

Lanark Transportation Association

**ACCELERATING RURAL
TRANSPORTATION SOLUTIONS**



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A. Overview of Transportation Initiative

The Lanark Transportation Association (LTA) is a not-for-profit organization that has been providing community-based transportation to residents of Lanark County and the Town of Smiths Falls since 2001. LTA is served by a team of eleven paid drivers (with a couple of volunteer drivers available for overflow), as well as one part-time and three full-time staff providing administrative support. It is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors, which includes representation from Lanark County.

Lanark Transportation Association provides transportation services for eligible residents to attend medical appointments, educational and training activities, agency-sponsored day programs, and other specialized services. They serve a base of over 5000 riders including seniors, children, people with disabilities, low-income families and clients of agencies. The service has thirteen vehicles on the road, four of which are wheelchair-accessible. Fares are based on approximately \$0.65 per kilometre and the cost of trips is subsidized to ensure greater affordability. LTA provided over 15,000 trips in 2013, covering more than 507,000 kilometres.

B. Community Profile

Location

Lanark County is located in south-eastern Ontario, about 50 kilometres or half an hour southwest of Ottawa and 100 kilometres or one hour northeast of Kingston. The towns of Perth, Smiths Falls and Carleton Place are main settlement areas within the county's boundaries. The area covers approximately 3,034 square kilometres and is home to over 100 lakes, rivers and waterfalls, including part of the Rideau Canal System. The landscape is varied, from the rocky Canadian Shield in the northern part of the county to the limestone plains, sand and clay of the Great Lakes Basin in the south.¹



Demographics/Density

The population of Lanark County in 2011 was 65,667, with a density of 21.6/km². Given all of the lakes, rivers and trails, the area is also a destination for outdoor enthusiasts. The population therefore increases substantially during the summer months with the arrival of seasonal residents and cottagers.²

Political and Governance Structures

The County of Lanark is an upper-tier level of government comprised of eight lower-tier municipalities, which include Beckwith Township, Town of Carleton Place, Drummond/North Elmsley Township, Lanark Highlands Township, Town of Mississippi Mills, Montague Township, Town of Perth, and Tay Valley Township. The Town of Smiths Falls is physically within the boundaries of the county as well, but it is a separated municipality and is therefore not under the jurisdiction and administration of the Lanark County government.³

¹ Wikipedia: The free encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lanark_County Accessed: June 6, 2014; and Lanark County website, <http://www.lanarkcounty.ca/>; Accessed May 29, 2014.

² Statistics Canada, Census 2011

³ Wikipedia: The free encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lanark_County. Accessed: June 6, 2014.

Economy

The logging industry stimulated economic development in the area during the 19th century, so lumber mills flourished throughout the region, along with textile mills. Today, many of those mills have become transformed into condominiums, high-tech offices, restaurants, retail boutiques and specialty shops such as craft and antique galleries. As a result, several quaint villages with limestone buildings and bridges are combined with local waterways and parks, offering tourism and recreation and an important source of economic stimulus. In addition to farmers' markets and flea markets, a couple of well-known annual summer festivals are held in the area, such as Perth's World Record Kilt Run and the Mississippi Mills International Puppet Festival. Lanark County has also been described as "The Maple Syrup Capital of Ontario", as it is one of the top maple syrup producing centres in the province.⁴

Local Transportation Context

Daily commerce and various health and social services can be accessed within the different towns, villages and hamlets of Lanark County. The City of Ottawa is also a major destination for many goods and services that are not provided locally, including those services offered at large regional hospitals. Many residents, particularly in the northeastern part of the County, also commute to Ottawa for employment, as Lanark County provides a good quality of life within a reasonable drive of the nation's capital.⁵

There are currently a couple of bus companies that provide daily commuter service to Ottawa, with route and schedule information offered through the OC Transpo "Rural Partner Services" webpage. Greyhound Canada and VIA Rail also provide bus and train services for out-of-county excursions to Ottawa and Kingston. Car and truck rentals are available, as well as carpooling options. In addition, several taxi services operate within Lanark County.

Yet, the county is a largely rural area and so access to transportation is a greater issue for those living outside of the towns and villages, particularly for those who do not or cannot drive or do not have access to a vehicle. Community Home Support for Lanark County has a transportation program for out-of-town medical appointments and can provide escorts for those who qualify. The Canadian Cancer Society also offers transportation to local residents attending cancer treatments. In addition to these options, Lanark Transportation Association provides transportation services to those who need them.⁶

C. Background

Background of Current Initiative

In the late 1990s, rural transportation was being addressed across the province via community-based regional work groups. It was determined, through a grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, that a lack of transportation was a quality-of-life issue. In 1996, the Valley Heartland Community Development Corporation sponsored the Lanark County/Smiths Falls Community Transportation Group to examine rural transportation issues in the area. Then, in 1998, the Lanark, Leeds & Grenville Community Transportation Project was established. Many of the early members of this group played a role in the eventual creation of a Lanark County community transportation service. There was initial representation from Lanark Community Programs, Access Taxi, the Canadian Cancer Society, Lanark County and local municipalities.⁷

In 1999, the Lanark County Transportation Planning Committee came into being. A six-month pilot project, called the Lanark County Transportation Project, was established and sponsored by the Volunteer Bureau of Lanark County, under the supervision of the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC). This pilot project was mainly funded by the United Way of Lanark County and the National Child Benefit Fund, with in-kind support

⁴ Wikipedia: The free encyclopedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lanark_County; accessed May 29, 2014.

⁵ Wikipedia: The free encyclopedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mississippi_Mills,_Ontario; accessed June 6, 2014.

⁶ South East Health Line website. <http://www.southeasthealthline.ca>; accessed June 7, 2014

⁷ Interview with Marilyn Bird, Executive Director, Lanark Transportation Association, on June 4, 2014.

from Lanark Community Programs (vehicles), Emergency Health Services (computers), and Access Taxi (office space).⁸

The pilot project concluded in June of 2000 and, after a summer recess, further funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation allowed the service to continue, along with \$15,000 in emergency funding from Lanark County. At this time, the name was changed to Lanark County Transportation. Sustainable funding remained a priority through 2001 and, with incorporation, the name of the service was once again changed to its current name, Lanark Transportation Association (LTA).⁹

Initial Funding Sources and Local Support

Since 2001, ongoing funding and support has been received from Lanark County. Until 2010, annual contributions ranged from \$40,000 to over \$80,000, with a consistent contribution of \$76,000 for the years 2005, 2006 and 2007. Lanark County Council made their financial support for LTA a regular line item in 2005. This was the same time that the provincial gas tax fund became available, and local government contributions to a transportation service were a requirement for receiving the funds. Considering that LTA was the only organization providing accessible transportation at the time, it was an easy decision for Council to support them. The LTA has received gas tax funds ever since.¹¹

In 2005, the Town of Smiths Falls also provided \$10,000, and additional grants were received from the Ontario Trillium Foundation for the purchase of vehicles. A substantial amount of revenue came from fares as well, from \$28,054 in 2003 up to \$261,200 in 2008.

Given that Smiths Falls is a separate municipality and not a part of the governance and financial structures of Lanark County, LTA staff began to track and report to the Town of Smiths Falls Council on the number of riders originating in the town. For example, it was found in 2009 that 3,596 trips originated within the Town of Smiths Falls (approximately 30% of overall ridership), and in 2010 6,218 trips originated from there (approximately 44% of ridership). Given the high percentage of riders, representatives from Lanark County worked with LTA staff to persuade the Town of Smiths Falls to consider making regular financial contributions to the service. In 2011, the Town of Smiths Falls began providing consistent contributions to LTA (i.e., \$8,500 in both 2011 and 2012).¹²

D. Current Operations

Organizational Structure

Lanark Transportation Association is a not-for-profit organization that provides community-based transportation to residents of Lanark County and the Town of Smiths Falls. LTA is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors, who is responsible for overall operations. Over the years, board members have included people with a wide variety of backgrounds and occupations, including banking, law, municipal governance, social services and community development.¹³

Lanark Transportation Association is also served by a team of eleven paid and two volunteer drivers. The paid drivers receive approximately \$14-16 per hour, are registered employees with the organization and covered by program benefits. The volunteer drivers are only used for overflow and/or if the paid drivers are not available.

⁸ Marilyn Bird, Executive Director's Report, Lanark Transportation Association Annual General Meeting, 2009.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Marilyn Bird presentation to Smiths Falls Council. Town of Smiths Falls Council Minutes, March 10, 2014; and Interview with Marilyn Bird, Executive Director, Lanark Transportation Association, on June 4, 2014.

¹¹ Marilyn Bird presentation to Smiths Falls Council. Town of Smiths Falls Council Minutes, March 10, 2014.

¹² Interview with Marilyn Bird, Executive Director, Lanark Transportation Association, on June 4, 2014; and Marilyn Bird presentation to Town of Smiths Falls Council. Smiths Falls Council Minutes, March 10, 2014.

¹³ Marilyn Bird presentation to Smiths Falls Council. Town of Smiths Falls Council Minutes, March 10, 2014.

All of the drivers have the same training, which is offered once a year (defensive driving, first aid, etc.).¹⁴

Dispatch and administrative support is provided by the office staff, which is made up of one part-time and two full-time employees, as well as an Executive Director who oversees day-to-day operations.¹⁵ LTA has thirteen vehicles, four of which are wheelchair accessible. The organization owns and operates their own vehicles, as they feel that this is very important to both risk management and quality of service.¹⁶

Routes and Ridership

Lanark Transportation Association does not operate a fixed route. Rather, they pick clients up at their homes, take them to where they need to go, wait for them to conduct their business and then return them home again.¹⁷ Transportation is available primarily for medical appointments, agency-sponsored day programs and other specialized services. LTA also provides non-emergency, non-ambulance, inter-facility medical transfers. This sort of transportation is offered between long-term care facilities and hospitals for appointments, treatments and discharge. In 2012, LTA vehicles travelled over 500,000 kilometres and made 15,000 trips.¹⁸

Lanark Transportation Association charges a fee for service operation, coupled with subsidies for people with low incomes and others in need. LTA currently provides transportation to over 5000 eligible residents, with new clients coming on frequently. Passengers include seniors, children, people with disabilities, low-income families and

clients of various agencies. Eligible referrals come from a wide range of agencies, including the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), Ontario Works (OW), child & youth agencies, Lanark Community Programs, Adult Protective Services, seniors' residences, the Children's Aid Society and the local women's shelter.¹⁹

The majority of Lanark Transportation Association's riders are registered with OW and ODSP, as both programs contain provisions to pay for medical transportation. Once a client has been approved to use LTA by their agency, LTA invoices and is paid directly by the agency on the rider's behalf. Clients may also be eligible if they are unable to access other transportation because of physical or financial limitations. Eligibility is determined in advance through the completion of a form to demonstrate financial need.²⁰

In 2013, LTA transported 13,562 passengers. As demonstrated in Figure 1, most passengers originated in the towns of Smiths Falls, Perth and Carleton Place.²¹

¹⁴ Interview with Marilyn Bird, Executive Director, Lanark Transportation Association, on June 4, 2014.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ OHCC Environmental Scan Survey of Rural Transportation Initiatives in Ontario. Conducted: December 2013.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Marilyn Bird presentation to Smiths Falls Council. Town of Smiths Falls Council Minutes, March 10, 2014.

¹⁹ Interview with Marilyn Bird, Executive Director, Lanark Transportation Association, on June 4, 2014.

²⁰ Interview with Marilyn Bird, Executive Director, Lanark Transportation Association, on June 4, 2014; and South East Health Line website. <http://www.southeasthealthline.ca/displayService.aspx?id=72697>; Accessed June 7, 2014.

²¹ Marilyn Bird presentation to Smiths Falls Council. Town of Smiths Falls Council Minutes, March 10, 2014.

Figure 1: Passengers Transported by LTA in 2013

2013 Passenger Totals Originating From:

Beckwith Township	234
Carleton Place	2008
Drummond/North Elmsley Township.	632
Lanark Highlands Township.	1020
Mississippi Mills	760
Montague Township	90
Perth	3110
Town of Smiths Falls	4334
Tay Valley Township	1314
Other	60
Total.	13562

Schedules and Fares

The Lanark Transportation Association service operates from Monday to Friday, 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Trips may take place outside of these hours or on the weekend, based on driver availability. Clients are requested to call one to two weeks in advance for scheduling purposes, however, efforts are made to accommodate short notice and even same day requests. In some cases, clients going to the same destination or travelling for similar purposes will be requested to share rides.²²

The cost of the trips is subsidized to ensure affordability, and fares are currently based on approximately \$0.65 per kilometre.²³ Fares can range from \$30 for an in-town run to \$120 for a return trip from Perth to Ottawa. Fares

include a round-trip and one hour of wait time.²⁴ There is financial assistance available for those who need it, but some form of fare needs to be provided by the rider. The amount that a rider pays is determined in advance at the time of booking and at the discretion of the rider (i.e., they state what they feel they can afford to pay).²⁵

Operating Costs and Revenues

The funding provided by Lanark County, the Town of Smiths Falls and the provincial gas tax is integral to Lanark Transportation Association being able to keep their prices affordable. In 2012, approximately 67% of LTA’s revenue was received through fare recovery (which includes direct fares from passengers and fares paid by agencies), 20.8% from the provincial Gas Tax, 11% through the County of Lanark, and 1.2% from the Town of Smiths Falls.²⁶

LTA receives an annual special grant from Lanark County (\$76,800 in 2013) with an additional contribution from the Town of Smiths Falls (\$8,000 in 2013). Due to these contributions, LTA is further qualified to receive money from the provincial gas tax fund, which Lanark County accepts the gas tax money on LTA’s behalf. As with other municipalities, the amount of money from the gas tax fund depends on the population of the area served, the number of kilometres covered and the number of passengers transported. As a result, in 2013, LTA received \$374,000 from the provincial gas tax fund.²⁷

Operations are demand-driven and based on need; annual budgets and expenses are therefore difficult to determine and vary from year to year. In 2012, employee wages and benefits were over \$375,000; fuel was approximately \$56,000; vehicle repairs and maintenance were nearly \$35,000; and insurance was approximately \$26,000.²⁸

²² South East Health Line website. <http://www.southeasthealthline.ca/displayService.aspx?id=72697>; Accessed June 7, 2014.

²³ Interview with Marilyn Bird, Executive Director, Lanark Transportation Association, on June 4, 2014.

²⁴ OHCC Environmental Scan Survey of Rural Transportation Initiatives in Ontario. Conducted: December 2013.

²⁵ Interview with Marilyn Bird, Executive Director, Lanark Transportation Association, on June 4, 2014.

²⁶ Marilyn Bird presentation to Smiths Falls Council. Town of Smiths Falls Council Minutes, March 10, 2014.

²⁷ Interview with Marilyn Bird, Executive Director, Lanark Transportation Association, on June 4, 2014.

²⁸ Lanark Transportation Association, Financial Statements, December 31, 2012.

Challenges ²⁹

Providing transportation is expensive, and in the first few years of LTA's existence, the most challenging issue was obtaining enough funding to operate. Due to the low number of rides provided at the beginning, fares only covered approximately half of the cost of operations. Thankfully, significant growth over the years has now put LTA in a relatively stable funding situation. However, this could certainly change.

For instance, the money that they currently receive from the provincial Best Start program was previously available for a much broader range of transportation needs. Best Start funding for transportation is available for children six years of age and younger to attend registered day care. When the school board started providing transportation for all-day kindergarten, daycare and before/after school programs, both funding and ridership levels for LTA dropped substantially. At one point, they were receiving over \$60,000 from the program, but this amount has now fallen to less than \$5,000 per year.

There is also recognition that residents in the Town of Smiths Falls have the lowest mean income in the County and that there is a high percentage of people on social assistance. For this reason, it is not surprising that residents there require more of LTA's services. This also means that it is hard for town council to provide a level of assistance that compensates for this situation, given that their tax base is low considering the number of people on social assistance.

Another challenge currently being faced by the organization is related to addressing the physical needs of clients while also meeting the health and safety needs of the drivers. Concerns have been raised about back issues resulting from needing to assist an increasing number of bariatric clients in wheelchairs. This issue has been raised in other health and social service sectors as well.

Impacts and Successes

One of the reasons for Lanark Transportation Association's success has been the involvement of both municipal- and county-level representatives from the beginning. For instance, an initial board member was a municipal representative who had good working relationships at various local townships. This person had also been a representative at county council and therefore played an active role in helping to "make the case" to Lanark County Council. A finance and administration staff person at the county level was also instrumental in getting the Town of Smiths Falls Council to come on board. In both cases, having champions on the inside was key to obtaining political support. To this day, someone from Lanark County Council sits on the LTA Board of Directors and, while they are appointed by Council, those most interested typically step forward.³⁰

Prior to 2009, clients had to be registered with some form of social assistance to use LTA's service. Yet, staff and board members of the organization were concerned about people who were not registered with any service and still could not afford to pay for much-needed transportation. For example, people on ODSP have medical provision and assistance with transportation until the age of 65, but not beyond that. Once they turn 65, they need further assistance. Therefore, the Association changed its mandate to broaden what they could provide transportation for and to whom, as long as there was demonstrated financial need.

As a result of situations such as this, in 2010 Lanark Transportation Association also established a discretionary fund to further assist with the cost of transportation. This fund has grown over the last three years and is expected to continue to grow.³¹ It has been possible for LTA to create a discretionary fund because, along with financial support from the county and municipal levels, they are

²⁹ This entire section came from the Interview with Marilyn Bird, Executive Director, Lanark Transportation Association, on June 4, 2014.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Marilyn Bird presentation to Smiths Falls Council. Town of Smiths Falls Council Minutes, March 10, 2014.

able to make use of money from the provincial gas tax fund for programming. They had previously been told that the gas tax money was only to be used for capital expenses such as vehicles. However, it was welcome news when they later learned that the fund could be used for program delivery as well. In addition, LTA is able to earn interest on a Guaranteed Investment Certificate (GIC) that it currently holds, and also generates a small amount of revenue from selling its used vehicles.³²

In terms of other accomplishments, Lanark Transportation Association was recognized in 2007 with an Ontario Trillium Foundation Great Grants Award in Human & Social Services. They have also served as an operating model for the North Frontenac Transportation Service and in 2011 completed a one-year rural transportation pilot project for the counties of Leeds & Grenville.³³

E. Future Considerations

Over the last thirteen years, Lanark Transportation Association has been able to not only survive, but continue to grow. LTA does not advertise, instead relying on the referrals of satisfied clients and agencies. Their high standard of service is made possible by the dedication and commitment of their staff, both drivers and administration, and volunteers. LTA owes its current success to them, and its financial stability to the continued support of Lanark County and the Town of Smiths Falls. In the words of Lanark Transportation Association Executive Director, Marilyn Bird, "Lanark Transportation Association continues to improve the quality of life for the most vulnerable members of Lanark County."³⁴

To date, Lanark Transportation Association has chosen not to develop a fixed-route or fare system given that it is expected to be more expensive for both the rider and the organization. However, last year was also the first time in many years that LTA actually lost money. As a result, the organization may have to consider increasing their established fare system in the coming year and may look more closely at other options, including even a fixed-route system.³⁵

³² Interview with Marilyn Bird, Executive Director, Lanark Transportation Association, on June 4, 2014.

³³ Marilyn Bird presentation to Smiths Falls Council. Town of Smiths Falls Council Minutes, March 10, 2014.

³⁴ Interview with Marilyn Bird, Executive Director, Lanark Transportation Association, on June 4, 2014; and Marilyn Bird, Executive Director's Report, Lanark Transportation Association Annual General Meeting, 2009.

³⁵ Interview with Marilyn Bird, Executive Director, Lanark Transportation Association, on June 4, 2014.