

## Orangeville-Shelburne transit receives funding

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Dufferin County Council has approved a motion to fund the Grey Transit Route (GTR) that runs between Shelburne and Orangeville on a month-to-month basis up to the end of the year.

During their meeting on Aug. 22, Dufferin County Council discussed a letter received from Brian Milne, Warden of Grey County, regarding the discontinuation of the route as of Sept. 2.

In the letter, Milne said Grey County had made the decision to discontinue the stops in Shelburne due to over-capacity use from Shelburne residents.

“For the past several months, there have not been enough seats to accommodate everyone who wishes to use the service between Dundalk and Orangeville,” wrote Milne. “Grey County made the difficult decision to terminate the Shelburne stops beginning September 2 in order to preserve seats for our residents.”

The letter noted that for the service to continue for riders catching the bus in Shelburne, a second vehicle of the same size and seating, which is 10 passenger seats, would be required for Route 2 and would need to be funded by the County of Dufferin.

In July, the Town of Shelburne received similar correspondence from Grey County's Chief Administrative Officer, Kim Wingrove with the same recommendation. Shelburne Town Council voted in favour of discontinuing the service due to the financial cost of operating.

“We didn't feel as though it was a financial burden that we could or should necessarily take on our own in terms of this being a long-term transit strategy,” said Coun. Wade Mills at the meeting. “We knew from day one that this probably was going to be a limited-time opportunity and it was a bit of a stopgap from the outset. We were fortunate enough as a community to be able to piggyback on the Grey County initiative, but we kind of knew what there may be a sunset coming at some point and here we are.”

According to the letter to County Council, the cost to provide the service five days per week would be \$13,500 per month plus HST and a fuel cost of approximately \$500.

The Grey Transit Route (GTR) is a rural transit service managed by Grey County and operated by Driverseat Owen Sound.

The transit service in Shelburne launched in 2020 as a weekday service funded by a \$2.3-million provincial grant received by Grey County and Southgate Township. The funding was used to implement the service of a 10-passenger van from Dundalk to Orangeville, also known as Route 2, Monday through Friday. Shelburne does not fund or contribute any cost to the weekday service.

The GTR weekday service includes two stops in Shelburne. One at Col. Philips Drive at Highway 10 and another stop at Victoria Street at Town Hall.

During the meeting, Dufferin County councillors debated whether they should fund the service until the end of the year or allow the service to discontinue.

“I'm concerned about the gap and I'm concerned we will have residents who will be left without solutions,” said Coun. Gail Little.

The cost of the service in comparison to the number of riders was a common concern raised by councillors at the meeting.

In May, the Shelburne stops on the GTR's Route 2 saw 227 pick-ups and 206 drop-offs for an average of 18.82 rides per day.

In June, the total number of pick-ups was 210 and drop-offs was 195 for an average of 17.60 rides per day.

'I would be challenged to spend \$1,000 a rider right now to fill the gap because we don't have a budget allocation for that,' said Coun. Lisa Post. 'I do agree with Coun. Little though that we've got folks in our community who are depending on it heavily.'

Councillors also expressed whether extending the service would provide enough time to begin looking for solutions for Dufferin County's transit issues.

'Essentially what we're doing then is giving these folks hope just to take it away again later, which is probably worse. I don't see us having a solution by December; I really don't,' said Warden Darren White.

Following the discussion, Dufferin County Council approved a motion to provide subsidy funding for the Grey County Transit Route 2 in the amount of \$15,000 on a month-to-month basis for up to four months.

The goal of the subsidy funding is to continue the service until the County's transit task force, who are expected to meet in early September, can begin exploring the feasibility of the service and explore other options.

'This was identified four or five years ago that we should look at some sort of transit plan and we, as council past and present, have not done that,' concluded Coun. Chris Gerrits.