

Council offers support of local transit projects

By Kira Wronska Dorward

The July 15 Committee of the Whole Working Session illuminated some long-anticipated developments on a public transportation system in the Town of New Tecumseth.

John Hubble, the Associate Vice-President of HDR Corporation, led with a 20-minute summary of the report commissioned by Council, on the request that it be heard earlier in the process.

The Senior Transit Practitioner commented generally that the picture that [the study] paints is that [the Town] is growing, relatively wealthy, and stable.

He began with some statistics.

Of those 73 people polled on the online survey (which is still open online, and with a public information centre being open in the fall), 32% would use transit for internal trips (within New Tecumseth), and 68% would use transport to go outside of the township on a regular basis.

A further 60% would like the transit to be able to travel within Alliston, with another 9% predicting travel between the three settlements (Tottenham, Alliston, Beeton), and 19% between rural and settlement locations.

Hubble commented that, the data looks a little different than what I see in many communities. As the data matures, you'll see more work and school trips.

In general, 90% of those polled support a public transport system, with the Bradford GO being the top of mind destination.

Hubble reminded those present at the Working Session that what you're talking about tonight is not a cheap or easy thing to do. It requires substantial funds.

Social, economic, and environmental goals had all been factored into the findings of the study, and Hubble emphasized that his biggest piece of advice was to start small and build on success. Other points to keep in mind were focussing on the core market, pricing reasonably, and consideration of other non-traditional forms of transportation.

HDR proposed three different possible options for the Town: scheduled fixed routes, dial a ride, and car share programs like Uber.

He advised Council that whatever option they chose, there should be synergy between internal and external transportation services. On average, in communities of similar size, all annual operational expenditures exceeded \$290,000, there was an annual deficit of \$220,000, and the percentage of cost covered by revenue was between 10 and 35%.

Of the options presented, HDR advised Council to go with Option A2 as the preferred alternative, a Fixed Route with three buses (two in Alliston and one in the South) and 20 stops, at a cost of \$820,000. Hubble described it as 'good mobility to key destinations' with the final destination being the GO Station in Bradford.

They also advised Option C, Demand Responsive Rideshare, as a secondary alternative.

However, Hubble said, Option C would require further study, was uncertain (as in the case of Innisfil) about controlling costs, and could cost between \$800,000 to \$1 million if operating optimally. However, it does offer 'a very high level of mobility.' Hubble also proposed the Town work closely with Simcoe County in enacting one of these plans. 'There would be, I would call it, a number of business discussions.'

It was pointed out by councillors that none of the options presented, except for Option C, provided service in rural areas, which would necessitate the driving to bus stops. As for Option C, Hubble stated that 'it has some advantages, [but] I feel a responsibility to tell you there are some risks there.'

Councillor Foster asked if any consideration had been given to a hybrid model. Hubble responded that, 'you can?' just a caution that you're going to get a very expensive undertaking.'

Councillor Sainsbury inquired about the allocated yearly budget of \$120,000 for senior transportation, and concerns of the elderly about 'fixing what ain't broke.' Councillor Beattie also brought up a provincial bylaw that requires services to accommodate those with disabilities. Hubble responded that designating some vehicles within the taxi fleet would be a simple solution to the problem in the short term.

Councillor Sainsbury

brought up the most obvious issue: 'The capitol: I'm not sure where we're going to get it unless we raise taxes.' The cost of this transportation service all in was estimated by the clerk to be around \$1.6 million, which would mean a 6% increase in taxes, or double this year's increase.

As things stand

currently, the plan for transportation is to feature buses 12 hours a day, six days a week from 6am to 7pm. 'We haven't done all the planning, but that's what's been budgeted for with the idea of to get a program up and running by August of next year.'

Discussion then

returned to Option C. 'It's wide open,' said Hubble, 'and you're subsidizing that usage. You have to put some limitations and caps in place to minimize your financial exposure.'

Councillor

Harrison-McIntyre asked if the County would be supporting the transit with parking spaces, to which Hubble responded that a central parking location would be provided in any case, either for parking or as a kiss-n-ride system.

When the Councillor

asked about whether the County had considered transit further south past Bradford, Hubble responded that these were 'baby steps' yet, and 'I'm not saying we're not going to do it, but if no one's on the bus it becomes a substantial proposition. Remember, we're starting this off as an initial project?the whole idea is to get people into an area?when parking becomes a problem, we then re-design the route. But in general, we're finding more people use the kiss-n-rides.'

School Board Representative

Janice Hutchinson then took the podium to discuss the issue of lack of transportation for school-age children doing after school programs or going to and from work, which was already a strain with lack of employment options for young people.

'From 2014, when I was

elected, and before, I've been asking for transportation?.I look at this B2 route and I like it?.it would help our students out.'

'That's exactly what I

was thinking,' said Councillor Lacey. 'I think our riders are mostly going to be our students and our seniors.' He also added that, 'we need to more clearly define how we are going to capture our ridership.'

HDR pointed out the

route has not been defined yet, and that this a preliminary meeting on the topic. While voting to pass the recommendation, Mayor Milne suggested that Option B2, which incorporates County Roads 1 and 10, be adopted as the preferred alternative.

Council voted on the amended motion, with B2 being the preferred alternative and C the secondary alternative.