

SAUGEEN MOBILITY

and REGIONAL TRANSIT

GENERAL BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Friday, October 28, 2022, 1:30 p.m.

Via Videoconference

Board Members Present: Councillor Warren Dickert, Town of Hanover Councillor, Board President
Councillor Beth Hamilton, Municipality of West Grey, Board Vice-President
Vice Deputy Mayor Mike Myatt, Town of Saugeen Shores, Board Past President
Councillor Doug Bell, Municipality of Arran-Elderslie
Councillor Jim Frew, Township of Southgate
Councillor Dean Leifso, Municipality of Brockton
Mayor Scott Mackey, Township of Chatsworth
Councillor Ed McGugan, Township of Huron-Kinloss

Board Members Absent: Councillor Dave Cuyler, Municipality of Kincardine

Others Present: Paul Allen, Councillor, Municipality of Grey Highlands
Stephan Labelle, SMART Manager
Catherine McKay, Recording Secretary

1. Call to Order

The President called the meeting order at 1:30 p.m.

2. Disclosure of Pecuniary Interest and Declaration of Conflict of Interest

None declared.

3. Approval of the Agenda

Motion #2022-067

Moved by Scott Mackey; Seconded by Beth Hamilton

That the agenda for October 28, 2022 be accepted as circulated.

Carried

4. Delegation

There were no delegations.

5. Minutes of Previous Meeting – September 30, 2022

The President thanked the Vice-President for chairing the September 30 meeting in his absence.

Motion #2022-068

Moved by Jim Frew; Seconded by Ed McGugan

That the minutes of the July 22, 2022 General Board Meeting be accepted as circulated.

Carried

6. Business Arising from the Minutes

A. Media Relations Policy

Ed McGugan suggested that the policy should specifically state that in media interviews, the President and Manager are speaking on behalf of the Board, and not themselves. Dean Leifso agreed, adding that usually the President or Manager would speak to the media following a SMART presentation at a council meeting. The President noted that municipalities have different positions on SMART issues, and the intent of the policy is not to muzzle a council member but to ensure that SMART's corporate position is put forward. Scott Mackey noted the Mayor typically represents council issues and he also suggested that some media releases should be kept on the web site for more than three months. The President noted that this provision is intended to ensure that the web

site is current. Scott Mackey suggested an amendment stating that media releases remain on the web at the discretion of the Manager or President, and Ed McGugan suggested an amendment stipulating that when speaking to the media, the views presented must be those of the Board and not the views of the individual. Doug Bell supported the two proposed amendments to the policy.

Motion #2022-069

Moved by Beth Hamilton; Seconded by Ed McGugan

That the Media Relations Policy be amended as discussed and that the policy be approved as so amended.

Carried

B. Board and Employee Meetings Policy

The Vice-President suggested that the policy be amended to specify that minutes or notes of Board and employee meetings be taken by a Board Member or the Manager and made available to employees.

Motion #2022-070

Moved by Scott Mackey; Seconded by Jim Frew

That the Board and Employee Meetings Policy be amended as discussed and that the policy be approved as so amended.

Carried

C. Open Board Meetings Policy

This item was deferred.

D. Mileage Reimbursement Policy

The President reviewed the policy, explaining its purpose and intent.

Motion #2022-071

Moved by Beth Hamilton; Seconded by Ed McGugan

That the Mileage Reimbursement Policy be approved as presented.

Carried

7. New Business

A. Salary Increase for 2023

The Manager noted that inflation is roughly 7% and he contacted Christine Walker, Director of Corporate Services/Treasurer for the Town of Hanover who advised him that the Town's plans for an increase for 2023 have not yet been finalized. Scott Mackey noted that SMART's practice is to refer to the average of the increase by the municipal partners. It was noted that a specific percentage increase may have to be used for budget purposes and due to the budget cycle of the municipalities, awarding retroactive pay may occur, although it is not ideal. Ed McGugan stated that Huron-Kinloss awarded an increase of significantly more than 1.9%. The President suggested that SMART follow its Annual Wage & Salary Review Policy and that the issue be deferred to the new Board when its members can speak to the practices of their respective municipalities.

B. Christmas and Boxing Day Dates

The Manager explained that the current policy provides that employees are paid for Christmas Day and Boxing Day which are statutory holidays. This year, Christmas falls on a Sunday with Boxing Day falling on Monday. He proposed that SMART staff be paid for Friday, December 23 and Monday, December 26, or Monday, December 26 and Tuesday, December 27. Scott Mackey and the President favoured Monday and Tuesday since it would be preferable to have staff working on Friday, December 23 as more clients are likely to want rides in the days leading up to Christmas, rather than in the days following Christmas.

Motion #2022-072

Moved by Mike Myatt; seconded by Doug Bell

That SMART provide staff with Monday, December 26 and Tuesday, December 27 off with pay for the 2022 Christmas Day and Boxing Day statutory holidays.

Carried

C. Strategic Plan

The President thanked the Vice-President for taking the time to revisit the plan. The Vice-President note that the updated plan sets out the priorities, showing whether they are complete or in progress, along with explanatory notes and next steps. She also referred to the Legacy Activities which will allow the next Board to see the work done by the current Board. Scott Mackey thanked the Vice-President for her work which will be beneficial for the new Board.

D. CUTRIC Membership

The Manager noted that CUTRIC (Canadian Urban Transit Research & Innovation Consortium) is taking the lead on electrification of transit vehicles and provides consulting advice to municipalities on purchasing electric vehicles. When he attended the CUTA (Canadian Urban Transit Association) conference, he learned that many municipalities are looking at electric vehicles and at the CUTRIC conference, he met a Shell representative in charge of installing charging stations who said that Shell plans to install 500,000 in the next three years as part of its carbon neutral objective. The Manager proposed that SMART join CUTRIC, which would cost \$718 for the rest of 2022 and all of 2023.

Ed McGugan thanked the Manager for this information and noted that Huron-Kinless is a small rural municipality and he has heard a lot during the election campaign about climate action plans and electric vehicles. Huron-Kinloss has an electric Zamboni which does not cost a lot more than a propane machine. He said that SMART should be aware of this organization and it might be possible to get a discount on electric vehicles as a member. The Vice-President expressed appreciation that the Manager brought the matter forward and suggested that SMART join and if the membership is not useful, it would not be renewed. She said that electric vehicles are the way of the future and should be investigated. Scott Mackey is not opposed to a membership, but suggested that the Manager reach out to other organizations in Grey and Bruce to see if a joint membership is possible. The President requested that the Manager follow up with Amanda Froese, Transportation Director in Bruce County, and Grey Stephanie Stewart, Manager, Community Transportation for Grey County to pursue a joint membership.

E. ID Cards

The Manager proposed that SMART staff should have ID cards given that they are providing service to the public. He noted that staff wear shirts with "Saugeen Mobility" stitched on them, but it is up to drivers whether their name is also on the garment. He said it is not necessary to purchase a machine to make cards, since they can be purchased on line for about \$10 each. Scott Mackey agreed, and Ed McGugan suggested that the vehicles driven by the drivers might be sufficient identification, although the Manager noted that as is the case with a taxi, there is a distinction between the vehicle and the driver. Beth Hamilton supported the proposal since SMART staff often go into hospitals and long term care facilities. She suggested that a provision could be added to the policy covering clothing, rather than creating a new policy. Scott Mackey said that if ID cards are obtained for staff, they should be required to wear them, which the Manager said would be the case.

Motion #2022-073

Moved by Beth Hamilton; seconded by Scott Mackey

That the Manager be authorized to spend a maximum of \$500 to purchase staff ID cards and that he develop a policy on staff ID cards for Board approval.

Carried

Board Member Mike Myatt left the meeting at 2:25 p.m.

F. Service Cancellation Policy

The Manager stated that clients who repeatedly cancel their booked rides should have their service suspended or cancelled. He noted that the welcome letter that clients receive says that service may be cancelled, as does the user fees policy, so there may not be a need for an additional policy. In response to a question from Scott Mackey, the Manager stated that there is a \$25 fee for last minute cancellations, and added that if a client cancels a ride at the last minute, other clients cannot get a ride because a vehicle is tied up. The cost of last minute cancellations is lost rides to clients and staff time spent on rides that do not materialize. Scott Mackey suggested that the \$25 fee might not be high enough if clients continue to cancel. The Manager said that some clients do not seem to care, and some do not respond when the driver knocks on their door or calls them, and there are about six clients who book rides, cancel and then pay the cancellation fee. The President pointed out that the cost of many client rides is less than \$25 and the Manager agreed that most rides are short. Ed McGugan suggested that an additional policy is not required and that the decision on cancelling a client's access to SMART rides should be left to the Manager, given he has the most experience with the issue. Dean Leifso agreed that more discretion is better and suggested that the circumstances should always be taken into account. He suggested a sliding scale or a limit such as if a client cancels ten times, they are no longer eligible for service. He noted that SMART has charitable status and should be careful to avoid discriminating against clients. He added that the Board can give the Manager the discretion to decide, but has to back him up since dissatisfied clients often call a Board member, a Mayor or send a letter to a local newspaper. The President suggested a higher cancellation fee, but the Manager felt that this would not be effective. He suggested a sliding scale of a one month and then a two month suspension. He concluded that he has enough tools in place to handle service cancellations. The President concluded the discussion by noting that a policy is not needed at this point, and that the Manager can bring the issue back to the Board if necessary.

G. Participation at the CUTA Conference 23-26 October 2022

The Manager attended the conference which was sold out and had more than 1,000 participants and vendors in attendance. He reported that it was certainly beneficial as it presented vendors and available products, along with users of transit and trends such as electrification. He said that he was able to make a number of good contacts from organizations the size of SMART as well as smaller ones. He highlighted a number of appoints from the conference:

- there are one million positions waiting to be filled in the transportation industry in Canada as a result of COVID, early retirement and the fact that the industry is seen as “dirty”, causing people to not want to join. The inside of a bus is seen as toxic and young people do not want to join an industry where they have to wait to get seniority in order to have good shifts.
- SMART is the only service that charges for “no shows”, as others are leery of discrimination complaints. The issue of clients who cancel is a large problem, and in addition, organizations are trying to find ways to avoid an empty return trip. UBER for example, delivers groceries.
- remote work has caused people to not want to go back to their former way of working, and fuel increases of 40% have impacted budgets. A lot of municipalities are looking at electrification and some are spending money to buy a lot of electric vehicles.
- the demand for SMART rides exceeds capacity and there may be ways to supplement current resources to meet the demand, such as using taxis or UBER. SMART has more hours available than it uses, but has to turn down rides four times a day on average because it does not have drivers and vehicles available. Another option would be to use volunteer drivers like Home and Community Support Services, which has lost half of its volunteer drivers during COVID.
- some attendees at the conference are worried about the situation after 2025 when some federal funding will cease, although in SMART's case it has municipal funding, rather than relying solely on federal funds.
- a five year review of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act is currently underway and might lead to changes which could impact SMART and similar services.

Ed McGugan thanked the Manager for his attendance and asked if public transit is struggling to survive. The Manager noted that it has in fact survived the last few years but is hurting and running at 80% of ridership compared to pre-pandemic times, and there are a lot of budget pressures.

8. Correspondence

There was no correspondence.

9. Reports and Recommendations

A. Report on September 2022 Operations

The Manager reviewed the report, noting that rides are going back to pre-pandemic levels. Some rides are longer, such as those in Grey Highlands, where the driver has to travel 90 – 100 km to get to a client who is taking a much shorter ride of one or two kms. The President confirmed that this occurs because there are no drivers on staff who live near Grey Highlands clients.

Motion #2022-074

Moved by Beth Hamilton; seconded by Ed McGugan

That the Board approve Report SL2022-1002 September 2022 Operational as presented.

Carried

B. Report on Draft 2023 Budget

The Manager presented the report, noting pressures resulting from increased costs in virtually all items including insurance and maintenance. The report forecasts a 2023 net operational deficit of \$597,825 based on total municipal contributions of \$740,975, which is a 7% increase from the 2022 municipal contributions.

He noted that one vehicle rather than 3 will be purchased in 2023 since three would increase municipal contributions by 55%. The budget is based on a 7% increase in contributions and a wage increase has been included. In response to a question from Scott Mackey, the Manager noted that municipal contributions are based on ridership and population, adding that in the most recent census Chatworth's population decreased. Its contribution for 2023 amounts to \$44,000. The Vice-President asked about the gas tax revenue and the Manager noted that it is now \$1.1 million due to efficiencies achieved in the previous year. The Vice-President expressed concerns about using all of the gas tax funding and there is no guarantee about how much SMART would get. In the past, gas tax funds have been put towards reserves, but this year, there would not be any excess funds. The Manager noted that if SMART had continued to receive ICIP funding, it could have put funds towards reserves, and added that it is hard to reduce the budget in order to achieve a surplus. The Manager noted that with the same number of drivers and vehicles, SMART can provide rides as budgeted and would still have available hours to increase rides. Furthermore, the budget is based on an increase of \$90,000 for fuel which could be lower or higher, and if lower, it might be possible to have funds to put aside.

Paul Allen noted that Grey Highlands' trial is coming to an end on May 1, 2023 and asked if it would be beneficial to take the \$10,700 contribution to Council and renew its membership in SMART at budget time. The Manager noted that if Grey Highlands renews, the cost would be \$12,000 - \$14,000 more. Paul Allen noted that the \$10,700 figure is the unused portion and asked for a firm figure to take to Council at budget time. The Manager agreed to identify the amount for the period May 1 – December 31. If Council supports this, then Grey Highlands would become a full-fledged partner, and could renew at the end of December 2023.

Scott Mackey said that user fees should increase with costs so that all the increases are not borne by the municipalities. The Manager said that user fees could be increased but this could cause a loss of clients, since SMART's fees are already higher than other services. He said that next year, one of the areas of focus will be to increase charitable donations which could eliminate the need for a fee

increase. Paul Allen asked if SMART has explored sponsorship options such as asking Chapman's Ice Cream or Ice River Springs to sponsor a certain percentage of riders. The Manager said that this is being considered, along with the option of having advertising on vehicles. Doug Bell suggested approaching Bruce Power which the Manager said he plans to do.

Scott Mackey asked which services in more than SMART, noting that a transfer to hospital by Voyago can cost in the range of \$480. The Manager mentioned Home and Community Support Services, but did not have their fees at hand, but they are less than SMART's. He will provide the Board with figures at a future meeting. Ed McGugan said that he regularly sees accessible buses operated by a private service called One Care in the Wingham area, noting that it could result in fewer rides for SMART. The Manager agreed to do a survey of such services and report back to the Board.

The President noted that municipalities would like to have numbers for their budget discussions and asked Board members if the budget needs to be adjusted. The Board agreed to a 7% increase. Doug Bell noted that Arran-Elderslie's share is going up \$10,000 which the Manager explained is based on ridership and population. Its population increased, and last year its share was 9.03%, and this year it is 9.88%.

Scott Mackey noted that 2022 has been a very tough year, he supports SMART, and is hoping to stay on the Board. He feels that the Manager has done a good job putting together a reasonable budget given inflationary pressures, but fears that if expenses lead to contribution increases, this might drive municipalities away.

Dean Leifso noted that SMART makes more money on short trips and in light of possible competition from taxis, could increase user fees, but should not price itself out of the market.

The Vice-President supported the 7% increase and asked the Manager to bring a recommendation regarding user fees to the next meeting. She acknowledged that SMART should work at increasing its charitable revenue stream and pursue efficiencies such as reducing postage and costs of staff driving to submit paper work in favour of doing these tasks electronically. She asked the Manager to circulate information regarding population and rides to the Board.

The President clarified that it is the overall budget that is increasing by 7%, not individual municipal contributions.

Discussion ensued about SMART versus taxi service with Dean Leifso noting that SMART clients do not always need specialized equipment if, for example, they are sight impaired or do not have a driver's licence due to a medical condition. So taxi services providing rides to SMART clients do not need handicapped vans to provide rides, and Hanover, Walkerton and Saugeen Shores have taxi services that can provide short rides, and would be able to do 5 or 6 in a day. Scott Mackey suggested that taxis might be an option since every ride costs SMART money and if it used taxis, it would not lose as much. Ed McGugan said that as a result of the staff event, he learned that some drivers are concerned about clients not being qualified to use SMART, and in such a case, they should take a taxi if they are able.

Motion #2022-075

Moved by Dean Leifso; seconded by Beth Hamilton

That the Board approve the 2023 proposed budget as presented.

Carried

C. Legacy Activities

The Vice-President asked the Manager to advise her of anything that might have been missed in the document. The President stated that this document will be valuable to the new Board.

Scott Mackey asked for a short survey of those in attendance to see who might return to the Board following the municipal elections and said that he would like to continue, adding that some continuity would be helpful for the Manager. Ed McGugan said that he hoped to be back, and the President said that the Mayor decides committee and board assignments, but he would welcome the opportunity to serve on the Board again.

10. Committee Reports

There were no Committee Reports.

11. Closed Session

There were no items for a closed session.

12. Adjournment & Upcoming Meeting Dates

The Board discussed the impact of the municipal elections on the Board's composition. It was noted that there might not be a quorum for a December meeting due to the timing of the swearing in of new Councillors and the time required for the subsequent appointments to boards and committees.


Board members conveyed their best wishes to their colleagues and the President and Vice-President were thanked for doing more than expected and setting the organization on the correct course. The Vice-President thanked Catherine McKay for the meeting minutes, assisting SMART through its transition, and help with policy development. The Vice-President noted that the Board has every confidence in the Manager and wishes him all the best.

The next meeting of the Board will take place on Friday, January 27, 2023 at 1:30 p.m. in the SMART boardroom.

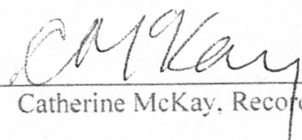
Motion

Moved by Dean Leifso; Seconded by Ed McGugan
That the Board of Directors of SMART adjourn at 3:35 p.m.

Carried


04. Feb. 2023

~~Warren Dickert~~, President


Catherine McKay, Recording Secretary