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Shelburne-Orangeville transit ends September

Written By **Paula Brown**

Shelburne residents who use the weekday transit system to travel to and from the Town of Orangeville will soon need to find new transportation.

Shelburne council plans to discontinue the bus service between the municipalities in September.

Council officially opted not to fund the continuation of the weekday transit service with Grey County. Passengers originating from or travelling to a Grey County destination will still be able to utilize the transit service.

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

During its July 22 meeting, council received a report from Denyse Morrissey, Shelburne's CAO, about the future of the transit service.

The report came to council after town staff received a letter on July 17 from Kim Wingrove, CAO 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 at Town Hall.

?This was an option which kind of fell into our laps,? said Shelburne Mayor Wade Mills. ?It was never presented as a permanent solution and I don't think any of us were under any illusions that this was going to last forever.

?We always knew at some point there was the chance that funding would cease and this couldn't continue. It was a great opportunity presented to us. I still think we would have been foolish not to take advantage of it, but in fairness we did know that this day could come.?

The report 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.

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.

Shelburne councillors were given three options in order to fund the unbudgeted service, if they decided to support the additional bus.

The options included utilizing the 2024 funds that were budgeted to come from the tax stabilization reserve at $300,000; to transfer and borrow from the Planning and Development Reserve, which has a balance of $429.081; or to fund against a possible 2024 year-end surplus.

Councillor. Walter Benotto said that, while he believes public transit is a necessity, he would not support a decision to continue the service.

?It's really unfair to expect the town to provide the tax base for transit, it really should be a county initiative,? said Benotto. ?We already have a lot of projects on the go that we have to provide for our citizens as a whole.

?If you look at it ? 10,000 population, 200 riders ? that's a few compared to the whole and we have to provide service for the whole; that's our objective as a council.?

Coun. Len Guchardi said funding the service for the remainder of the year would be a ?bandage? to the inevitable.

?It's either going to end in September or it's going to end in 2025. It's not a matter of if it's going to happen, but when,? he said.

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.

If Council was to decide to fund the weekday transit service in Shelburne for an entire year, the result would be a nearly two per cent increase on the tax rate.

?We all acknowledge the benefit and we know that it's an important service, but we have to sit around this table and look at the financial aspect of it. We have to be responsible without taxpayers' dollars,? said Coun. Lindsay Wegener.

Deputy Mayor Shane Hall said he would like to see the program extended, particularly to give the riders the time to find alternative modes of transportation.

?I think ending in September would be premature,? he said.

Hall brought forward a motion to extend the transit service until the end of December, which was struck down by a 5-1 vote.

?You still got 45 days till September, roughly, to figure something out before it's going to stop,? said Coun. Dan Sample. ?With all our other stuff that's going on, I just don't think we can throw the funds at this.?