



Municipality of Port Hope

Staff Report

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Report Title: 2024 Transit Review

Report to: Council

Date of meeting: November 5, 2024

Report Author:

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Department responsible:

Works & Engineering

Report Number: WE-08-24

Recommended Action:

1. That Council receive report WE-08-24 for information; and
2. That the Rural ROLLS pilot project be cancelled at the end of 2024; and
3. That the fees and charges by-law be amended to make the fee for the special student pass free.

Highlights:

- The proposed cancellation of the Rural Rolls pilot program effective December 31, 2024.
- An amendment to the Fees and Charges By-law to make the Special Student pass free.
- Maximizing service demands remains a high transit priority in addition to improving service levels within the context of approved budgets. The transit route map is a living document which will continue to evolve in support of best serving all patrons.
- Staff will continue to strive towards providing an efficient transportation alternative in the form of Conventional and Specialized transit.

Background:

The provision of Public Transit Services in Port Hope began in 1969 and although components of the service have changed over the years, the primary focus of providing a reasonable, accessible and affordable transportation alternative to Municipal patrons remains the same.

The current Port Hope Transit system is divided into 2 separate and distinct programs, Conventional and Specialized transit.

Specialized Transit locally known as ROLLS provides door-to-door transportation to registered eligible patrons with accessibility related needs though advanced

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appointment/reservation. The service is provided Monday through Saturday on the same operating schedule as conventional transit.

A public transit service is classified as an “Other” service category initiative according to the Province of Ontario. This means there is no legislative requirement to provide a public transit system in any form. Municipalities who choose to provide transit must comply with all Federal and Provincial legislation including regulations to ensure public safety and equitable operation of the program. In Port Hope, transit has traditionally been considered a Special Service offered to and paid for by the urban ward.

In 2022, Staff brought forward in the annual special services report a recommendation to consider public transit in the rural ward. Council deferred this consideration until the end of the 10-year phase-in adjustment period that ended in 2023. In 2023, staff recommended to further defer this decision to 2025 budget deliberations and Council supported this recommendation. At the September 10, 2024 Committee of the Whole meeting, Council considered report FS-12-24 related to special and common services passing the following motion:

That Report FS 12-24 be referred back to staff for additional information regarding special and common services.

A significant consideration in that report is related to the status of the Rural ROLLS pilot which is reviewed in the Rural ROLLS section of this report.

At the October 1, 2024 Committee of the Whole, a notice of motion was brought forward related to student transit that provided for the following direction:

NOW BE IT RESOLVED THAT Council directs staff to consult with Port Hope High School and present to Council a plan for free public transit for Port Hope High School Students, including considerations for a public transit schedule that aligns with Port Hope High School’s bell schedule and accommodates extracurricular activities at Port Hope High School, for consideration in the 2025 Annual Budget

A review of current student transit options are outlined in the Student Transit section of the report.

Discussion:

Rural ROLLS

The development and launch of the Rural ROLLS pilot program was primarily in response to a series of requests from rural residents seeking special consideration from the specialized transit program to assist with transportation from the rural ward for medical related purposes and appointments.

To support the pilot program, Transit received significant support through the communications department and the municipality provided extensive promotion of the program. Regardless of marketing and promotion there was very little uptake by the public for this programming.

Since its launch in March 2023 the rural ROLLS pilot served a total of 7 different rural riders with 5 currently registered in the program. There are 397 individuals registered in

the ROLLS program from the urban ward. The total number of rides in both operating years of the pilot are provided as follows:

Dates	Total Rides	Rural Rides
March 2023 – Dec 2023	4838	212
Jan. 2024 – October 2024	2808	71
Total Pilot Program	7646	283

In terms of number of riders, rural patrons represent 1.7% of the total ROLLS ridership while the rural trips are 3.7% of the total. This would indicate that rural users while significantly less in numbers than urban users are more active. The data also shows that in year one of the program there were significantly more rides in the rural area, almost 3 times more than in 2024. The decline in rural usage can be attributed to a decline in medical related travel requirements this year which reflect significantly in program usage.

Without a stable growing ridership and a very small base of users it is difficult for staff to support making the Rural ROLLS program a permanent service offering. Considering the tax rate implications as identified in report FS 12-24 as:

Changing Specialized Transit from an Urban Special Service to a Common Service would result in a \$16.22 increase to the typical Rural residential taxpayer and a \$6.31 decrease to the typical Urban residential taxpayer.

Staff recommend canceling the Rural ROLLS pilot program effective December 31, to provide the time and opportunity for current users to receive notice and arrange for alternate transportation options.

While there is no other municipally operated transit in the rural ward, there is municipally subsidized transportation options. Community Care Northumberland has provided transportation services since 2015 with their Rural to Urban program that services rural Port Hope residents on the Western Route and has been traditionally supported by a municipal community grant. In addition, the Municipality has recently deregulated the taxi industry within the Municipality which also provides for alternative transit options for people that weren't there before.

Student Transit

The Port Hope Transit system provides service in the urban area from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Friday during the typical school week including most holidays. The current conventional transit buses have seating for 7 riders and appropriate safety devices to support 5 further standing riders for a total of 12 passengers. The system is served by 2 vehicles in constant operation one to cover routes A and B with the second bus serving route C. There is an interactive map that outlines the transit routes on the municipal website here: [Municipal Transit Map](#)

The in-town routes A and B run at a total of 60 minutes or 30 minutes for route A and the same for route B with a common stop at the Town Hall at the top and middle of the

hour. There is a stop in very close proximity to Port Hope High School (A28 on the transit map) which sees a bus at 22 minutes past the hour. To support the school students in the morning as the bus travels north on Toronto Road it routes down Fraser Rd to Victoria St. N to the school and back to Toronto Road on Lavinia Street. This alternate routing adds an additional morning stop at the school at 11 minutes past the hour to better accommodate the start of school. The morning warning Bell at the high school rings at 8:25 am. After school the bus continues to pick up at the scheduled time of 22 minutes past the hour until 7:22 p.m. Based on the current inventory of vehicles and their current condition, the transit division does not have the infrastructure to improve the current stop frequency from one hour to 30 minutes. This could be considered when the new inventory of vehicles is procured and ready for service. At that time staff would recommend doing further analysis of operating cost and staffing implications.

Currently the cost to ride the bus on route A or B is free in support of Walton reconstruction. The current student fare is \$2.00 per single ride and \$30.00 for a monthly pass for unlimited rides. The Municipality also offers a special student pass (ages 4 to 17) with a valid student card for a \$15.00 monthly pass. This pass is valid for rides from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m., 2:45 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. and all-day Saturday. The annual student pass revenues are less than \$7,000 and if council wishes to make student fares free to support the local high school staff would support this decision.

Current morning ridership between 7 a.m. and 10 a.m. shows an average of 6 students, 5 adults and 6 seniors across routes A and B per weekday. The 7 a.m. or first run of the day picks up on average 2 students.

Financial Considerations:

Rural ROLLS

Cancelling the Rural ROLLS pilot program will have no impact on the current tax rates as there would be no service level change.

Should Council consider making rural ROLLS a common service they should reconsider report FS 12-24 which outlines the financial and service level implications.

Student Transit

The 2023 transit revenues for conventional transit were \$79,126. From May 1, 2024 transit fares have been free for patrons of route A and B which make considering the impact related to this years fees impractical. Special student pass revenues account for less than \$7,000 of the 2023 transit revenues. Making special student passes free for local students would reduce annual transit revenues by approximately \$7,000.

Communication and Public Engagement:

Communications provided strong support to the rural ROLLS pilot in 2023 and 2024 with a variety of efforts including but not limited to:

- Municipal media releases, Council eNewsletters, the Mayor's Corner;
- Collateral poster and banners were developed for the Transit division and the program was highlighted in the General ROLLS transit brochure;

- Promoted on Social Media (FB and IG);
- Also promoted through a number of retirement living organizations;and
- Webpage content updated to include Rural component.

Should Council direct staff to no longer continue with the Rural ROLLS pilot, the Municipality would provide updates through social media, the Municipal website and all other traditional communications channels.

Conclusion:

The current municipally operated transit conventional and specialized transit programs actively serve the residents of the urban ward and are included in the operating budget as an urban special service. In 2022 Council indicated that it wanted to consider extending transit to the rural ward and in response Port Hope Transit piloted specialized transit services to the rural community. The pilot was unable to yield stable growing ridership and the cost implications for rural rate payers make it unaffordable to extend the service to the rural community. In light of these circumstances staff recommend cancelling the program effective December 31, 2024 and maintaining all transit as an urban special service in the 2025 operating budget.

Currently routes A and B operating intown offer hourly service and have student ridership. There is programing developed to support student in town transportation to the best of the department's abilities. Current vehicles and transit infrastructure can only support the routes and the frequency of service as it is being delivered today. Improving frequency during peek operating hours could only be considered when the new vehicles are introduced to the fleet and a more fulsome cost benefit analysis can be done. The Municipality already offers reduced student transit fare monthly passes and should council wish to make transit free to support the local high school staff recommend changing the current fees and charges by-law to make the special student pass free.

Attachments:

None.