

SAUGEEN MOBILITY

and REGIONAL TRANSIT

GENERAL BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Friday, September 15, 2023, 11:00 a.m.

Boardroom, 603 Bruce Rd 19, Walkerton, ON & via Zoom

Board Members Present: Ed McGugan, Councillor, Huron-Kinloss, President
Doug Townsend, Councillor, West Grey, Vice-President
Warren Dickert, Deputy Mayor, Hanover, Past President
Cheryl Grace, Councillor, Saugeen Shores (via Zoom)
Kym Hutcheon, Councillor, Brockton
Rory Cavanagh, Councillor, Kincardine (via Zoom) for Doug Kennedy
Joel Loughead, Councillor, Grey Highlands (via Zoom)
Scott Mackey, Mayor, Chatsworth
Jennifer Shaw, Deputy Mayor, Arran-Elderslie (via Zoom)
Monica Singh-Soares, Councillor, Southgate (via Zoom)

Board Members Absent: None

Others Present: Stephan Labelle, SMART Manager
Catherine McKay, Recording Secretary

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 11:00 a.m.

2. Disclosure of Pecuniary Interest and Declaration of Conflict of Interest

None declared.

3. Approval of the Agenda

Motion

Moved by Scott Mackey; Seconded by Doug Townsend
That the agenda be approved as presented.

Carried

4. Delegations

There were no delegations.

5. Minutes of Previous Meeting – June 23, 2023

Motion

Moved by Kym Hutcheon; Seconded by Monica Singh-Soares

That the minutes from June 23, 2023 be amended so that the first sentence in the 5th full paragraph on page 3 states that it was the Manager who spoke to the Ministry of Transportation and that the minutes be approved as so amended.

Carried

6. Business Arising from the Minutes

There was no business arising from the minutes.

7. New Business

A. New SMART Vehicle

The Manager reviewed the Vehicle Purchase Recommendation report highlighting the pros and cons of four vehicles. The only vehicle with no significant disadvantages was the Promaster MoveMobility.

The Manager was commended for his in-depth report, and discussion clarified the following points about the MoveMobility vehicle. The power train is from Chrysler and its chassis from Fiat, so parts would be available.

The ramp can be manually operated in case of a power failure. It requires less maintenance and is suitable for Canadian winters. Vehicles are available and it will take 5 to 6 months for modifications such as installing the ramp which slides under the lower floor. It is not known if the company is Canadian or American. Only one vehicle will be purchased using SMART funds as ICIP (Improving Canada's Infrastructure Program) funding is no longer available.

With respect to budgeting for vehicles, it was noted that an area police service budgets for 1.5 vehicles per year which allows one purchase in a year, and two the following year, a practice which SMART could consider.

The Manager will clarify the technological capabilities of the MoveMobility vehicle such as navigation, communication, etc., which are likely the same as SMART's current vehicles. Hybrid vehicles are not available and none were on display at the recent conference he attended.

Motion

Move by Scott Mackey; Seconded by Kym Hutcheon

That the Manager be authorized to procure a new SMART vehicle as presented for the sum of \$156,000.

B. Budget Update

The Manager reviewed the budget report noting that the \$125,000 deficit is expected to increase to \$595,000 by the end of the year. SMART will receive approximately \$1.81 million in gas tax revenue and is projected to start 2024 with reserves of more than \$1 million. The Manager reported that expenses to date have been well managed with fuel amounting to \$137,000, and projected to be \$250,000 by year end. It was suggested that SMART use any budget surplus as part of its asset management plan and should prioritize projects in terms of funding and cost/benefit. The Manager noted that future plans include the purchase of another vehicle as well as projects to ensure the safety of clients and staff, such as the purchase of Automatic External Defibrillators (AEDs). Insurance costs are on budget and savings have resulted from getting rid of some vehicles. Capital expenditures such as computer upgrades are not required in 2023, and the Manager is currently reviewing the photocopier/printer situation to determine if purchasing a new machine is more cost effective than the lease.

The Chair suggested that SMART should have an asset management plan to plan future acquisitions, particularly with respect to vehicles which are SMART's major asset expense and which depreciate.

Motion

Moved by Warren Dickert; Seconded by Kym Hutcheon

That the budget report be received for information.

C. HCSS Collaboration

The Manager has been working with HCSS and the GTR to meet demand that exceeds their capacities. The HCSS agreement is operational and there have so far been two requests, and no additional client registrations. The HCSS clients served by SMART are all from member municipalities. SMART has not received any requests from GTR clients. The Manager met with Bruce County representatives and Stephen Musehl, Executive Director of HCSS, to explore how these organizations could help each other. This is a positive step and synergies could result in more rides for SMART and possibly reduced deadhead costs.

One possibility is for SMART to move up to the County level and the question was posed whether it makes sense to have three organizations each with fleets of vehicles and drivers. Bruce County is currently doing a transportation study with a broad scope covering road, public transit, bikes, and accessible transit, and is expected to produce a draft report in October, although it is not clear whether it will address accessible transit. Point-to-point transit systems are the way to go in rural areas, versus fixed routes, which do not tend to work effectively, although some fixed routes might make sense. SMART may have an opportunity to work with HCSS to become the area's accessible transit provider.

The Manager does not know the source of demand for HCSS services, and noted that calls from HCSS clients can come in from anywhere in Grey/Bruce and SMART needs to be careful as to which ones to take. Emergency plans are in place with long term care homes, but are not part of the agreement with HCSS, although this could be looked at. HCSS may also not be interested in focusing on transportation.

The Board was informed that Owen Sound Transit has contracted with Voyago to run all its transit routes at a lower cost due to economies of scale which will lower prices to clients. Also, Voyago has bought Kunkel Bus Lines.

Motion

Moved by Monica Sing-Soares; Seconded by Jennifer Shaw

That the report on HCSS collaboration be received for information.

Carried

D. GTR Agreement

This item was addressed under item 7C above.

E. Camera Program

The purchase of cameras was approved at the last Board meeting and 21 cameras have been purchased at \$53 each, below the amount approved. They are installed as vehicles go for oil changes and signs will be put up advising of the presence of the cameras. No issues have been reported by drivers or clients with respect to the cameras. The following points were clarified: cameras turn off when the vehicle is turned off but have motion detectors that turn them on if there is movement in the vehicle; they are both front and rear facing; data is stored on a card and 8 – 15 seconds of data is stored in case of an accident; the cost did not include installation which is \$40/vehicle; there are no maintenance costs since the cameras have solid state memory and no moving parts. The Manager is preparing a policy relating to the cameras which will be presented at the next Board meeting.

Motion

Moved by Doug Townsend; Seconded by Kym Hutcheon

That the report on the camera program be received for information.

Carried

F. Performance Review

The Chair advised that the Board's Executive Committee completed the Manager's performance review and will meet with him to review it. The review was positive and review will be shared with the Board at a future closed session.

8. Correspondence

There was no correspondence.

9. Reports and Recommendations

A. Report on June, July and August 2023 Operations

There were 2,156 rides in June 2023 with \$32,517.85 in user fees, a 1% decrease in rides and a 2% increase in fees over June 2022. There was an 8% increase of in billed kilometers compared to the same period last year. The decrease in rides from 2022 may be due to people being on holidays in the summer and two SMART clients have purchased their own accessible vehicles. The system tracks both billed kilometres and total kilometres, although the system does not do it as well as the Manager would like. The difference between billed kilometres and total kilometres will show deadheading which is costly. It was agreed that billed vs. total kilometres would be a useful metric for the Board and the Manager agreed to work on producing a regular report on this. Overall, the Manager said that rides are trending towards pre-pandemic levels.

Voyago has an increased presence in the area and it is not easy to find the cost of a ride on its web site. It operates an accessible transit service in Kitchener-Waterloo, and charges \$6 a ride. This low cost is likely the

result of it being unable to charge a higher fee to people with disabilities than is charged for the same service to a person without a disability since it is operating the service for a public transit system. Kym Hutcheon has a contact in this area and agreed to obtain more information for the Board.

The Manager clarified that when a client is taken to the Owen Sound hospital, the driver waits a minimum of two hours. The Town of Meaford has contracted with a new accessible transit provider, although it is not clear where it operates and Scott Mackey agreed to get more information.

Motion #2023-045

Moved by Joel Loughead; seconded by Rory Cavanagh

That the Board approve Report SL2023-0915-1 June, July and August 2023 Operational Report as presented.

Carried

10. Committee Reports

A. Strategic Planning Committee – Level of Service

The Chair suggested sending a letter to the Kincardine in response to the request from tis Accessibility Advisory Committee for a higher level of service from SMART. Discussion focused on whether the cost projections are solid and if an enhanced level of service is offered to one municipality through a dedicated driver and vehicle, none of the cost should be picked up by any of the other municipalities. The capital purchase of a vehicle spread out over one year would be expensive, compared to spreading the cost out over four years, but this would require a contract between SMART and the municipality.

The cost of an “Essential Service”, should be an amount per kilometre which covers all of the cost, although the Ministry of Transportation has indicated that such rides would not be covered by the gas tax program. A further question was raised as to how SMART could operate a service in a municipality without that municipality paying into SMART. If full cost recovery is not feasible, then what would be the level for “Essential Service”? The Manager indicated that the Ministry of Transportation cannot come up with that number, but it would likely be in the \$5,000 to \$10,000 range, with a base rate. There should be some mechanism to increase the per kilometre rate while lowering the levy on municipalities, which would help retain the existing municipalities in the SMART partnership and attract additional partners.

It was suggested that the current formula for municipal contributions (70% rides and 30% population) could be adjusted (e.g. 75% for rides) which would lower the municipal contribution. The cost must be manageable with the right balance so that clients are not paying too much and the municipal levy is reasonable. Other suggestions included making changes in rates and ensuring a minimum levy for the municipalities to which could be added additional costs for different levels of service, such as an entry level service offering rides only from Monday – Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.. The Manager explained that any reduction will lead to a reduction in gas tax funds and he will confirm with the Ministry of Transportation that the gas tax formula is 70% rides and 30% population. The Chair reminded the Board that any increase in rates leads to a decrease in rides and gas tax funds, and leaves the door open to private companies to attract the business.

SMART staff could handle different rates for different municipalities by coding rides based on the municipality. This is an additional step compared to the current practice, but is quite doable.

Rory Cavanagh said that there is considerable interest in Kincardine in having a higher service level to accommodate events outside of Monday through Friday and there are other groups wanting to get involved. He added that this could work by creating a hub and building from there. It was noted that shared mobility hubs might be a creative solution.

The Manager was asked if it is possible to group rides, which he said occurs now with 2 or 3 individuals who travel to school, but he said not a lot of groups go to the same place at the same time.

The Chair raised the possibility of sending a letter to the member municipalities setting out a menu of services including basic, enhanced and essential levels. This might cause users to bear the cost of any cost recovery model and for some municipalities, it is all about the cost which would have to be reviewed in the context of the budget. It was felt that an update needs to be sent to municipalities and Board members should be able to communicate to their Councils about what SMART is working towards in terms of a cost per ride or per client, and a ratio as to what the client pays and what the municipality pays, whether that is 2/3 to 1/3 with room to make adjustments so that it is 50/50 to make the situation more equitable with respect to the amount per ride.

The Chair referred to a proposal put forward in August which based on no cost for “essential service”, and possibly a membership fee of \$10,000 for example. Sending a letter to the municipalities with a menu of services and cost estimates will initiate discussion as to ways to deliver service. If, for example, 6 of the partner municipalities go to the basic level to achieve a lower municipal levy, that results in a large amount to be made up through user fees. Such a situation will raise fees and lower rides to the point where it might become untenable. So the options need to be more thoroughly investigated and tested to ensure that they are sustainable before being presented to the municipalities.

In response to a question, the Chair explained that weekend service was ended for financial reasons, to reduce costs, and the situation is better now. He noted several trends within the past few years, including the pandemic which led to reduced costs and the current situation where some municipalities want lower costs and others want a higher level of service which leads to higher costs. He suggested running scenarios to show the impact of various levels of service, adding that SMART should not offer a service that it cannot support and scenarios are always projections, with no guarantee of a particular result.

SMART rates have remained the same for some time and municipalities should have some control over what they pay, without necessarily experiencing an unsustainable steady increase. Rates could be capped but should also be competitive.

The Chair and the Manager will work on scenarios and a draft letter to municipalities to present at the next meeting. The figures will show 2024 cost projections for all municipalities based on appropriate rates, including the impact of a cap on municipal contributions.

Motion

Moved by Scott Mackey; seconded by Kym Hutcheon

That the Manager be directed to prepare a report for the Board’s next meeting setting out an increased rate and projections of the impact on municipalities so that the information can be taken into account in preparing 2024 municipal budgets.

Carried

B. Strategic Planning Committee – Going Forward

The Chair explained that he has taken on additional responsibilities and will not be able to contribute to the Committee. He asked for volunteers although depending on the results of the report in item A. above, there may be no need for the Committee to continue.

The Committee could, however, work on setting goals and objectives for the Manager and identifying priorities outside of Level of Service issues. In fairness, this would provide the Manager with direction from the full Board as to goals, objectives and priorities.

The Board agreed to hold a planning session following its next regular meeting to chart a course for the rest of its term, define what success would look like and what is needed to be successful from a governance point of view. Jennifer Shaw has experience with strategic planning and so she and the Chair will discuss in more detail how she might be able help.

Motion

Moved by Monica Sing-Soares; seconded by Kym Hutcheon

That the Board's regular meeting of Friday, November 17, 2023 begin at 10:00 a.m. rather than 11:00 a.m., to be followed by lunch and a strategic planning session in the afternoon.

Carried

11. Closed Session

Motion

Moved by Scott Mackey; seconded by Warren Dickert

That the Board of Directors of SMART move into Closed Session at 1:00 p.m. in order to address matters pertaining to litigation or potential litigation, including matters before administrative tribunals.

Carried

Rory Cavanagh left the meeting.

The Board of Directors of SMART reconvened in open session at 1:15 p.m. and the President confirmed that the Board had gone in closed session and discussed matters pertaining to litigation or potential litigation, including matters before administrative tribunals and that no other matters were discussed.

12. Adjournment & Upcoming Meeting Dates

Upcoming Meeting Dates

Friday, October 20, 2023, 11:00 a.m. Regular Monthly Board Meeting, SMART Office, 603 Bruce Rd 19, Walkerton, ON

Friday, November 17, 2023, 10:00 a.m. Regular Monthly Board Meeting, followed by lunch and an afternoon Strategic Planning Session, SMART Office, 603 Bruce Rd 19, Walkerton, ON

Motion


Moved by Warren Dickert; Seconded by Doug Townsend

That the Board of Directors of SMART adjourn at 1:25 p.m.

Carried



Ed McGugan, President



Catherine McKay, Recording Secretary