



# HURON SHORES AREA TRANSIT

Huron Shores Area Transit operates a local and long-distance public transit bus service linking Lambton Shores, South Huron, North Middlesex, Bluewater, and Kettle & Stony Point First Nation with each other and Sarnia, London, Goderich and Strathroy.

## Annual Report 2024

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Municipality of Lambton Shores



**SET YOURSELF FREE  
WITH  
HURON SHORES AREA TRANSIT**

# Contents

Huron Shores Area Transit.....	2
VISION .....	1
Southwest Community Transit (SCT) Members.....	1
SCT Advocacy Efforts.....	2
2024 Overview .....	3
Goal: Increase Ridership .....	3
Route 1: Sarnia to Grand Bend via Lambton Shores.....	3
Route 2: London to Grand Bend via South Huron .....	4
Route 3: Grand Bend to Goderich via Bluewater .....	4
Goal: Increase Revenue .....	4
Fare Revenue .....	4
Advertising Revenue .....	5
Goal: Increase Awareness & Promotion .....	6
Goal: Increase Customer Service Quality.....	7
Other Initiatives .....	8
Bus Shelter Illumination Project .....	8
Route & Bus Stop Changes.....	8
Passenger Polls.....	9
Social Agency Smart Card .....	9
Lambton Shores Extends Funding for Huron Shores Area Transit .....	9
Appendix .....	10
Table 1: Bus Stop Usage - Total of On & Off .....	10

# Huron Shores Area Transit

Launched December 2020, Huron Shores Area Transit (HSAT) operates a local and long-distance public transit bus service linking Lambton Shores, South Huron, North Middlesex, Bluewater, and Kettle & Stony Point First Nation with each other and Sarnia, London, Goderich and Strathroy. The fully accessible service was made possible by a \$3.3-million grant from Ontario's Community Transportation Grant Program.

The service area has a population of 37,686 (2021 Census) and covers 1,780 km<sup>2</sup> (687 sq. mi.). HSAT operates four routes with two 20-person buses (and two spare buses), all of which offer wheelchair lifts and carry up to two bikes. The route network has 53 bus stops, one of which is a flex stop enabling passengers to connect with intercity buses heading to Toronto, Kitchener, Montreal and other cities. It shares five bus stops with London Transit, Sarnia Transit and Strathroy-Caradoc Intercommunity Transit, providing passenger access to those transit systems and other modes of travel (train and plane).



**Population**



**Area Served**



**Routes**



**Bus Stops**



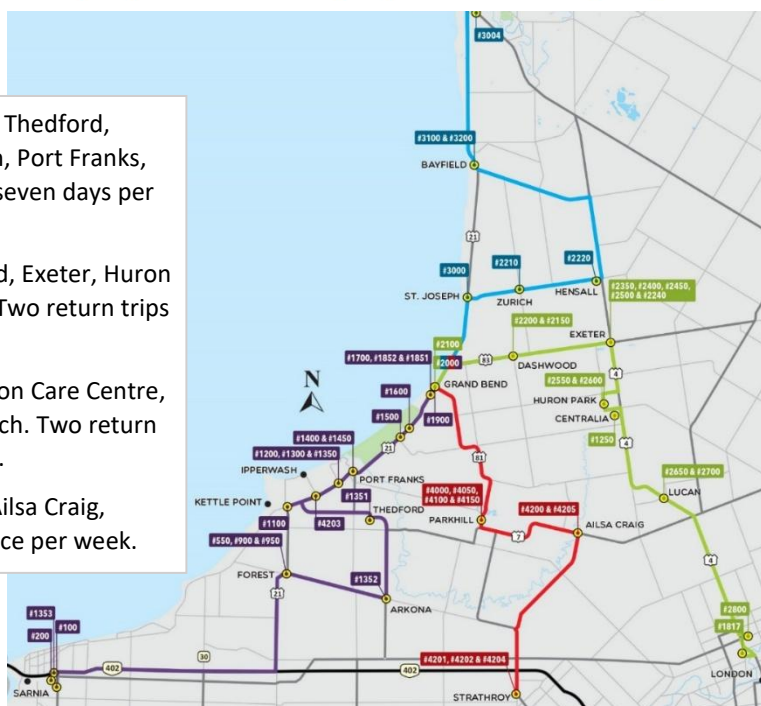
**Fleet**

**Route 1:** Sarnia, Forest, Arkona, Thedford, Kettle & Stony Point First Nation, Port Franks, Grand Bend. Three return trips seven days per week.

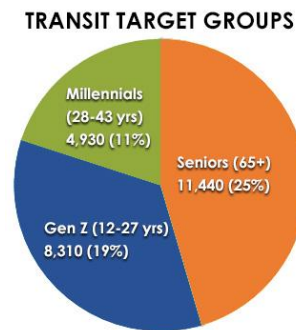
**Route 2:** Grand Bend, Dashwood, Exeter, Huron Park, Centralia, Lucan, London. Two return trips seven days per week.

**Route 3:** Grand Bend, West Huron Care Centre, Zurich, Hensall, Bayfield, Goderich. Two return trips three afternoons per week.

**Route 4:** Grand Bend, Parkhill, Ailsa Craig, Strathroy. Three return trips twice per week.



The Feasibility Study (2020) recommended addressing the community segments with the greatest need – those with no access to a car, defined as low-income, not enough income for a second or third vehicle, people with a disability or medical condition that prevents them from driving, those who choose not to drive (often for aging, prescription or medical reasons), youth, young workers, and seniors. According to the 2021 Census, 11.4% or 4,930 of HSAT’s service area residents are low income (LIM-AT<sup>1</sup>).




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*Eighty percent (80%) of HSAT passengers polled in 2024 reported being completely reliant on the bus to get around, and 28% relied on the service to get to work.*

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## VISION

Residents and businesses in Huron Shores Area Transit’s (HSAT) service area have access to safe, reliable, and affordable public transit that connects local communities and contributes to community economic development, sustainability, and vibrancy. HSAT improves community residents’ access, equity, and mobility to community assets, such as employment, education, medical, social, retail, and recreational, thereby reducing outmigration.

## Southwest Community Transit (SCT) Members



HSAT is a member of Southwest Community Transit (SCT / ride-sct.ca), an association of member municipalities and non-profit organizations in Southwest Ontario with rural transit systems. With HSAT, members include County of Brant/Brant Transit, Grey County/Grey Transit Route, Middlesex County Connect, Norfolk County/Ride Norfolk, Perth County/Perth County Connect, Strathroy-Caradoc/Inter-Community Transit, and Tillsonburg/T:GO.

Working together with the South Central Ontario Region Economic Development Corporation (SCOR EDC), transit members seek to increase travel connections between member services,

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<sup>1</sup> LIM-AT: Low-income after tax – income substantially below what is typical. The Low-income measure after tax refers to a fixed percentage (50%) of median-adjusted after-tax income of private households.

promote inter-community connections, share best practices for planning and delivery of services, and identify potential operating efficiencies and capital savings by purchasing as a single entity.

Meetings are held quarterly.

## SCT Advocacy Efforts

In 2024, SCT prioritized advocacy for inter-community transit.

At the January Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) conference, representatives secured a meeting with Minister Prabjeet Sakaria of the Ministry of Transportation of Ontario (MTO). The economic benefits of transit services and the need for MTO to work with municipalities on sustainable cost-sharing models were emphasized. This led to the creation of the Ontario Transit Investment Fund (OTIF), which was announced in October. SCT held eight one-on-one meetings with senior MTO staff on transit and growth priorities for Southwestern Ontario.

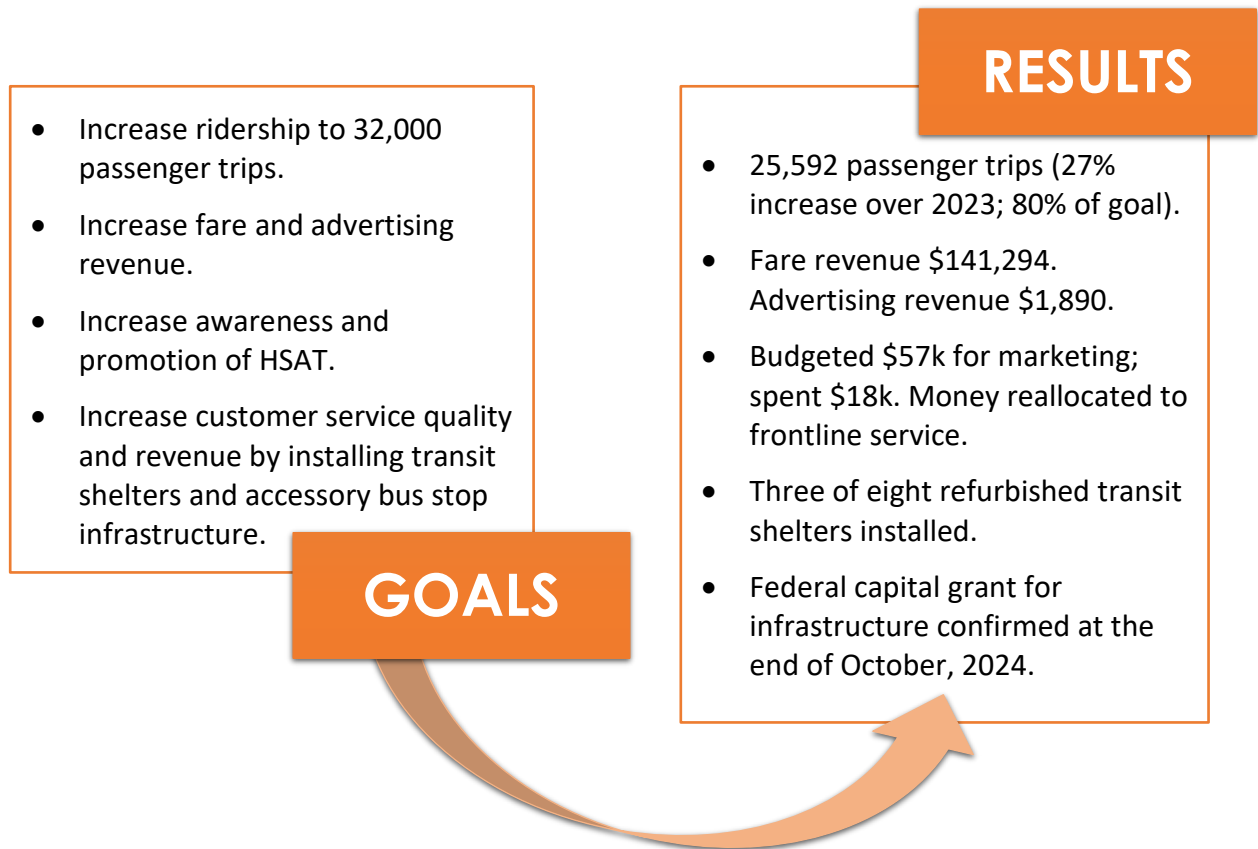
In addition to Minister Sakaria, SCT met with other key officials, including Ministers Lisa Thompson (Minister of Rural Affairs), Vic Fedeli (Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade), Patrice Barnes (Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development), Jill Dunlop (Minister of Education), Stephen Lecce (Minister of Energy and Electrification), and party leaders Marit Stiles (New Democrats), Bonnie Crombie (Liberal Party), and Mike Schreiner (Green Party).

At the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) Conference in August, SCT met with provincial leaders and focused on the economic impact of transit, creating a separate Gas Tax funding stream for rural systems, and the disjointed timing between municipal budgets and funding programs. Meetings were held with Rob Flack (Associate Minister of Agriculture), Vic Fedeli, Marit Stiles, Bonnie Crombie, and Mike Schreiner.

SCT presented to the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus in August on the importance of intercommunity transit receiving a resolution to support SCT and to collaborate on advocacy.

A letter of support template was developed for SCT members to send to local community groups and councils to garner statements of support for the continuation of inter-community transit. The letters of support and council resolutions were included in advocacy packages.

# 2024 Overview



## Goal: Increase Ridership

Ridership increased 27% in 2024, reaching 80% of the 32,000 boardings target. The ridership figure is understated due to record-keeping challenges.

### Route 1: Sarnia to Grand Bend via Lambton Shores

From May 14 to June 2, 2024, Route 1 had no mid-day service due to the lack of a driver, resulting in 19 missed bus runs and reduced ridership for the month. Taxis were hired to transport seasonal workers, increasing operational costs by \$3,800.

Capacity issues began earlier in the year than in 2023, with full bus events on mid-May weekends, necessitating taxis to handle ridership overflow. Taxis were also needed on September and October weekends due to ridership demand.

Based on 2023 seasonal worker ridership patterns, a 48-passenger school bus was used for Employee Shuttles and ran 7 am outbound and 10 pm inbound trips, Thursday to Monday, from July 1 to September 1. The service was made available only to holders of valid Monthly Passes,



as the bus lacked payment technology. Key stops included Forest, Port Franks, and Grand Bend. Since Voyago was unable to track ridership on the Employee Shuttle, passenger counts relied on workers self-reporting through HSAT's website.

## Route 2: London to Grand Bend via South Huron

The new online pre-book/pre-pay system for the Route 2 overflow bus ("Beach Bus") from London's Masonville Mall to Sobeys Plaza in Grand Bend proved successful. It eliminated "stranded passenger" situations and the need for costly taxi rides back to London. The system was well-received, leading to a 36% ridership increase.

## Route 3: Grand Bend to Goderich via Bluewater

To accommodate the summer spike in tourism, the weekday bus schedule for Route 3 was extended to Saturdays and Sundays in July and August, with an additional evening run on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. The schedule extension led to a 174% increase in ridership, or 129 boardings.

## Goal: Increase Revenue Fare Revenue

Fare revenue in 2024 was \$141,486, a 33% increase over 2023. This represents a fare recovery ratio of 14%. Revenue naturally grew with ridership growth.

The increasing use of discounted Monthly Passes as a payment method has had the effect of lowering HSAT's average revenue per trip.

The Feasibility Study recommended a 20% discount on pre-paid Monthly Passes (unlimited rides in 31

## Stats & Facts

### Overall Ridership

- 25,592 boardings
- Route 1 the Busiest Route
- Route 1 ridership: 16,971
- Route 2 ridership: 8,150
- Route 3 ridership: 379
- Route 4 ridership: 92
- Average monthly ridership 2,133 (27% increase over 2023)
- Increased 1,685% since 2021

### Employee Shuttles

- Days of operation: 42 days
- Employee bus runs: 83
- Employee shuttle taxi runs: 111
- Employee shuttle bus self-reported boardings: 339
- Registered seasonal workers: 57

### Stranded Passenger Taxi Runs

- Stranded passenger taxi runs: 41
- Bus full taxi runs: 77

### Route 2 Express Summer Bus

- Days in operation: 19
- Bus runs: 76
- Passengers: 763
- \$8,080 farebox revenue
- \$7,085 net cost
- Cost recovery ratio: 53%

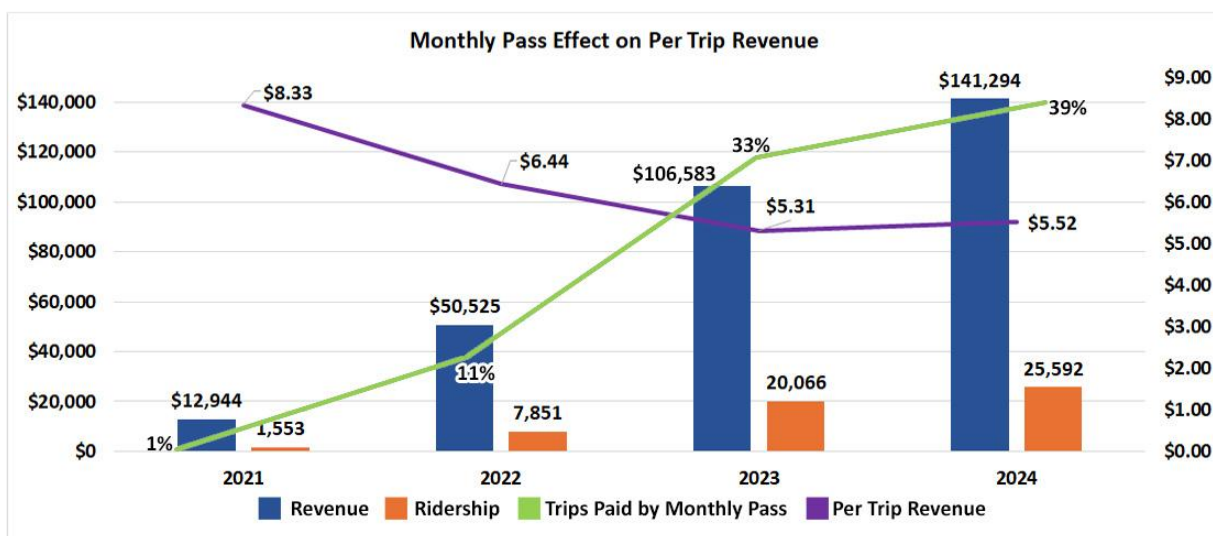
days), predicting 42% of rides would be long-distance trips and an average per trip revenue of \$7.

In 2021 (a pandemic year), the Monthly Pass was launched at \$50, and all regular single fares were reduced to \$5 to encourage ridership. As ridership and payment data were tracked and collected, it revealed the Monthly Pass provided a 61% discount on long-distance rides. The challenge became raising the pass price to increase per trip revenue to the recommended level without negatively affecting ridership.

The Monthly Pass price has increased a number of times, and as of January 1, 2025, the pass costs \$120. Future increases will continue until the average per trip cost reaches \$7.



At \$10 for a long-distance trip, the HSAT passenger can travel 69 km at just \$0.14/km. This is less than half the cost of a discounted 10 km GO Transit trip at \$3.70 (\$0.37/km).



## Advertising Revenue

Advertising revenue (\$1,890) fell short of the \$20,000 target. The shortfall was due to several factors, including limited availability of advertising spots and time for sales activity due to operational priorities. There are currently 18 interior headliner ad<sup>2</sup> spots with a maximum revenue potential of \$16,200. The goal for 2024 had factored in estimated revenue from bus

<sup>2</sup> Headliner Ad: Headliner Ad Cards are positioned in frames above the windows.



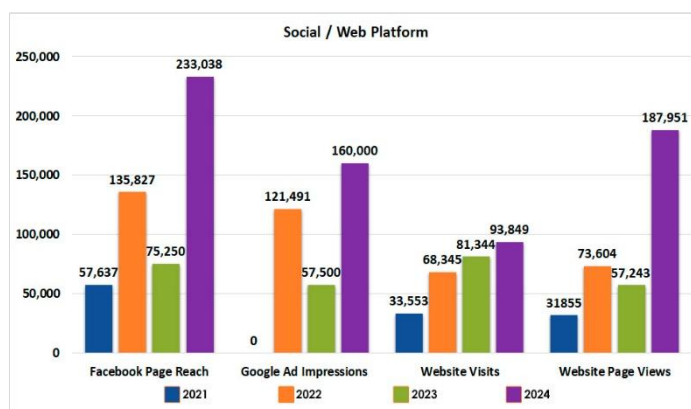
shelter posters, benches and bike rack advertising that would have been made possible by the Federal Rural Transit Solutions Fund (RTSF). The capital grant would have expanded the number of available advertising spots by 83% to 33 locations.

HSAT received notification late October that its grant application for \$299,467 was approved in principle. HSAT is still waiting to discuss the contribution agreement with program officials. The \$74,867 from the CT Program intended to serve as HSAT's 20% contribution to secure the capital grant had to be used for frontline operational costs. Alternative methods must now be found to raise HSAT's contribution to secure the RTSF funding.

Another challenge in selling the interior bus headliner ads is their lack of visibility to potential advertisers. Several local businesses expressed interest in bus shelter advertising, which has not yet been available.

## Goal: Increase Awareness & Promotion

Due to budget constraints, advertising and promotional efforts were mainly realized through cost-effective digital and social media channels<sup>3</sup>. These included targeted Facebook ads and boosted posts, Google Ads, and local websites such as BayfieldBreeze.com, ExeterToday.ca, HuronCountyNews.ca, MiddlesexBanner.ca, and ItStartsAtTheBeach.ca.



Print advertising was focused on specialized publications, such as *Daytripping*, *Stops Along the Way*, and *It Starts At The Beach* visitor guide and map. Press releases were distributed regularly to maintain visibility and stay top of mind.

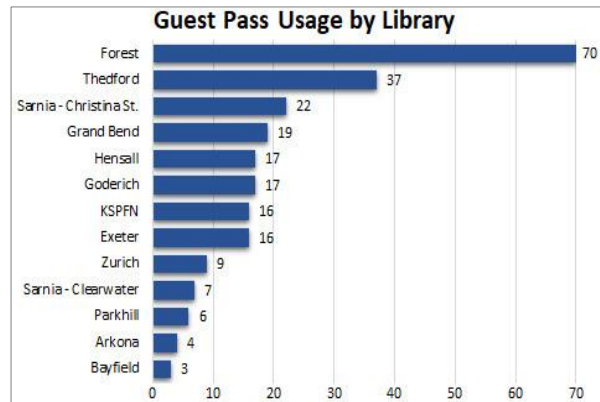
In addition to digital and print efforts, outreach activities included participation in local events such as Age-Friendly Sarnia-Lambton (May), Discover North Middlesex (May), and the South Huron Job Fair (June). HSAT also gave presentations to the Lambton Trails Committee (March), West Huron Care Centre / Blue Water Rest Home (November) and Rotary Club of Grand Bend (January) to further engage with the community.

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<sup>3</sup> Social/Web Platform Definitions: Facebook Reach – Number of people who saw content. Google ad Impressions: An impression is counted each time your ad is shown on a search result page or other site on the Google Network. Website visits: Number of unique user visits. Web pages viewed:

## Library Pass Promotion

In March, HSAT launched a Smart Card borrowing program with 26 Lambton and Huron county libraries, and Kettle & Stony Point First Nation's library. Library cardholders sign out a special Smart Card for a five-day borrowing period during which they can ride for free for as many trips as they like. Several branches exhausted their initial supply of Smart Card Packages and requested more. The most used Smart Card was the Forest library card, used for 72 boardings, followed by the Thedford library card used for 38 boardings.



## Goal: Increase Customer Service Quality

Customer service for transit passengers focuses on three main things: comfort, safety, and reliability. The 2024 goal to enhance passenger comfort and safety was to install transit shelters with solar lighting, benches, and bike racks. Transit shelters protect from weather, improve safety with lighting, provide seating for comfort, and meet AODA accessibility standards for passengers with mobility issues. The ability to secure a bike at a bus stop offers greater transportation flexibility and passenger confidence their bike will be there when they return.

The Federal Rural Transit Solutions Fund (RTSF) approval in principle notification was received October 28, 2024, too late to implement any of these plans. However, a \$6,500 donation from the Rotary Club of Grand Bend enabled the installation of three of eight refurbished shelters with benches.

Other factors affecting customer service quality include transit reliability and frequency (hours of operation). In 2024, more trips were completed, although there was a 61% increase in lost runs due to mechanical breakdown, no driver or weather-related cancellations. Of those lost runs, 53% were due to the lack of a driver.

Performance	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Vehicle Kilometres	22,221	321,373	330,781	328,606	360,340
Revenue Hours	278	5,720	6,927	7,303	8,191

Reliability	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Trips Completed	0	1,769	2,001	2,235	2,577
Breakdown/No Driver Lost Runs			46	14	53
Weather Related Lost Runs			14	30	18

## Other Initiatives

### Bus Shelter Illumination Project

The Kettle & Stony Point plaza's teepee structure inspired the Bus Shelter Illumination Project, the first of its kind in Southwestern Ontario.

HSAT called for submissions from local Indigenous artists who were also Kettle & Stony Point First Nation (KSPFN) members, inviting them to create an image that would transform two bus shelters into visual representations of the First Nation's culture while enhancing the bus passenger experience.

In part, made possible by a \$2,500 grant from Lambton County's Creative County Grant Program, a contest was held to select two winning designs. Southwind Corporate Development's board of directors chose the winning artwork created by Moses Lunham and Bridget George. Their designs were printed on translucent vinyl film, with an outdoor lifespan of five years, and installed in October. A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held to mark the project's completion, with the artists, KSPFN Chief Kimberly Bressette, Lambton Shores Mayor Doug Cook, and Southwind Corporate Development's CEO Michael George in attendance.

The installation of three shelters at Points Plaza, Stony Point Community, and Sobeys Plaza in Grand Bend was supported by a \$6,500 donation from the Rotary Club of Grand Bend.



### Route & Bus Stop Changes

**Route 3 – Grand Bend to Goderich via Bluewater:** As of September 20, 2024, the St. Joseph bus stop at Highway 21 and County Road 84 was relocated to the West Huron Care Centre. The relocation was made in response to passenger feedback, indicating the Zurich Village bus stop located in front of Bluewater's Municipal building was difficult and unsafe for out-of-village

residents to reach. Walking or using a scooter on the county road shoulder posed challenges. The new location at West Huron Care Centre, which houses the Blue Water Rest Home and West Huron Early Childhood Learning Centre, was deemed a safer and more accessible option.

**Route 4 – Grand Bend to Strathroy via North Middlesex:** Effective October 1, 2024, the 8 pm bus run was discontinued due to low ridership. This service was introduced November 2023 in response to requests from residents for extended hours in both Grand Bend and Strathroy. However, ridership did not meet expectations.

## Passenger Polls

Six one-question polls were consecutively published online between April 29 and July 19, 2024, to gather passenger travel triggers and basic demographic information. One key finding from the data revealed that 28% of respondents use HSAT to get to work, and 80% completely rely on the bus to get where they need to go. Other reasons for riding the bus included heading to social or leisure activities (20%), shopping (16%), and attending medical appointments. The full report is published online at <https://huronshoresareatransit.ca/polls-report>

## Social Agency Smart Card

In 2023, an Agency Smart Card was introduced in support of social, health and wellness agencies support of their client travel needs. Agencies purchase the card at a discounted rate for their clients. In 2024, ten social, health and wellness agencies purchased quantities of the Agency Smart Card, including Kettle & Stony Point Child & Family Services, North Lambton Community Health Centre, Sarnia-Lambton Native Friendship Centre, Community Living, Family Services Perth-Huron, CMHC – Lambton-Kent, Indwell-London, VON Community Support Services, Bluewater Health and JobPath (Community Living Sarnia-Lambton).

## Lambton Shores Extends Funding for Huron Shores Area Transit

Lambton Shores Council has approved up to \$50,000 in additional funding to extend Huron Shores Area Transit (HSAT) services until April 30, 2025, ensuring uninterrupted transit operations while long-term funding solutions are pursued. With the Ontario Community Transportation Grant set to expire on March 31, 2025, the Municipality is actively working with partners to secure sustainable funding, including an application to the Ontario Transit Investment Fund and financial commitments from municipal and First Nation partners. HSAT has become an essential service, providing over 25,000 trips in 2024 and offering residents access to employment, education, healthcare, and other critical services. The temporary funding extension reflects Lambton Shores' commitment to maintaining public transit and finding a long-term solution to support its continued operation.

# Appendix

## Table 1: Bus Stop Usage - Total of On & Off

BUS STOPS	Total Usage (On+Off)
Grand Bend - Hub at Sobeys (all routes)	12,446
Lambton Mall (R1)	6,885
Lambton College (R1)	6,865
London – Masonville (R2)	5,174
King St W @ Library (R1)	2,567
Welcome Centre (R1+R2)	2,060
Exeter – McDonalds (R2)	1,887
Kettle Point Plaza (R1)	1,451
Exeter - Main St & Sanders St (R2)	1,103
Dashwood - Dashwood Rd & Centre St (R2)	1,079
Walmart – Sarnia (R1)	1,029
Thedford Community Centre (R1)	996
Lakeshore Rd & Northville Cres @ Grogs (R1)	827
University Hospital (R2)	722
Townsend Line @ King St E / Foodland (R1)	639
Ontario St S @ River Rd. (R1)	505
Arkona Community Centre (R1)	484
Lucan - Arena & Municipal stops (R2)	433
Grand Bend - Main St & Ontario St (R2)	406
Exeter - Main St & Huron St W (R2)	375
Lakeshore Rd. @ MacPherson's (R1)	341
Ontario St. S @ NoFrills (R1)	331
Stony Point - Army Camp Road (R1)	272
Goderich – Walmart (R3)	244
Huron Park – @ Arena (R2)	220
Lakeshore Rd & Northville Cres (R1)	107
Hensall Town Hall (R3)	81
Bayfield Old Town Hall (the Square) (R3)	79
Pineview Mobile Homes (R1)	49
Strathroy - Shops on Sydenham (R4)	47
Zurich (Mill St) (R3)	46
Centralia (R2)	32
Parkhill: Main & Anna St (R4)	29
Lambton Heritage Museum (R1)	26
Parkhill: Main & McLeod (R4)	26
Strathroy – Walmart (R4)	21
Bayfield - Cameron St & Highway 21 (R3)	20
Ailsa Craig: Craigwiel Grdns (R4)	12
Ailsa Craig: Main & Jameson (R4)	3

## BUS STOP USAGE (On+Off)

