

SAUGEEN MOBILITY

and REGIONAL TRANSIT

GENERAL BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Friday, October 20, 2023, 11:00 a.m.

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

Board Members Present: Ed McGugan, Councillor, Huron-Kinloss, President
Warren Dickert, Deputy Mayor, Hanover, Past President
Cheryl Grace, Councillor, Saugeen Shores
Kym Hutcheon, Councillor, Brockton
Doug Kennedy, Councillor, Kincardine
Joel Loughhead, 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: Doug Townsend, Councillor, West Grey, Vice-President

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

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 11:05 a.m.

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

None declared.

3. Approval of the Agenda

Motion Moved by Warren Dickert; Seconded by Doug Kennedy

That the agenda be amended to add item *7C Grey Highlands Membership* and that the agenda be approved as so amended.

Carried

4. Delegations

There were no delegations.

5. Minutes of Previous Meeting – September 15, 2023

Motion Moved by Cheryl Grace; Seconded by Kym Hutcheon

That the minutes from September 15, 2023 be approved as circulated.

Carried

The Manager provided the following updates. A recommendation regarding the office photocopier will be presented at the next meeting. The report on the Bruce County Transportation Study is expected in mid-November. SMART and Home and Community Support Services (HCSS) have agreed to an emergency management plan which will require amendments to the agreement providing that SMART provides service to HCSS clients. SMART has an emergency services agreement with Bruce Lea Haven and other long term care facilities, but not with area hospitals to cover situations such as the bomb threat at the Hanover Hospital. The Manager will clarify the situation with the hospitals and reach out to other long term care facilities in Grey and Bruce. In an emergency, 100 to 150 people per facility would have to be evacuated and currently, the only service available is Emergency Medical Services (EMS). A letter has been drafted to the Town of Kincardine which will be addressed in item 10A.

6. Business Arising from the Minutes

A. Municipal Contributions Forecast for 2024

This item is covered in *9B Report on Municipal Contributions for 2024*.

B. Dashcam Policy

The manager presented the policy, highlighting the following points. No data or images are stored unless there is an accident/event, in which case, 25-30 seconds are stored. Access to dashcam data is restricted to the Manager and the Board. There is no remote viewing of drivers. Access to recordings is on an incident by incident basis, to statutory authorities, or for training purposes. If misconduct is noted on a recording, action will be taken. Recordings can be provided to police authorities. The policy will be reviewed annually. Disciplinary action will be taken if employees tamper with the dashcam equipment.

The following points were clarified through discussion. Signs will be posted notifying clients of the presence of dashcams. The policy will be amended to be clear about data being retained for up to five years if used in a disciplinary proceeding, and a question was asked whether it should be seven years. The recording is looped every 24 hours, so there is no retention beyond that except in the case of an accident/event. A question was asked about dashcam video of an incident that only comes to light sometime later or if a driver does not alert the Manager to an incident. It was agreed that additional clarification of these points is required and it was suggested that the Manager look into what police services do with body camera recordings. The dashcam is plugged into the vehicles' 12V receptacles and so is turned on and off when the vehicle is turned on and off, although the vehicle must be turned on to operate the lift. Drivers can turn on an automatic recording feature and interact with clients after a vehicle is turned off and incidents could occur during that time. Dashcam footage can provide protection for drivers against abuse by clients. Policies are generally not expected to cover every possibility, and with experience, this policy can be assessed and adjusted as necessary. The Manager was complimented for his work on the policy and will present an updated draft at the next meeting.

Motion Moved by Scott Mackey; Seconded by Cheryl Grace

That the draft Dashcam Policy be accepted and that an updated policy be reviewed at the next meeting.

Carried

7. New Business

A. New Recording Secretary Rates

The Recording Secretary outlined the reasons for the proposed new rates, particularly increased costs and proposed rates of \$150 for meetings up to 1.5 hours and \$175 for meetings of more than 1.5 hours effective January 1, 2024.

Motion Moved by Scott Mackey; Seconded by Warren Dickert

That the new rates be authorized as presented.

Carried

B. Staff Wages

The Manager asked the Board if it is satisfied with the rates paid to staff, adding that the only change to salaries and wages is the annual adjustment, if any, awarded by the Board. He noted that a job in the area similar to one at SMART is paid more, and discussion ensued about employee retention and how recruiting and retaining staff is a challenge across municipalities and other organizations, although SMART's employee retention is good. The relative pay of SMART jobs was discussed in terms of the expertise required. The recent increase to the minimum wage (now \$16.55) was noted, along with the fact that the wage for SMART drivers starts at \$1.30 above that, and drivers have a level of responsibility, deal with vulnerable people, and have more impact in their jobs than in minimum wage jobs. Comparable jobs could be those at HCSS, equipment operators, Grey Transit, and other similar organizations that are corporations with charitable status. The value of SMART's employee benefit package has to be taken into account in doing salary and wage comparisons. An annual review of benefits was done in 2023 by the insurance broker who handles SMART's benefit package. It was suggested that wages should be reviewed although it is not ideal for wage increases to be paid for solely by ratepayers without any contribution to an increase coming from the users of the service.

Motion Moved by Monica Singh-Soares; Seconded by Cheryl Grace

That the Manager conduct a salary survey of office and driver positions and report back to the Board.

Carried

C. Grey Highlands Membership

The Manager has discussed this issue with Chris Walker, Director of Corporate Services/Treasurer for the Town of Hanover, who indicated that although Grey Highlands passed a by-law authorizing the Town of Hanover to receive gas tax funds on its behalf, Grey Highlands must be added to the SMART partnership agreement in order to be recognized by the Ministry of Transportation which issues gas tax funds. Consequently, the agreement needs to be amended to show ten members and their signatures. Joel Loughead agreed to raise the matter with Council and work with the Manager on the matter. It was suggested that the Manager might attend a Grey Highlands Council meeting to explain his communications with Ms. Walker.

8. Correspondence

There was no correspondence.

9. Reports and Recommendations

A. Report on September 2023 Operations

The Manager presented the report, noting decreases in rides and billed kilometres compared to September 2022, but he does not consider the decreases to be significant. The report includes billed kilometres and travelled kilometres in September 2023 for each municipality, with the difference being “deadheads”, trips without paying clients. This information is generated by NOVUS, the booking software which calculates distances on a straight line basis rather than following the road system, so the information generated is not entirely accurate. It would be expensive to change the software to calculate distance based on the road system, and there is a step available to drivers to ensure that distances accurately tracked from the time they leave their home. The Manager will remind drivers to complete this step. Other companies do not segregate travel time to the client’s location in calculating their charges and doing so would be a major change for SMART. The Manager added that the \$7.50 minimum fee takes this into account. The question of a taxable benefit arose, since using SMART vehicles for personal use could constitute a taxable benefit to employees and there are tax rules covering this.

Discussion turned to the NOVUS system and whether it is the right product and available alternatives. It would cost \$50,000 to change the system and there would be an initial fee plus licensing fees with any new system. HCSS also uses NOVUS so there is an opportunity for it and SMART to work together given the \$22,000 annual fee. If SMART did not have NOVUS, it would have to invest in an extensive database to track the more than 70 rides per day. There are several alternatives to NOVUS which are just as expensive and the Manager said he could check if they are more accurate. It would take time to go to the market to see if there is a better system available, with no guarantee of finding one. It was noted that municipal vehicles have GPS which tracks distances and locations in real time. The Manager said that it would cost \$11,000 to put GPS in SMART’s vehicles, not including the software and yearly licence fees.

Motion Moved by Scott Mackey; seconded by Kym Hutcheon

That the Manager be directed to review the NOVUS system and present options for alternatives to the Board before March 31, 2024. *if*

Carried

Motion Moved by Cheryl Grace; seconded by Kym Hutcheon

That the report on September 2023 operations be accepted as presented.

Carried

Councillor Loughead left the meeting at 12:30 to attend another meeting.

B. Report on Municipal Contributions for 2024

The Manager presented the report noting that the growth trend in Grey and Bruce from 2016 to 2021 was 7.5%, or an average annual growth rate of approximately 1.5%. To account for possible deviations, a population growth for 2023 has been conservatively set at 1.25% to project municipal contributions for 2024 which municipalities can factor into their 2024 budgets.

Motion Moved by Kym Hutcheon; seconded by Monica Singh-Soares
That the report on municipal contributions for 2024 be accepted as presented.
Carried

C. Report on Decreased Contributions

The Manager noted that the purpose of the report is to outline the implications of decreasing the municipal contributions using Chatsworth as a case study. If annual contributions continue to increase, municipal Councils may decide to leave the partnership, and so the possibility of reducing the contribution is being presented as an option. Due to the funding formula, reduced contributions will likely reduce rides as well as the amount of gas tax funding. However, if user fees were increased to compensate for the reduced contribution, this might mean a lower reduction in rides. The likely outcome of a system for reduced contributions would be that the consumer rather than the ratepayer would be paying for most of the ride and there would be different rates for different municipalities, tailored to the municipal profile and based on what the municipality decides is affordable. Rides are currently heavily subsidized and there may be room to increase user fees without causing a reduction in rides and the formula for calculating contributions (30% population and 70% rides) may need to be adjusted. It was agreed that a reduced contribution for one municipality should not result in it being subsidized by the other partners. Billing different amounts for rides in different municipalities could be accomplished with codes which may add to the complexity of invoicing.

Scott Mackey volunteered Chatsworth as a pilot project beginning January 1, 2024 which would be monitored for its impact on rides. He noted that people are struggling with inflation and their tax rate must be manageable, and while a municipality should make a contribution to be in the SMART partnership, the user fee should be increased to share the cost. He hopes to be able to inform his Council that it will have the opportunity to choose its level of contribution and Chatsworth hopes to be able to cap its municipal contribution without being subsidized by other municipalities, with users making up the difference to avoid a reduction in the number of rides available. Any increases in user fees could be phased in, depending on the amount. The Manager pointed out that historically, rate changes are done with six months' notice, and two months' notice would be provided if the pilot begins January 1, 2024, although the issue of notice is one for each municipality to address.

People on various forms of social assistance tend to live in built up areas rather than in rural areas and their rides are generally shorter and less costly than those in rural locations. ODSF pays for its clients' medical rides and it is not known if it would continue to pay if the user fee increases. Most SMART clients in long term care are in private facilities which make a profit. Thus, they benefit from having the municipality pay a good portion of the cost of rides for their residents without contributing to the cost. Discussion centered on various options for calculating reduced contributions while maintaining service.

A media release was discussed and it was ultimately decided to circulate information about the pilot project to all Grey and Bruce municipalities. Some municipalities find that the level of contribution is manageable and do not anticipate issues about the cost.

The Manager will prepare three scenarios for Chatsworth based on different contribution levels and email the information to the Board before the next meeting. Scott Mackey indicated that he will endeavour to communicate with Chatsworth Council about the possibility of a reduced contribution and he thanked the Board for its cooperation in addressing the issue.

Motion Moved by Scott Mackey; seconded by Cheryl Grace
That a pilot project be initiated instituting a reduced municipal contribution for the Township of Chatsworth beginning January 1, 2024.
Carried

10. Committee Reports

A. Strategic Planning Committee

The Board will address its strategic plan at the November 8, 2023 meeting. Jennifer Shaw has agreed to review the plan in advance of that meeting.

The Chair informed the Board that he had discussions with Mayor Ken Craig and Councillor Doug Kennedy of Kincardine. He circulated a draft letter to the Mayor setting out a proposal for enhancing accessible transportation services in that municipality. The Board discussed the letter and asked that it be copied to Kincardine's Chief Administrative Officer. It was suggested that a note be added indicating that the current rates are subject to change. Doug Kennedy thanked the Board for the work that has gone into considering an enhanced level of service for Kincardine. The Manager may attend Kincardine Council to speak to the matter.

Motion Moved by Warren Dickert; seconded by Doug Kennedy

That the Chair be directed to send the letter to the Mayor of Kincardine with the changes as noted.

Carried

Motion Moved by Scott Mackey; seconded by Kym Hutcheon

That the Manager be directed to prepare a report for the Board's next meeting on the rates per kilometre charged by other organizations for services comparable to SMART.

Carried

11. Closed Session

Motion Moved by Scott Mackey; seconded by Kym Hutcheon

That the Board of Directors of SMART move into Closed Session at 1:38 p.m. in order to address personal matters about an identifiable individual, including employees/contractors, specifically the performance and salary of a staff member.

Carried

Jennifer Shaw left the meeting. Monica Singh-Soares signed out of Zoom and rejoined the meeting via telephone. The Manager left the meeting and returned following the adjournment of the closed session. The Recording Secretary remained for the closed session.

The Board of Directors of SMART reconvened in open session at 2:14 p.m. and the President confirmed that the Board had gone in closed session and discussed personal matters about an identifiable individual, including employees/contractors specifically the performance and salary of a staff member and that no other matters were discussed.

Motion Moved by Kym Hutcheon; seconded by Warren Dickert

That the salary scale for the position of Manager be amended effective January 1, 2024 to consist of the following five steps: step 1 - \$ 85,000; step 2 - \$ 88,000; step 3 - \$ 92,000; step 4 - \$96,000; step 5 - \$100,000, with the rates subject to any increase awarded in accordance with the Board's Annual Wage & Salary Review Policy.

Carried

12. Adjournment & Upcoming Meeting Dates

Upcoming Meeting Dates

Wednesday, November 17, 2023, 9:00 a.m. Regular Monthly Board Meeting, followed by lunch and an afternoon Strategic Planning Session, SMART Office, 603 Bruce Rd 19, Walkerton, ON

Friday, December 15, 2023, 11:00 a.m. Regular Monthly Board Meeting, SMART Office, 603 Bruce Rd 19, Walkerton, ON

Motion Moved by Doug Kennedy; Seconded by Kym Hutcheon

That the Board of Directors of SMART adjourn at 2:19 p.m.

Carried



Ed McGugan, President



Catherine McKay, Recording Secretary

