



Working together with our community

Council-In-Committee Meeting – November 13, 2024

Subject: Ride Norfolk On-Demand Software Extension
Report Number: CD-24-132
Division: Community Development
Department: Economic Development
Ward: All Wards
Purpose: For Decision

Recommendation(s):

That Staff Report CD 24-132 Re: Ride Norfolk On-Demand Software Extension be received for information;

AND THAT Council approve a single source extension for the Ride Norfolk On-Demand Software with Blaise Transit.

AND THAT Council authorizes a single source supply as outlined in Norfolk County Purchasing Policy CS-02, Section 4.8.4 with Blaise Transit for a twelve (12) month term commencing January 1, 2025 and ending December 31, 2025 to provide a Transportation on Demand (ToD) Software Platform which shall include a public user Customer-facing mobile application, an Operator-facing Application, an Administrative Dashboard, and an integrated Reporting System to optimize the County's public transportation services;

AND THAT Community Development in collaboration with Purchasing will develop and issue a competitive bid to market prior to the end of the single source extension to ensure the continuity of services for January 1, 2026.

AND FURTHER THAT Council authorizes the Director, Strategic Innovation-Economic Development and the Public Transportation and Business Development Coordinator to negotiate an agreement with Blaise Transit for the provision of an On-Demand transit software solution for the 2025 calendar year.

Executive Summary:

Staff Report CD-24-132 provides information for Council consideration in relation to extending the On-Demand Transit Software contract with Blaise Transit. Staff are seeking Council's approval to renew the agreement with Blaise Transit to provide Norfolk County with seamless services for the 2025 calendar year.

Discussion:

Background

Traditionally a fixed-route service, Ride Norfolk entered into a one-year Pilot with Blaise Transit for on-demand transit software for the period from May 1, 2023 – May 1, 2024. This agreement was extended May 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024 to allow for seamless service while awaiting confirmation of potential grant funding. While that funding has been approved, extending the current agreement aligns with the completion of the Norfolk Transit Master Plan, currently on track for Q2 2025, as well as ensures a seamless service for riders and our service contract provider.

2023 Pilot

Ride Norfolk launched a one-year on-demand service pilot on May 1, 2023, with Blaise Transit. Phase 1 of the pilot saw ride booking become available on the fixed Brantford routes, allowing riders to request trips through a mobile app, website, or over the phone by selecting a pickup point and destination. Phase two launched on July 17, 2023, with the service removing all local fixed schedules and allowing riders to book their trip between any existing bus stops.

The pilot was established in order to gain new insight into travel patterns and open travel options within the County, all with the goal of increasing ridership and improving service availability.

Service Provider and Customer Service

Ride Norfolk has contracted Voyago as the service provider for transit services. Within this agreement, Voyago offers a customer service call centre for riders to obtain information and book trips. Voyago also oversees the services of neighbouring systems, all of which use the Blaise Software platform. Retraining drivers and call centre agents on a new platform will take a great deal of time. In an effort to reduce costs and maintain consistency for riders and contractors, it is recommended to continue with the Blaise Software for the upcoming calendar year.

Project Data

Ridership has increased by 43% in the first eight (8) months of 2024 compared with 2023. This represents a 126% increase in ridership compared to that same time period in 2022. Over 37 new bus stops have been installed since launching the project, significantly increasing service availability to underserved areas of the County and within Simcoe.

Ride Norfolk underwent a comprehensive user fee review in 2023 with a number of new pass offerings and fee increases to expand the revenue base supporting the service.

Currently, the application for a grant to aid in the funding of this technology has been approved. As part of that application, Norfolk County requested funding for two years of on-demand service software to support further data collection for service review.

Financial Services Comments:

The Approved 2024 Levy Supported Operating Budget contains an allocation of \$26,000 for Transit Technology and On-Demand Software costs. Staff have secured grant funding worth 80% of the On-Demand Software costs for 2025. Based on the total cost of the 2024 contract extension of \$20,000 (incl. net HST) from May to December, staff are confident that there are sufficient funds available to accommodate a single source contract with Blaise Transit in 2025. Future budgets will be adjusted as necessary.

Interdepartmental Implications:

Purchasing Services

Purchasing staff have reviewed the report and advise that Norfolk County Policy CS-02, Section 4.8.4 requires all single source procurements to be authorized prior to purchase through resolution of Council. Single source supply is defined where there is more than one vendor able to supply the goods or service but for reasons of function or service, one supplier is recommended for consideration and the purchase will be made without a competitive bidding process. Further, Purchasing staff will work together with the Community Development Division to develop and issue a competitive bidding opportunity to the marketplace in accordance with CS-02 Purchasing Policy.

Consultation(s):

Consultation on this report included By-Law, Clerks, Purchasing and Finance.

Strategic Plan Linkage:

This report aligns with the 2022-2026 Council Strategic Priority Connecting Norfolk - Bringing the community together with cultural, physical and technological linkages.

Explanation: Facilitating innovative solutions to create and expand our physical mobility linkages to bring Norfolk together. Improving how Norfolk communicates and delivers services to the community, both digitally and in-person.

Conclusion:

Staff are recommending a single source extension to the On-Demand Transit Pilot until December 31, 2025. If approved, staff will negotiate an extension of the current agreement with Blaise Transit to ensure Norfolk residents experience seamless service through the customer service call centre (provided by the service Contractor) and dates align with the final report of the Transit Master Plan.

Attachment(s):

- N/A

Approval:

Approved By:
Al Meneses, CAO

Reviewed By:
Brandon Sloan, General Manager, Community Development
John Regan, EcD(F), CEcD, Director, Strategic Innovation and Economic Development

Prepared By:
Blair Sylvester, Public Transportation and Business Development Coordinator