



Ministry of Municipal Affairs & Housing

ONTARIO CENTRE FOR MUNICIPAL BEST PRACTICES

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Best Practice Summary Report August 2005

Urban Transit – Route Restructuring

TR-05-02

Practice Identification: Route Restructuring for Specific Markets

Case Study Municipality: City of Sarnia, City of Barrie

Benefits Resulting from the Practice:

- Increased ridership

Description of the Practice in the Case-study Municipality

Sarnia Transit serves the urban community of Sarnia and the Village of Pt. Edward, with a 2003 population of approximately 75,000. Based on 2003 MPMP data, Sarnia Transit carried approximately 850,000 passengers, or 975,000 boardings. This ridership results in a rides per capita statistic of about 14.0. Based on this data, Sarnia Transit's cost per trip was approximately \$3.38.

While this overall performance does not rank Sarnia among the top 2003 performers in the population group, the performance was identified as superior based on significant change over 2002. Based on a comparison of 2003 MPMP data to 2002, Sarnia Transit increased its rides per capita by just over 18 percent, while cost per trip decreased from an average of \$3.85 to \$3.38.

Corroborating these data with the 2003 and 2002 CUTA data reveals that, like other municipalities in 2003, the MPMP data reports passenger boardings, while the 2002 MPMP data reported revenue passengers. After reviewing the CUTA data and discussing

the statistics with Sarnia staff, it was determined that ridership increase in 2003 was a little more than 6 percent, while the actual cost per trip increased slightly.

Using this new data, Sarnia still exhibited growth over 2002 near the top of its population category, placing second in improvement in overall performance on the combined indicators.

The City of Sarnia has been in a stable growth situation for many years. With population consistent at around 50,000 for many years, it grew to 75,000 with the amalgamation of the former Sarnia Township in the 1990s. The amalgamation resulted in a bump in transit ridership as well, as service was expanded to outlying communities. Since that time, the population has remained at approximately 75,000.

Sarnia Transit represents a typical small system originally designed with a radial route focused on downtown, with loop routes and timed transfers. This pattern recognized downtown as the centre of activity in the town, and required all transfers to take place there. Chemical Valley, the economic hub of Sarnia, is located south of the main city area, and has traditionally been a very difficult market for Sarnia Transit. As a result, the main markets for Sarnia Transit are students, seniors, and local employment focusing on the commercial/retail market.

Over time, the economic centre of the City has moved gradually eastward, with the development of a regional mall, Lambton College, and surrounding residential and employer developments.

Sarnia Transit responded to this growth with the development of a satellite terminal near the former eastern boundary of the City, which served as a hub, with routes serving the developments further east. In this framework, one spine route (Route 9) operated from downtown through the satellite terminal via the mall to the college, providing good access from the centre of the City. Passengers using all other routes would need to transfer to this route to continue their trip to the mall or the college.

In response to requests from passengers in the south end of the city, the system's traditional market stronghold, Sarnia Transit extended the main south end route through the satellite terminal to connect directly to the mall. While the route does not directly serve the College, it also extends the reach of the service to major retail and employment centres around the mall not serviced by the central Route 9.

The new route configuration required 0.5 buses, and allowed the reconfiguration of other routes to streamline the service. Approximately 8 additional vehicle-hours of service were added daily.

Evaluation of the Practice

The new route attracted substantial ridership from the south end of the City, and has been very popular with area residents.

Sarnia Transit staff have been unable to provide specific data on change since the new route was implemented, but Route 1 currently performs as Sarnia Transit's second best performing route.

Staff attribute much of the ridership growth in this period, not only to the specific Route 1 ridership increases, but related increases in passenger trips to and from the area, facilitated by the expansion choice of a second route serving the corridor. In addition to the expanded direct connections via this route from the City's south end, departing passengers in the corridor have had their travel choices expanded from 4 buses per hour to six, and can board the first available bus for either a direct ride to their destination or connections at the satellite terminal. The result has been an increase in ridership, with a stable population base, of approximately 6 percent.

Replication of the Best Practice

Several other communities have had similar experiences with universal passes for post-secondary students, student-oriented routes and specific marketing campaigns.

In 2002, Barrie completed a comprehensive review of its system which included identifying key market areas and ways to serve them. This included:

- ~ burgeoning commercial development in the major north-south corridor in the north end of the city and in the power centre area to the south-west;
- ~ significant residential development in areas adjacent to these developments;
- ~ substantial enrollment growth and campus development at Georgian College; and
- ~ increased internal travel as a proportion of overall travel.

Part of this process was a detailed review of student travel patterns in various periods of the day. This review identified major campus residences, including a newly opened residence on campus, major concentrations of home-based students in the community (both living at home and billeted), and the major attractions for these students for employment and shopping destinations.

New and existing routes were reconfigured to provide 15 minute service between the campus and the identified major attractions. Also, the direct route from campus links directly to the destinations without going to the downtown terminal (downtown was not one of the key student destinations). Routes were also reconfigured to be two-way, instead of one-way loop routes. This makes the trip transfer-free, with shorter and more direct travel.

The new services were accompanied by a reduced-rate post-secondary pass, with a reduction from the previous adult rate of \$68 to \$52 (an almost 25 percent reduction), equal to the secondary student pass. Barrie also increased its marketing efforts on campus, including route and service information in the campus "Welcome Back" guide distributed to all new and returning students.

The new services have proven very popular, with a solid contribution to Barrie's ridership growth. While specific ridership figures are not available, Barrie transit staff report that student complaints, previously common, have been significantly reduced. With a similar objective, YRT in York Region is working to identify the home locations of all York University students living in York Region, to determine any specific concentrations of students that are not served, or can be better served by more direct routing. A GIS program is being used with postal code data provided by the university. YRT is working to obtain similar data for Seneca College students attending campuses located throughout York Region.

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