

CASE STUDY

EasyRide

PERTH AND HURON COUNTIES

**ACCELERATING RURAL
TRANSPORTATION SOLUTIONS**



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ONE CARE Home and Community Support Services



A. Overview of Transportation Initiative

EasyRide is a collaborative, rural transportation service shared by five community support agencies across Huron and Perth Counties. As a group of agencies sharing a common interest in improving community based transportation services, the group submitted a proposal and was awarded a project grant through the South West LHIN's Aging at Home Strategy in 2008/09, which resulted in the creation of EasyRide. The program relies on a central dispatch coordination system that leverages the fleet resources of the partner agencies to provide "frequent and flexible door-to-door service."

Transportation is available for registered clients who are seniors as well as for clients who

- are without access to transportation or are where public transportation is not available,
- have physical or cognitive limitations,
- require specialized transit (e.g., wheelchair access), or
- do not have family and friends who are able to help out.¹

B. Context

Location

The Counties of Perth and Huron are located in southwestern Ontario, north of the City of London and west of Kitchener. They are adjacent to each other.

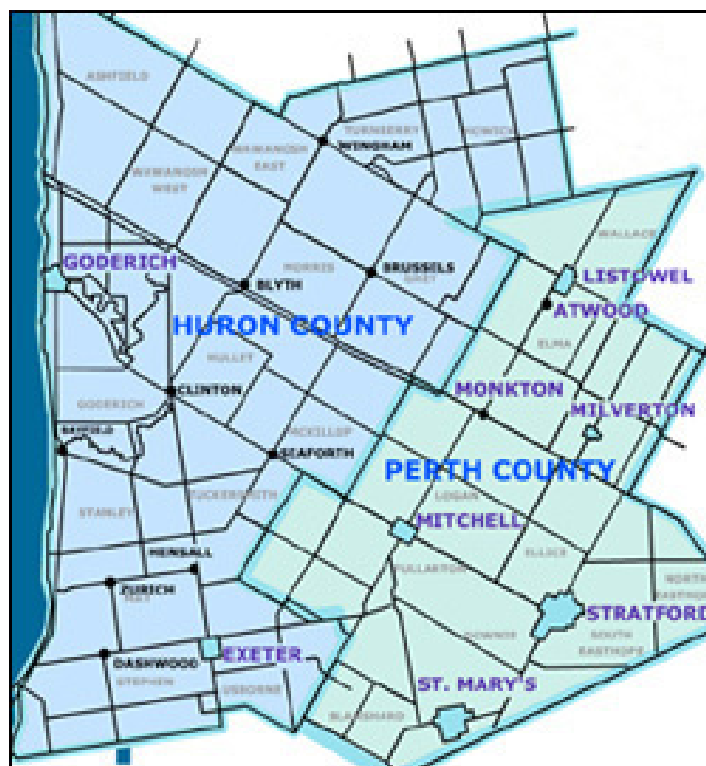
Demographics/Density

The two counties cover a large geographic area of approximately 5,600 square kilometres. Perth County covers about 2,200 square kilometres and is approximately 50% rural. Urban populations are found in the small towns of Listowel, Mitchell and Milverton. The City of Stratford and the Town of St. Marys, while located within Perth County, are separate municipalities.²

Huron County covers about 3,400 square kilometres and is more than 60% rural, with small urban populations in Clinton, Goderich, Wingham, Exeter and Seaforth.

Huron County is considered one of the most rural counties in Ontario with an overall population density of 18 people per square kilometre, while Perth's population density is considerably higher at 34 people per square kilometre.

The average age in Perth County is 39.3 years, which is just slightly higher than the Ontario median age of 39 years.



¹ Info Huron County website: <http://centraleastontario.cioc.ca/record/PER2130?UseCICVw=18>; accessed April 14, 2014.

² Lynn Bowering Consulting, *The Road Ahead: A Study of Transportation Needs across Huron and Perth Counties*, The Social Research & Planning Council 2012.



However, in Huron County, the median age is 42.3 years. The percentage of seniors (over the age of 64 years) in both counties is higher than in the province as a whole (19% in Huron, 16% in Perth and 13% for Ontario). A high ratio of dependent family members is expected as a result of an aging population. Changing family composition may result in additional pressures for drivers.

Both counties are relatively homogenous in terms of ethnocultural diversity compared to the province as a whole, with the notable exception of the small Anabaptist populations. The most common languages, apart from English and French, are German and Dutch, which are spoken by approximately 10% of the population.

Median family income in 2005 was \$62,446 in Huron County and \$68,713 in Perth County. Both of these figures are below the Ontario median family income of \$69,156. Social and health problems that may accompany poverty can be compounded by a lack of transportation as it restricts access to services.

Political and Governance Structures

The County of Huron is a municipal corporation known as an upper-tier municipality. Within the county, there are nine lower-tier municipalities:

1. Corporation of the Township of Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh (Formerly Ashfield, Colborne and West Wawanosh Townships)
2. Corporation of the Municipality of Bluewater (Formerly Hay and Stanley Townships, plus the Villages of Bayfield, Hensall and Zurich)

3. Corporation of the Municipality of Central Huron (Formerly Goderich and Hullett Townships, and the Town of Clinton)
4. Corporation of the Town of Goderich
5. Township of Howick
6. Corporation of the Municipality of Huron East (Formerly Grey, McKillop and Tuckersmith Townships, Village of Brussels, and Town of Seaforth)
7. Corporation of the Municipality of Morris-Turnberry (Formerly Morris and Turnberry Townships)
8. Corporation of the Township of North Huron (Formerly Village of Blyth, Township of East Wawanosh, and Town of Wingham)
9. Corporation of the Municipality of South Huron (Formerly Stephen and Usborne Townships and Town of Exeter)

Within Perth County, there are four member municipalities and two separate municipalities:

1. Municipality of North Perth
 2. Township of Perth East
 3. Township of Perth South
 4. Municipality of West Perth
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1. Town of St. Marys
 2. City of Stratford

Major Industries

Huron County has three key economic pillars: agriculture, manufacturing and tourism. Historically, agriculture has been the mainstay of the local economy. However, Huron County's manufacturing sector has grown significantly over the past decade, and it has eclipsed agriculture as the lead revenue generator for the county. Tourism is the third major pillar of the local economy and is fueled by numerous tourist attractions as well as local events such as the Goderich Celtic Festival and the Blyth Threshers.³

In Perth, the five consistent industries are:

1. Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting
2. Manufacturing
3. Arts, entertainment and recreation
4. Wholesale trade
5. Construction.

C. Background

Local Transportation Context

Like many, if not most, rural areas of the province, transportation in Huron and Perth Counties is a long-standing issue. In Huron County (including lower tier municipalities), there has been no public transit service. Prior to the formation of One Care in 2011 through the amalgamation of Town & Country Support Services, Midwestern Adult Day Services and Stratford Meals on Wheels & Neighbourly Services, Town & Country Support Services and Midwestern Adult Day Services both had their own transportation programs for seniors and adults with disabilities operating in Huron County. Additionally, Lambton Elderly Outreach (LEO) provided transportation services to seniors and adults with disabilities in Sarnia and Lambton as well as limited services for Midwestern Adult Day Centre's⁴ Grand Bend site; however, most



of LEO's services have been for seniors and adults with disabilities in Sarnia and Lambton County.⁵

According to Dillon Consulting, another not-for-profit provider called Huron Bruce Transit, out of Wingham, was created to service North Huron and South Bruce.

The organization had received financial support from the Municipality of Morris-Turnberry and therefore qualified for additional provincial support through the gas tax fund. However, the program ceased in May of 2010 and was not replaced by any other service.⁶

The City of Stratford is the only community offering public transit within the two counties.

The demographic profile of the counties indicates a higher than provincial average of seniors and youth while, at the same time, family incomes are below the provincial average. Dillon Consulting conclude that there are five groups with "the most acute transportation needs":

1. People on low incomes
2. People with disabilities
3. Youth
4. Women
5. Seniors⁷

³ Huron County Economic Development website: <http://www.huroncounty.ca/econdev/>; accessed March 23, 2014.

⁴ Midwestern ADC was one of the agencies that amalgamated to become ONE CARE. LEO continues to provide transportation to One Care's Grand Bend site.

⁵ Dillon Consulting Limited, Assessment of Community Transportation Service Expansion in Huron County, Final Report. October 2010.

^{6,7} Ibid.

Initiative Background

In June 2009, seven community support agencies in Huron and Perth initiated the idea of developing a coordinated booking service that would provide people with one number to call to access transportation services. Funding for this booking system was provided by the South West LHIN through their Aging at Home Strategy. Through the funding program, EasyRide partner agencies also received three Dodge Grand Caravans; however, they were not wheelchair-accessible, so they could not be used to replace vehicles in the fleet. Out of more than 30 projects vying for funding, the initiative – initially called Rural Transportation across Huron Perth – was rated the number one project.

The seven agencies initially involved were:

1. Stratford Meals on Wheels and Neighbourly Services
2. Midwestern Adult Day Services
3. Town and Country Support Services – Huron County
4. Community Outreach & Perth East Transportation
5. Mitchell & Area Community Outreach & Mobility Bus
6. St. Marys & Area Home Support Services
7. VON Perth-Huron.

Although the agencies already had their own transportation services that they were providing to their respective clients, they recognized that coming together could allow them to more efficiently and effectively address the following needs:

- providing easier access to transportation for clients, hospitals, CCACs, long-term care homes, etc.
- providing affordable and accessible transportation for clients throughout Huron Perth and beyond
- increasing efficiencies by having access to more vehicles, drivers and volunteers
- providing clients with access to specialized transportation services within and outside of Huron & Perth counties for health services such as medical appointments, dialysis, treatments etc.

With funding from the LHIN now available, the organizations contracted with a consultant to research four partnership transportation delivery models that would best fit their needs. Of the four models presented, the one that seemed most appropriate for the agencies was a centralized, coordinated dispatch system.

As part of the planning process, the partners developed a vision and set of goals for the initiative. The vision includes “creating a ‘system’ for community support transportation through central coordination of trips using web-based scheduling software; having one number to call to access service; providing centralized intake, scheduling and dispatch; and standardized policies and procedures.”⁸

Additionally, the goals laid out for the project included the following:

- improve access to Community Support Service transportation
- expand and enhance existing transportation services
- reduce duplication of service
- reduce confusion on the part of clients or other agencies over whom to call
- increase the potential for efficiency
- agencies retain ownership of agency vehicles.⁹

Given that funding was through the Aging at Home Strategy, it is not surprising that the program was designed largely to focus on improving the health of seniors and older adults who were dealing with one or more of the following:

- living with complex needs
- living with, or at risk of developing, a chronic disease
- living with mental health and addictions challenges.

⁸ EasyRide Door-to-Door Service, Niagara Connects PowerPoint Presentation. April 2013.

⁹ Ibid.

Initial funding for the EasyRide project (2008/09) included base funding of \$109,000 and a one-time investment of \$137,000 which was used to hire Dillon Consulting and set up the central office.

The program funding increased in 2009/10 to \$228,224 and \$238,000 in 2010/11. According to Melanie Higgins, EasyRide Lead Transportation Coordinator, funding has stayed constant over the past several years.¹⁰

D. Current Operations

In 2011, Stratford Meals on Wheels & Neighbourly Services, Midwestern Adult Day Services and Town & Country Support amalgamated to form One Care Home & Community Support Services.

One Care is the lead agency for the initiative and assumes responsibility of the central dispatch service. Using the Trapeze Novus Transportation Management System software, the central office provides a single point of contact for people needing the service.

The software package allows web-based scheduling that can be viewed by all of the agencies, and the central office in Stratford has access to all of the agencies' vehicle information allowing EasyRide staff the opportunity to book whichever vehicles make most sense given clients' locations and transportation/ accessibility needs.

Demographic description of ridership, members and/or participants:

Clients using the service must

1. have completed the intake process with one of the member agencies and be registered with EasyRide
2. be a senior or an adult who has physical or cognitive limitations
3. require specialized transit
4. be without access to transportation
5. not have family and/or friends who can assist



Client user data reveals that the profiles of the types of trips required include approximately one third for health related appointments such as specialist appointments, treatments, dialysis, discharges or admissions to/from hospitals, long term care facilities and retirement homes. Another third provides transportation for adult day programs and the remaining third of trips are for shopping, employment and social purposes.

Schedules and Fares

The central dispatch office is open for taking bookings between 8:30 am and 4:00 pm, Monday to Friday, although the trips may actually happen outside of the office booking hours. Bookings can be made for one-time or regular trips, and same-day bookings will be accommodated if possible (depending on driver and vehicle availability). The service provided is door-to-door; and EasyRide can arrange for escorts or attendants through partner agencies to assist clients if needed.

The fares vary according to the service provider and the location; however, flat fees do apply for in-town trips and per-kilometre fees for out-of-town trips. Clients are responsible for all transportation costs, including parking if needed.

¹⁰ Telephone interview, April 8, 2014.

¹¹ EasyRide Door-to-Door Service, Niagara Connects PowerPoint Presentation. April 2013.

In-town fares:

- \$3.50-\$5.50 per in-town volunteer trip
- \$3.75-\$10.00 per in-town accessible trip.

Long-distance fare ranges:

- \$0.37-\$0.46/km for out-of-town volunteer trips
- \$0.40-\$0.80/km plus wait time for accessible trips.

Resources available

Collectively, EasyRide resources across the different agencies include 24 agency-owned or -operated vehicles, including:

- eight wheelchair-accessible buses
- eight full-size wheelchair-accessible buses
- five wheelchair-accessible low-floor minivans
- three seven-passenger minivans.

There are also 34 paid staff drivers and more than 200 volunteer drivers.

**Organizational Structure**

Because each EasyRide partner agency was already providing transportation services to its own clients prior to the formation of EasyRide, no new delivery model was created. The structure for EasyRide is based on a collaborative model, and each agency has its own unique clients, governance, transportation resources and funders.

Funding for the EasyRide program is provided through the South West LHIN. It is no longer provided through the Aging at Home Strategy program, but, instead, is part of the operational funding for One Care. Additional funding for transportation staff time is also provided by One Care.

For the individual agencies providing the actual driving services, funding arrangements are unique. However, the majority of funding is provided through municipal and provincial gas tax dollars, the South West LHIN and the United Way of Perth-Huron, as well as other contributors.

Impacts

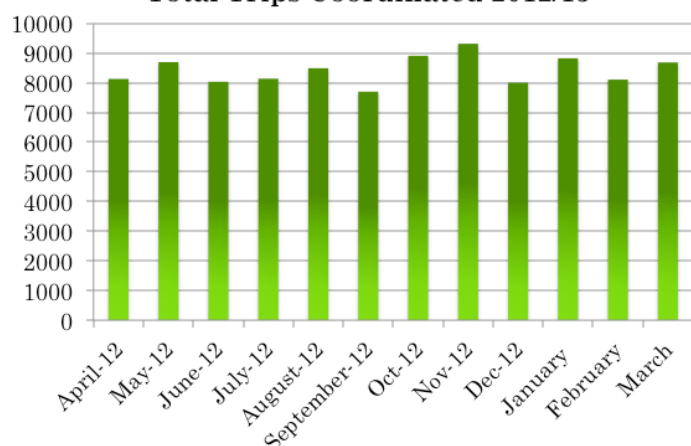
Continued annual growth since 2008 point to a successful program. In 2012/13, more than 4,000 clients were served, and more than 100,000 trips were coordinated, with an average of 8,300 coordinated trips per month. ¹²

Program staff have also identified the key successes of EasyRide:

- a standardized intake process
- efficient scheduling and dispatch
- standardized policies and procedures
- a marketing and public awareness campaign
- service provision to hospitals and the Community Care Access Centre

¹² Niagara Connects PowerPoint Presentation. April 2013.

Total Trips Coordinated 2012/13



Not only has it become a model of collaborative transportation services in Huron and Perth Counties, but representatives from the program are regularly asked to share their story for other programs throughout Ontario considering a similar model.

Stakeholders involved with the program have identified a number of lessons learned. One key lesson relates to having a greater time for planning to work through elements of the partnership model early on in the process. This would allow all agencies to know what is required and what is expected ahead of time.

EasyRide has improved access to community support service transportation and allowed for expanded and enhanced transportation services throughout the geography. Clients have experienced a reduction in confusion over who to call for their transportation needs and are able to access affordable and accessible transportation. When required, EasyRide connects clients to alternate funding sources and further subsidy programs to ensure that transportation costs are manageable for all users.

Keeping up with changing software and licensing costs and changing communication technology continues to be a challenge for EasyRide. Stakeholders continue to experience pressures related to static funding levels, increasing demand, increasing operational costs, fleet management and vehicle replacement as well as a lack of alternative transportation options for this geography.

Affordability is an ongoing challenge. Transportation is expensive to operate and it has fallen onto community support service agencies, especially in rural areas. Affordability is a cornerstone of accessibility, especially for the population served by EasyRide. EasyRide continues to seek opportunities to address affordability through new funding streams and cross-sector collaborative opportunities.

E. Future Plans

In future, one of the goals of the EasyRide partnership is a standardized fare structure, which must be phased in gradually to allow agencies to keep services affordable and to maintain ridership.

Additionally, EasyRide is one of the organizations involved with the Huron Perth Transportation Task Force, a larger network of organizations in the two counties led by the United Way Perth-Huron. With funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the Task Force is currently researching transportation needs in the two-county area, and the “results will be used to inform recommendations for improved service provision/collaboration and new service adoption throughout Perth and Huron.”¹³

Rural transportation continues to present unique challenges and opportunities for EasyRide. They continue to play an active role in identifying emerging collaborative models and investigating creative funding opportunities for a cross-sector transportation solution for Huron & Perth Counties.

¹³ “United Way Perth-Huron Releases Transportation Survey”. Media release, United Way Perth-Huron, November 15, 2013: <http://perthhuron.unitedway.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Transportation-Task-Force-Media-Release-November-2013.pdf>; accessed April 14, 2014.