

New transit system starts up early next month

Barriers to accessing neighbouring communities are being eliminated in New Tecumseth.

Alliston and Beeton residents will soon be able to ride a bus in between the two towns as well as travel to and from Bradford.

This bus system is under the new Simcoe County LINX Transit route that will start boarding passengers August 4.

"We'll be doing a soft opening in August, where we're going to allow people the ability to ride the transit service for free," said Dennis Childs, Simcoe County LINX Transit Manager.

"It also gives us the opportunity to work out any problems we may have had, any design issue."

Fare collection will start in September.

Trips from Alliston to Beeton or within New Tecumseth's town limits will cost passengers \$2, while trips from New Tecumseth to Bradford or vice versa will cost \$4.

Adults currently receive a 10 per cent discount and seniors or youth get 15 per cent off.

Gone are the days of paper transfers, particularly in the era of COVID-19; Simcoe County is utilizing smart cards as a contactless payment method.

"It really means the operators aren't handling cash," Childs noted. "It's really allowed for social distancing where the customers could actually tap onto the fare."

The routes themselves will start at the New Tecumseth Recreation Centre (7300 Industrial Pkwy), make two stops in downtown Alliston, travel to Beeton for two stops, and then make a stop at Bond Head before heading to the Bradford Go Station.

The bus service in Alliston starts just after 7:20 a.m. and finishes up there at approximately 6 p.m., however this is subject to change.

"Now, if service picks up and the ridership does in demands, and people start being able to go to the GO Station, [in Bradford], we're more than prepared to start the service at 5:20 a.m.," said Childs.

He noted that because of COVID-19, trains don't run as early at the Bradford Go Station and with the pandemic, it's difficult to gauge what the ridership will look like.

"What we've seen in our forecasts of our ridership is a 60 to 70 per cent reduction," Childs explained.

New Tecumseth Deputy Mayor Richard Norcross said while it's great that the Town's getting a bus service linking Alliston, Beeton and Bradford, Tottenham has been left out of the mix.

"I just wanted to point that out that when we were advocating for this [with the County], we wanted to hit all three of our urban areas, but we were told it would not be able to go to Tottenham because they felt it wasn't a county responsibility," he noted. "Of course, we'll continue to advocate that we get some sort of run from Tottenham into Beeton and over to Bradford."

For the new route, eight 35 ft long conventional buses have been ordered as well as two specialized transit vehicles that better accommodate residents who have disabilities. However, both vehicles can kneel down to accept wheelchairs.

The total cost for the eight conventional buses was \$2 million while the two specialized transit vehicles together were under \$500,000.

The specialized transit vehicles will offer a service specifically for people with disabilities who cannot take conventional transit and live within a few kilometres of the route.

The new buses features some of the latest technology in the transit world, such as an automatic vehicle locator, which works as a GPS.

Similar to how the Smartphone app Uber allows customers to track their drivers as they await pickup, the buses automatic vehicle locator allows passengers to track their buses' drivers as they wait to be picked up.

The conventional buses each feature eight cameras and the specialized transit vehicles are equipped with five.

"This allows us to be able to capture any real-life events from the outside of the vehicle to the inside of the vehicle," Childs noted. "Not that we have a lot of events in Simcoe County but it really takes away a lot of the guessing.

"There's no 'he said, she said,' when you actually sit down and look at the videos it gives you a really good, crystal idea of exactly what's going on."

Childs said after the new Alliston-Beeton-Bradford route launches, data will be collected on which bus stops see the most passengers and bus shelters will be built along those spots.

Businesses will not be able to advertise on Simcoe County's LINX Transit buses, but they will be used to promote local municipalities.

Simcoe County LINX Transit started in August 2018 with its first route from Penetanguishene to Midland to Barrie.

The program expanded in 2019, as it started two more routes. One runs from Barrie to Wasaga Beach and the other from Barrie to Orillia.

In addition to the Alliston-Beeton-Bradford route, LINX Transit is introducing a bus line between Midland and Orillia. It's slated to launch this fall.

By Sam Odrowski Local Journalism Initiative Reporter