



The Corporation of the City of Stratford
Community Services Sub-committee
Open Session
AGENDA

Date: Thursday, February 16, 2023
Time: 4:30 P.M.
Location: Council Chamber, City Hall
Sub-committee Present: Councillor Beatty - Chair Presiding, Councillor Henderson - Vice Chair, Councillor Briscoe, Councillor Sebben, Councillor Wordofa
Staff Present: Tim Wolfe - Director of Community Services, Michael Mousley - Manager of Transit, Danielle Clayton - Recording Secretary, Stephanie Potter - Corporate Initiatives Lead

To watch the Sub-committee meeting live, please click the following link:

<https://video.isilive.ca/stratford/live.html>

A video recording of the meeting will also be available through a link on the City's website

<https://calendar.stratford.ca/meetings> following the meeting.

Pages

1. Call to Order

The Chair to call the Meeting to Order.

2. Disclosure of Pecuniary Interest and the General Nature Thereof

The *Municipal Conflict of Interest Act* requires any member of Council declaring a pecuniary interest and the general nature thereof, where the interest of a member of Council has not been disclosed by reason of the member's absence from the meeting, to disclose the interest at the first open meeting attended by the member of Council and otherwise comply with the *Act*.

Name, Item and General Nature of Pecuniary Interest

3. Delegations

None scheduled.

4. Report of the Manager of Transit and Corporate Initiatives Lead

4.1 Community Transportation – PC Connect Update 2023 (COM23-001)

3 - 9

Motion by

Staff Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "Community Transportation – PC Connect Update 2023" (COU23-001), be received for information.

5. Department Update

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The Director/Manager to provide an update on department activities and ongoing projects

6. Advisory Committee/Outside Board Minutes

There are no Advisory Committee/Outside Board minutes to be provided to Sub-committee.

7. Next Sub-committee Meeting

The next Community Services Sub-committee meeting is March 23, 2023 at 4:30 p.m. in the Council Chamber, City Hall.

8. Adjournment

Meeting Start Time:

Meeting End Time:

Motion by

Sub-committee Decision: THAT the Community Services Sub-committee meeting adjourn.



MANAGEMENT REPORT

Date: February 16, 2023
To: Community Services Sub-committee
From: Mike Mousley, Manager of Transit and Stephanie Potter, Corporate Initiatives Lead
Report #: COU23-001
Attachments: None

Title: Community Transportation – PC Connect Update 2023

Objective: To update Council on the Community Transportation Program and program extension.

Background:

A) Community Transportation Program – PC Connect

In 2018, the City of Stratford received \$1.45 million in Community Transportation grant funding to operate 3 intercity bus routes as a five-year pilot program. Stratford operates three intercity routes of the PC Connect service, connecting North Perth with Kitchener-Waterloo on Route 1; and Stratford and St. Marys to Kitchener-Waterloo and London on Routes 2 and 3. The service is an equal partnership with North Perth and St. Marys that provides each partner with equal service levels and shared expenses.

The County of Perth also received \$1.45 million in Community Transportation funding to deliver two intercounty PC Connect routes that connect the rural communities of Listowel, Millbank, Milverton, Atwood, Monkton, Sebringville and Mitchell; and provide connectivity to Stratford and St. Marys. Perth County routes A and B are provided with the Town of St. Marys contributing a portion of project expenses.

Stratford and Perth County continue to provide in-kind contributions to each other's projects, with City Staff working with the County's Transportation Coordinator. In-kind contributions are related to key messaging, marketing, route design, and advocacy. The service operates under one unified PC Connect brand, as the regional service areas, objectives, and interests overlap. The partnership helps to share common project costs and ensure that the service remains a regional initiative, designed to benefit all communities in the region. The PC Connect staff project team continues to hold monthly meetings with the CAOs of Stratford, St. Marys, and North Perth.

Each of the five PC Connect routes operate 8 hours per day, 6 days a week from Monday to Saturday; representing 240 total weekly service hours in the communities. The City and the County have contracted Voyago to provide the service.

B) PC Connect Service Update

i) Ridership

Since the service launch, PC Connect has experienced two province-wide lockdowns which included stay-at-home orders. During these periods, riders were advised to utilize the service for essential travel only. Until Spring 2022, PC Connect was operating at 50% capacity to accommodate physical distancing on board the bus. Passengers were required to wear a mask, drivers were masked, and even now passengers continue to be instructed not to ride if they are feeling ill. Since Ontario began reopening in spring 2022, there has been a steady increase in ridership as follows:

PC Connect Ridership to Date

Funding Period	Route A: Perth County North	Route B: Perth County South	Route 1: KW to Listowel	Route 2: KW to St. Marys	Route 3: London to Stratford	TOTALS
Funding Year 3: Nov 2020-Mar 2021	342	87	55	186	94	764
Funding Year 4: Apr 2021-Mar 2022	1,116	578	872	978	1,127	4,671
Funding Year 5: April 2022	128	37	128	102	106	501
May 2022	143	38	110	168	64	589
June 2022	203	49	188	210	160	810
July 2022	320	120	209	335	227	1,211
August 2022	250	104	140	296	252	1,042
September 2022	258	112	136	362	153	1,021
October 2022	211	96	140	297	189	933
November 2022	236	77	129	326	240	1,008
December 2022	197	84	130	284	167	862
TOTALS	3,404	1,382	2,237	3,544	2,779	13,412

ii) Digital Fare Booking

In June 2022, the initiative introduced a new digital booking platform that includes a web portal and a mobile app through Blaise Transit that continues to improve ridership, customer service, rider experience, and operational efficiency. The app allows riders to book their ride in advance, pay their fare, receive service notifications and track the bus in real time. Alternatively, riders can still call 1-888-465-0783 to book their ride in advance, and cash fares are still being accepted.

iii) Service Enhancements

In Autumn 2022, weekday scheduling improvements were made on Routes 2 and 3. As a result of user feedback and consistently low ridership on the early morning trips, both routes now have a later start time to better align with other transportation services (including GO Train, London Transit, and Grand River Transit), and to better accommodate University of Waterloo Stratford Campus scheduling. Negotiations for a new Route 1 stop along Highway 86 are currently underway to improve service access in rural communities.

The County has introduced service enhancements on Route A with an express trip through high-ridership areas (Stratford, Listowel, and Mitchell), and has eliminated the underutilized Saturday service on Route B.

After strategic development of PC Connect General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS) data, PC Connect is now available for viewing on Google Maps. The creation and submission of this data enables Google to suggest PC Connect as a method of transportation when viewers search a relevant destination. Google maps now educates and reminds viewers of the PC Connect public transit option, and makes planning a trip with PC Connect as easy as ever. In the first month of launching the data, there has been over 33,600 search queries for PC Connect.

iv) Service Promotion

➤ Marketing

In order to continue to grow the service and educate the public about PC Connect, extensive and creative multi-media marketing campaigns are on-going. A sample of recent PC Connect advertisements include:

- Brotherhood Journal – reaching >2,000 Mennonite homes per month
- Pictures with Santa sponsorship – reaching nearly 500 families
- Mitchell Advocate advertisements
- Stratford Beacon & Marketplace advertisements
- Listowel Banner & Independent Plus advertisements
- FM 96 – 30 ads/week reaching 156,726 weekly listeners
- Country 104 – 30 ads/week reaching 98,433 weekly listeners

- The Ranch 100.1 – 200 ads reaching approximately 16,000 listeners
 - 107.1 Juice FM & 107.7 2Day FM – 110 ads covering Stratford, Listowel, Mitchell, St. Marys, London & more
 - TikTok advertisements – one promoted video resulting in over 30,000 impressions and 285 link clicks.
 - Facebook and Instagram paid advertisements
 - Town of St. Marys Visitors' Guide
 - North Perth Visitors Guide
 - Huron-Perth Boomers magazine (Fall 2022 Issue)
 - Listowel Digital Billboard
 - Mitchell Digital Billboard
- Free Ride Promotions

In an effort to promote the service and welcome new riders, PC Connect has been offered for free on special dates:

- Transit Appreciation Day: 18 March 2022
 - Rational: To celebrate Transit Day and promote the service;
 - Results: 61 free rides on 5 routes; nearly five times the average daily ridership from the previous month.
- Summer Kickoff Week: 4-9 July 2022
 - Rational: To kickoff summer and offer an opportunity to try the service during summer holidays and promote local tourism;
 - Results: 483 free rides on 5 routes over 6 days of free service; 94% of the average 2022 monthly ridership in just one week.
- Black Friday: 25 November 2022
 - Rational: To celebrate 2 years of service and promote local in-person shopping in local communities;
 - Results: 64 free rides across 5 routes; twice the daily average ridership in October

➤ Community & Employer Outreach

Community and employer outreach include brochure distribution, site visits and educating the community on the service and its offerings. The "PC Connect for Employers" campaign focuses on educating local employers about the service and emphasizing the many benefits that it can provide to their employees.

v) Community Impact

PC Connect is vital to the social and economic prosperity of this region. The service allows residents to affordably access employment, health care, critical services, recreation, retail, and visit friends and family in other communities. It provides the workforce and employers with access to regional transportation options, supports local

economic activity and tourism, provides transportation for students and seniors, access to healthcare, supports social service agencies and their clients, affordable access to resources and services amid the ongoing cost of living crisis, is fully accessible for seniors and persons with disabilities, and is an environmentally sustainable alternative to personal vehicles.

PC Connect consistently scores 5-star ratings through the feedback portal, and daily requests are received for service expansion and increased frequency. PC Connect is an integrated transit service that local communities have been requesting for over a decade.

C) Service Extension 31 March 2023 to 31 March 2025

The current term of this service will end on 31 March 2023. The Community Transportation Program was originally intended to be a 5-year pilot program, however, the project launch was substantially delayed by the 2019 provincial election and the 2020 outbreak of COVID-19, which reduced program duration to two and a half years (to 31 March 2023). In summer 2021, the Ministry of Transportation of Ontario (MTO) announced that Community Transportation grant recipients would receive a two-year pilot program extension with additional funding. Stratford received an additional \$611,936.91 to continue PC Connect until 31 March 2025. This is an exciting opportunity to continue this important program with additional funding – however, a substantial municipal investment will be required to extend the program for the full 2 years.

Staff presented this information to Council on 25 October 2021 (COU21-108); Council adopted the following resolution (R2021-477):

THAT staff be authorized to submit revised budget documents to the Ministry of Transportation for the continuation of the Community Transportation Pilot Program to 31 March 2025 at current service levels;

THAT Council authorizes the Mayor, City Clerk and Chief Administrative Officer or their respective delegates to execute the Transfer Payment Agreement and other necessary documentation/reports with the Ministry of Transportation as required for the purpose of extending the Community Transportation Pilot Program to 31 March 2025;

AND THAT staff be directed to work with Metrolinx, municipal and community partners, and key stakeholders to build a business case for increased GO Train frequency and service sustainability.

Staff submitted the authorized documents and have held several follow-up meetings with the MTO since the program extension announcement to request more information regarding the City's funding allocation and to request additional funding. Meetings included an Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) Conference delegation

meetings with the MTO in 2021 and 2022. On 31 October 2022, Stratford and Perth County submitted a business case to the MTO, requesting that each of the program extension funding allocations be increased to \$1 million each. Two follow up letters have been sent since this submission. The Ministry has confirmed receipt of the request but has not committed to increasing extension funding.

Analysis: Through continued investment in the PC Connect pilot program into 2025, the City can continue to provide much-needed access to intercity transportation in this community with support from the Ministry of Transportation and local community partners. This is also a unique opportunity to use the PC Connect ridership data to build a strong business case for continued GO Train expansion in the region. The MTO extended GO Train services to London, St. Marys, and Stratford beginning on 18 October 2021 with one daily return trip, operating Monday to Friday. GO service allows residents and visitors to connect to/from London, Kitchener-Waterloo, Guelph, and the Greater Toronto Area. Staff continue to meet with Metrolinx and the MTO for program updates and to advocate for increased service frequency. Metrolinx confirmed that their intention is to slowly introduce service to this region with a similar process used in Niagara Region (i.e. introduce one train to start and slowly build service levels). Staff also continue to engage with Metrolinx, community stakeholders, and the other regional municipal partners to build a business case for continued GO Train expansion in this region.

In the long-term, the intent is to fill GO Train service gaps with PC Connect service and use the ridership data to build a business case for increased GO frequency. It is hoped that GO service would replace PC Connect for long-distance connectivity to London and Kitchener-Waterloo in Stratford and St Marys. PC Connect would function as the connecting link from Perth County to Stratford and St. Marys. North Perth will also require long term and ongoing PC Connect bus service to access St. Jacobs-Elmira and Kitchener-Waterloo directly.

Financial Implications:

Financial impact to current year operating budget:

The 2023 draft budget for the PC Connect service includes the use of the remaining available grant funds and contributions from each of Stratford, North Perth, and St. Marys to make up municipal contributions of approximately \$34,000.00 each in 2023. Other financial impacts are not expected.

Financial impact on future year operating budget:

Substantial municipal contributions will be required to carry on with PC Connect in 2024 and the first quarter of 2025. The extent of these are unknown until such time as discussions occur with the Service Provider. This will be determined through further analysis of the available funds, the structure of the routes and service and pending any information on additional funding.

Alignment with Strategic Priorities:

Mobility, Accessibility and Design Excellence

Improving ways to get around, to and from Stratford by public transit, active transportation and private vehicle.

Strengthening our Plans, Strategies and Partnerships

Partnering with the community to make plans for our collective priorities in arts, culture, heritage and more. Communicating clearly with the public around our plans and activities.

Developing our Resources

Optimizing Stratford's physical assets and digital resources. Planning a sustainable future for Stratford's resources and environment.

Widening our Economic Opportunities

Strengthening Stratford's economy by developing, attracting and retaining a diversity of businesses and talent.

Alignment with One Planet Principles:

Equity and Local Economy

Creating safe, equitable places to live and work which support local prosperity and international fair trade.

Culture and Community

Nurturing local identity and heritage, empowering communities and promoting a culture of sustainable living.

Travel and Transport

Reducing the need to travel, encouraging walking, cycling and low carbon transport.

Staff Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "Community Transportation – PC Connect Update 2023" (COU23-001), be received for information.

Prepared by: Stephanie Potter, Corporate Initiatives Lead
Michael Mousley, Manager of Transit

Recommended by: Tim Wolfe, Director of Community Services
Joan Thomson, Chief Administrative Officer

TRANSIT CAPITAL

- **Approved** Projects for 2023 (ICIP)
- Accessible shelters (RFP posted)
- Bus wash replacement (still pending approval from ICIP)
- Underground fuel tank replacement (approved and anticipating project start in Spring)
- Consultant fees (project ongoing with an April completion)
- IT/GPS expansion (Completed)
- Bus Storage/Facility Upgrades (still pending approvals from ICIP)
- 40 ft. Hybrid Electric/Diesel Conventional Buses (2) (still pending approvals from ICIP)
- Magnuscards Mobile App (still pending approvals from ICIP)

PARALLEL TRANSIT

- All fleet disinfected nightly
- Gloves/surgical masks/disinfectant still made available to Staff.
- **Weekly Ridership Average**
- Jan 2- Jan 7 298
- Jan 8- Jan 14 383
- Jan 15- Jan 21 369
- Jan 22- Jan 28 399
- Ridership at approximately 90% of normal prior to pandemic.

PARALLEL TRANSIT CAPITAL

- No update at this time

RECREATION PROGRAMMING

- No update at this time

RECREATION FACILITIES

- The Boathouse washroom renovation project that is currently in progress had a target completion date of January 31, 2023. Due to supply issues for materials, the completion date has been extended. At this point, there is not a firm date in place for the opening of the washrooms.
- The supply and installation of a new sound system at the Allman Arena was awarded to CP-Stoneman Inc. in the amount of \$66,500.00 plus H.S.T. Staff is working with the Contractor to schedule the project installation dates.
- The repairs to the elevator at City Hall have been completed and the elevator is now back in service.

- With the elevator now in service at City Hall, rentals in the Auditorium will now be permitted.

RECREATION FACILITIES CAPITAL

- No update at this time