

To: Warden Aitcheson and Members of Committee
Meeting Date: October 20, 2020
Prepared By: Maggie Martin, Transit Project Coordinator
Subject: Perth County Connect- October Update

Recommended Action:

THAT Perth County Council receives the “Perth County Connect- October Update” report for information.

Background Information:

County staff continue to work towards the November 16, 2020 launch of the Perth County Connect (PC Connect) transportation service to connect workers to employment, and provide residents with an alternative, affordable means of transportation to medical appointments and essential services such as grocery stores, social services, and other points of interest. The PC Connect is the result of the \$1.45 million grant from the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) Community Transportation Program to the County of Perth to implement an intracommunity transportation pilot project.

On October 1, 2020, County Council approved the following recommendations:

THAT Perth County Council receives the “Perth County Connect- September Update” report for information

THAT the County operate its two transportation routes on alternating days during the soft launch period (Monday/Wednesday/Friday and Tuesday/Thursday/Saturday).

Due to the ongoing delays presented by the pandemic, Voyago has been experiencing difficulties sourcing interim buses, and have advised that they would only have access to one bus for a November 16, 2020 launch. Despite the probable inability to launch a full service on November 16, 2020, Staff proposed that proceeding with an alternating soft launch service would allow residents to develop PC Connect brand recognition, become familiar with the standard routes and daily schedules, while gathering operational data for service improvements. Although reduced frequency, a November soft launch

would still contribute directly to the economic recovery by providing a source of transportation for residents to get back to work safely, and will also help draw people to small businesses throughout the County.

The Service License Agreement has been signed by both Voyago and Perth County, and is now considered finalized. Voyago has advised that they have successfully placed the order for the County's permanent fleet. At this time, the fleet is estimated to arrive within 90-120 days of the order, resulting in late January to early February 2021 arrival. In the meantime, efforts are ongoing to source an addition interim bus for a full November 16, 2020 launch.

The LPA has been signed by Stratford, and it is anticipated that it will be taken to St. Marys' Council at an upcoming Council Meeting. Service to St. Marys and the Town's inclusion on any marketing materials remains contingent on the signing of the LPA.

Comments:

The following comments will provide insight into each project component, and the status of those that need to be finalized prior to launching the service. The diagram below serves as a reference to all key project milestones that have happened to date.



1. Duration of the Service

a) Project Launch

- The team is preparing for a November 16, 2020 soft launch, servicing Route A on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays; and Route B on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.
- The team is pushing forward on all required project components in order to provide the best service possible on November 16, 2020.

b) Project End Date

- On October 5, the MTO provided a signed waiver that formalized the new launch deadline of January 24, 2021. The communication also acknowledges the receipt of requests from several recipients for a project extension beyond 2023. The Ministry is considering the options regarding a program extension, and will provide an update once a decision has been made.

2. Legal Agreements

a) Local Partnership Agreement (LPA)- Stratford and St. Marys

- As earlier stated, the LPA has been signed by Stratford, and expected to be taken to St. Marys' Council meeting for final approval.
- Regular partnership working meetings continue in order to ensure that priorities are aligned, and that preparation milestones are met.

b) Service Agreement

- The service agreement with Voyago has been successfully completed.

3. Marketing

a) PC Connect Logo

- The finalized logo has been attached, and is accompanied by the new positioning statement: *Your Community Transit System*. The statement has been designed to create a sense of ownership and belonging amongst riders.
- The logo will be used to identify the service across all avenues, such as fleet, bus signs, social media, and marketing material.

b) Materials

- The team is in the process of designing bus stop signs, service brochures, postcards, and marketing posters.
- Printed materials that include routes and schedules will be ordered in smaller quantities due to the likelihood of route and stop changes, once operational data is gathered.
- Distribution will take place through community networks, socially responsible speaking engagements, and Unaddressed Admail.

c) Outreach

- Multi-media marketing will be leveraged in order to penetrate the market and reach as many residents as possible.
- Social media outreach will be heavily leveraged through the launch of the service, in addition to radio advertisements and mailings.
- Local employers have been engaged in order to identify and best suit their needs, and promote the PC Connect to their employees.
- As per the Ministry of Health guidelines, a comprehensive health and safety marketing campaign will be executed in order to reassure passengers of the COVID-19 preventative measures that are in place.
- Posters will be visible in accessible places and will include messaging emphasizing the importance of regular hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.

d) Promotions

- The MTO has confirmed that a fare promotion of free or discounted fares during the period of November 16, 2020 to Jan 1, 2021, is acceptable.

- Staff recommend providing a complementary service for a duration of the soft launch, in order to encourage residents to explore the PC Connect, and provide feedback on the service.

4. Other Updates

a) Bus Stop Locations

- Many businesses are excited about the opportunity to welcome residents to their properties, and are working with their own legal representatives to meet the insurance requirements set out in the agreement.
- County staff are working with the member municipalities to confirm bus stop locations that land on municipal properties.
- Securing bus stop locations continue to be a priority for both County and City staff, and close collaboration to do so is ongoing.

b) Southwest Community Transportation (SCT) Association

- Kim Earls, Executive Director of SCOR, joined the Committee meeting to discuss the SCT, and the potential of Perth County's involvement.
- The Committee was overall supportive of the Association's mission, however a decision to sign the MOU will be made at a later date.

COVID-19 Impact

The ongoing global pandemic continues to pose potential challenges that may be faced while launching the PC Connect. Some of the primary challenges are outlined below:

- While the Provincial State of Emergency ended on July 24th, some emergency orders remain in effect around the sizes of gatherings, limits on special events and other measures that may have a dampening effect on ridership.
- In order to allow for safe social distancing, available seating on the bus would need to be reduced. Tillsonburg launched their service with reduced seating; however increased demand for the service has resulted in the team to reconsider their restrictions.
- Riders and drivers would be expected to practice respiratory etiquette and wear masks while onboard the PC Connect.
- The team is working closely with Huron Perth Public Health to ensure that all necessary precautions are in place, and that the service is as safe for riders as possible.

Connection to Strategic Plan:

Goal 1 – Growth & Economic Development

Goal 2 – Regionalization & Service Effectiveness

Goal 3 – Customer Service Excellence

Goal 4 – Community Development & Planning

Goal 5 – Corporate Sustainability

Attachments:

[Updated Transportation Budget - October 2020](#)

[PC Connect SUMMARY Update October 2020](#)

Reviewed By:

Justin Dias, Manager of Economic Development & Tourism

Community Transportation Grant Program: Revised Budget (October 2020)

Based on November 16, 2020 Launch Date

	Actual Costs - Year ending March 31, 2019	Actual Costs - Year ending March 31, 2020	Forecasted Costs - Year ending March 31, 2021	Forecasted Costs - Year ending March 31, 2022	Forecasted Costs - Year ending March 31, 2023	Totals
Expenses						
Consulting services/professional service (Charles Fitzsimmons, Transportation Consultant)	\$ 3,053	\$ 42,123	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 45,176
Full time administration salaries/benefits (Maggie Martin, Transit Project Coordinator)	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 85,437	\$ 91,460	\$ 97,015	\$ 273,912
Legal Services	\$ -	\$ 9,667	\$ 10,000	\$ 10,000	\$ 10,000	\$ 39,667
Contracted transportation services (Voyago: \$86.67/hour, 303 days/year)	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 157,384	\$ 419,691	\$ 419,691	\$ 996,767
Equipment, supplies, materials	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 20,000	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000	\$ 30,000
Public outreach/marketing	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 20,183	\$ 20,000	\$ 20,000	\$ 60,183
Contact number or website	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 6,000	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000	\$ 10,000
Administrative Costs	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 10,000	\$ 10,000	\$ 10,000	\$ 30,000
A. Total Expenses	\$ 3,053	\$ 51,790	\$ 309,004	\$ 558,151	\$ 563,706	\$ 1,485,705
Funding Sources						
CT Grant	\$ 3,053	\$ 51,790	\$ 309,004	\$ 539,971	\$ 545,526	\$ 1,449,345
County Contribution						\$ -
Partner Contribution(s)						\$ -
Fares (based on 10 riders/day @ \$6/ride)				\$ 18,180	\$ 18,180	\$ 36,360
B. Total Funding	\$ 3,053	\$ 51,790	\$ 309,004	\$ 558,151	\$ 563,706	\$ 1,485,705

Perth County Connect
Community Transportation Update: October 2020

The County of Perth has been granted \$1.45 million from the Community Transportation Grant Program to implement an intra community transportation pilot project throughout the County. The service is designed to provide alternative, affordable means of transportation to places of employment, grocery stores, medical appointments, and other places of interest. The County’s transportation service is intended to dovetail with Stratford’s inter community transportation service, which will allow for increased connectivity and access to major urban hubs. The purpose of both the inter and intra community transportation services are to support employment, seniors, youth, low income, and others who lack access to transportation, in order to eliminate financial and social hardships, while supporting the economy. The following report has been drafted to provide a brief project update for all member municipalities.

Project Milestones

- The timeline below outlines the key milestones to date of the complex transportation project.



Launch of the Service

- The PC Connect will be launching on November 16, 2020.
- In the case that bus procurement delays continue due to COVID-19, the PC Connect will launch with one bus and alternate service days, until the full fleet is available.

Legal Agreements

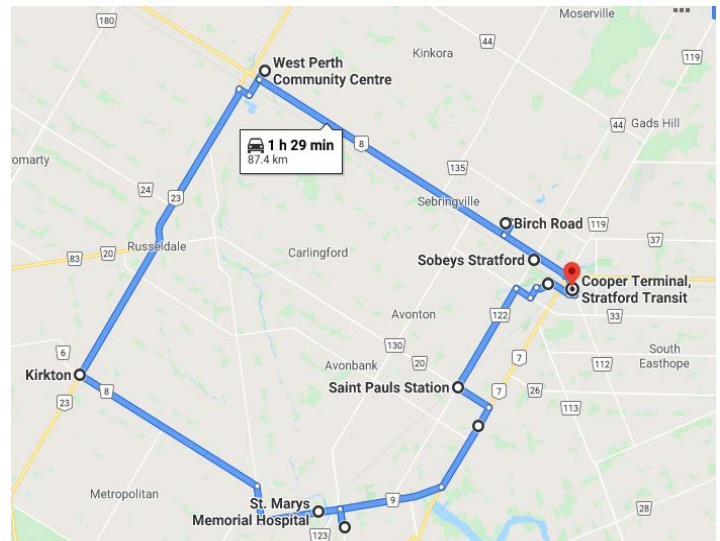
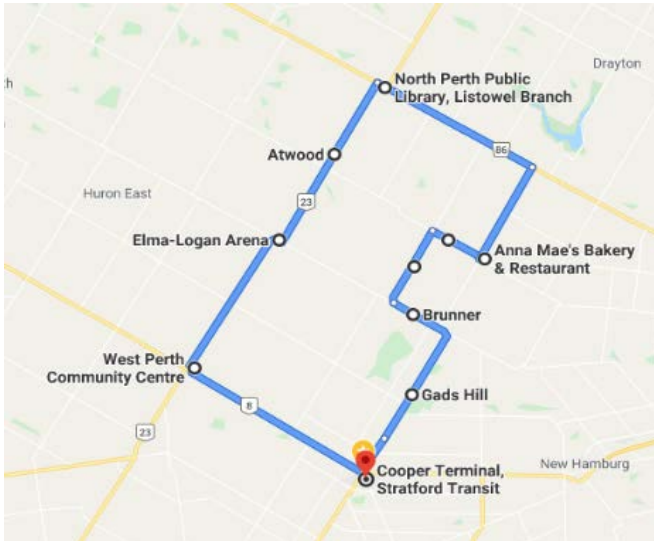
- The Service Agreement with Voyago has been completed.
- The LPA has been signed by Stratford, and it is anticipated that it will be taken to St. Marys’ Council at an upcoming Council Meeting. Service to St. Marys, as well as the Town’s inclusion on marketing materials remains contingent on the signing of the LPA.

Bus Stops

- The bus routes identified below represent two loops of service, Route A and Route B.

Perth County Route A: Stratford, Gadshill, Brunner, Milverton, Newton, Millbank, Listowel, Atwood, Monkton, Mitchell.

Perth County Route B: Stratford, St. Pauls, St. Marys, Kirkton, Mitchell, Sebringville.



Bus Stop Locations

- Bus stop locations have been identified along both routes. Businesses have been approached in order to gauge their interest and willingness to host a bus stop, and the appropriate municipal contacts have been engaged to confirm feasibility of proposed locations.
- Private locations will be presented with a legal agreement for liability and insurance purposes.

Marketing & Branding

- The name and branding of the service has been identified as the *Perth County Connect*.
- County Staff have created a marketing and communications plan, and continue to work on creating content that will be executed leading up to November 16, 2020.
- COVID-19 precautions will be heavily marketed in hopes of minimizing any potential hesitancy to leverage the PC Connect.

Ongoing Impact of the Pandemic on Ridership

- As per the MTO's COVID-19 guidelines for transportation, it is recommended that two meters are kept between passengers and drivers in order to ensure safe physical distancing.
- In order to allow for physical distancing, the capacity of the buses will need to be reduced, limiting the number of ticket sales per day.
- There are currently instructions by the Huron Perth Public Health unit and provincial public health recommendations for wearing masks/face coverings on public transportation.

- The team is working closely with the HPPH to ensure that all necessary precautions are put in place in order to make the service as safe for riders as possible.

Regional Coordination

- Discussions with the intercity transportation project (Stratford) are ongoing to identify areas of cooperation and collaboration on transfers, fare collection and areas of mutual benefit with the common service provider.
- South Central Ontario Region (SCOR) Economic Development is looking to formalize their role in facilitating coordination among all transit pilots by encouraging membership in the Southwest Community Transit Association.