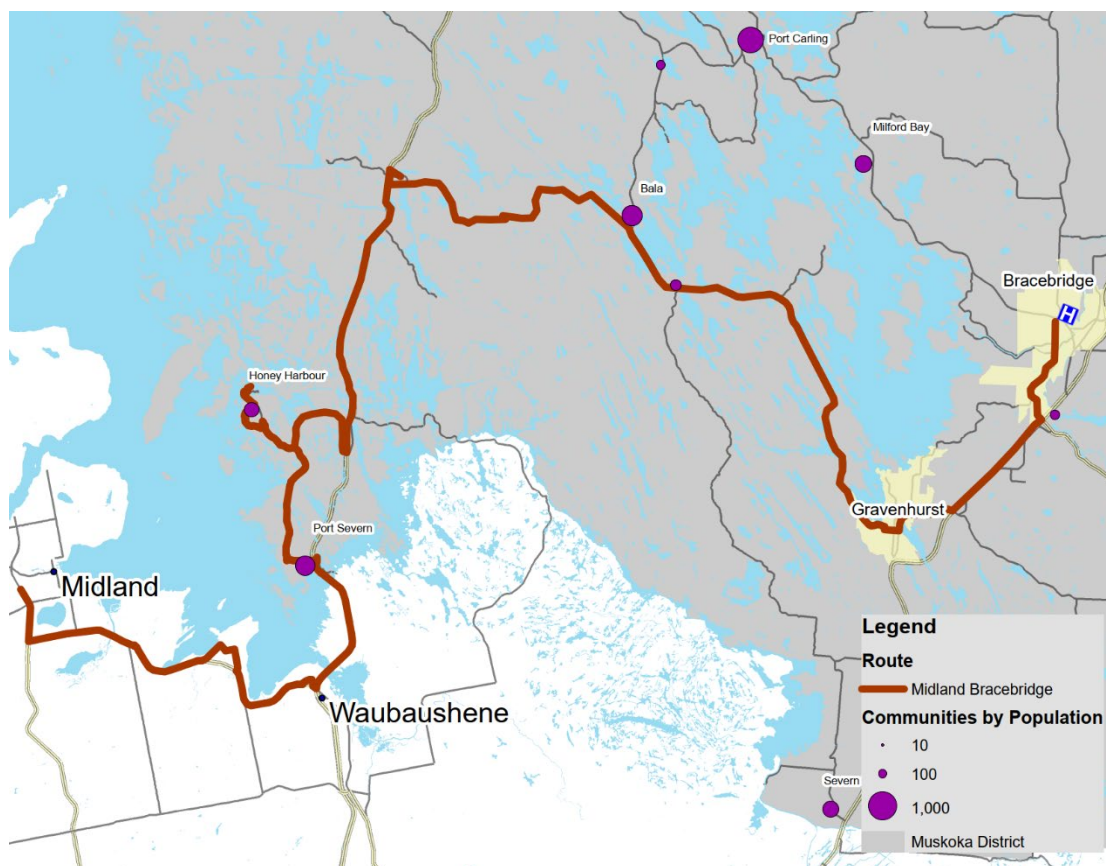


Figure 9: Midland-Bracebridge Route

Based on the sample schedule in [Appendix G](#), the service could provide two eastbound and two westbound trips per day, connecting three urban areas (i.e. Midland, Gravenhurst and Bracebridge). This allows passengers to make both a short-duration trip or a longer duration trip. While the entire route can be driven in 1 hour and 50 minutes, the sample schedule provides a run time of 2 hours and 20 minutes to provide time to accommodate flex stops. Additional service hours may be required if demand for flex pick ups and drop offs is high.

The proposed schedule allows passengers to connect with the Simcoe LINX Route 1 from Midland to Barrie on southbound trips. Trip times are to be coordinated with the LINX schedule so that passengers coming from Barrie will be able to connect to the Midland-Honey Harbour route. Simcoe LINX will begin service between Orillia and Midland in 2020, which would include a stop in Waubaushene, so ONTC could be approached to stop in Waubaushene to connect to the LINX service. This service could be marketed to residents in the communities of Mactier and Port Severn in the District of Muskoka for travel to Orillia. On the east side of the route, passengers can also connect to the Corridor 11 service for a morning southbound trip to Orillia and an afternoon return northbound trip.

6.6 Short-Term Pilot Program Budget 2020-2023

The detailed budget forecast is found in [Appendix H](#). The budget identifies the estimated costs and revenues over the life of the CT grant funding. Note that for the purposes of this budget, it is assumed that the new transportation changes will take effect on June 29, 2020, although these may be subject to change given the current COVID-19 Pandemic.

The cost of the Corridor 11 service was assumed to remain at the current cost per revenue vehicle hour of \$55.43. To be conservative, new services were assumed to cost \$65 per revenue vehicle hour. Costs are presented in 2019 dollars and were not adjusted in the budget noted below.

Revenues assume an average fare of \$7.50 on all services. It was assumed that there would be 2 passengers per hour on rural services for all three program years and on the Corridor 11 service for the 2020/2021 program year. Corridor 11 ridership is expected to increase to an average of 2.5 riders per hour for the final two pilot program years, with the goal of achieving an average of 3 riders per hour on the Corridor 11 service post-pilot.

During the pilot program, the District will qualify for Provincial Gas Tax funding (see Section 8.1), but in order to be conservative, Gas Tax revenues have not been reflected in the pilot program budget forecast. Conservatively, the District could expect to receive between \$60,000-\$65,000 in Gas Tax funding for each of the pilot program years. Any Gas Tax funding revenues received should be set aside to accommodate unforeseen costs or revenue shortfalls, carried over to support transit services beyond the pilot program, or to be used for expanded services.

While the short-term CTP recommendations can be accommodated with the CT grant funding, the project team addressed enhanced service options that could be considered either during the pilot program or post-pilot program, should the District wish to invest additional resources. The options are addressed in Section 9.

7. RIDERSHIP GROWTH STRATEGIES

A number of best practices to assist in growing transit use in the District have been identified for consideration by the District going forward. Best practices are based on lessons learned by the consulting team members in both the public sector through direct municipal implementation and pilot program experience, and the private sector through studies and research involving well over 100 municipalities in Ontario, across Canada and internationally.

These are relatively low-cost initiatives that can increase transit use among existing transit customers while also attracting new customers to improve the efficiency of the District's community transportation options. The strategies can be considered for implementation during the pilot programs, if resources allow, to maximize sustainability beyond March 31, 2023.

7.1 Continued Inter Transit Agency Co-operation

It is evident that co-ordinating the existing services both within the District and with transit operations in nearby communities outside the District makes sense and is in line with best practices. Program recommendations highlighted several examples of improved service integration. Additional co-ordination efforts should be fully explored for future opportunities such as ensuring scheduling, stop locations, and fare integration to the extent possible between the pilot rural services, the Corridor 11 Bus, Bracebridge Transit, Huntsville Transit, and the ONTC services. These discussions could also be expanded to agencies. A potential future transportation round table type advisory group may be a coordinated solution to further explore integration.

7.2 Fare Integration and Smart Card Technology

Within the District, there will initially be different fare structures for the Corridor 11 Bus, the pilot east-west rural connecting services, Bracebridge Transit and Huntsville Transit. Consideration can be made to integrate fares between service providers; however, the fare structure will be somewhat complex to administer since fare structures vary significantly, as do the fare collection and revenue management processes of each transit agency. Once the new pilot routes and schedules are in place, the District should monitor transferring activities between services before working with other transit providers to re-visit fare discounts or other methods to streamline the customer experience.

Another issue is the ability to transfer between a District service and the ONTC. While the District services have a fare by distance fare structure without the need to book a trip in advance, the ONTC bus is a reservation-based service, which has a higher fare than the Corridor 11 Bus. While conversations with ONTC suggest it is not feasible in the short-term, the District should consider further integration of the services in the medium-term. For example, fares for customers travelling within the District on ONTC could be subsidized by vouchers or with promotional codes for customers booking with ONTC. While this would be a direct expense for the District, it would be less expensive than adding additional service on the Corridor 11 Bus. The trip would also be eligible for Gas Tax funding (Gas Tax funding is discussed further in Section 8.1).



Best practices point to the desire to have ‘seamless transit’ through the use of a smart card system. A number of transit systems throughout Ontario utilize low-cost fare collection technology that is integrated with GPS. These include Bracebridge, Simcoe, Wasaga Beach, Collingwood, Midland, and Penetanguishene. The use of the tap and pay ‘proximity’ smart cards is considered to be a transit ridership growth strategy by the Province of Ontario given its ease of use (simply tap the card reader) and elimination of the need for exact cash fare. By integrating with GPS, the District will be able to track smart card boarding transactions by bus stop, direction and time period (i.e. by trip, by hour, time of day, week, month, and annually).

A transit smart card system enables transit customers to load value on a microchip-based card that acts like an electronic purse (e-purse), also referred to as a farecard. The back-end software consists of ‘business rules’ such as a complex fare pricing system built in to the farecard. Value can also be reloaded onto the re-usable smart card, as required.

Benefits of the smart card technology include:

- Reduced boarding times;
- Tracking of smart card use through embedded serial numbers (track demographics, time of use, origin-destination information, etc.);
- Flexibility in fare pricing (i.e. to the five-cent level, if required);
- Ease of implementing fare changes;
- Built-in times for transfers, which do not have to be viewed by the bus operator;

- Ridership boarding data for 100% of trips;
- Enables mobile payment from a smart phone;
- Built-in GPS can provide real time schedule information;
- Users do not need to know each system's fare structure, making transit travel more convenient;
- Reduced cash handling (i.e. improved driver health and safety);
- The ability to be used at other transit systems with smart card systems, thereby eliminating the need to purchase tickets or passes providing seamless integration.

Since Bracebridge Transit, Simcoe LINX and Midland Transit use the same technology supplier, it would be prudent to assess the feasibility of expanding the technology to the District services and Huntsville Transit. This would result in the technological ability to allow users to hold a single card for all services both within and beyond the District, should this be desirable in the future.

7.3 Enhanced Marketing and Branding

In conjunction with the implementation of the pilot rural routes and changes to the Corridor 11 Bus services, there would be an opportunity to build and brand the entire District transit system by adopting clear and consistent messaging through a communications plan. A recognizable transportation brand should be developed for inclusion in all marketing that will enhance transit system visibility and help residents recognize that the programs are District-run. Branding should be consistent with corporate brand guidelines. It should include a logo, brand colours, and potentially a tag line. Branding should appear on all elements of the community transportation system, including:

- The community transportation vehicles;
- Bus stops signs, which should be consistent, prominent and accessible (i.e. AODA compliant font size and contrasting colours);
- Posted, online or paper schedules and route maps; and
- Any printed or online announcements regarding detours, route changes, etc.

A detailed communication plan should be developed including the content of marketing materials as well as the mediums through which they should be distributed. Marketing channels that could be considered would include, but are not limited to:

- Maximizing the use of social media;
- Radio or newspaper ads;
- Flyers distributed throughout the community and to major employers;
- A dedicated community transportation page on the District website and the Engage Muskoka website; and
- Other channels as recommended by the District's internal communications experts.

Should the District consider the regional community transportation concept discussed in Section 7.12 below, this would require a coordinated effort to co-market all public transportation services within the District rather than different messaging for Bracebridge and Huntsville.

7.4 Targeting Seniors – the 'Grey' Market

The District population is aging and is older than the Ontario average, so a growing number of seniors will come to rely on community transportation services. Providing services that seniors are able to use is consistent with one of the key findings from this project's community engagement activities, which

indicated that assisting the District's more vulnerable residents, which include seniors, should be the primary goal of the CTP. There is also an opportunity to expand ridership in this growing segment of the population. The ability to access infrequent medical appointments, go shopping, or socialize, can make a significant difference in quality of life, even if service is limited.

Many of the recommendations throughout this report address the 'grey' market. For example, the ability of vehicles to flex off of the rural routes takes into consideration that some seniors may not be able to walk to a bus stop. Recommendations to have information available through a variety of mediums and marketing channels consider that others may not be comfortable viewing transportation information and schedules online. Accessibility on all routes is also key for an aging market.

7.5 Travel Training

Travel training is for people of all ages and abilities who need additional knowledge and skills in order to use transit effectively. Typical travel training programs involve the development of instructions that can be adapted to suit individuals with a wide range of abilities and can be supplemented with a public information guide.

The following groups are potential candidates for a Travel Training Program:

- Seniors – the 'grey' market;
- Individuals with physical disabilities;
- People with certain sensory disabilities;
- People with cognitive or intellectual disabilities;
- Individuals with communication disabilities;
- Seniors not familiar with taking transit; and
- New immigrants.

Typically, a manual, website or video series would be developed locally to assist in travel training. The materials would be divided into comprehensive sections that cover everything one needs to know and understand when taking the bus and should contain both text and photos to help with understanding and enable the customer to use the bus system safely and with confidence. Travel training can provide the link between wanting to make a journey and actually making the trip by building knowledge and user confidence.

There are travel training programs available across Canada that could be used as a template for District residents, agencies, and caregivers. The 'myRide' Travel Training manual for York Region Transit (2007) is one excellent example of a transit travel training program. <https://www.yrt.ca/en/riding-with-us/myride-travel-training.aspx>

7.6 Bus Passes for Social Service Agency Clients

The range of clients served by various government agencies such as Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), and youth and seniors support services generally promote affordable transportation for their clients. Social agencies may defray some client transportation costs through mileage reimbursement or the purchase of bus tickets or passes where transit is available. Consideration can be given to investigating the business or community benefits case for District social services to provide clients with paid monthly bus passes that would provide for unlimited travel.

7.7 Integrating Volunteer-Based Services with Public Transportation Options

Demand for volunteer-based transportation in the District will likely increase as the population continues to age. With the introduction of accessible east-west rural services, some volunteer agency clients may be physically able to use public transit as an alternative. If this is the case, there would be less pressure on volunteer-based services, their resources could be redirected to others in need, and the District service would benefit from increased ridership.

As the pilot programs are in place, the District could work with volunteer agencies to identify potential clients that would be able to use the rural east-west community buses and/or the enhanced Corridor 11 Bus services for some or all of their trips.

7.8 Community Transportation Brokerage Concept

A more comprehensive and long-term approach to integrating demand-responsive volunteer or publicly operated transportation services that can be considered is a ‘brokerage concept’, whereby the public contacts a single central phone number or website to book a trip. This is sometimes referred to as ‘one stop shopping’. Eligible residents could be registered in advance along with their travel requirements that are dictated by any physical or cognitive disabilities they may have. For example, a person that uses a wheelchair who can only travel with a caregiver/ family member would need an accessible vehicle to travel between their point of origin and destination. The dispatcher or back-end software would then match the resident with the lowest cost transportation available that meets their needs at the approximate time that they need to travel.

A key first step to determining the viability of a brokerage concept is to undertake an inventory of both accessible and non-accessible privately- and publicly-owned vehicles that are available in the community. Depending on the business model used and governance structure, the brokerage could take ownership of the vehicles and maximize the vehicle’s availability to residents throughout the District. Overall, fewer vehicles operated by qualified drivers would likely be needed. The idea is to accommodate more residents with the same financial resources or to do more with less. As an example, in the case of a vehicle owned by a seniors’ residence, there are significant annual costs associated with fuel, maintenance, insurance, and a driver. The vehicle may only be used one or two days per week. If the brokerage owned the vehicle, the seniors’ residence can lower costs by only paying for service as needed, and that same vehicle can be used to serve a greater number of people elsewhere in the District.

Alternatively, the brokerage structure could be as simple as implementing the District’s “no wrong door approach”. In this model, District staff would maintain an inventory of available public, private, and volunteer-based transportation services, the types of vehicles they operate, the groups of people and trip purposes they serve, schedules, and their catchment areas. District staff could then direct inquiring residents to the most appropriate transportation service for their needs. This would be more of an information service, where residents could call in, describe their transportation needs, and receive recommendations for the service(s) available that would best fit their needs and budget.

Even this simpler brokerage model would help grow ridership by providing a resource for residents to learn about various services that would meet their needs that they may not otherwise discover or be too nervous to try to use.

7.9 Better Accommodating Employee Shifts

The public transportation pilot programs recommended in this Plan do not meet the needs of most employees since they will not accommodate normal business hours and day shift work. Adding buses is cost-prohibitive with the current level of investment. However, lower cost alternatives do exist for modest additional investment. For example, employees that work near Highway 11 could be accommodated by the addition of an early morning or afternoon trip to the Corridor 11 Bus schedule. This would be cost effective, as a new vehicle would not be required, and employers could potentially contribute to the cost of added service hours. Alternatively, the District could work with employers to supply employee shuttle services through the District. Both District and employer contributions would be included in municipal own spending in the Provincial Gas Tax funding formula, which would result in increased funding.

7.10 Bike Racks on Buses

Active transportation plays a significant role in the overall transportation choice across Canada. One active transportation market that can be accommodated by transit are those that travel by bicycle and this would complement the ongoing investment by the District in this transportation mode in accordance with the District of Muskoka Active Transportation Plan. Bike racks on buses are now becoming the norm for public transit systems. Doing so expands the transit market potential and is a step towards a successful active transportation strategy that does not unduly burden the ability of buses to maintain schedules.



7.11 Real-time Passenger Information

Real time information for passengers via smart phone mobile apps, personal digital assistants (PDA) and home computers is a desirable feature. The availability of real time schedule information will enable transit customers to reduce the waiting time at bus stops by obtaining next bus stop arrival times, which will be helpful during inclement weather conditions when service can be delayed.

The District should investigate low cost GPS trackers for vehicles. One of the biggest challenges with fixed-flex routes is the less predictable bus arrival time, and providing real time information for passengers on the location of the vehicle will help reduce frustration with the service and increase ridership as a result. MyTrax GPS is one example of a low-cost system that offers a GPS tracker for vehicles along with online and mobile mapping so that users can track the vehicle location on a computer or their smart phone.

7.12 Regionalization of Community Transportation Services

As suggested during discussions with the various transportation providers, the District could consider assuming oversight of all public transportation systems that operate within it. While the option would exist for one of the Area Municipalities to play the lead role in a regional system, the District would appear to be more well positioned given its existing programming and upper-tier function. Under a regional approach, inter-agency cooperation would be streamlined, since the lead agency would only have to coordinate with ONTC, Orillia Transit, and Simcoe LINX. This would reduce the number of collaborating agencies from six to four, and the scheduling of connections could be more efficient.

Technology for fare integration, smart card technology, and real time bus tracking and passenger information could potentially be purchased at a lower cost per vehicle, and all systems could be seamlessly integrated with common fare structures. Marketing, messaging, and branding would be consistent, travel training could encompass all services, and information about all community transportation services within Muskoka would be in one place. Further, a regional approach would make it easier to coordinate with volunteer services, and the “brokerage” role would be simplified, resulting in a more seamless transportation network.

All of the sustainability measures could still be achieved without a regional system, but a regional system with common goals and objectives could result in synergistic ridership growth.

7.13 On-Demand Service

An on-demand service could be considered in future if resources allow, to augment other community transportation services. This could be in the form of a dial-a-ride service, with rides organized by a staff member of the District or a contracted operator. Alternatively, software with a mobile application could be used, or a partnership with an existing ride-sharing company could be developed, should one of these companies expand operations into the District. It is the project team’s experience that technology costs will come down significantly over time while capabilities will improve, so a software application may be more affordable in the future. The on-demand service could help increase ridership by serving areas not covered by other community transportation services. The service could also be used to transport people to existing community transportation routes, thereby increasing ridership on other routes as well.

On-demand service is typically very costly to operate in a large geographic area with low population densities, due to the higher number of service vehicles required to provide acceptable levels of service, and is not recommended at this time. If the District was to consider an on-demand option, cost control parameters would need to be in place to ensure that demand for the service does not drive up the total budgeted cost. Cost containment measures may include higher fares, reduced hours of operation or improving efficiency of the service by better maximizing shared-ride trips (e.g. increasing passengers per hour).

7.14 Summary of Transit Ridership Growth Strategies

The transit ridership growth strategies based on best practices were identified for the District to implement over time concurrent with or beyond the term of the pilot projects recommended in this Plan. The focus initially should be on 'quick wins' such as branding, public information and education, introducing low-cost real time schedule information technologies, developing travel training, and improving inter-agency co-operation to improve schedules and connectivity. Other strategies will take time to set up, such as accommodating employment-related trip needs and fare integration technology.

It is worth noting that increasing public transportation coverage, expanding hours of operation, improved technology, and enhanced community awareness will result in increased transit use. If the District's ridership growth exceeds the average ridership growth rate of all Ontario public transportation systems, the District will receive a larger share of the Provincial Gas Tax funding pool. Increasing ridership is one of several ways the District can increase its Gas Tax funding, and additional methods are outlined in the Gas Tax funding discussion in the next section. The increased funding can, in turn, be re-invested into additional public transportation services to increase use and sustainability.

8. EXTERNAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

The CTP for the pilot programs was designed to reflect the key community priorities and be implemented within the CT grant funds available. The proposed recommendations provide a blueprint for the District to follow for the next five years and beyond.

Should the District wish to explore the potential to provide additional services during the pilot programs and continue investing in CT programs after the pilot programs, additional funding could be sought. An overview of the funding opportunities available are discussed.

8.1 Dedicated Transit Two-cent Per Litre Gas Tax Funding

For every litre of gasoline sold in Ontario, the Province currently provides two cents to municipalities to help fund local public transportation. Ontario's Dedicated Gas Tax Funds for Public Transportation (Gas Tax) Program provides a long-term, sustainable source of funding which is provided to those municipalities that contribute towards a local public transportation system. The maximum funding allocations for municipalities are based on a formula of 70% ridership and 30% population. The towns of Bracebridge and Huntsville each receive Gas Tax funding to support their own public transportation programs, so their populations are excluded from the District's population for the purposes of calculating the District's maximum funding allocation.

The current Gas Tax program provides funding for up to 75% of a municipality's own spending on public transportation, up to the maximum funding allocation. Municipal own spending (MOS) includes passenger revenues, donations, and municipal contributions to operating and capital expenses. The municipality's funding may be capped if the amount equalling 75% of MOS is greater than the total maximum allocation.

Gas Tax funds received can be banked for use in future years or can be used for expenditures that support ridership growth and are incremental to the municipality's spending. Gas Tax funds must not replace or reduce the municipality's contribution. If the District's contribution to transportation programs declines in a given year, Gas Tax funding could be reduced in the following year. Gas Tax funding cannot be spent on the same aspects of the recommended pilot programs as CT grant funds. However, Gas Tax funding could be used on different aspects of the CT grant pilot programs. For example, while the CT grant funding supports basic operation of the programs, Gas Tax funding could be spent on efforts to expand the programs, secure more riders, and ensure long-term sustainability.

There are a few different ways the project team estimated the District's potential Gas Tax funding. The first is to look at the average Gas Tax funding received per capita across the province, as well as in the Towns of Bracebridge and Huntsville. For the April 1, 2018 to March 31, 2019 program year, Ontario municipalities received an average of \$8.44 per capita of Gas Tax funding, plus an additional \$0.30 per passenger. For comparison purposes, in the 2018 calendar year, the Town of Bracebridge received \$7.06 per capita while the Town of Huntsville received \$6.60 per capita. To be conservative, the average of the Towns' Gas Tax funding can be used, since it is lower than the provincial average. The District's Gas Tax funding post-pilot can therefore be estimated at approximately \$6.83 per capita. Based on the District's population of approximately 30,000 (excluding the populations of Bracebridge and Huntsville) this would approximate \$204,900 per year. Currently, the District receives less than this because the 75%

MOS calculation still applies, and the District's MOS is not sufficient to qualify for this level of funding. In order to receive this level Gas Tax funding, MOS would have to increase, however, this provides an estimate of the potential funding that could be received.

To arrive at an estimate of potential Gas Tax funding from a different perspective, the project team also came up with an estimate of what the District could receive per hour of transportation service added. The project team reviewed the average Gas Tax funding received per hour of service for Bracebridge and Huntsville in 2018. Bracebridge received an average of \$36 of funding per hour of service. Huntsville received roughly \$16 of funding per hour of service. The weighted average for Huntsville and Bracebridge was approximately \$21 of Gas Tax funding received per hour of service. This provides a good estimate of additional funding that could be received per additional service hour should the District choose to invest additional funds over and above those outlined in the CT grant budget.

8.2 Federal-Provincial Transit Funding Initiative

On March 14, 2018, The Governments of Canada and Ontario signed an Integrated Bilateral Agreement for the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP). With an end date of March 31, 2028, the Program encompasses several investment streams. The formula also provided for 40% funding by the Federal government, 33% Provincial and 27% Municipal.

Eligible projects for the ICIP had to meet one of the following outcomes:

- Improved capacity of public transit infrastructure;
- Improved quality and safety of existing and future transit systems; and
- Improved access to a public transit system.

The deadline to apply for this funding has passed, but the District could consider applying if a new, similar program or a fresh round of funding is announced.

8.3 The Federation of Canadian Municipalities

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities has over 2000 member municipalities from across Canada and administers the Green Municipal Fund (GMF). The GMF invests in innovative, effective environmental programs and sustainability projects. In 2019, the Federal Government contributed an additional \$950 million to the GMF to help Canadian municipalities face growing environmental challenges and to help improve residents' quality of life.

The GMF funding stream for Transportation Networks and Commuting Options may be relevant to the District. Funding is available for projects that reduce pollution in communities by improving transportation systems and networks or encouraging people to switch to less polluting transportation options with the goal of helping municipalities reduce energy consumption and green house gas emissions. In order to be considered for funding, projects must do at least one of the following:

- Reduce the number of vehicles on the road, the number of kilometres they travel, or the amount of time they spend transporting people or goods, or
- Get people to use their vehicles more efficiently or switch to less polluting forms of transportation (i.e. a modal shift to public transit, walking, or cycling).

The broader community benefits of proposed projects are also considered, such as improved health for residents, job creation, or enhanced quality of life.

The District could consider an application for this grant during the pilot programs to help fund some of the service enhancements discussed in Section 9 of this CTP, or alternatively, an application could be made nearer to the end of the pilot programs to help sustain the programs beyond the end of the CT grant period.

A second GMF funding stream that could potentially be relevant for the District is the Signature Initiative funding. This funding supports transformative, best-in-class municipal projects that are highly innovative and impactful and create transformative change. Preference is given to projects that can be replicated and widely adopted in other municipalities. Examples of types of initiatives that could be funded include advanced, emerging, and adaptive technologies, innovative financing mechanisms and business models, and projects and programs that generate environmental, economic, and other benefits to the broader community.

The District could potentially consider an application to this funding stream for technology to support the fixed-flex system or real time passenger information. Technology that was initially designed to support on-demand transit systems is being adapted to support fixed-flex routes, so there may be an opportunity to partner with one of these companies to pilot a new application of this software. If successful, this might have relevance for many other rural Canadian municipalities that face similar challenges as the District.

Pilot projects funded by GMF in either of these two funding streams must be supportive by a detailed feasibility study that outlines the expected environmental performance of the pilot project against a baseline to demonstrate the anticipated environmental results. District staff are currently exploring these opportunities and it is anticipated that this Plan will, at least in part, qualify as the required feasibility study.

9. PROGRAM ENHANCEMENT AND LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY

This section explores an enhanced pilot program and long-term planning for community transportation programming in the District based on information in the preceding sections.

9.1 Service Enhancements

The following service enhancements could be considered should the District decide to invest additional funds during the pilot programs to implement added services that would not be covered within the CT grant budget. Alternatively, these service enhancements could be implemented post-pilot.

9.1.1 Corridor 11 Bus Service

Future Corridor 11 Bus service options that can be considered and that respond to community identified priorities are:

1. Add Saturday Service: Provide 3 round trips per day between Huntsville and Orillia
2. Add Sunday Service: Provide 3 round trips per day between Huntsville and Orillia
3. Add one earlier morning trip and one later afternoon trip on weekdays between Huntsville and Gravenhurst to better accommodate employees

In addition, service post-pilot should run 52 weeks of a year and should not take a two week break around the winter holidays. It is industry standard for transit to operate all year, and people still need to travel during the holidays.

9.1.2 East-West Rural Service

Potential options to further enhance east-west connectivity in the District include:

1. MacTier-Huntsville – Increase from 2 trips per day to 3 trips per day
2. Midland-Bracebridge – Increase from 2 trips per day to 3 trips per day
3. Mactier-Huntsville – maintain 2 trips per day, increase from 1 day per week to 2 days per week
4. Midland-Bracebridge – maintain 2 trips per day, increase from 1 day per week to 2 days per week

9.1.3 Future On-Demand Service Option

The opportunities associated with full curb-to-curb on-demand service were also explored, but the cost associated with operating enough vehicles to provide sufficient service is high. It was determined that a District-wide application of on-demand service should not be considered for the pilot program due to budget limitations. However, a scaled-down version could consist of operating one vehicle, two days per week for areas not covered by the other District services. The service areas would be determined based

on the coverage that can be accommodated by one vehicle. Dispatching would be accomplished via cell phone.

9.1.4 Recommended Service Enhancement Priorities

The previous section described a variety of service enhancements that could be considered. The following table ranks these enhancements in order of highest priority to lowest:

Priority #	Description	Rationale
1	Add Saturday Corridor 11 Bus using the same schedule as weekday service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Same days of operation as Huntsville Transit and Bracebridge Transit Relatively low cost
2	Add one AM and one PM weekday trip to Corridor 11 Bus between Gravenhurst and Huntsville	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accommodate earlier and later trips to better accommodate work hours Potential to tie into resorts Improved service to Gravenhurst Relatively low-cost
3	Add Sunday service to Corridor 11 Bus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve inter-community service to complement Ontario Northland (ONTC) Potential to accommodate some work trips Better accommodates weekend student travel
4	Add trip to MacTier-Huntsville rural service, to increase to three round trips per day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased choice to better meet travel requirements resulting in less wait times
5	Add trip to Midland-Bracebridge rural service to increase to three round trips per day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased choice to better meet travel requirements resulting in less wait times
6	Add one day to MacTier-Huntsville service (2 trips per day)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve options for day of travel
7	Add one day to Midland-Bracebridge service (2 trips per day)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve options for day of travel
8	On-demand rural service for areas unserved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve District coverage Service delivery options would be determined based on lowest cost that meets need

Table 8: Service Enhancement Priorities

The suggested service enhancement priorities focus on the Corridor 11 Bus, which will be the backbone of the District's community transportation service for travel both within the District and to Barrie (currently)/Orillia (recommended), where passengers have options to connect to destinations further south. Consistency in the schedule would be realized within the existing pilot program funding framework while a modest additional investment could be made to provide service on Saturdays as well, with Sunday or earlier/ later hours also being valid considerations to build on an already reasonably successful service.

The east-west rural routes build on the lessons learned from the former MET service and provide good coverage for the modest budget available. Adding to the hours of operation and days of the week the service operates provides for more choice and, over time, an opportunity to build clientele.

By expanding the pilot program, the District will be in a position to be eligible for Provincial Gas Tax funding that will build over time. This will contribute to a more sustainable transportation network that will set the framework for further expansion.

9.2 Operating and Capital Budgets

The following sections outline the budget impacts of implementing service enhancements during and after the pilot programs, as well as post-pilot capital budget considerations.

9.2.1 Revenue and Cost Assumptions

The revenue and costs assumptions were calculated differently for pilot programs and post pilot programs for the following reasons:

- Ridership is expected to increase on both Corridor 11 and the east-west services over time;
- The Corridor 11 service currently takes a two week break during the winter holidays, but post-pilot, it should operate 52 weeks a year;
- Corridor 11 operator costs are based on current contracted costs during the pilot program while post-pilot costs will be higher due to normal inflation, and operating costs for the rural service are expected to rise slightly post-pilot as well;
- During the pilot program, Gas Tax funding will not apply to program costs covered by CT grant funds;
- After the end of the CT grant, MOS will apply to 100% of the costs of running the community transportation services, unless the District is successful at other eligible grants; and
- Administrative costs can potentially be reduced once programs are up and running.

Table 7 below summarizes the assumptions made for budgeting purposes during the pilot program and post-pilot.

Assumptions	During Pilot Program	Post Pilot-Program
Ridership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corridor 11 existing service – 2 passengers/hour for 1st year • Corridor 11 existing service – 2.5 pass./hr for 2nd and 3rd years • Corridor 11 expanded service – 2 pass./hr • Rural Service – 2 pass./hr 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corridor 11 – 3 pass./hr on weekdays • Corridor 11 – 2 pass./hr on weekends • Rural Service – 3 pass./hr
Seasonal breaks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corridor 11 takes 2 week break during winter holidays 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services operate 52 weeks per year
Corridor 11 Average Fares	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$7.50 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$7.50
Rural Service Average Fares	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$7.50 (based on \$5 and \$10 zone fares) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$7.50 for fixed-flex route • \$10 for on-demand, if offered

Corridor 11 Costs*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$55/hr for existing service • \$65/hr for any expanded service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$70/hr
Rural Service Costs*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$65/hr 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$70/hr
Potential Gas Tax Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$21/hr for every hour of additional service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$21/hr for all hours of service (pilot programs + enhancements) or \$6.60 per capita
Administrative Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Averages \$70,250 per year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can possibly reduce costs of staff and marketing

Table 7: Budget Assumptions

*Costs assume the District continues to operate services with a contracted operator.

9.2.1 Pilot and Post-Pilot Operating Annual Budget Summary

The estimated financial impact of enhancing the Corridor 11 and east-west rural services during the CT grant timeframe is summarized in Table 9 below and reflects only costs and revenues that exceed the CT Grant budgets.

Table 10 reflects the Districts costs and revenues for all services after the CT Grant program is over effective March 31, 2023.

PILOT Program - Added Budget to CT Grant	Annual Hours	Annual Cost	Annual Passenger Revenue	Annual Gas Tax	Total Annual Revenues	Annual Net Cost
Corridor 11 Bus Saturday (3 trips)	546	\$ 30,030	\$ 8,190	\$ 11,466	\$ 19,656	\$ 10,374
Corridor 11 Bus Sunday (3 trips)	546	\$ 30,030	\$ 8,190	\$ 11,466	\$ 19,656	\$ 10,374
Corridor 11 am +. pm weekday trips added (Gravenhurst-Huntsville)	976	\$ 53,680	\$ 14,640	\$ 20,496	\$ 35,136	\$ 18,544
Added east-west trip one day per week (Mactier-Huntsville)	234	\$ 15,210	\$ 3,510	\$ 4,914	\$ 8,424	\$ 6,786
Added east-west trip one day per week (Midland-Bracebridge)	247	\$ 16,055	\$ 3,705	\$ 5,187	\$ 8,892	\$ 7,163
Added one day per week based on two trips (Mactier-Huntsville)	468	\$ 30,420	\$ 7,020	\$ 9,828	\$ 16,848	\$ 13,572
Added one day per week based on two trips (Midland-Bracebridge)	494	\$ 32,110	\$ 7,410	\$ 10,374	\$ 17,784	\$ 14,326
Added On-demand Rural Service (2 vehicles, one day per week)	1,040	\$ 67,600	\$ 20,800	\$ 21,840	\$ 42,640	\$ 24,960
Total Pilot Program Service Enhancements	4,551	\$ 275,135	\$ 73,465	\$ 95,571	\$ 169,036	\$ 106,099

Table 9: Impact of Service Enhancements During Pilot Project

The estimated annual cost of the adding all of the above service enhancements to the pilot programs, would be \$106,099 per year. This estimate could vary, as refinements might be made to schedules, and cost assumptions would need to be confirmed. This net cost reflects the estimated Provincial Gas Tax funding that would apply to MOS, revenues, ridership, and costs that exceed those covered by the CT grant.

Once the pilot programs end concurrently with the end of the CT grant timeframe on March 31, 2023, all MOS, revenues, ridership, and costs would be included in the District's Gas Tax funding allocation calculation. Costs to implement the service enhancements post-pilot are illustrated in Table 10 below.

Post Pilot Program	Annual Hours	Annual Cost	Annual Passenger Revenue	Annual Gas Tax	Total Annual Revenues	Annual Net Cost
Corridor 11 Pilot Program	2,667	\$ 210,107	\$ 60,008	\$ 56,007	\$ 116,015	\$ 94,092
Rural Pilot Program	962	\$ 90,757	\$ 21,645	\$ 20,202	\$ 41,847	\$ 48,910
Corridor 11 Bus Saturday (3 trips)	546	\$ 38,220	\$ 12,285	\$ 11,466	\$ 23,751	\$ 14,469
Corridor 11 Bus Sunday (3 trips)	546	\$ 38,220	\$ 12,285	\$ 11,466	\$ 23,751	\$ 14,469
Corridor 11 am +. pm weekday trips added (Gravenhurst-Huntsville)	1,000	\$ 70,000	\$ 22,500	\$ 21,000	\$ 43,500	\$ 26,500
Added east-west trip one day per week (Mactier-Huntsville)	234	\$ 16,380	\$ 5,265	\$ 4,914	\$ 10,179	\$ 6,201
Added east-west trip one day per week (Midland-Bracebridge)	247	\$ 17,290	\$ 5,558	\$ 5,187	\$ 10,745	\$ 6,546
Added one day per week based on two trips (Mactier-Huntsville)	468	\$ 32,760	\$ 10,530	\$ 9,828	\$ 20,358	\$ 12,402
Added one day per week based on two trips (Midland-Bracebridge)	494	\$ 34,580	\$ 11,115	\$ 10,374	\$ 21,489	\$ 13,091
Added On-demand Rural Service (2 vehicles, one day per week)	1,040	\$ 67,600	\$ 20,800	\$ 21,840	\$ 42,640	\$ 24,960
Total Pilot Program Service Enhancements with on-demand rural service	8,204	\$ 615,913	\$ 181,990	\$ 172,284	\$ 354,274	\$ 261,639

Table 10: Post Pilot Program Budget

Should the District of Muskoka decide simply to extend the pilot programs beyond the CT grant time period, the annual cost for service is estimated at \$300,864 while the net cost to the District is estimated at \$143,002, not including any additional grants that may be offered subsequent to the CT timeframe. If service enhancements are included, the estimated impact on each option is also provided in the table above. If all service enhancements are implemented the total cost is estimated at \$615,913 per year while the net cost to the District is estimated at \$261,639. The net cost assumes that the District's annual Provincial Gas Tax revenue is estimated at \$172,284 based on the assumption that the District would receive a total of \$21 per hour of service.

The \$172,284 estimated Gas Tax revenue equates to approximately \$5.74 per capita for the District's 30,000 population. This is lower than the per capita average of \$6.83 received by Bracebridge and Huntsville during the 2018 calendar year.

As a further check, the provincial average Gas Tax funding allocation for the April 1, 2018 – March 31, 2019 period was \$8.44 per capita plus \$0.30 per revenue passenger. Applying those numbers to the District services equates to:

- 23,572 passengers @ \$0.30 = \$7,070 (approximately, assuming all enhancements are implemented)
- 30,000 @ \$8.44 = \$253,200
- Total annual Gas Tax funding estimate = \$260,270

Based on the aforementioned, it can be concluded that the estimated Gas Tax revenue assumptions used for budgeting purposes are conservative, and it is conceivable that the District would be eligible for a higher level of funding.

9.2.2 Post-Pilot Program Capital Budget

A number of capital investments can be made to support the provision of public transportation services. Costs that are typical of municipal public transportation budgets include bus stop infrastructure, bus transfer stations, vehicle purchases, and technology. During each budget year, money can be set aside as a reserve fund with the intent to make some of these capital investments in future.

Vehicle Purchase and Replacement

It is recommended that, if the District would like to continue to operate public transportation services, the District should own the assets, including vehicles. The District should explore government grants and low-interest government loans for capital purchases. The vehicles used in service are currently owned by the contractor, and private contractors do not qualify for government funding. In the case of a private operator, 100% of the cost of the vehicle is built into the hourly cost charged to the District, whereas if a grant can be secured for capital purchases, the District would only have to cover a portion of the cost of the vehicle. If the District plans to operate services long term, best practices indicate it is more cost effective to own the vehicles.

Grant funding should be sought to help cover a portion of costs, and a capital reserve should be established. Transit vehicle options for small communities can vary significantly. Based on the limited demand and infrequent stops, it is suggested that for budgeting purposes, the lower-cost vehicles currently used for Bracebridge Transit and Huntsville Transit be considered for District services. Fully equipped buses that meet AODA requirements and Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) technology should be budgeted at \$100,000 per vehicle and will have a design life of five years.

Bus Stop Infrastructure

Bus stop infrastructure varies significantly from having a simple bus stop sign and post (approximately \$500) to a more elaborate bus stop that consists of a concrete passenger area complete with bench, shelter, and lighting (up to \$10,000). Given the fact that bus service in the District is relatively new, large investments should be avoided until stronger passenger demand becomes established. In this regard, priority for benches and bus shelters would be determined based on passenger volumes and customer safety considerations. A budget of \$5,000 per year for bus stop infrastructure is recommended should service continue beyond the pilot program. During the pilot program, existing local transit bus stops should be used for the District services within Bracebridge and Huntsville, while rural bus stop signs, if permitted, can be affixed to existing traffic or utility posts as a low-cost interim solution.

Smart Card Technology

Smart card technology similar to that used by Bracebridge Transit and Simcoe LINX is a transit ridership growth strategy that would provide significant benefits to the District including the ability to integrate fares, track ridership and revenues, assess bus stop demand, and be able to track when and where passengers get on and off the bus (i.e. origin-destination information). This would help in the planning of future transit routes and service levels. The cost for a smart card system integrated with GPS is estimated at \$30,000 per vehicle. It should be noted that the smart card hardware can be reused when vehicles are replaced. Should the District elect to purchase smart card technology, the cost would approximate \$70,000 to equip two vehicles in service and equip a spare vehicle with the ability to accept the portable smart card technology from the vehicle taken out of service.

Other Technology

A nominal capital reserve of \$10,000 per year is suggested to enable the District to purchase future technology that will improve public transportation efficiency.

Summary of Capital Budget

Should the District of Muskoka continue to fund and operate community transportation services beyond the pilot programs, annual capital budgets are recommended to reflect the following:

Budget	Description
\$20,000	Capital reserve for each vehicle for expansion and replacement (\$100,000 per vehicle)
\$35,000	One-time purchase and installation of a GPS-integrated smart-card fare collection system for each bus, and automated next stop announcements
\$5,000	Bus stop infrastructure budget (signage, concrete pads, benches, lighting, etc.)
\$10,000	Technology reserve

It is also worth noting that costs for capital investments made both during and after the pilot program would qualify for Provincial Gas Tax funding.

10. MEETING PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The following table summarizes how each of the project objectives can be met through the implementation of community transportation programs recommended in this CTP.

Objective	CTP Program Recommendation	Rationale
Individual Transportation Solutions	Fixed-flex rural route	Vehicle can flex for door-to-door service.
	Collaborate with volunteer-based services	Volunteer agencies can fill in service gaps.
Accessible Rural Transportation	Fixed-flex rural route	Vehicles will be accessible. Vehicle can flex for those who cannot walk to the bus stop.
East-West Connectivity	Fixed-flex rural route	Provides connections between many rural communities and to larger town centres
Expansion of Corridor 11 Bus	Integrate with ONTC	Provides additional travel options for the public
	Eliminate trip between Orillia and Barrie	Covered by Simcoe LINX, re-invest hours within the District
	Reorganize stops in towns	Add stops in Huntsville and Gravenhurst, eliminate a stop in Bracebridge
Seamless Transportation Network	Timed connections between all services within the District	Rural routes connect with Corridor 11 Bus and town services
	Timed connections with services beyond the District	Corridor 11 Bus and rural route to Midland connect with Simcoe LINX
Long-Term Growth and Sustainability	Ridership growth strategies	Increase ridership and revenue, and by extension, Gas Tax funding
	Additional funding opportunities	To be explored as they become available

Table 11: Meeting Project Objectives

10.1 Individual Transportation Solutions

Several options were considered to help meet the needs of residents who require door-to-door transportation service. The fixed-flex rural route is designed to help meet individual transportation needs. The ability of the vehicle to flex off the route to pick up residents at their homes will assist those who are unable to walk to a bus stop.

The CTP also supports improved collaboration with volunteer-based driver services that operate within the District. As District resources are limited, these services can help fill in service gaps.

In more densely populated areas, fully on-demand ride share models can provide a high level of service, however, in areas with lower population densities and large geographic areas, such as Muskoka, the cost to provide a sufficient level of service is often prohibitive. For this reason, this type of service is not recommended for the District as a pilot program. It is acknowledged that this service model does provide a high level of individualized transportation and could be considered in the future if resources allow.

10.2 Accessible Rural Transportation Solutions

The CTP addresses the need for accessible rural transportation through recommendations for the District to use wheelchair accessible vehicles for the fixed-flex rural service and the ability of the vehicle on the fixed-flex route to veer off the route to pick up or drop off those that cannot walk to a bus stop.

Since the fixed-flex route rural service should only flex off the route for a total of five minutes per flex stop, the service will not be able to serve all residents. If there is a consistent request for service from residents who live just outside of the flex zone, the fixed route could be modified over time to better meet needs.

10.3 East-West Connectivity

The new proposed fixed-flex rural routes running between Midland and Bracebridge and MacTier and Huntsville connect many of the District's rural communities to each other and to the larger town centers of Huntsville, Bracebridge, Gravenhurst, and Midland. This service will build on the previous MET service as there are more trip destinations to choose due to longer routes connecting a greater number of communities, and the schedule will be improved with careful consideration of connections to the Corridor 11 Bus and transit services in other municipalities for connections to the south in Midland, Orillia, and Barrie.

10.4 Expansion of Inter-Community Corridor 11 Bus

The new proposed fixed-flex rural routes running between Midland and Bracebridge and MacTier and Huntsville connect many of the District's rural communities to each other and to the larger town centers of Huntsville, Bracebridge, Gravenhurst, and Midland. This service will build on the previous MET service as there are more trip destinations to choose due to longer routes connecting a greater number of communities, and the schedule will be improved with careful consideration of connections to the Corridor 11 Bus and transit services in other municipalities for connections to the south in Midland, Orillia, and Barrie.

10.5 Seamless Transportation Network in Muskoka

The CTP provides numerous recommendations to help create a seamless network of transportation services within the District, including ensuring smooth connections between the east-west rural service, the Corridor 11 Bus, the ONTC bus, and the Bracebridge and Huntsville transit systems. Changing the Corridor 11 schedule to make each weekday the same will assist in planning timed transfers. The CTP also includes several recommendations to improve connections with transit services beyond the District,

including Simcoe LINX. Fare integration is a future consideration which would help improve the ease of transfers between services.

10.6 Long-term Growth and Financial Sustainability

Strategies are provided to assist the District in growing ridership and revenue for community transportation services during the pilot programs, which will help grow the system and provide for increased Provincial Gas Tax funding. These factors will contribute to the financial sustainability of the programs. Additional funding opportunities are also discussed. The concept of one regional provider for all services that operate within the District, including area municipalities, should be explored to determine whether there are additional opportunities to enhance sustainability.