



Administrative Report

To: Warden MacDonald and Members of Essex County Council

From: Allan Botham, P.Eng., Director, Infrastructure & Planning Services

Date: Wednesday, February 5, 2025

Subject: Leamington to Windsor Transit Funding 2025

Report #: 2025-0205-IPS-R03-AB

Purpose

The purpose of this Administrative Report is to recommend that Essex County Council allocate up to \$100,000 in support of 50% of the net operating deficit for the Leamington to Windsor Transit (LTW) for the period of April 1, 2025 to December 31, 2025. Additionally, the report recommends that the County of Essex support a regional transit working group with representation from County Administration, and all local municipal partners, to explore and develop a modest Regional Transit Service delivery model.

Background

In 2014, the County of Essex Official Plan (OP) established a policy framework to promote ongoing cooperation and the resolution of inter-municipal issues, including public transit. This commitment to transit was reaffirmed in Chapter 11 of the County of Essex Official Plan 2024 (Draft). The OP includes language supporting "the planning, design, and creation of a County-wide public transit system that integrates with existing transit services in the City of Windsor and Local Municipalities."

Regional transit aligns with all three goals and directions of the County of Essex Strategic Plan. It emphasizes uniting "Team Essex County" to drive shared priorities, serve the public effectively, and lead in regional governance while delivering quality public services. Additionally, it supports building a regional powerhouse by providing reliable infrastructure for partners and fostering dynamic, thriving communities.

After 85 years without regional transit, the Municipality of Leamington received funding toward operation of an inter-community service through the Community Transportation (CT) grant program, offered by the Ontario

Ministry of Transportation. At the time, regional transit was a public service asked for by many residents utilizing Leamington's own transit service, and a topic that had been discussed at the regional level in 2011. The Municipality of Leamington determined that creating a business plan and seeking provincial funding to launch the service was an effort worth pursuing.

In July of 2019, the Municipality of Leamington launched the Leamington to Windsor (LTW) intercommunity transit service with stops in Leamington, Essex and Kingsville. The LTW service currently provides three round trips per day Monday - Friday, and two round trips on Saturdays, along a route between Leamington and the City of Windsor (St. Clair College). Once riders arrive at the college, a transit hub for Transit Windsor, they are provided a free connector to ride anywhere Transit Windsor serves. In 2024 the route logged over 13,000 one-way rides. (please refer to Appendix II for additional information)

Leamington entered into an operating contract with Transit Windsor to provide the LTW transit service. The current funding model includes contributions from fares, Leamington tax dollars, and the CT grant.

The province has now taken a different approach in offering and supporting a transit program through the Ontario Transit Investment Fund. This new program will only support new or expanded transit services, rendering existing services ineligible.

Discussion

Due to the pending expiry (March 31, 2025) of provincial funding for the regional transit service, the Municipality of Leamington sent a letter, in October of 2025, to the County of Essex requesting:

1. County of Essex funding to help sustain the LTW regional transit service for the remainder of the 2025 fiscal year; and
2. Formal collaboration with the County of Essex and all local municipalities in the County of Essex, to consider establishing permanent regional transit services.

The Municipality of Leamington has exhausted all efforts to secure a provincial funding source and turned to local regional partners. The Towns of Essex and Kingsville have already committed to funding a portion of the LTW transit deficit, up to \$20,000 each. Without participation from the County of Essex, this regional transit service is likely to end when the CT program funding ends.

At the November 29, 2024 Regional CAOs meeting, there was consensus to seek County of Essex financial support to ensure the LTW service could continue past March 31st and through to Dec 31, 2025. Discussion identified the risks associated with discontinuing the service which included the impact to riders who might not otherwise have access to education, healthcare and economic resources throughout the region. While the LTW service requires immediate financial attention, it was identified that transit routes in LaSalle, Amherstburg and Tecumesh that feed into the City of Windsor should also be considered as part of a broader regional transit strategy at the County level.

Administration is currently working on an update to the Transportation Master Plan. Engagement with the Traffic Advisory Group and the public has indicated strong support for the County to increase transit routes in the region. Inter-urban regional transit is already in place to some degree, with routes servicing LaSalle, Amherstburg, Essex, Kingsville and Leamington.

Regional transit services significantly improve the quality of life for some of the most disadvantaged members of our population, including individuals facing transportation barriers, seniors, people with disabilities, youth attending post-secondary institutions, and those with low incomes. By enhancing accessibility for those without vehicles, it promotes social equity and offers critical support to seniors and individuals with disabilities.

County support of regional transit assists in achieving one of the goals set in the new Official Plan as well as aligning with the County of Essex Strategic Plan.

Supporting regional transit through the proposed gradual approach offers several advantages. It minimizes financial impacts, enables data-driven decision-making, and ensures resources are directed to high-demand areas effectively.

Financial Implications

The maximum allocation required to address a potential 2025 deficit for the Leamington to Windsor (LTW) regional transit route is \$100,000.

Administration proposes two options for funding this request:

Amendment to the 2025 Budget: Council may approve an amendment to the 2025 Budget to incorporate this allocation. Moving forward this amount would be included in the County Budget for Regional Transportation initiatives.

Utilize Rate Stabilization Reserve: Alternatively, the \$100,000 allocation could be funded from the Rate Stabilization Reserve, which is intended to offset unexpected or temporary financial impacts.

The Towns of Essex and Kingsville have each committed up to \$20,000 to help fund the LTW transit deficit. With these contributions, the County's support would ensure the continued operation of this regional service beyond the expiry of provincial funding on March 31, 2025. Without County participation, the LTW service is unlikely to continue.

Consultations

During the preparation of this report, consultations with the following individuals took place:
 CAOs of all Essex County municipalities,
 Robert Sharon, Director of Infrastructure Services, Municipality of Leamington

Strategic Plan Alignment

Working as Team Essex County	Growing as Leaders in Public Service Excellence	Building a Regional Powerhouse
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Scaling Sustainable Services through Innovation <input type="checkbox"/> Focusing "Team Essex County" for Results <input type="checkbox"/> Advocating for Essex County's Fair Share	<input type="checkbox"/> Being an Employer with Impact <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A Government Working for the People <input type="checkbox"/> Promoting Transparency and Awareness	<input type="checkbox"/> Providing Reliable Infrastructure for Partners <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Supporting Dynamic and Thriving Communities Across the County <input type="checkbox"/> Harmonizing Action for Growth <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Advancing Truth and Reconciliation

Recommendation

That Essex County Council receive report number 2025-0205-IPS-R03-AB, for information.

AND

That Essex County Council direct Administration to establish a Regional Transit Working Group to engage all local municipalities regarding their interest in establishing regional transit services in their communities; and

That Administration bring a follow up report to County Council summarizing the work of the Regional Transit Working Group later in 2025 and prior to the 2026 budget.

AND

Consider adopting ONE of the proposed options listed below.

OPTION A

That County Council approve the funding of 50% of the 2025 net operating deficit costs of the LTW regional transit service up to a maximum of \$100,000 as follows:

- 2025 Budget Amendment – to be debated and considered at the February 19, 2025 Council Meeting

OR

OPTION B

That County Council approve the funding of 50% of the 2025 net operating deficit costs of the LTW regional transit service up to a maximum of \$100,000 as follows:

- Transfer from the Rate Stabilization Reserve;

Approvals

Respectfully Submitted,

Allan Botham

Allan Botham, P.Eng., Director, Infrastructure and Planning Services

Concurred With,

Melissa Ryan

Melissa Ryan, CPA, Director, Financial Services/Treasurer

Respectfully Submitted,

Allan Botham

Allan Botham, P.Eng., Director, Infrastructure and Planning Services

Concurred With,

Sandra Zwiers

Sandra Zwiers, MAcc, CPA, CA, Chief Administrative Officer

Appendix	Title
Appendix I	County of Essex Official Plan Language Regarding Transit
Appendix II	Supplemental Information regarding Regional Transit