

Transportation in Tillsonburg: Getting There

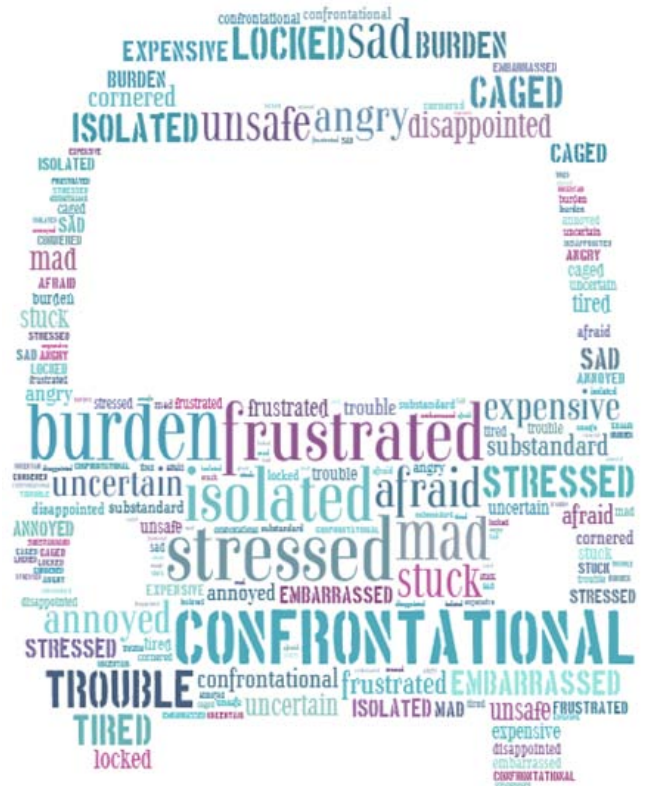
A study of transportation needs in Tillsonburg, Ontario

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Message from the Social Planning Co-ordinator

Transportation in Tillsonburg: Getting there is a study of the transportation needs of Tillsonburg, Ontario and its surrounding area. This study ran from January 2013 to February 2014. The process involved compiling data from existing sources, and conducting and analyzing a community survey, and focus groups. All of this information is included in this report. The details of this report were presented to the community in Tillsonburg, Ontario on March 6, 2014.

This project was possible because of the funding from Ontario Trillium Foundation, and support of United Way Oxford. This report is being shared with the community for use as development of a transportation strategy continues.

My sincere thanks to those who have contributed to this report in a variety of ways. Many agencies have been supportive, providing data and information about their transportation services, participating in community discussions, and committing to action moving forward.

While so many passionate community members and agencies were instrumental in this project, I would like to extend a special thank you to Max Adam and John Verbakel for their assistance with the research portion of this project, Phil Gravelle for his incredible support in distributing the community survey, and the various organizations who hosted focus groups. Thank you also to Matthew MacNeil for his assistance in various steps of the process – you have been wonderful to work with!



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Executive Summary

Access to accessible, affordable transportation has continually been shown through research and community experience to provide an increase in one's quality of life. Despite this, the residents of many rural communities across Ontario still lack adequate access to public transportation.

Residents of the Town of Tillsonburg, and the Townships of Norwich and South-West Oxford repeatedly described the experience of not having transportation as stressful, tiring, frustrating, and isolating. Lack of transportation was expressed as negatively impacting their social and employment opportunities, their relationships with family, friends, and neighbours, and their connection to their community.

Lack of transportation also has a significant financial cost to our community. Agencies whose clients often lack transportation are left to use their limited resources to assist with transportation. The result is that the social service sector is being drained of its financial resources, staff time, and expertise.

Cross-sector collaboration is a solution that is supported by the community, with the greatest strength identified throughout this research project being the interest and commitment of various sectors in working towards a collaborative solution. Additionally, the wider community supports public transportation. Of 526 survey respondents, 95% believe that having access to public transportation in Tillsonburg is either important or very important, including the majority of respondents who said that they would not use transportation, who said they currently own a car, and who reported an annual household income of greater than \$50,000.

The financial and geographical barriers to public transportation can often act as inhibitors of action. However, the social and financial costs of not having public transportation are too costly to our community. Public transportation is an economic driver. It provides and supports employment, promotes spending, and builds more inclusive communities. The agencies and residents of Tillsonburg are ready for change.

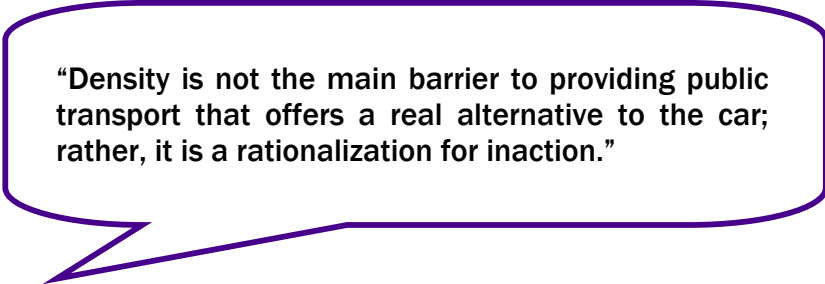
Introduction

Transportation is essential to meeting our most basic needs – going to work, grocery shopping, participating in the community through social, volunteer, or civic activities, entertainment, and healthcare. Research and community experience has consistently shown that access to transportation increases one’s quality of life. Despite this, many residents of rural communities across Ontario are still without reliable, affordable, and accessible transportation. Those who live in rural areas are generally limited to high reliance on personal vehicles because of a lack of public transportation, and it often being unsafe or not practical to use active forms of transportation like walking or cycling.

Statistics Canada defines a rural area as one with a population of less than 1,000 or a population density of less than 400 people per square kilometer (Statistics Canada, no date). Low population density often means two things: individuals from rural areas have to travel longer distances than their urban counterparts to access services, and some services may not be available locally, but in the closest larger centers. These two issues can also be true of the residents of small towns located near rural areas.

Often rural areas and small towns do not have public transportation, simply for the reason that it is believed to not be viable, due to low populations, low population densities, and the long distances between people and services. In 2011, the Ontario Ministry of Transportation Transit-Supportive Guidelines suggested that the minimum density to support a basic transit service is 50 people and/or jobs per hectare (Ontario Ministry of Transportation, 2011). While not a standard, this roughly translates to mean that transportation is only viable in areas where there are 5,000 people and/or jobs per square kilometer. In other words, the threshold for public transportation is roughly ten times greater than Statistic Canada’s definition of a rural area.

Despite these numbers, not all believe that rural transportation is not viable. Many rural communities who believe that it is possible, have come up with solutions that meet the needs of many of their residents. This report will outline a number of these initiatives. Author Paul Mees states in his 2011 book ‘Transport for Suburbia’ that,



“Density is not the main barrier to providing public transport that offers a real alternative to the car; rather, it is a rationalization for inaction.”

Furthermore, a thesis by Eric Marr from the University of Guelph found that public transportation in rural areas is far more viable than is often perceived (Marr, 2012). The Social Planning Council Oxford argues that public transportation may not always be set as a priority for a community, because when a community does identify public transportation as a priority, collaborations that leverage resources have provided successful solutions.

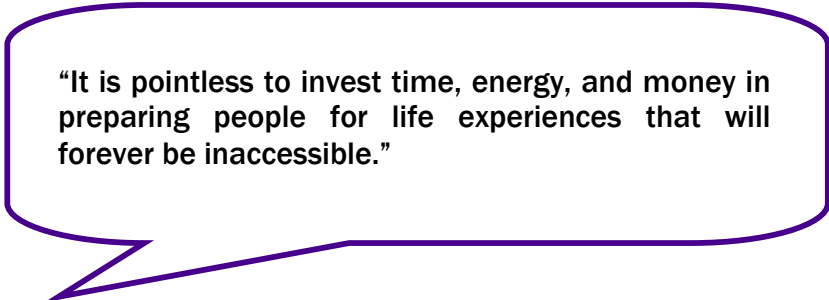
While this report will focus on public transportation, it is important to note that other factors can assist in addressing transportation disadvantage in the rural context. For example, providing community hubs in rural areas that bring services to people, rather than the opposite, can remove some barriers. However, a single method cannot meet the needs of rural residents completely. A creative solution that utilizes several methods is a best foot forward program to meeting the transportation needs of rural and small town communities.

The Role of Transportation in Inclusion

In 2012, United Way Oxford conducted several community conversations across Oxford County. Conversations were held with a wide range of socio-demographic groups, who have varied life experiences. Conversations were informal and focused on the hopes and aspirations of the people who live in Oxford County. Some of the issues identified included transportation, housing, and youth issues. The broad underlying theme of these issues, as identified by United Way Oxford and based on community feedback, was community belonging.

United Way Oxford reports that “people want a voice, but are concerned that community leaders, people in authority and decision makers do not genuinely understand the ramifications of the decisions they make and the effects they have on real lives.” They also report that “people want to feel that they belong in their community, but they are concerned that there are many barriers to belonging, and that their community is not open to addressing these barriers,” and that “people want convenient, safe, affordable transportation options that allow them to meet their basic needs and participate in other essential daily activities” (United Way Oxford, 2014).

There are many barriers to community belonging and Tillsonburg resident Matthew MacNeil is clear that transportation is one of them (MacNeil, 2013). He says,



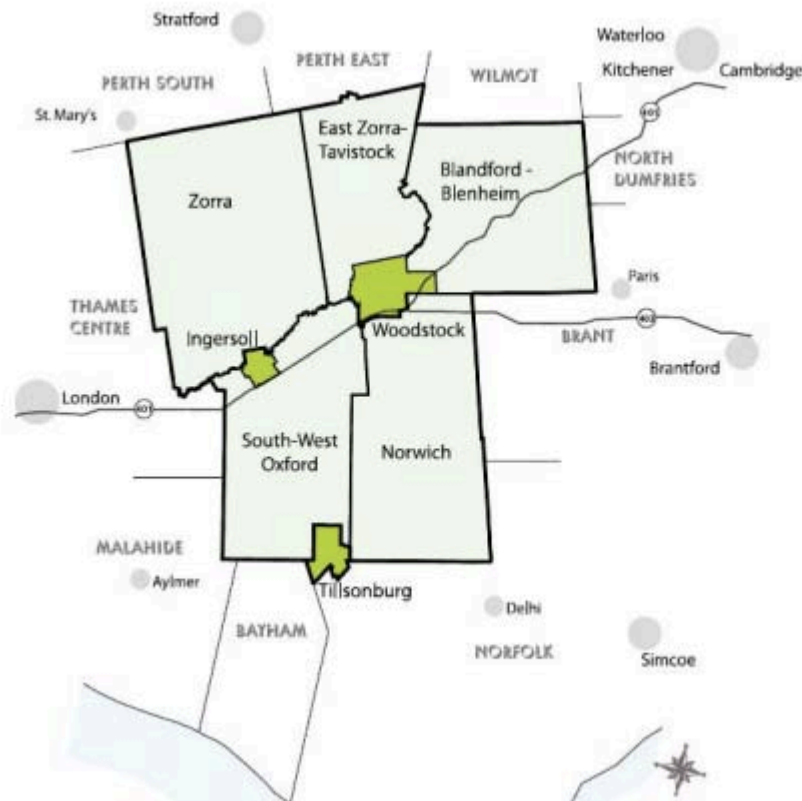
“It is pointless to invest time, energy, and money in preparing people for life experiences that will forever be inaccessible.”

We have strong agencies providing excellent services across Oxford County, including Tillsonburg and its surrounding area. Our residents need transportation to utilize these supports, and to build the strong, inclusive community that we envision.

Community Overview

Oxford County is a regional municipality located in Southwestern Ontario. It is comprised of three municipalities, the Towns of Tillsonburg and Ingersoll, the City of Woodstock, and five townships (Zorra, East Zorra-Tavistock, Blandford-Blenheim, Norwich, South-West Oxford). Please see Image 1 for a map of Oxford County.

Image 1: Map of Oxford County



Source: County of Oxford Official Plan

Geography and Population Characteristics

Oxford County covers a large geographic area of 2,039 square kilometers where 96% of the land is rural. The total population of Oxford County is 105,719 (a 2.9% increase since 2006), with a population density of 52 people per square kilometer.

Of the total population, 38% live in a rural part of the county (Statistics Canada, 2011 Census).

The Town of Tillsonburg is located south of Woodstock (37 km) and London (60 km). With a land area of 22 square kilometers, Tillsonburg accounts for 1.1% of the total land area of Oxford County (Statistics Canada, 2011 Census). Tillsonburg is also south of the rural Townships of South-West Oxford and Norwich. Residents of South-West Oxford and Norwich are split on where they receive services, accessing programs in all three major centers, Tillsonburg, Ingersoll, and Woodstock. In some cases the same individuals will access services in multiple centers. Please see Table 1 for the land area and population density of the Townships of South-West Oxford and Norwich.

Although located in Oxford County, Tillsonburg is unique because of its tri-county proximity, bordering both Norfolk and Elgin Counties. This tri-county location means that there are many residents within Oxford, Norfolk, and Elgin counties seeking services in jurisdictions where they are not registered.

Tillsonburg saw a population growth of 3.2% from 2006 to 2011, with a total population of 15,301 in 2011. Tillsonburg accounts for 14.5% of the total population of Oxford County. The population density of Tillsonburg is 685 people per square kilometer (Statistics Canada, 2011 Census).

Table 1: Land area, total population, and population density

Location	Land Area (km ²)	Total Population	Population Density (people/ km ²)
Oxford County	2,039	105,719	52
Tillsonburg	22	15,301	685
South-West Oxford	371	7,544	20
Norwich	431	10,721	25

Source: Statistics Canada 2011 Census, 2011 Community Profiles

Tillsonburg and surrounding area do not meet the threshold suggested by the Ontario Ministry of Transportation Transit-Supportive Guidelines of needing 5,000 people and/or jobs per square kilometer for a successful public transportation system (Ontario Ministry of Transportation, 2011). However, it should be noted that the City of Toronto has a population density of 4,150 people per square kilometer (Statistics Canada, 2011 Census). With a large number of commuters into the city, it is likely that they meet this threshold. However, it is clear that this threshold would support public transportation only in Canada’s largest cities.

Demographics

It is anticipated that by 2021, seniors in Oxford County will make up 40% of the population, compared to 19% in Canada (Sheridan, 2012). This increase in the

number of seniors is expected to increase our challenges in meeting needs through supportive programs and services in the county, including transportation.

Other data presented in the Oxford Master Aging Plan indicate that seniors in Oxford County, as compared to Ontario, are more likely to live in a household alone, and tend to have lower income and education levels (Sheridan, 2012). In combination with the rural nature of the county, these factors are likely to contribute to the isolation of seniors, and to a lack of access to services. It is also possible that the number of dependent family members will increase, resulting in additional pressure for drivers. This is particularly true for Tillsonburg, who has the highest percentage of people aged 65 years or older in Oxford County (please see Table 2).

Table 2: Percentage of population aged 50-64 years and 65 years and older

Location	Percent (%) of population aged 50-64 years	Percent (%) of population aged 65 years or older
Tillsonburg	20.5	25.1
Oxford County	20.5	16.6
Ontario	20.5	14.6
Canada	21.1	14.8

Source: Statistics Canada 2011 Census, 2011 Community Profiles

When looking at the ethno-cultural makeup of Oxford County, we are restricted to data from the 2006 Census because of quality issues (please see Appendix 1). Compared to Ontario, a smaller percentage of the residents of Oxford County are immigrants (Oxford County = 10.9%, Ontario = 28.3%). Within Oxford County, Tillsonburg has the largest proportion of immigrants, at 14% (Oxford County Public Health & Emergency Services, 2011). Oxford County’s settlement services have reported that transportation is a major barrier for newcomers (Community Employment Services, personal communication, 2013). As the number of newcomers choosing Oxford County and Tillsonburg as their home increases, the need for affordable, accessible transportation will also continue to increase.

Education and Income

When examining education and income, we are restricted to data from the 2006 Census because of quality issues (please see Appendix 1). Both Oxford County and Tillsonburg residents tend to have lower educational attainment when compared to Ontario (please see Table 3).

Table 3: Educational attainment of population 15 years and over

Educational Attainment	Tillsonburg (%)	Oxford County (%)	Ontario (%)
No certificate, diploma or degree	25.5	29.3	22.2
High school certificate or equivalent	23.3	29.7	26.7
Apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma	8.2	9.6	7.9
College, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma	16.3	19.9	18.3
University certificate or diploma below the bachelor level	2.3	2.4	4.1
University certificate, diploma or degree	7.0	8.9	20.4

Source: Statistics Canada, 2006 Census Community Profile

The Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) is an income threshold where a family is likely to spend 20% or more of its income on food, shelter, and clothing than the average family. This leaves less income available for other expenses such as transportation, health, education, recreation and social activities. LICOs are calculated for families and communities of different sizes (Statistics Canada, 2008).

Within Oxford County, 5% of the population is considered to be living on incomes below the poverty line, falling into the LICO (compared to Ontario, where 11.1% fall into the LICO). In Tillsonburg, 5.6% of the population is considered to be living on incomes below the poverty line (Oxford County Public Health & Emergency Services, 2011). While both Oxford County and Tillsonburg have approximately half the rates of incomes falling below the poverty line when compared to Ontario, poverty is a concern to many of our community members and agencies. Poverty acts as a main barrier to access to transportation, as many cannot afford a personal vehicle or the cost of frequent taxicabs, which are the only available means of transportation for many low-income individuals living in Tillsonburg and the surrounding area.

Existing Transportation Services

Providing a sufficient transportation system in Tillsonburg is logistically and financially challenging, largely due to financial and geographical barriers. Due to its location, residents of Tillsonburg frequently need travel not just outside of Tillsonburg, but also outside of Oxford County. The following section will provide an overview of existing transportation services that provide service to Tillsonburg residents.

Public Transit

There is no public transportation available in Tillsonburg. In the past, Greyhound offered weekly bus service to and from Tillsonburg. The route connected to VIA Rail in Ingersoll. This service was cancelled because usage was not supporting the cost. There has also been a history of a local bus system within Tillsonburg, operating from 2001 to 2005, but it is no longer in service.

Passenger train services are provided by Via Rail stations in Ingersoll or Woodstock. No shuttle exists between the train stations and Tillsonburg, and train fares are generally out of reach for those living on a low income.

Taxi Services

Taxi services are particularly important in Tillsonburg because there is no public transportation available. There are two taxi companies who provide services in Tillsonburg: Why Wait Taxi and KTN Taxi. Both companies are open 24 hours daily, and charge a flat rate of \$8 for service within Tillsonburg. Both companies offer a rate of \$6 for students travelling to or from school, and KTN Taxi also offers this same rate for seniors. Why Wait Taxi reported that they are no longer able to offer a senior discount. Due to the high cost, neither taxi company is able to offer wheelchair accessible transportation at this time (Why Wait Taxi and KTN Taxi, personal communication, 2013).

On the whole, taxi fares are out of reach for people who are living on low income, or who require regular use for transportation. Some individuals living on low income report that they use taxi services, but they indicate that they use them quite infrequently due to the cost. In the past, there have been some concerns about the viability of taxi companies in Tillsonburg (Taxi Trouble in Tillsonburg, 2012). The taxi companies report that their barrier to reducing their fares is financial sustainability.

The Tillsonburg & District Multi-Service Centre

The transportation program provided by the Multi-Service Centre, a non-profit organization, has been operating in an official capacity since 1981. Adults who are 55 years or older, and people with disabilities are eligible for transportation services. The organization services Elgin, Norfolk, and Oxford County, from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday. In some cases, weekend requests can be accommodated. Volunteer drivers, who are compensated for mileage, drive clients to medical appointments, shopping or social activities and programs, while providing a friendly visit on the way. The cost of the service is \$3 each way inside of Tillsonburg, plus \$1 for an additional stop, or \$0.38 per kilometer for trips outside of Tillsonburg.

Individuals who need wheelchair accessible vehicles can also contact the Multi-Service Centre. In the past, Tillsonburg did not have a local wheelchair accessible vehicle available to the community. Rather, all requests for a wheelchair accessible vehicle were filled through Red Cross. However, due to funding availability, it is estimated that only 40% of Tillsonburg residents requesting a wheelchair accessible vehicle were able to access one through Red Cross (The Tillsonburg & District Multi-Service Centre, personal communication, 2013). In December 2013 Stonebridge Community Services purchased a wheelchair accessible van through a grant from New Horizons for Seniors Program. Through their partnership with the Multi-Service Centre, it is anticipated that this purchase will increase access to accessible transportation in Tillsonburg.

The Multi-Service Centre reports that eligibility requirements set by their funding body, the South West Local Health Integration Network, places limitations on who they can serve. Additionally, because the program is volunteer-driven, while they go above and beyond to meet their clients' needs, at times they are not able to fulfill certain requests. For example, some residents have reported that it is particularly difficult to use the service for travel to work, both because of the volunteer nature of the program and its hours of operation. In order to meet this gap, the Multi-Service Centre's sister organization Stonebridge Community Services provides top-up transportation services.

Stonebridge Community Services

Stonebridge Community Services is a non-profit, fee-for-service extension of the Tillsonburg & District Multi-Service Centre. Stonebridge has no age limitations or requirements for its programs. They service the tri-county area, and are not limited by geographical boundaries. This means that Stonebridge is able to drive anyone, anywhere, without limitations.

Similar to the Multi-Service Centre, the transportation program at Stonebridge is volunteer-driven. Volunteer rides are booked two days in advance, and individuals

receiving services are invoiced monthly. Stonebridge also provides fee-for-service programs like accompaniment to medical appointments, blood tests, and picking up and dropping off prescriptions, which can help to ease transportation barriers.

Transportation services can be received to and from Mount Elgin or Tillsonburg for \$0.43 per kilometer. This means that in order for someone from Tillsonburg to attend a medical appointment in London (round trip of 119.4 km) it would cost \$51.34. As you can imagine, for an individual who is living on low-income, this cost is out of reach. As a non-profit, Stonebridge does not make money off of their transportation program. The main barrier for Stonebridge to decrease the cost of their service is funding or additional resources through collaboration.

The Tillsonburg & District Multi-Service Centre and Stonebridge Community Services were able to service all ride requests, over **550** drives, from August 1 to October 31, including one trip to Toronto.

Student Transportation Services: Ravin Coach Lines

F.L. Ravin Limited, commonly known as Ravin Coach Lines, was founded in the late 1940's. Over the years, the business has undergone many changes. Until June 2010, the Ravin fleet included more than 20 vehicles, a mix of school buses, mini buses, a wheelchair bus and mini vans. Presently, the company is downsized due to the current procurement guidelines for the Province of Ontario.

The government of Ontario transitioned to a request for proposal (RFP) process to procure student transportation. This means that various providers participate in a bidding process in order to become the student transportation provider of specific routes. This process led to several smaller transportation companies in Ontario losing several routes, including Ravin Coach Lines. This transition has led to a legal battle at the provincial level, where bus operators have received awards in their favour five times. Currently, there are legal battles in process trying to get the government to work with bus operators to find a system that is fair to operators of all sizes (F.L. Ravin Limited, personal communication, 2013).

Ravin Coach has bus routes in Thames Valley District School Board, London District Catholic School Board, and is one of the ten companies that transports for Southwestern Ontario Student Transportation Services. Buses are also used for charter work, including weddings, seniors, churches, family outings, and sports teams in Oxford, Norfolk, and Elgin counties. There are many benefits to the community in having Ravin Coach as the student transportation provider, including

local knowledge, local employment opportunities, and investment in the community.

Challenges that prevent Ravin Coach from providing additional transportation services in the area include a current shortage of school bus drivers, and time restrictions (meaning that if the bus were to be used for public transportation it could not be picking up passengers at school times, unless that driver was dedicated to a town bus run) (F.L. Ravin Limited, personal communication, 2013).

Client Transportation by Agencies

Many agencies across Oxford County have found ways to support the people who use their services with transportation. These services are not transportation programs in the sense that they are not available to the public; however, they are a response to the current lack of affordable and accessible transportation options.

Oxford County Human Services

Oxford County residents who are clients of Oxford County Human Services are eligible for transportation assistance for training and appointments, which includes bus passes or taxis for client meetings, medical transportation, including travel to methadone clinics, and employment related travel expenses for job placements and interviews.

Table 4: Total dollars spent by Oxford County Human Services on client transportation

Reason for Transportation	2012	2013
Training and Appointments	\$2,462.56	\$7,032.20
Medical Transportation	\$183,222.74	\$94,573.29*
Employment Related Travel	\$40,798.33	\$45,258.52
Total	\$226,483.63	\$146,864.01

* Indicates that numbers are not yet finalized as December invoices may not be fully accounted for

Source: Oxford County Human Services, personal communication, 2014

Tillsonburg accounts for 14.5% of Oxford County's population. If we assume that Tillsonburg also accounts for 14.5% of the dollars spent by Human Services each year on transportation, that would mean that in 2012, **\$32,840.13**, and in 2013, **\$21,295.28** was spent on Tillsonburg clients.

Canadian Mental Health Association, Oxford County Branch

From March-May 2013, the Canadian Mental Health Association, Oxford County Branch (CMHA) reports that their Tillsonburg staff drove clients a total of 14,493 kilometers, an average of 4,831 kilometers per month.

Table 5: Kilometers driven by Tillsonburg CMHA staff in three months in 2013

March 2013	April 2013	May 2013	Total
3,223 km	5,194 km	6,076 km	14,493 km

Source: Canadian Mental Health Association, Oxford County Branch, personal communication, 2013

Travelling 14,493 kilometers is equivalent to:

- Driving from Tillsonburg to Woodstock and back **197** times
- Driving from Tillsonburg to Ingersoll and back **303** times



It is also equivalent to:

- Two staff members driving from Tillsonburg to Woodstock and back every single day from March-May 2013
- Three staff members driving from Tillsonburg to Ingeroll and back every single day from March-May 2013

Not only is this a significant waste of dollars that could be spent on programs within CMHA, it is also a significant waste of the expertise and time of these staff members.

The majority of these kilometers, 38%, were accumulated driving within the Tillsonburg border. This was followed by 33% in trips to Woodstock, 11% driving to London, and 10% travelling to Ingersoll. Other destinations included other areas within Oxford County (Brownsville, Drumbo, Norwich, and Tavistock), Elgin County (Aylmer, Springfield), Ayr in Waterloo Region, Courtland in Norfolk County, and Paris in Brant County (Canadian Mental Health Association, Oxford County Branch, personal communication, 2013).

If we assume that staff are reimbursed \$0.45 per kilometer, a reasonable rate for a non-profit organization, in three months, this would have cost CMHA **\$6,521.85**. Using the average kilometers travelled from March to May 2013 (4,831 km), we can assume that each year, CMHA's Tillsonburg staff are reimbursed for approximately **57,972 km**, equaling **\$26,087.40**.

Community Living Tillsonburg

Community Living Tillsonburg has historically provided transportation supports to the individuals they support. The agency, funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services, was instrumental in the development of the town transit system that was in place from 2001 to 2005.

Transportation supports are provided to over 100 individuals on a regular basis, and they have several accessible vans that are used on a daily basis. Individuals pay a monthly fee of \$65 per month for in town transportation. There are also out of town fees based on the number of kilometers travelled. Although inadequate, ODSP Income Support provides funds for transportation costs in a person's monthly cheque.

Of the **\$176,000** spent each year by Community Living on transportation costs, including vehicle operation and maintenance, and mileage paid to staff for use of their vehicles, only \$35,000 is recovered in transportation fees (Community Living Tillsonburg, personal communication, 2014).

Community Living Tillsonburg is committed to working on solutions to transportation issues in rural communities.

VON Oxford

In June 2013, VON Oxford reported how their 39 Tillsonburg Adult Day Program attendees travel to the program. Seventeen clients get themselves to program or have family drop them off, 12 take a taxicab, 9 receive transportation from their Community Living support worker (three of who require accessible transportation), and one client uses the Tillsonburg & District Multi-Service Centre's service.

VON reports that they are beginning to see an increase in clients with complex needs and they anticipate that the need for accessible transportation will continue to grow. With the unequal distribution of seniors across Oxford County, this growth is particularly anticipated in the Tillsonburg area.

Other Agencies

There are many other agencies within Tillsonburg and Oxford County whose clients have transportation as a barrier. For example, Community Employment Services reports that of those seeking training, education, and employment through their organization, 47% see transportation as a barrier (Community Employment Services, personal communication 2013). Other organizations who have identified transportation as a barrier and provide some support to their clients include, but

are not limited to The Salvation Army's, Society Saint Vincent de Paul, and the Children's Aid Society of Oxford County.

Pilot Transportation Programs

Several transportation pilot projects have also taken place in Tillsonburg in the last year. These projects are described below.

Special Olympics Ontario: Tillsonburg Transportation Program

Special Olympics Ontario (SOO) Tillsonburg has identified specific athletes who need access to transportation to attend practices and events, and have developed a pilot program. Taxi rides are scheduled through Why Wait Taxi with up to four people per taxi. Cost varies according to the number of stops that the taxi makes, but the taxi becomes more cost efficient and affordable through the carpooling method.

Athletes pay a fixed cost to SOO Tillsonburg, and in turn, Why Wait Taxi bills SOO Tillsonburg once a month. At this time, SOO Tillsonburg subsidizes the cost of the taxi ride by 50%. In December 2013, it was reported that five athletes were using this service; however, this number may increase in the future (Special Olympics Ontario Tillsonburg, personal communication, 2013).

CAT CAB Coupons

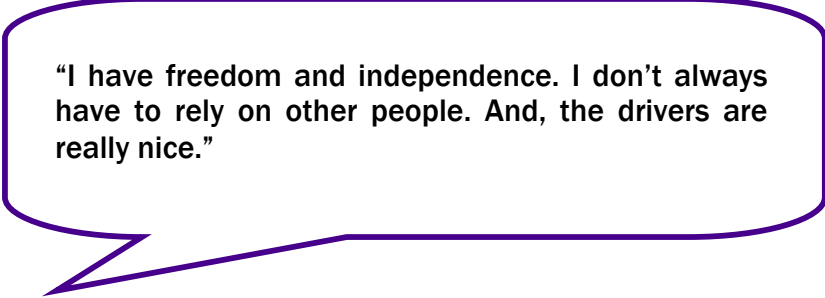
Community Advocates Tillsonburg (CAT) is a group of parents who have grown children with disabilities. The vision of CAT is a community that values its citizens with special needs. The mission of CAT is "to work to obtain for our citizens with special needs; jobs, transportation, supported housing, viable recreation and volunteer opportunities, respite for parents, lifelong satisfaction, and enduring friendships" (Community Advocates Tillsonburg, personal communication, 2013).

The goal of CAT CAB Coupons is to create subsidized transportation using current taxi services through a partnership with Why Wait Taxi company. People with disabilities that belong to Special Olympics Tillsonburg, the CAT group, or are supported by Community Living are able to purchase a coupon for five rides with Why Wait Taxi within Tillsonburg for \$10. These are the existing vouchers that Why Wait Taxi uses, but CAT offers a 75% subsidy on rides. This pilot project is in the very early stages, and so at this time, it is unknown whether or not this level of subsidy is sustainable. However, this level of subsidy means that individuals pay \$2 per ride, which many community members have described as an affordable price.

Once a coupon is purchased, the card owner is responsible for calling and booking a taxi ride. The phone number for Why Wait Taxi is provided on the coupon. Each time the coupon is used, the taxi driver marks the use of one ride. More than one

person may ride in the taxi to the same destination at the cost of one ride on the coupon.

Due to limited funds, the program will be reassessed monthly with the goal of running until at least the end of March 2014. At that time, if funds are available, it will be extended. In February 2014 it was reported that there were 13 individuals regularly using CAT CAB Coupons (Community Advocates Tillsonburg, personal communication, 2014). Matthew says he likes the coupons because,



“I have freedom and independence. I don’t always have to rely on other people. And, the drivers are really nice.”

This program is currently being funded by a community fundraiser, the 1st Annual Community Advocates Tillsonburg Scramble, which was held on July 27, 2013 at the Mount Elgin Golf Course. This fundraiser raised a total of \$6,800. The 2nd Annual tournament is scheduled for June 14, 2014 (Community Advocates Tillsonburg, personal communication, 2014).

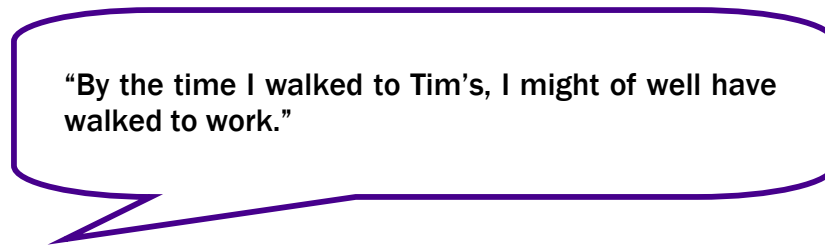
It is anticipated that as this program grows, change will occur. Future directions may include partnerships that allow for central purchasing of vouchers, increasing eligibility, a sliding scale cost structure, and increased coordination and administration support.

Work Transportation Pilot: The Tillsonburg Transit Initiative

On September 30, 2013, a pilot project aimed to improve access to employment for Tillsonburg residents who are supported by Employment Ontario Services was launched. The program offered affordable transportation to the industrial sectors of the Town.

Supported by many local agencies, the program was a collaboration between the Tillsonburg and District Multi-Service Centre and Why Wait Taxi. Five days a week, starting at 5:15 am, and covering all shift times, Why Wait Taxi picked up riders from the Tillsonburg Tim Hortons’ locations for \$4 per ride. The cost of the ride was covered for workers until they received their first paycheck. The cost of travel remained low because five riders shared the \$20 cab fare to get across town (Tillsonburg & District Multi-Service Centre, personal communication, 2013).

While creative, due to low ridership, when the pilot ended on December 6, 2013, it was not renewed. Feedback from the community indicates that the location pick-ups were not practical for some. One resident commented that,



Despite the end of this pilot project, the Multi-Service Centre remains committed to improving transportation.

Collaboration

Many of the above services and agencies are supportive of community efforts to develop transportation solutions, and are committed to collaboration to strengthen current resources and improve access and affordability to the community. Over 30 community partners met on July 16, 2013 to identify existing resources, gaps in service, and barriers to transportation in Tillsonburg and the surrounding area. The biggest strength identified was the interest and commitment in working towards a collaborative solution (please see Table 6).

Table 6: Community identified resources and barriers to developing a collaborative transportation solution in Tillsonburg

Resources	Barriers
Commitment to the development of a collaborative solution	Sharing maintenance and depreciation costs of vehicles
Switchboard and scheduling technology	Affordability of vehicle maintenance
Vehicles	Lack of funding
Volunteer rosters	Funding restrictions and boundaries
Fundraising experience	Lack of Provincial Gas Tax
Experience in prior transportation strategies	Lack of paid drivers
Knowledge of existing transportation barriers	Back-up plans if vehicles or drivers are unavailable
Knowledge of transportation programs in other rural communities	Volunteer burnout
	Tillsonburg's tri-county geography
	Little access to wheelchair accessible vehicles*

**Note that this was prior to Stonebridge Community Services purchase of an accessible van in December 2013*

Although the group could easily identify the challenges to developing a sustainable transportation strategy, the tone of the day was positive. Some commented that although transportation programs are costly, and tend not to make money, the cost of not having transportation is too high – moral implications, residents and employers leaving the community, people unable to receive proper health care, access education, or find and maintain employment. One participant remarked, “Let’s not sell ourselves, our agencies, or our community short.”

A discussion of priority groups determined that **affordable**, **accessible**, and **sustainable** transportation was a common link.

Affordability was discussed to mean cheaper than current alternatives and market value transportation. Accessibility was defined as a wheelchair accessible vehicle that has trained drivers who are well equipped to assist passengers and load assistive devices. Sustainable transportation was identified as a system that would outlive its pilot phase and see continued growth over the years. Seven priority groups were identified:

- Individuals living on low income
- Individuals seeking employment
- Individuals living with disabilities and high medical needs
- Seniors
- Youth
- Women
- Newcomers

Following this meeting, a survey was developed and distributed throughout the community and focus groups were held. The results are reported below.

Recent Research Initiatives

The following section will outline the most recent investigations into transportation within Tillsonburg. Community and agency consultations and surveys by the Social Planning Council Oxford, United Way Oxford, and the Town of Tillsonburg, as well as the Oxford County Transportation Master Plan have been included.

United Way Oxford

In March 2012, United Way Oxford released the report, “Oxford Transportation Strategy: Moving Ideas to Action.” The report was a summary of a meeting held on

March 21, 2012, where over sixty community stakeholders from Oxford County gathered to develop a Transportation Strategy for the County.

Five action groups were developed using community service providers and client input (United Way Oxford, 2012). The five action groups, including a brief description were:

- Taxi collaboration with service providers
 - To have a more efficient and coordinated service system
- Rural mobile hub: A collaboration
 - Providing services locally or in a centralized area where transportation is available
- Coordinated services through pooling of resources
 - Building capacity with existing resources
- Corporate green wheels
 - Workplace carpooling
- Long term strategy
 - A desirable, stable, and sustainable funding and operational model

Due to the lack of a dedicated staff person, these efforts lost their momentum. However, these efforts were taken on by the Social Planning Council Oxford in 2013. Due to the gap between leadership, these action groups, while informative, were not developed into working groups.

Social Planning Council Oxford Focus Groups

In 2013, the Social Planning Council Oxford, in partnership with Community Advocates Tillsonburg, met with Tillsonburg, South-West Oxford, and Norwich residents to talk about transportation challenges.

Overwhelmingly, residents without transportation described the experience as stressful, tiring, frustrating, and isolating. All talked about lack of transportation as limiting their social and employment opportunities. One individual described the experience as being cornered,

“People don’t care. To them, it’s just another cost on their taxes.”

“Not having transportation makes me feel substandard.”

and another said, “Not having transportation makes me feel substandard.” Community members who do not have reliable, affordable transportation do not feel cared for, “People don’t care. To them, it’s just another cost on their taxes.”

Residents talked about their challenges travelling within their town, Oxford County, and between counties. People

spoke about having trouble finding work that they would be able to get to safely and timely, attending appointments or job interviews, and travel for social and entertainment opportunities.

People talked about how lack of transportation negatively impacts their relationships, often feeling as though they are a burden to their friends and family. “You can only ask your friends and neighbours [for a ride] so many times. I’m too embarrassed to keep asking. People start to avoid you, and it can be confrontational with friends and family. I’m afraid to call them.” One community member said that they had been trying to get to Woodstock for two months, and hadn’t been able to coordinate with anyone to get there.

“You can only ask your friends and neighbours [for a ride] so many times. I’m too embarrassed to keep asking. People start to avoid you, and it can be confrontational with friends and family. I’m afraid to call them.”

“It sucks to rely on others because if you can’t find someone you miss appointments and sometimes you get charged for them.”

Some also talked about how expensive lack of transportation is. Available transportation options are not affordable to use regularly. “I am on a fixed income. I probably spend \$50-70 a month on cab fare... just going out and paying bills, getting groceries, and doctor’s appointments. I usually try to save up and go to two or three different places at once.” Residents spoke about incurring additional costs when they’re late or miss an appointment.

Some people spoke about the struggle to coordinate schedules, and the uncertainty of not knowing whether or not they would have a ride to get to work or appointments. “It sucks to rely on others because if you can’t find someone you miss appointments and sometimes you get charged for them.” Another resident spoke about the cost of getting to work, “Without a ride from family or friends, I spend almost two hours of my wages on taxi rides, then I give back half of my earnings to ODSP.” Another resident calculated that if he works four hours at minimum wage, he will have worked four hours for around \$4.

“Without a ride from family or friends, I spend almost two hours of my wages on taxi rides, and then I give back half of my earnings to ODSP.”

Not having reliable transportation can also impact employment. Community members talked about how you will get in trouble by some employers for being 15 minutes late, but that when you don’t own a vehicle, it is not always within your control to be on time. “Cabs aren’t dependable. Even if you have timed your calls [correctly], things come up.” Residents spoke about relying on walking to get to work, and the impact of bad weather, “...but you can’t pick and choose what days you go to work.”

People felt that access to transportation not only increases social and employment opportunities, but also makes them feel included in the community, and it provides freedom and independence, “I am able to manage my time better when I know I

“I am able to manage my time better when I know I have a way to get places.”

have a way to get places.” Another resident said that lack of transportation, “Makes me feel sad and not very included.” Community members spoke of the way in which they would participate in the community, through work, recreational activities like dances, London Knights games and other sports events, eating at restaurants, going to the community centre, and seeing a movie, if

they had transportation. Many talked about the reduction in stress that they would experience if they weren’t always looking for transportation.

Some community members talked about walking as their primary mode of transportation, but it was acknowledged that this is not an answer for all, “There are a lot of people who need it [transportation]. Certain individuals just need it. I can walk, but there are other people here that can’t.” A variety of issues can impact one’s ability to walk short and longer distances, including personal factors such as mobility, age, physical health, and external factors like weather, lack of snow or ice clearing, presence of sidewalks, day light, and dim lit street lighting. One participant said, “Winter is really hard to get around. People are always walking on the road. It’s not safe.”

“Winter is really hard to get around. People are always walking on the road. It’s not safe.”

Residents from the rural Townships of Norwich and South-West Oxford talked about the additional challenge of having no local taxi companies. As a result, those without transportation rely heavily on family and friends. They spoke about trouble getting groceries and attending medical appointments. Some talked about the difficulty of accessing food banks, clothing drives, and the backpack program that takes place at the beginning of each school year. Local churches are the main central support that many community members rely on to ensure that their basic needs are met.

A challenge that was uniquely described by rural residents was the difference in access to transportation between men and women. In some households, the man is the only one who drives, or there is only one vehicle that is primarily used by the man. Residents talked about struggling when their husbands were hospitalized for an illness, finding it extremely difficult to visit on a regular basis. Others talked about feeling isolated when they are at home without a vehicle and unable to “get out.”

When community members were asked how they envision a successful transportation strategy, three themes emerged: affordability, accessibility, and operational details. Residents spoke of an affordable option, with suggestions of

subsidies available to those on a fixed income, a sliding scale fee for service, and alternative billing options (for example, billed monthly for use). Some talked about purchasing a ticket that was valid for an entire day, others of a low cost per use, around \$1.50-\$2.00. Some residents spoke about finding it stressful to count money and stated that they prefer having a monthly pass.

Community members also spoke about accessible transportation, vehicles that have space for wheelchairs, and other mobility devices, and drivers who are able to assist individuals in getting in and out of the vehicle. People expressed that they wanted a service that would do special stops off of the main route for those who have mobility issues, or safety concerns. Some individuals talked about needing assistance in carrying heavy items like groceries to their doors.

Other features of a transportation strategy that community members expressed interest in included having a fixed route with a schedule, having the ability to both text and call to inquire about the transit schedule, as well as access information through a website. However, many residents also believed that booking a ride in advance would be just as easy.

Residents discussed the importance of a route that covers a large area of the town, and many mentioned that it would be most useful if it crossed county boundaries.

“From my house you cross boundaries in two to three minutes in either direction.”

“From my house you cross boundaries in two to three minutes in either direction.” One community member spoke of shopping at the Norfolk mall grocery store, as it is the most affordably priced in the area. Others spoke about the hours of operation, commenting that they need transportation for their shift work schedule, including working on holidays. One community member suggested that a partnership between service providers, where one card can be used through multiple providers would be

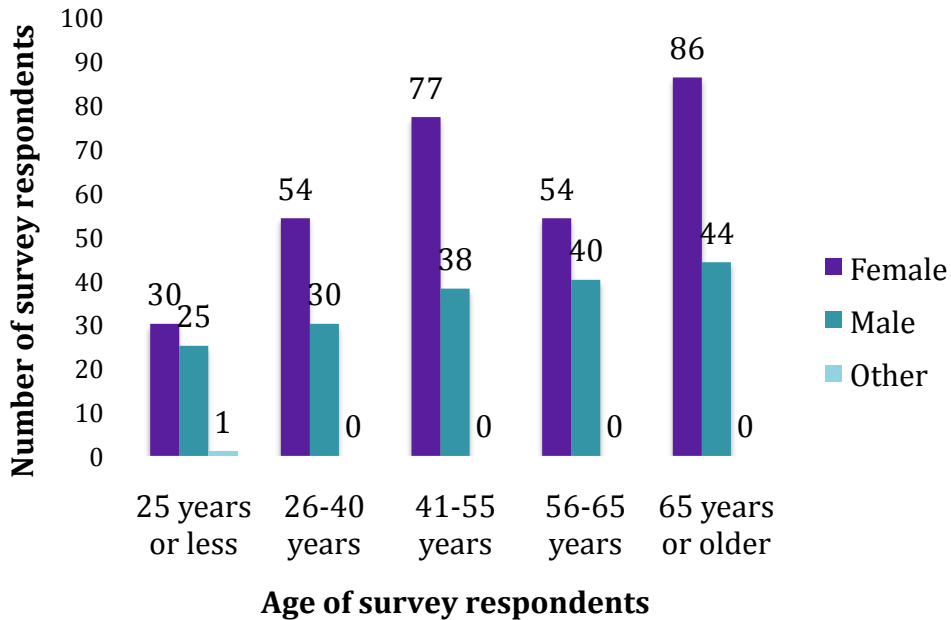
helpful. For example, if a scheduled route is not running past a certain time, the same card could be used to get a cab ride to their destination.

Social Planning Council Oxford Survey

In the fall of 2013, the Social Planning Council Oxford, the Tillsonburg & District Multi-Service Centre, Stonebridge Community Services, and Community Advocates Tillsonburg released a transportation survey throughout the community. Surveys were distributed throughout Tillsonburg, including at the Community Services and Career Fair held on October 3 at the Tillsonburg Town Centre Mall, two of Oxford County Public Health’s influenza shot clinics on October 22 and 29, 2013 at the Tillsonburg Community Centre, and through service agencies and churches. Surveys were also collected online, distributed through social media, as well as email lists, such as the Tillsonburg Chamber. The survey is included as Appendix 2.

A total of 526 community members filled out the survey. Of those who filled out the survey, 57% were female, 34% were male, <1% reported their gender as other, and 9% did not report their gender. Seventy percent of the respondents were over the age of 40. A more detailed breakdown of age and gender of survey respondents is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Age and gender of survey respondents

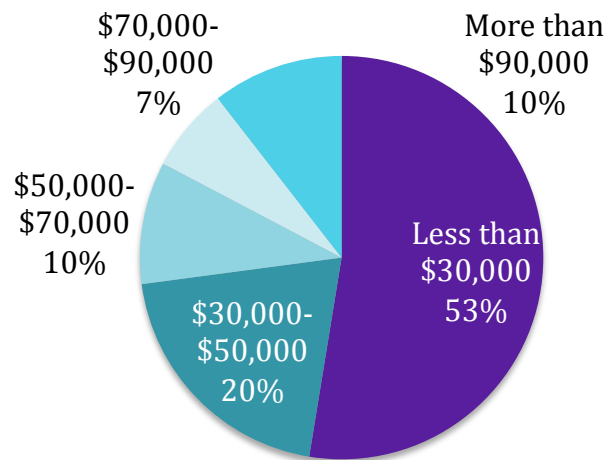


**Note that 47 (8.9%) of respondents did not report their age or gender*

Thirty-eight percent of survey respondents reported being married, 22% single, 11% widowed, 11% divorced or separated, 8% living with another, and 10% of respondents did not report their marital status.

Figure 2: Household income of survey respondents

More than half of the survey respondents had a household income of \$30,000 or less (please see Figure 2). While this proportion is not reflective of the general population of Tillsonburg, it does communicate the importance of transportation to this portion of our community. Households whose incomes are less



**Note that 98 (18.6%) of respondents did not report household income*

than \$30,000 are most likely to feel the impact of a lack of affordable transportation. It is likely that the impact lack of transportation has on their daily lives increased their willingness to participate in the survey.

Survey respondents were asked what mode of transportation they currently use. While just under half (47%) currently own a car, others reported various modes. Some respondents who indicated that they use a taxi also commented that their use was relatively infrequent due to the high cost. The category 'rely on others' includes individuals who rely on family and friends for rides. Other sources of transportation include both public and client-only agency transportation services. The transportation currently used by survey respondents is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Modes of transportation currently used by survey respondents

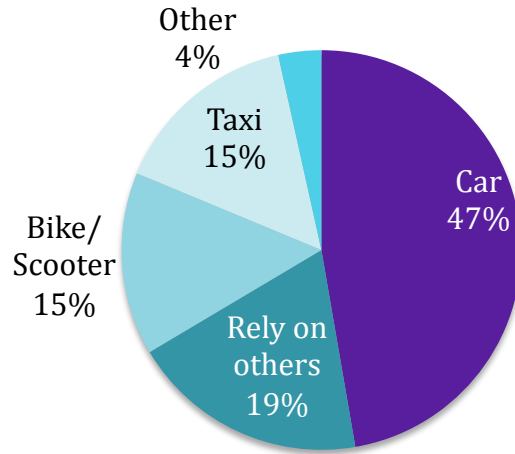
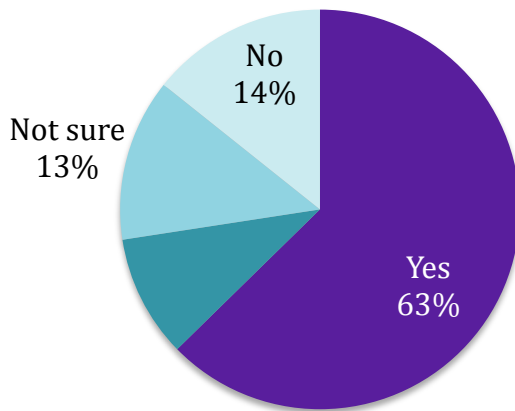


Figure 4: Anticipated use of public transportation in Tillsonburg by survey respondents



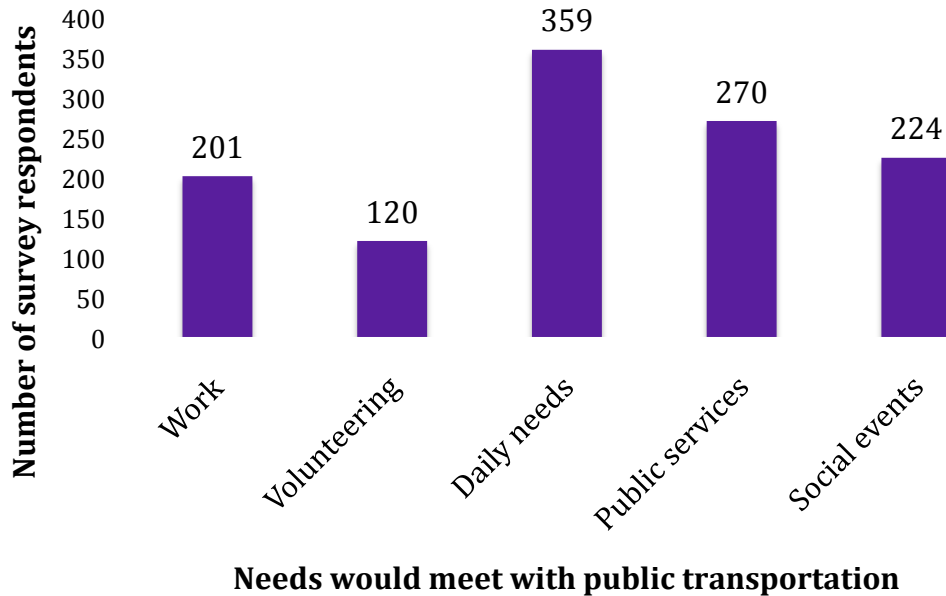
The majority of survey respondents, 63%, indicated that they would use public transportation in Tillsonburg if it were available to them. An additional 10% reported that they would use it seasonally. Of the 526 individuals who responded to the survey, only 74 individuals (14%) definitively said that they would not use public transportation. Please see Figure 4.

**Note that 1 (0.2%) of respondents did not report whether they would use public transportation in Tillsonburg*

When asked what survey respondents would use public transportation for, 475 individuals responded. Many respondents chose multiple categories, with daily

needs and public services being the most common responses, at 76% and 57% of respondents selecting these categories. Please see Figure 5.

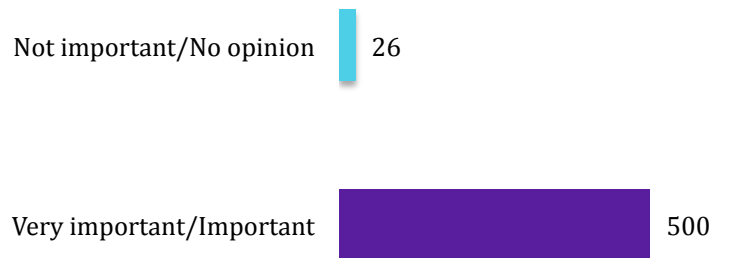
Figure 5: Survey respondents would use public transportation to meet the following needs



We asked survey respondents how much they would spend on a one-way trip inside of Tillsonburg for transportation. Respondents’ answers did not show a clear preference, and no relationship was observed between cost and household income, perceived importance of transportation, or whether or not the individual reported that they would use transportation. For example, higher income earners were not more likely to select a higher acceptable cost than lower income earners. There was a general trend of respondents preferring lower costs than higher costs. Of the 526 survey respondents, 30% selected \$2, 27% selected \$3, 25% selected \$4, and 16% selected \$5.

The vast majority of the 526 survey respondents (95%) perceive that access to public transportation in Tillsonburg is either very important or important. Please see Figure 6.

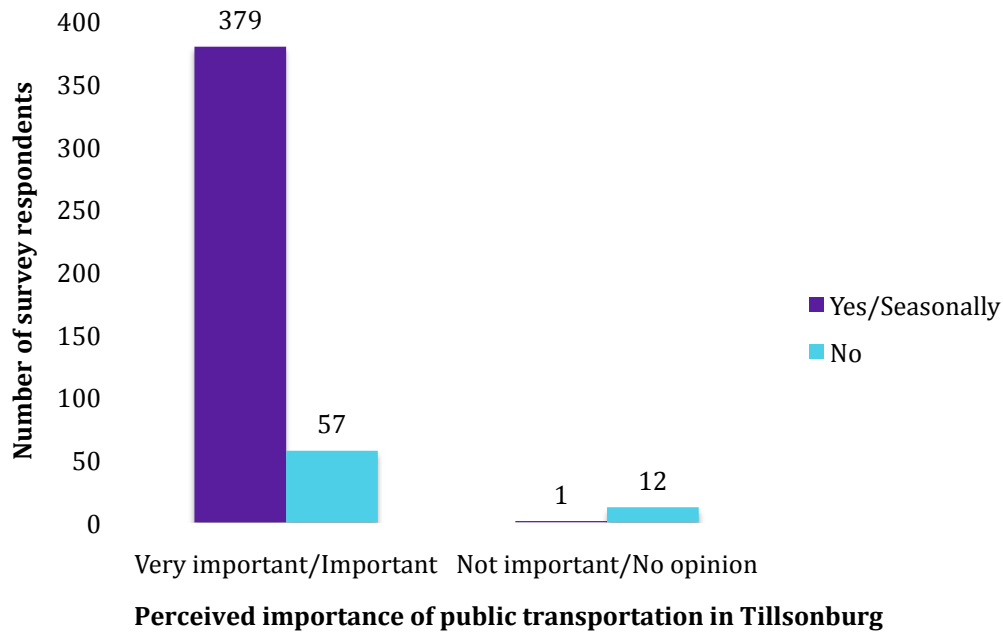
Figure 6: The perceived importance of public transportation in Tillsonburg by survey respondents



0 100 200 300 400 500 600

There were some observed relationships between survey questions, which means that survey respondents who responded to a specific question one way were more likely to respond similarly to another question. For example, survey respondents who responded that they would use public transportation if it was available to them were more likely than those who said they would not use public transportation to give a higher value to public transportation (measured through perceived importance of public transportation). Please see Figure 7.

Figure 7: Perceived importance of transportation in Tillsonburg vs. Predicted use of public transportation in Tillsonburg



**Note that the 77 (14.6%) individuals who responded that they were 'not sure' if they would use transportation were not included*

Survey respondents who currently do not own a car were also more likely than those who currently do own a car to report that the availability of public transportation is either very important or important. None of the survey respondents who currently do not own a car felt that the availability of public transportation is either not important, or that they have no opinion. Please see Figure 8.

Finally, survey respondents whose annual household income is less than \$50,000 a year were more likely than those whose annual household income is more than \$50,000 a year to report that the availability of public transportation is either very important or important. Please see Figure 9.

Figure 8: Perceived importance of public transportation in Tillsonburg vs. Current status of car ownership

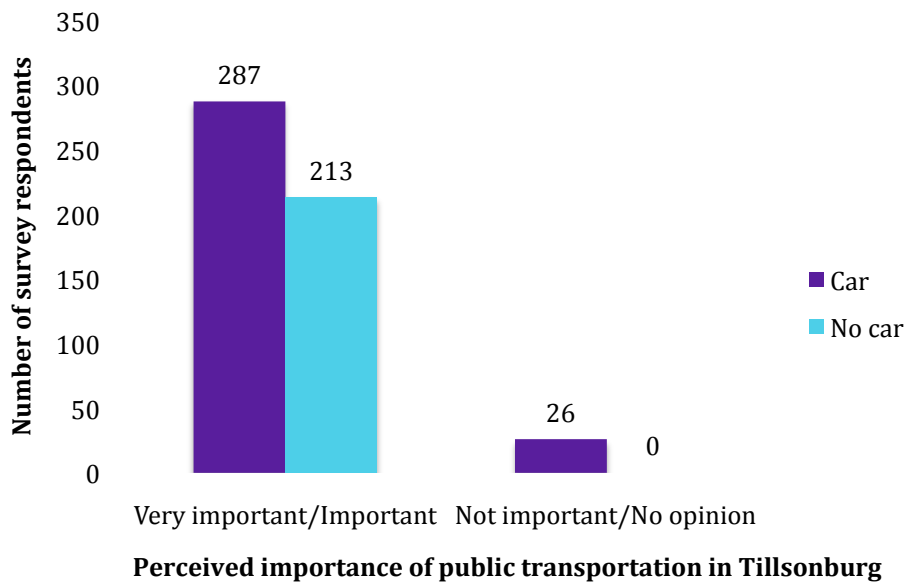
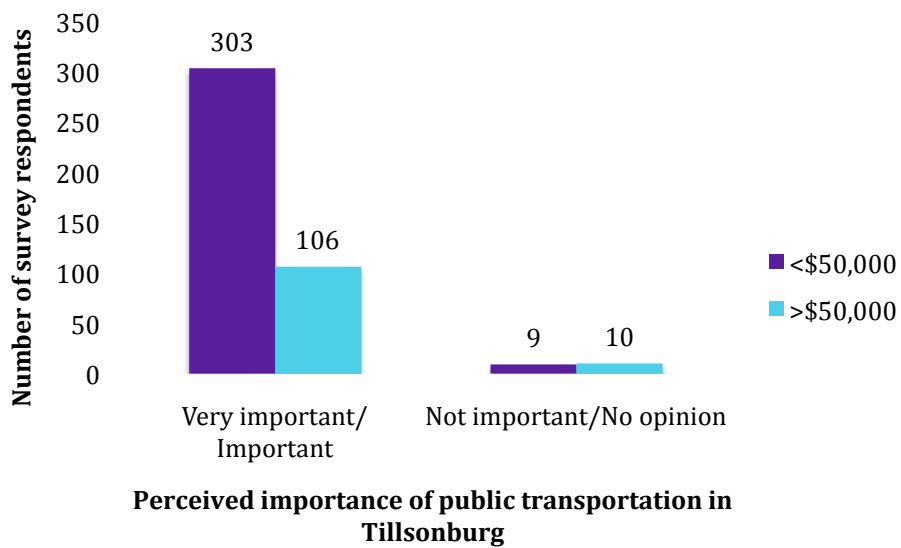


Figure 9: Perceived importance of public transportation vs. Annual household income



**Note that 98 (18.6%) survey respondents did not report their household income*

Regardless of these relationships:

- **83%** of survey respondents who said that they would not use transportation
- **92%** of survey respondents who currently own a car, and
- **91%** of survey respondents who reported an annual household income of greater than \$50,000

Still believe that access to public transportation in Tillsonburg is either **very important** or **important**.



It is important to recognize that the majority of our decision makers fall into the car owning, household income of \$50,000 or greater categories. Those who are granted these privileges must recognize that their viewpoint on public transportation might vary from many of their constituents. The decisions that they make will have a real impact, whether positive or negative, on those who they represent.

It is essential that while decisions on public transportation are being made, **everyone** in our community is given an **equal voice**.

Town of Tillsonburg Taxicab Survey

A Taxicab survey, developed by the Town of Tillsonburg, was conducted in early 2013. The survey asked five questions (please see Appendix 3) (Town of Tillsonburg, 2013). It is unknown how many community members responded to the survey. The Town reports that the survey showed that there was not a need for an accessible taxicab service in Tillsonburg. Without knowing the total number of community members who responded to this survey it is difficult to make any conclusions, however, it is possible that those who require the use of accessible transportation were not represented by survey respondents.

Oxford County Planning

In 2005, a study was initiated to work on a 20-year Transportation Master Plan for Oxford County. It was published in 2009. The report gives direction on future policies, services, and infrastructure that would be beneficial to the county, and provides a framework for establishing a sustainable and environmentally friendly growth management strategy (AECOM Canada Ltd., 2009).

Chapter eight of the County of Oxford Official Plan includes the Town of Tillsonburg Land Use Policies. This section focuses on developing transportation that utilizes multiple modes, is safe and effective, and which moves people and goods into and through the Town. Among other things, this plan addresses increasing ease, safety and use of active modes of transportation, such as bicycling and walking (County of Oxford, no date).

While these reports do examine community values, environmental considerations, financial constraints, and other societal trends that impact the public's perception of multi-modal transportation, their focus is largely on improving current transportation routes and patterns, rather than expanding accessibility overall.

What's Been Done Elsewhere?

Communities across Ontario are in various stages of creating transportation programs to meet the needs of their residents. In this section, I will briefly describe several community transportation strategies.

The Rural Overland Utility Transit (TROUT)

Centered in Bancroft, Ontario, TROUT uses a four-part public transit service model to meet the transportation needs of the community:

Scheduled Regional Route Service, Door-to-Door Service, Special Destination Service, and

Individualized Service. The regional population is

15,000, and the area served is 3380 square kilometers. TROUT's Blended Flex Public Transit Service accommodates their demographic and geographic challenges.



The Scheduled Regional Route Service is a fixed bus stop route service throughout the region. Regional pick-ups are made in the mornings, returning riders in the afternoon. Daily route service in Bancroft connects riders from throughout the region to most businesses and all medical centers in the town.

Door-to-door service is blended into TROUT's regularly scheduled route service, and is available to adults who are 55 years or older, and adults with physical disabilities.

This means that TROUT transit drivers incorporate door-to-door service pick-ups into their regular route times and locations. Although this requires drivers to maneuver some organizational challenges, to date, it has been a very successful model and quite easily managed (TROUT, personal communication, 2013).

Special destination services are also available to facilitate access to local special events, attractions, and other destinations that are off the regular route and time schedules. This component of the system is particularly important to help promote the emotional and mental health and wellbeing of riders.

Riders who require wheelchair accessible transportation outside the regularly scheduled route service can access the individualized public transit service. This service is often used for medical appointments or transportation home from the hospital.

In 2012, a report released by Community Care North Hastings put forward an alternative funding formula for TROUT, based on a total private dwelling model, as opposed to a population based model. A total private dwelling model means that each household is asked to contribute a total dollar amount slated for public transportation. The amount can be added to tax bills as a separate line item clearly visible to ratepayers. This report recommended a contribution of \$11.72 per household. The author of the report, Gord Macdonald said, "This recommendation provides a fair and equitable financial formula across all municipalities in determining their annual municipal contribution. Municipal contributions are important because public transportation is for everyone and is available to everyone in all municipalities" (Shaw, 2012).

Ride Norfolk

In October 2011 a fixed route service throughout Norfolk County was launched. One bus, with the capacity for 16 passengers and two wheelchairs serviced all "urban" centers of the county. Sharp Bus Lines of Simcoe, a major provider of transportation for local Catholic and public school students was named the service provider (Sonnenberg, 2011).



The fares are a flat rate of \$6 for out of town rides, and \$2 for in town rides. The service is available from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm Monday to Friday. There is no weekend or holiday service. Not all areas of the county receive service every day. Simcoe, where the majority of services, shopping and other amenities are, is used as the hub of the service, and has daily bus service.

In February 2012, changes were made to improve the service. Changes included the addition of new stops, routes and schedules, and changes to the marketing strategy.

Changes were based on ridership data and public feedback. In early 2013, the service again underwent changes, when Cox Transportation of London and St. Thomas replaced Sharp Bus Lines of Simcoe. Cox is operating the shuttle at a cost of \$45 an hour, compared to the \$117 an hour Sharp Bus Lines was charging (Sonnenberg, 2013).

Wellington Transportation Services

Wellington Transportation Services is a collaborative network of community service providers that believes every resident of Wellington County should have access to transportation supports appropriate to their needs. The service is housed at the Community Resource Centre of North and Centre Wellington.



In 2004, when the need for increased transportation services in the community was identified, rather than develop a new transportation service, work began to develop a collaborative model that integrated existing services. Participating service providers include Community Resource Centre of North and Centre Wellington, East Wellington Community Services, Fergus-Elora Seniors Transportation, Family & Children's Services of Guelph and Wellington County, VON Canada, and North Wellington Senior Council. Clients seeking transportation services contact the Wellington Transportation Service hub at the Community Resource Centre, who then directs the client to the appropriate provider.

The transportation service is available to residents of Centre, North or East Wellington who do not have access to transportation and meet eligibility criteria. Target populations include seniors, adults with disabilities, and individuals and families living on low incomes. The service operates 7 days a week, although rides must be arranged during office hours from Monday to Friday, and requires at least 48 hours notice. It is a volunteer based program, and so no ride request can be guaranteed, although, best efforts are made to fulfill all requests.

Rides, which are fully accessible, can be arranged for medical, social services, or legal appointments, social events and visiting, and errands of daily living, such as grocery shopping or banking. Out of town transportation is also available.

The Community Resource Centre, a partner in the Wellington Transportation Services is fully funded by the County of Wellington. The Community Resource Centre receives \$60,000 for a 1.5 FTE transportation coordinators, as well as up to \$120,000 per year for mileage reimbursement (volunteer drivers are reimbursed \$0.45 per kilometer). Money is reimbursed for what is spent, so funding could be less than \$120,000 depending on service demand. As part of the funding agreement with the county, the Community Resource Centre acts as the central referral point for Wellington Transportation Services. The other partner agencies of Wellington

Transportation Services have their own funding structures, and as a result, also have various fees for service (Community Resource Centre of North and Centre Wellington, personal communication, 2013).

The program reports that they provide approximately 200 rides each month, with an average cost per month of \$10,000 for volunteer reimbursement (United Way Oxford, 2012). Approximately two thirds of rides are for medical reasons, while other drives are provided for Ontario Works and Ontario Disability appointments, court appointments, food bank visits, family visits, starting a new job, and training and education.

Some challenges reported by the program include: customer service being provided by volunteers, attendance at volunteer training, sorting out car seat responsibilities (driver vs. parent responsibility), unexpected requests, the cost of on-going rides, and ensuring the safety of volunteer drivers (United Way Oxford, 2012).

Quinte Access

The mission of Quinte Access is to provide specialized transportation service to persons with disabilities and seniors so they may participate in all of life's activities. Initiated in 1990, the program was designed specifically to



meet the need of accessible transportation for people with disabilities, and service began with one accessible van donated by Easter Seals. A combination fixed and on-demand model, this service provides both specialized service for persons with disabilities and seniors, and public transit, available to anyone, for the City of Quinte West.

Specialized service is a door-to-door service, and operates Monday to Friday from 7 am to 6 pm. Evening, weekend, and holiday service are available upon request, but are provided on a first come first serve basis, and are dependent on driver and vehicle availability. Bookings must be made 24 hours in advance, and between 8:30 am and 4:30 pm, Monday to Friday. Service is available for medical appointments, employment, education, social events and visiting, recreation, and daily errands, such as shopping. Transportation to medical appointments and for individuals with mobility issues who cannot access alternate means of transportation are considered priorities. The cost of specialized service is based on a zone fare model.

Public transit runs Monday to Friday from 6:00 am to 7:30 pm and Saturday's from 9:00 am to 4:30 pm. It does not run on Sundays or holidays. Public transit follows a route with scheduled stops.

While navigating many challenges, including reduced funding, and increased demand for services, ridership has increased from 5,200 in the 1998-1999 year to 29,223 in 2012. In the same years, the number of vehicles has increased from three to 11 in order to meet this need (Quinte Access, personal communication, 2013).

The program is funded in a variety of ways, including rider fares, United Way of Quinte, the City of Quinte West, the Municipality of Brighton, the County of Prince Edward, Hastings County Social Services, donations and bequests, fundraising, Provincial Gas Tax, and the Ontario Trillium Foundation. In 2011, the operating costs of the programs were \$673,300 for specialized services, and \$342,609 for public transit (Quinte Access, personal communication, 2013).

Conclusion

Public transportation is an economic driver. It provides and supports employment, promotes spending, increases community belonging, and reduces health costs by keeping people active and in their homes. Public transportation strengthens and builds more inclusive communities.

At first glance, the financial cost of public transit can act as an inhibitor of action. However, the costs of not having public transit are far more costly to our community. Lack of transportation hinders the work of our social service sector by draining its financial resources, staff time, and expertise. Lack of transportation also has an incredible social cost to the community. We need to shift the way we think of public transportation. Transportation services don't make money – not in Canada's largest cities, and not in rural areas. Once we can shift our thinking, we can recognize that in the same way that paving roads doesn't directly link to incoming dollars, the benefits that it does provide far outweigh the financial cost. Public transportation is a valuable investment that we need to make in Tillsonburg, and Oxford County. Let's stop making excuses, and start making change.

Recommendations

- 1) A transportation system needs active municipal support, including financial. The vast majority of successful rural transportation programs are supported financially by municipal or regional government. Additionally, in order to tap into the Provincial gas tax rebate, municipal support is needed. Even small financial contributions from municipalities can make a large difference in the amount a community receives in their rebate. The gas tax program provides sustainable transit funding to municipalities, although there are some guidelines to what types of programs meet eligibility for the rebate. These eligibility requirements need to be explored as part of the planning process.

- 2) We need to continue to build on our community's strengths. Stonebridge Community Services is a non-profit that has existing transportation programs that cross geographical boundaries, and are not bound to funding guidelines that restrict eligibility requirements. This organization could act as a center for a transportation strategy that is based on collaboration.
- 3) We need multiple sector involvement. Involvement from government, the social service sector, and the private sector will allow us to build the strongest and most effective transportation strategy. Exploring creative partnerships is essential to success.
- 4) We need active community involvement in an iterative process that moves from planning, to implementation, to evaluation and reflection, and back to planning. To start, a steering committee, made up and lead by community members is essential. The development of sub-committees, each led by a community member may follow.
- 5) Future plans should consider the development of partnerships with the other municipalities and townships inside of Oxford County. Financial support from all areas of the county could expand a transportation program and allow for the benefits of transportation to be experienced by all Oxford County residents. Additionally, a tri-county location means that a tri-county solution is ideal. Partnerships across counties should be considered in the future.

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Appendix 1

Social Planning Network of Ontario statement on the National Household Survey

The voluntary National Household Survey (NHS) has produced lower quality data than the mandatory long-form Census it has replaced. The Social Planning Network of Ontario only uses NHS data when higher quality data is not available.

Statistics Canada has said their evaluations of NHS data “support the general reliability of the data at the national, provincial and territorial levels” but they have not extended this confidence to using NHS data at the community level. They have noted that “risk of error in NHS estimates increases for lower levels of geography and smaller populations.” Due to the increase in error at the local level compared to previous Census data, Statistics Canada has released very few NHS data tables for smaller geographies like municipalities and neighbourhoods.

Statistics Canada has also cautioned against doing historical comparisons between NHS and Census data because the data was collected differently.

Good quality data about demographics, social and economic conditions at the local level is essential for social planning and research, including the design and delivery of public services.

The cancellation of the mandatory long form Census has resulted in a significant loss of reliable data that will greatly reduce the ability of residents to understand their own communities. This critical data gap will also affect the quality and cost-effectiveness of the services residents use for years to come. The Social Planning Network of Ontario with its partners at the local, provincial and national levels will continue to bring attention to this major data gap and to call for the return of a full mandatory Census.

Appendix 2

Tillsonburg Transportation Survey

1. For the general public to have access to public transportation in Tillsonburg it is:
 - Very important
 - Important
 - No opinion
 - Not important

 2. I would use public transportation if it was available to me:
 - Yes
 - No
 - Seasonally (winter)
 - Not sure

 3. For one way travel inside of Tillsonburg, I would be willing to pay (choose all that apply):
 - \$2
 - \$3
 - \$4
 - \$5
- *Note that a one way taxi fare in Tillsonburg currently costs \$8.
4. I would use public transportation in Tillsonburg for the following reasons (choose all that apply):
 - Work
 - Volunteering
 - To meet daily needs (e.g. groceries, hair cut)
 - Social events
 - Public services (e.g. health care, social services)

 5. How do you currently get around Tillsonburg?
 - I own a car
 - Rely on family and friends
 - Taxi
 - Bicycle/Scooter
 - Other (Multi-Service Centre, Stonebridge, Community Living, Red Cross, etc.)

6. What is your gender?
- Female
 - Male
 - Other
7. What is your age?
- 25 or under
 - 26-40
 - 41-55
 - 56-65
 - 65 or older
8. What is your marital status?
- Single
 - Living with another
 - Married
 - Separated
 - Divorced
 - Widowed
9. What is your current annual household income?
- Less than \$30,000
 - \$30,000-\$50,000
 - \$50,000-\$70,000
 - \$70,000-\$90,000
 - More than \$90,000

Appendix 3

Town of Tillsonburg: Taxicab Survey

1. Do you use taxicabs in Tillsonburg?
Yes No

2. Do you or someone you know require the use of an on-demand accessible taxi in Tillsonburg?
Yes No

3. Have you or someone you know previously requested the use of an accessible taxicab in Tillsonburg?
Yes No

4. How often would you or someone you know use an accessible taxicab in Tillsonburg?
Daily
Once a week
More than once a week
Once a month
More than once a month

5. Do you feel there is a need for on-demand accessible taxicabs in Tillsonburg?
No
Yes, one accessible on-demand taxicab
Yes, two accessible on-demand taxicabs
Yes, three accessible on-demand taxicabs
Yes, four accessible on-demand taxicab