

Background

Municipalities often look for alternative transportation solutions to meet community needs in areas that do not warrant a full sized conventional bus. TransCab and Ridesharing services are examples of On-Demand transportation models which can be established within a Transit System to provide cost effective solutions in areas of low population and transit demand.

On-Demand transit models provide service where individual passengers can request a ride from one specific location to another specific location at a certain time. These requests require advance reservations. Vehicles are smaller in size, ranging from cars, vans, sedans and small buses, and do not follow a fixed route, but rather travel throughout the community transporting passengers according to their specific requests.

This report outlines how TransCab services operate within Greater Sudbury Transit services and provides information on ridesharing transportation models, including Canada's first Uber partnership.

Greater Sudbury TransCab Service

Greater Sudbury Transit has an effective and efficient way of extending the reach of public transit by providing TransCab services to serve lower density and outlying communities within the City of Greater Sudbury (City) that are not easily accessible by Greater Sudbury Transit conventional buses. TransCab service offers connection to Conventional Transit at key points with no extra cost to the passenger, as only the transit fares used on Conventional fixed route services applies.

Currently, two types of services operate within the network:

On-Demand TransCab

On-Demand TransCab provides service to any point within a designated area. Appendix A – Conventional and TransCab Service Areas, provides an overview of TransCab service areas identified by purple routes. The TransCab service operates on a 90-minutes call-in advance booking basis. A taxi picks up a passenger at the front door of their origin, which is usually their home, and brings them to the nearest TransCab connection point which is coordinated with the Conventional Transit service schedules. When starting from a Conventional Transit route, a passenger advises the operator upon entering the bus that a TransCab is required. The passenger is then met by a taxi at the TransCab connection point and brought to the front door of their destination.

Fixed-Route TransCab

Fixed-Route TransCab provides service to designated stops on a regular schedule, using smaller (7.3m) school buses and brings passengers to the nearest TransCab connection point to meet Conventional service. The fixed-route TransCab service is currently being offered in Dowling and Levack, with a connection in Chelmsford.

Transit Action Plan Recommendations

Through the Transit Action Plan public engagement process in Phase I, the following were identified by the community as desired improvements to the current TransCab services offered by Greater Sudbury Transit:

- Simplified booking process with less lead time - use of a single telephone number and of technology such as an app
- Expanded access to the TransCab network
- Improved coordination of services providing more time points for connections
- Enhanced communication and marketing of this type of service
- Coordinated access between all types of services for persons with disabilities

The Transit Action Plan route review points to some areas of the City which could benefit from converting Conventional service to TransCab service, some or all of the time.

The preliminary proposals further suggest that a TransCab zone matching Handi-Transit boundaries should be considered, which could, if provided with accessible vans, make TransCab service an extension of both Conventional and Specialized services, reducing the demand on Handi-Transit and improving the overall effectiveness of service to residents.

The Transit Action Plan's collective recommendations will be finalized and brought to Council for consideration in the spring of 2018. It is important to note that there are many factors to explore to ensure the best solution is adopted for Greater Sudbury Transit services. The final Transit Action Plan will present an outline of a suggested implementation plan along with considerations which need to be resolved prior to making changes to current practices.

Ridesharing Service Partnerships (UBER)

There is a growing trend in the United States, where Transit Services look to Ridesharing solutions such as Uber, Lyft and Chariot, to provide trips to and from transit stops. These trips are typically subsidized and aim to enhance existing transit service. In May of 2017, the first Canadian municipality partnered with Uber to create a Ridesharing solution to meet community needs. In 2015, the Town of Innisfil, Ontario completed a Transit Feasibility Study to examine transit options for the town. After considering fixed route conventional bus service, it was determined by Council that it would be too costly for the limited level of service which could be provided.

In 2016, a new report was presented to the Town of Innisfil's Council that suggested looking into an on-demand transit option. A Request for Expressions of Interest was made. From this process, Uber emerged as the only company with an app-based platform that would facilitate ridesharing and the matching of 2 or more passengers on trips across the area.

The model that is currently being operated is an on-demand shared rides platform, powered by Uber and subsidized by the Town of Innisfil, Ontario. Using the Uber app, residents can book a trip to wherever they need to go. The Town also partners with local taxi companies for accessible rides for their residents.

Next Steps

The Transit Action Plan aims to provide a flexible framework where different types of services work together to serve different passenger needs and land use patterns.

New and innovative approaches to improve overall service will continue to be explored by Greater Sudbury Transit. Opportunities to improve Transit Services with an on-demand model will be brought to Community Services Committee when identified.

References

Innisfil, Ride, Uber - <https://www.uber.com/cities/innisfil/ride/>