



## County Council

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**Meeting Date:** May 26, 2023

**Submitted by:** Cindy Howard, General Manager of Finance and Community Services  
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**Subject:** Middlesex County Connect Technology Provider

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### **BACKGROUND:**

Since 2021, Middlesex County along with the Southwest Community Transit Association (SCT) partner municipalities have been seeking digital booking platforms that can integrate into each individual municipality's services, with the option for fixed route and on-demand options to enhance service access in rural/low ridership areas. SCT is an association of member municipalities and non-profit organizations operating small urban and rural transit systems across southwestern Ontario. As a collective, SCT members recognize the benefits and efficiencies in having transit systems with aligned routing where possible, similar fare structure and common booking, trip planning and payment technologies to support seamless rider experience.

In May of 2021, SCT members undertook a Request for Expressions of Interest (REOI) to determine the best technologies for the group. Qualified proponents were invited to submit proposals for the creation of a digital transit booking application and web portal booking platform to assist with the provision of inter and intra community transportation services. The contract was awarded, however after working with the service provider for 5 months the final product could not be implemented due to provider related issues.

Since November 2021, Middlesex County along with the other SCT members have continued to look for technology options to implement for our intercommunity transit services. SCT members undertook a follow-up Request for Proposal (RFP) process in mid 2022. Below is the list of criteria for the evaluation of technologies:

- Ability to provide fixed and flex route response dispatching of transit vehicles based on community needs and system connections

- Ability to provide on-demand or demand response dispatching of transit vehicles based on set routing and scheduling
- Communication with riders to confirm the bus is on time for the pickup or drop off, either through use of GPS technology or communication with the rider through the app in a rural operating environment
- Statistical data collection of passenger pickup and drop off locations to assist with operational planning and agency reporting
- Mobile ticket payment or mobile payment options for passengers and allowing for transfers
- Data stored in secured servers located in Canada
- Pricing and Fee Structure

As part of both the REOI and the RFP process, SCT members received a fair number of submissions from interested parties. Many technology providers have some of the required capabilities but the main component required is the flexibility to offer fixed route and on-demand dispatch and route optimization. Only one vendor, Blaise Transit Ltd. (to date) has the capacity to offer both fixed route and on-demand options and allows for the option to integrate both fixed-route and on-demand options into a deviated fixed route or "flex" model. Blaise is also the only platform on the market that can select the most optimal stops to send riders to, within a given walking radius from their origin or destination. Furthermore, Blaise's ongoing relationships with other SCT members providing intercommunity transit services (Perth County and Norfolk County) offer opportunities for integration and transfers down the line to support seamless rider experience. Blaise offers a universal application for riders in all communities, allowing riders to remain on the same user interface even when travelling to or within neighbouring SCT member communities, facilitating the possibility of transfers.

Staff have entered into negotiations with Blaise Transit and are recommending Council approval to proceed with them.

## **ANALYSIS:**

In accordance with section 9 and subsection 9.3 of the County of Middlesex Purchasing Policy, the requirement for inviting Tenders and Quotations may be waived where there is only one source of supply for the goods and services. In such a case, a Department Head may, under direction of the Chief Administrative Officer, purchase by negotiating with one or more vendors.

Section 9.8 of the County's Purchasing Policy states that a direct negotiation purchase exceeding \$10,000 shall be recommended to Council for approval.

As noted above, staff has determined that Blaise Transit Ltd. is the only source of supply for the services required for this project and, in reliance on section 9 and

subsection 9.3 outlined above, has entered into direct negotiations with Blaise Transit for the provision of innovative transit solutions for Middlesex County Connect. In accordance with section 9.8, staff is seeking Council approval to proceed with Blaise Transit Ltd. for this purpose.

#### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

Blaise Transit Ltd. has agreed to provide the services necessary to implement fixed-route and on-demand transit solutions for the County Connect at a cost of \$26,666.66 CAD before taxes until March 31, 2025. Services offered by Blaise Transit will be fully funded through the Community Transportation Grant.

#### **ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC FOCUS:**

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

<b>Strategic Focus</b>	<b>Goals</b>	<b>Objectives</b>
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>
Promoting Service Excellence	Innovate and transform municipal service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Anticipate and align municipal service delivery to emerging needs and expectations</li></ul>

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

THAT the Council approve proceeding with Blaise Transit for the provision of innovative transit solutions at the cost of \$26,666.66 CAD before taxes and that the General Manager of Finance and Community Services be authorized to execute all agreements and other documents necessary to implement this award on confirmation that such agreements and other documents be in a form satisfactory to the County Solicitor and Chief Administrative Officer.