



# County Council

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**Meeting Date:** Tuesday, November 12, 2024

**Submitted by:** Cindy Howard, General Manager Finance and Community Services, Deputy CAO

**Subject:** Rural Transit Solutions Fund Funding

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## **BACKGROUND:**

Middlesex County applied to the Government of Canada's Rural Transit Solutions Fund (RTSF) under the Planning and Design Projects stream in February 2024. We received a letter from the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure, and Communities Canada on October 16, 2024, informing us that Middlesex County has been approved in principle for up to \$50,000 in funding from RTSF to hire consultant(s) for a comprehensive assessment of inter-community transit and future transit development in Middlesex County.

## **ANALYSIS:**

Middlesex County launched the Middlesex County Connect inter-community public transit service on September 21, 2020. Funded by the Government of Ontario's Community Transportation Grant Program until March 31, 2025, the service provides accessible, convenient, and cost-effective transportation for residents, enabling access to education, employment, healthcare, and social activities.

In October 2021, Middlesex County applied to the Planning and Design Projects stream of the RTSF to conduct a rural transit needs assessment study. This successful application led to the hiring of Arcadis IBI Group in July 2022 to conduct the study. The recommendations resulted in replacing existing routes with two new fixed routes, launched on May 29, 2023:

- **Route 1:** Lucan, Ilderton, Arva, and London
- **Route 2:** Woodstock, Ingersoll, Putnam, Dorchester, and London

An additional route, **Route 3**, was introduced in April 2024, connecting Dorchester, London, and St. Thomas. A stop at the Amazon Fulfillment Centre in Southwold was added to Route 3 in August 2024. Several initiatives were also introduced alongside the new routes, including a mobile app, student passes, free library bus passes, and an employer toolkit.

In 2023, Middlesex County Connect experienced a remarkable 169% increase in ridership, with numbers continuing to grow across all routes, clearly demonstrating the need for these services. A significant portion of riders on Routes 1 and 2 are students commuting to Fanshawe College in London.



To ensure the transit system remains responsive to the evolving needs of residents, Middlesex County reapplied to the RTSF under the Planning and Design Projects stream in February 2024. Middlesex County has been approved in principle for up to \$50,000 in funding from RTSF. This funding will be used to hire consultant(s) with expertise in rural transit to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the Middlesex County Connect inter-community transit system. The assessment will evaluate various aspects of the system, determine the long-term viability of its routes, and develop recommendations for future transit development with a focus on sustainability and effectiveness.



**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

The estimated total cost of the project is \$60,000, with a contribution of \$50,000 from the Rural Transit Solutions Fund. The remaining \$10,000 will be provided in-kind by Middlesex County to cover staff time and meeting space.

**ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC FOCUS:**

This report aligns with the following Strategic Focus, Goals, or Objectives:

Strategic Focus	Goals	Objectives
Cultivating Community Vitality 	Advance a diverse, healthy, and engaged community across Middlesex County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote and support community wellness</li> <li>Innovate social and community services</li> <li>Attract, retain, and engage youth in our community</li> <li>Champion and encourage active transportation and public transit opportunities</li> </ul>
Connecting Through Infrastructure 	Ensure communities are built on a sustainable foundation that is connected and thriving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commit to a sound asset management strategy to maintain and fund critical infrastructure</li> <li>Use County infrastructure in an innovative way to provide a seamless service experience for residents</li> </ul>

Strategic Focus	Goals	Objectives
<p>Strengthening Our Economy</p> 	<p>Encourage a diverse and robust economic base throughout the county</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create an environment that enables the attraction and retention of businesses, talent, and investments</li> <li>• Attract visitors to Middlesex County</li> </ul>
<p>Promoting Service Excellence</p> 	<p>Innovate and transform municipal service delivery</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anticipate and align municipal service delivery to emerging needs and expectations</li> <li>• Engage, educate and inform residents, businesses, and visitors of county services and community activities</li> <li>• Strengthen our advocacy and lobbying efforts with other government bodies</li> <li>• Collaborate with strategic partners to leverage available resources and opportunities</li> <li>• Build organizational capacity and capabilities</li> </ul>

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**THAT** the Rural Transit Solutions Fund funding report be received for information;

**THAT** Middlesex County has the capacity and authority to undertake a comprehensive assessment of inter-community transit and future transit development in the County utilizing Rural Transit Solutions Fund funding; and

**THAT** the General Manager of Finance and Community Services be authorized to enter into and execute an agreement for Rural Transit Solutions Fund funding and to execute payment claims, reports and other documents required for the project.