

Local resident shares concerns about ending transit service

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A Shelburne resident is advocating for better local transit and for the decision to halt weekly transit service between Shelburne and Orangeville to be reconsidered.

Shelburne Council voted to discontinue service on July 22.

Lindsay Grater has been a resident of Shelburne for nearly 12 years and is a regular user of the Grey Transit Route (GTR) Route 2 that travels from Shelburne to Orangeville.

Grater, like many users of the GTR service, was shocked to hear the announcement that the service she relies on would be ending at the beginning of September.

“At the back of my mind I was thinking what am I going to do when the bus is no longer available,” said Grater, recalling the moment she found out about the announcement. “I know it seems absurd, but I have a real fear that I’m going to end up being a kind of prisoner in Shelburne.”

Grater initially began using the GTR service when both herself and her husband became less and less comfortable driving on the roads due to age and health. The couple eventually decided to give their car to their grandson, with the comfort of knowing they had one mode of transportation connecting them to Orangeville and Toronto – the GTR bus route.

Oftentimes Grater's trips on the Route 2 bus have been used to attend medical appointments, access card renewals at Service Ontario, have passport photos taken, and banking services. She has also used the bus as a jumping-off point to access the TOK bus, which runs from Orangeville to Toronto, to visit her son who lives in the city and has undergone medical procedures in the last year.

“I know it sounds silly, but I’m absolutely devastated because now I’m marooned in Shelburne,” said Grater.

Shelburne Town Council announced their decision to opt out of continuing the Grey Transit Route (GTR) service during their council meeting on July 22.

During the meeting, Council received a report regarding the future of the bus service after town staff was sent a letter from Kim Wingrove, chief administrative officer for Grey County, that indicated the neighbouring county's intention to end the Grey Transit Route (GTR) pick-ups and drop-offs in Shelburne.

“This route is currently operating above capacity, which unfortunately prevents some Grey County residents from utilizing the service when they need it,” Wingrove wrote. “As the GTR is funded by the Grey County tax levy, we have made the difficult decision to prioritize the availability of this service for Grey County residents.”

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 service 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 by Town Hall.

In the report to council, it was noted that for the service to continue for Shelburne riders, 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 Town of Shelburne.

?It's counterintuitive. We're using it because we need it and what is council going to do ? they're going to stop it. It's like a punishment for actually using the service,? said Grater.

Two of the main deterring factors highlighted by council in making their decision were the number of riders that use the service compared to the total population of Shelburne and the cost to operate the route.

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.

According to the report, the estimated cost to operate Route 2 for the four months starting in September would be nearly \$57,000. The service would cost a total of \$14,246 per month to operate and \$170,952 for one full year of service.

During the July 22 Shelburne Council meeting, councillors justified the cost cut by noting the ridership is ?a few compared to the whole?

?I think the importance of the need is being ignored. There are plenty of things that I'm sure have cost a lot of money in Shelburne that I don't use and that a lot of other people don't use,? said Grater. ?Different residents have different needs according to the stages of their life and lifestyle. I can tell you the people using the bus need it.?

Council also noted that riders have alternative options to help make the trip between Shelburne and Orangeville including asking for rides from other residents in town and utilizing rider share and taxi options.

In comparison, the cost for a rider to use the GTR is \$5 for adults and \$4.50 for students, while a one-way Uber drive can cost upwards of \$30.

?I'm infuriated when I watch these council members mention how easy it is to find alternative while they drive around in big, fat cars,? said Grater. ?I've lived here quite a number of years, but I think of my neighbours; they're either out, busy, working, elderly, or maybe they don't have cars. I cannot think of one person unless it were an absolute emergency, who I would even think of asking for a ride down to Orangeville.?

The discontinuation of the weekday transit service may have been a foregone conclusion as the town has over the last year pulled back on transit services implemented and funded by the previous council.

In July 2021, a five-month pilot project to expand the transit service to include weekends was launched with four stops. In April 2023, Shelburne increased the number of bus stops to 14, with the service consisting of 10 runs for five hours on Saturday and Sunday.

During the 2024 draft budgeting process, council opted to discontinue the weekend transit service after it was estimated to cost \$91,000 for 12 months, which would have affected the tax rate by an increase of almost one per cent.

?I wish they would be courageous. I think it's a cowardly thing to keep cowing to this need for cars,? said Grater.

The GTR Route 2 bus will no longer stop in Shelburne as of Sept. 2.