



## The Corporation of the Town of Tecumseh

Development Services

**To:** Mayor and Members of Council

**From:** Brian Hillman, Director Development Services

**Date to Council:** March 8, 2022

**Report Number:** DS-2022-09

**Subject:** Annual Status Report on the Tecumseh Transit Service for 2021 and Update on Initiation of On-Demand Pilot Project 2022  
OUR FILE: T03 TTS

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### Recommendations

It is recommended:

**That** DS-2022-09, entitled “Annual Status Report on the Tecumseh Transit Service for 2021 and Update on Initiation of On-Demand Pilot Project”, **be received**;

**And that** the current waiver of transit fares due to the pandemic **be continued** until March 28, 2022;

**And further that** transit fares **be waived** as an incentive to use the On-Demand Transit Pilot for a one-month period from March 28, 2022 up to and including April 28, 2022, after which regular transit fares **be reintroduced**.

### Executive Summary

This Report provides Council with an overview of ridership totals for the Tecumseh Transit Service (TTS) for the 2021 calendar year. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, TTS continues to experience lower than pre-COVID-19 ridership levels with no revenues being generated. The lack of revenue during this time is due to the decision of the

Town to eliminate the transit fare early on in the COVID-19 emergency (March 23, 2020). Elimination of transit fares has been a measure implemented by many transit operations across the country in an effort to keep transit riders and drivers safe while continuing to provide this essential service to the community, to maintain access to an alternative transportation mode and to maintain the habit of transit use. The revenue shortfall is expected to be fully offset by Provincial grant funding through the Safe Restart Agreement (SRA) program. In addition, a summary of the tasks being undertaken by Town Administration, Blaise Transit and First Student Canada in order to initiate the on-demand pilot project on March 28 is provided.

## **Background**

The Tecumseh Transit Service (TTS) is now into its thirteenth year of operation since it was introduced to the northerly urban area of the Town in December of 2009. The TTS currently operates on a circuitous route with a one-hour headway covering 30 kilometres and 43 stops. This route was slightly revised in May of 2018 after an extensive public consultation process that resulted in some bus stop locations being removed and others added in an attempt to minimize delays in service. The Town manages the service but contracts the operation and maintenance of the two Town-owned buses to First Student Canada (FSC).

The following statistics provide a summary of the ridership overview of the Tecumseh Transit Service (TTS) for the 2021 calendar year. As expected, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and related Provincial Orders, ridership levels remain lower than pre-pandemic levels of 2019, but are higher than the pandemic-affected 2020. As well, as authorized by Council, transit fees were waived from March 23, 2020 to September 8, 2020 and then from December 19, 2020 to present. These periods correspond with periods of heightened COVID-19 restrictions and were implemented by many transit operations across the country in an effort to keep transit riders and drivers safe while continuing to provide this essential alternative transportation service to the community and maintain ridership habits.

## **Comments**

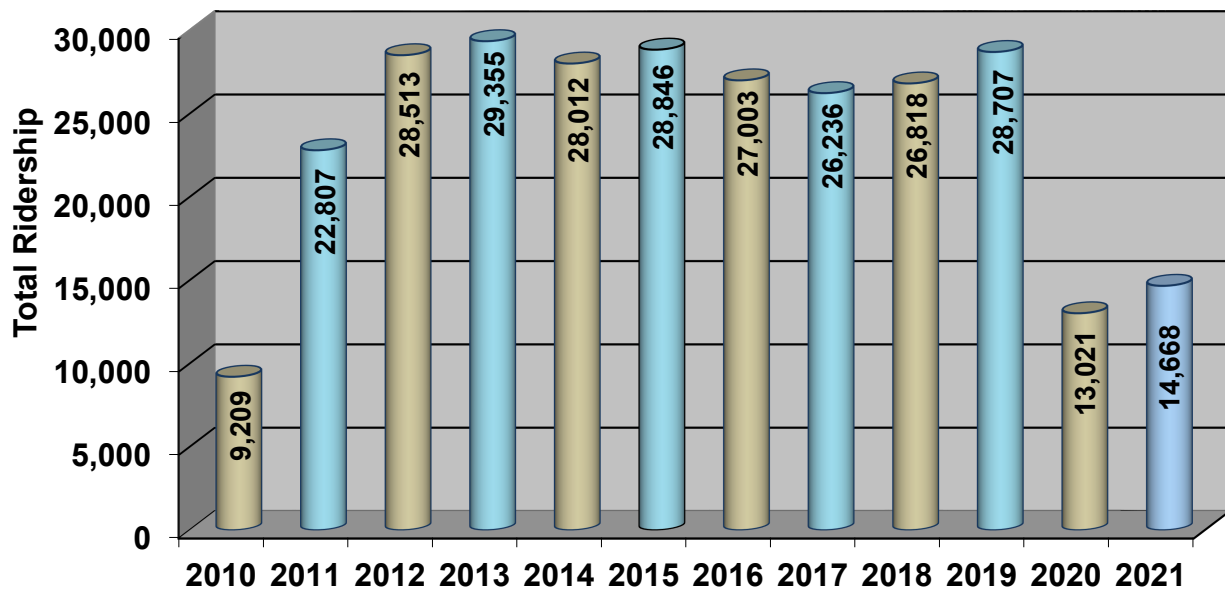
### **Ridership Use Analysis**

The current route is conveniently accessible to 65 percent of the population of Tecumseh with accessibility being based on a 400-metre walking distance to a bus stop. Within the northerly settlement area of the Town, 72% of the population have reasonable access to the service. When only the urban area north of County Road 22 is considered, the route is accessible to nearly 90% of the population. Over the past

twelve years, the TTS has served approximately 294,000 riders and, in the years prior to the pandemic, it maintained an annual ridership of between 26,000 and 29,000.

Total ridership in 2021 was 14,668 (see Figure 1 below) which represents an increase in ridership of approximately 12% from the 2020 total ridership of 13,021.

**Figure 1**  
**Total Yearly Ridership**  
**2010 to 2021**



The average daily ridership by month for 2021 was consistently higher than the pandemic-affected months of 2020. Only the pre-pandemic months of January to March 2020 had higher daily averages (see Figure 2 below). In 2021, the TTS reached a monthly average daily ridership peak of 77 passengers in November.

**Figure 2**  
**Average Daily Ridership by Month**  
**2020 and 2021**

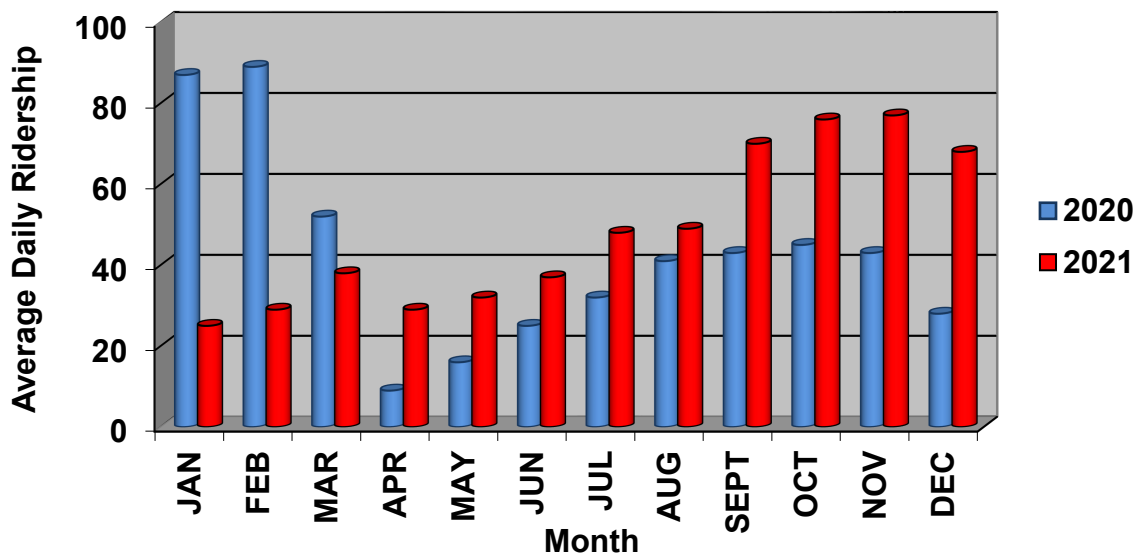


Figure 3 below provides a comparison of total monthly ridership for 2020 and 2021. The 2021 total monthly ridership high of 2,006 occurred in November. Similar to the average daily ridership comparison, total monthly ridership levels were significantly higher in 2021 when compared to the pandemic-affected months of 2020.

**Figure 3  
Total Monthly Ridership  
2020 and 2021**

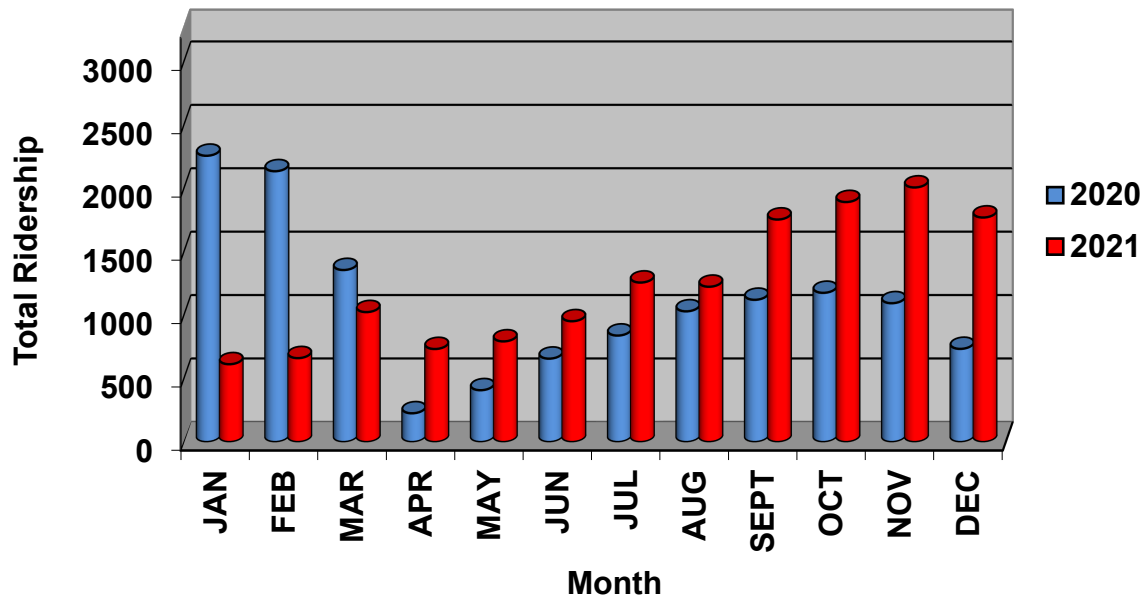
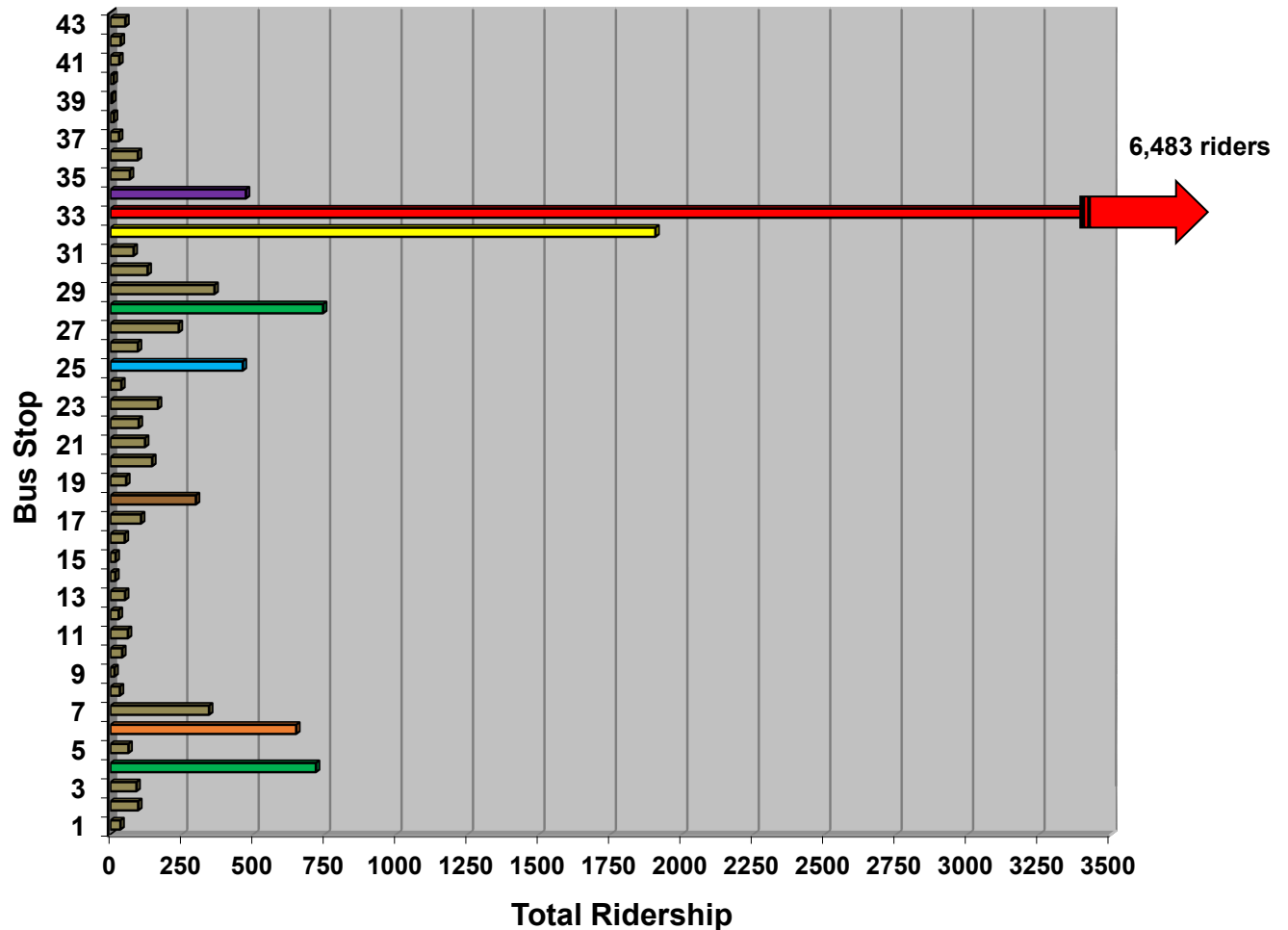


Figure 4 below and Attachment 1 illustrate ridership levels by bus stop for 2021. The bus stop at Tecumseh Mall (red bar) continues to be the most popular stop/destination with 44% of passengers boarding the TTS bus at this location. The next most popular stops in 2021 were:

- the bus stop immediately preceding the Tecumseh Mall stop at Southfield Drive (yellow bar – 13.0% of passengers);
- the bus stop located at the Tecumseh Road municipal parking lot and the bus stop at the Food Basic grocery store plaza (green bars – 5.1% and 4.9% of passengers respectively);
- the bus stop at the Zehr’s grocery store plaza (orange bar – 4.4% of passengers)
- the bus stop immediately after the Tecumseh Mall stop at Southfield Drive (purple bar – 3.2% of passengers); and
- the bus stop located on Lesperance Road at Little (blue bar – 3.2% of passengers).

**Figure 4**  
**Total Ridership by Bus Stop**  
**2021**



As shown in Figure 5 below, the TTS was in highest demand during the afternoon peak period of 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m., which accounted for 10.8% and 13.5% of total ridership. The next highest ridership levels were experienced midday between 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. and in the morning between 7:00 a.m. and 8:00 a.m., which accounted for 10.8% and 10.0% of ridership, respectively. Ridership is at its lowest during the early morning (6:00 a.m. to 7:00 a.m.) and early evening hours (5:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.) at the beginning and end of the daily schedule.

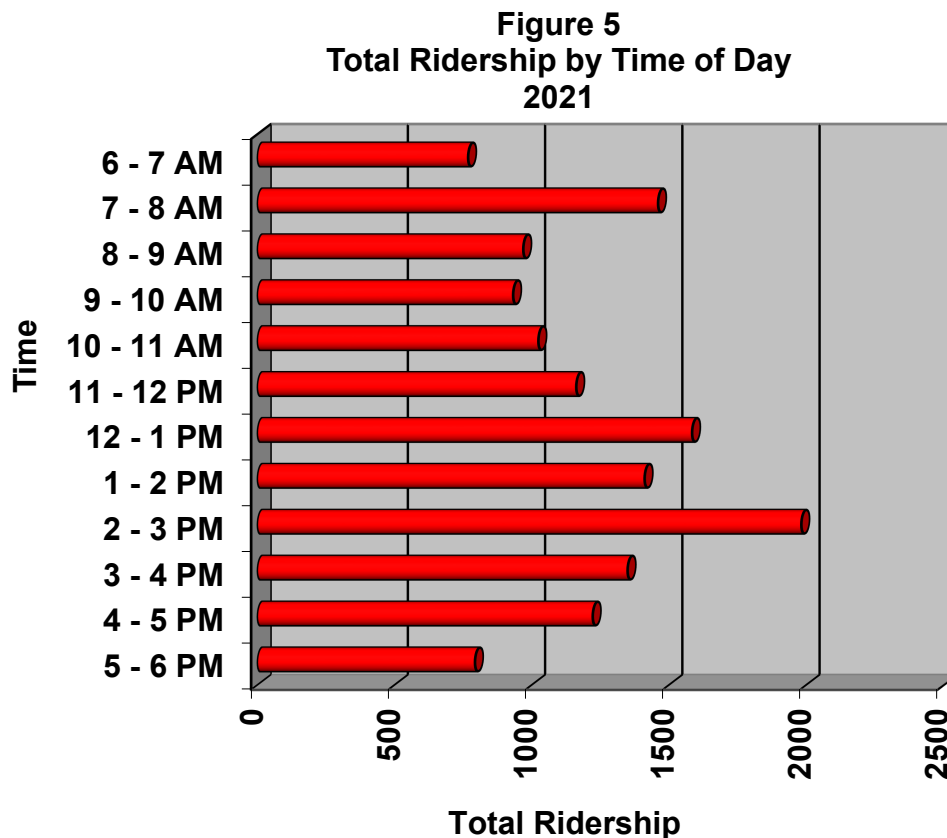
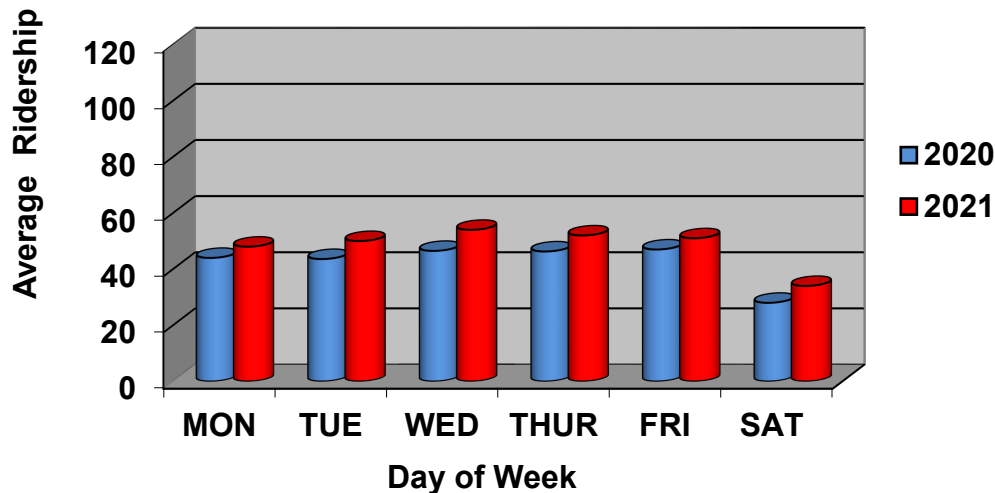


Figure 6 below illustrates that, with the exception of Saturday, there does not seem to be any significant difference amongst the days of the week on which people are using the transit system. Lower ridership on Saturdays can be attributed to fewer students using the service on this day and fewer places of employment being open. The lower daily ridership levels are indicative of the aforementioned reduction in overall ridership for 2021 from pre-pandemic levels.

**Figure 6  
Average Daily Ridership by Day of the Week  
2020 and 2021**



### Ridership Revenue Analysis

As noted above, no revenue was generated through fare box revenues or the sale of monthly bus passes as the TTS continues to operate as a free service during the pandemic. With the dropping of many COVID-19 restrictions now underway, the reintroduction of fees is currently being considered. However, in light of a transition to an on-demand service on March 28, which is to include one month free as an incentive, it is proposed that the current free ridership continue for the next three weeks. It is anticipated that after the foregoing one month free incentive period is over, transit fares would be reintroduced at that time.

### On-Demand Transit Pilot Project 2022

On June 22, 2021, Council approved a work program for a one-year pilot project for an on-demand transit service, partially funded by the Canada Healthy Communities Initiative – a Government of Canada application based grant program. The on-demand service will replace the current fixed-route TTS for the duration of the pilot project.

An on-demand transit service uses computer algorithms in response to service requests initiated through an app on a smart phone or on the web-based version or through a call-in service, resulting in instantaneous routing. Initially targeted to begin in late 2021,



the commencement of the on-demand service has been delayed due to complications arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and challenges with respect to securing a call centre service provider. With the pandemic restrictions loosening and the call centre service resolved, it is now on schedule to begin on March 28 of this year.

Blaise Transit, an on-demand transit service provider, was retained by the Town to develop the software solution (“Blaise Engine”) and app and to assist with marketing and promoting the service. Over the past several months, Town Administration has worked with Blaise Transit to develop the Blaise Engine and app by undertaking the following tasks:

- The operating parameters for the Blaise Engine/app were established with the following key variables selected:
  - Trip requests can be made from one week in advance until 45 minutes before a desired departure;
  - Trips can be entered using a specific origin or destination or by selecting a location on the map;
  - Trips can be defined by a desired departure or arrival time;
  - Trips can be selected for multiple passengers (same place and time) and for different ridership categories (i.e. student, seniors, wheelchair users);
  - Passengers can view a map presenting their walking itineraries from the origin to the boarding stop and from the arriving stop to the destination along with the real-time location of the bus;
  - Payments will continue to be made through the fare-box on the bus or through a bus pass. The fare structure is to initially remain the same, with a one-month free promotional period as riders become accustomed to the new service delivery format;
  - Passengers will be required to show the bus driver a private code (randomly selected emoji) for each trip;
  - Passengers can rate their trip from 1 to 5 and add comments;
- The stops and service area were identified. In addition to the existing 43 stops, a stop has been re-introduced at the Sobeys’ grocery store in Lakeshore;
- On-demand simulations were conducted within the Town’s transit service area to determine the efficacy of the Blaise Engine/app. These simulations initially included a proposed stop at Tecumseh Vista Academy, however, it was determined that the efficacy of the system would be undermined to an unacceptable level to include this school stop at this time (i.e. due to the remote location of the school relative to the core service area, trip requests made through the app during the testing were being denied at a high rate). As the pilot

project progresses, the inclusion of Tecumseh Vista Academy and other potential stops will be revisited;

- Administrative staff were trained on the use of the Blaise Engine and app;
- Internal testing of the Blaise Engine and app was conducted and any glitches were rectified;
- On-route testing of the app was conducted to ensure it was working smoothly and to identify any anomalies;
- Advertising/promotional/educational materials, including posters, flyers, social media publications and an instructional video for the Town's website, were developed;
- Mounts for the drivers' tablets were installed in the two town-owned buses;
- A call-in centre (Answer 365) was secured to receive and input ride requests 24 hours a day for riders who do not have access to a smart phone;

With the completion of the preceding, the following tasks are being undertaken prior to initiation of the on-demand service:

- Further testing of the app using the Blaise engine and rectification of any technical glitches (March 3);
- Deployment of advertising/promotional/educational material (week of March 7);
- Training of Call Centre staff (week of March 14 or 21);
- Training of First Student drivers (week of March 14 or 21);
- Pre-launch tests with drivers (week of March 21);
- Launch of on-demand pilot project (March 28).

Notwithstanding the considerable effort underway to ensure a smooth transition to the on-demand transit service model, we recognize that there will be challenges for both the transit riders and our service provider. We, along with Blaise Transit, will be working closely with both groups in order to respond to issues as they surface. Discussions with other on-demand transit service providers tell us that although there may be some

challenges at the commencement of the service, it should improve with time and ultimately provide an enhanced service.

It is recommended that the pilot project continue to the end of 2022, as originally planned, at which time the project will be fully evaluated and reported to Council.

## **Summary**

TTS ridership levels for 2021 continue to be below pre-pandemic levels, however ridership levels for 2021 have increased when compared to the similar pandemic-affected year of 2020. Despite lower ridership during the COVID-19 pandemic and related restriction periods, the TTS remains an essential service for many in the community.

Administration continues to believe that an on-demand approach to the existing fixed route network has the potential to yield increased ridership due to improved service, increased ridership, improved reliability and trip transparency, enhanced rider COVID-19 safety, reduced pollution and GHG emissions and extended useful life of the Town's fleet. The introduction of an on-demand pilot project on March 28 will provide the Town with an opportunity to fully appreciate the potential for such a service model by way of direct experience and allow us to evaluate it against our current service delivery model and other models that continue to be available.

## **Consultations**

Financial Services  
First Student Canada  
Blaise Transit

## **Financial Implications**

The Town received an allocation of \$33,894 from the Safe Restart Agreement (SRA) – Transit Stream Phase 1 in August 2020 to help support the Town's transit system facing financial pressures due to COVID-19. The SRA Phase 1 funding was intended to help offset financial pressures directly resulting from COVID-19 for the period April 1, 2020 through to March 31, 2021. Of that amount, \$21,566 was used for 2020 and \$12,328 was carried over and used in the first quarter of 2021 in accordance with the SRA agreement.

An additional \$52,397 was made available to the Town through SRA Transit stream Phase 2 funding subject to demonstrating additional support to Phase 1 funding was

necessary. Phase 2 funding was applied for and final reporting was filed demonstrating a need for \$14,362 in support for the period of April 2021 to December 2021. The Town has not received a Phase 2 grant to date as Phase 1 and Phase 3 allocations must first be exhausted.

Phase 3 funding in the amount of \$20,141 was received in 2021 to support COVID costs (i.e. lost fare revenue and cleaning supplies) for the period April 2021 to December 2021.

Phase 3 reporting, submitted Jan 2022, claimed \$25,977 in COVID-related losses and \$5,088 in eligible Transit initiatives costs (On-demand), for a total of \$31,064 claimed for the period April 2021 to December 2021.

In summary, the Town has received \$54,035 in SRA funding and has reported \$61,816 in costs (\$56,728 in direct operating impact of COVID-19 and \$5,088 in SRA Phase 3 eligible Transit Initiatives – On-demand transit). Funding for the difference is dependent on overall province-wide availability of SRA funds.

#### **On-Demand Pilot Project Cost:**

<b>Project Costs</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Software Solution/App Development	\$10,000
Marketing/Promotion/Education	\$5,800
Call-in Centre	\$35,000
Tablets	\$2,500
Mounts	\$1,900
<b>Total Project Costs</b>	<b>\$55,200</b>
<b>Project Funding</b>	<b>Amount</b>
CHCI Funding	\$27,150
SRA Funding	\$5,000
<b>Total Project Funding</b>	<b>\$32,150</b>
<b>Net Cost to Town</b>	<b>\$23,050</b>

In the 2022 Budget, \$20,000 from the Lifecycle Reserve is available to support on-demand transit. It should be noted that the cost of the Call-in Centre service is largely based on usage and could range significantly. Accordingly, a conservative cost estimate has been used in the foregoing analysis.

### Link to Strategic Priorities

Applicable	2019-22 Strategic Priorities
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Make the Town of Tecumseh an even better place to live, work and invest through a shared vision for our residents and newcomers.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ensure that Tecumseh’s current and future growth is built upon the principles of sustainability and strategic decision-making.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Integrate the principles of health and wellness into all of Tecumseh’s plans and priorities.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Steward the Town’s “continuous improvement” approach to municipal service delivery to residents and businesses.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Demonstrate the Town’s leadership role in the community by promoting good governance and community engagement, by bringing together organizations serving the Town and the region to pursue common goals.

### Communications

Not applicable

Website

Social Media

News Release

Local Newspaper

This report has been reviewed by Senior Administration as indicated below and recommended for submission by the Chief Administrative Officer.

Prepared by:

Enrico DeCecco, BA (Hons), MCIP, RPP  
Planner

Reviewed by:

Chad Jeffery, MA, MCIP, RPP  
Manager Planning Services & Local Economic Development

Reviewed by:

Tom Kitsos, CPA, CMA, BComm  
Director Financial Services & Chief Financial Officer

Reviewed by:

Brian Hillman, MA, MCIP, RPP  
Director Development Services

Recommended by:

Margaret Misek-Evans, MCIP, RPP  
Chief Administrative Officer

<b>Attachment Number</b>	<b>Attachment Name</b>
1	2021 Ridership Totals by Bus Stop Map