

## HUNTSVILLE / PARRY SOUND AREA

### COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION FEASIBILITY STUDY

October 1998

## **Background**

Accessible public community transportation for the residents of Muskoka and Parry Sound has been a long-standing concern. There is one municipal transit bus operating on a fixed route in the urban core of the Town of Huntsville and there is no transit service at all in the Town of Parry Sound. The lack of public transportation is referred to in every District Health Council report as a barrier to health and well-being. It contributes to isolation, adverse health effects and in accessible services.

A recent study of demographic trends in these districts, shows a gradual increase in senior citizens. This occurs over a 20 year period during which time the baby boomers are aging and translates directly to a rising need for services related to seniors. Transportation needs will increase relative to this growth.

The districts are sparsely populated with most residents living in the rural areas. The low population density combined with lower levels of income and the greater number of seniors makes it difficult for public or commercial transit service to remain viable. Many people rely on family members and friends for transportation services. Of greatest concern are seniors, people with physical disabilities, people with mental health and long-term care needs, and people with fixed and/or low incomes. Analysis of census data for the province indicates that Muskoka and Parry Sound Districts have a higher than average proportion of seniors, people with physical disabilities, and people with lower incomes.

A piecemeal assortment of services has evolved to meet the need for transportation. Services are provided by businesses, boards of education, health care and social service agencies, seniors organizations and service clubs, to name a few. The Town of Huntsville has made an attempt to meet the needs of its urban residents with the provision of a wheelchair accessible fixed route bus service, operating five days a week. Provincial funding cuts have placed this particular system in jeopardy. Proposals for linked/complimentary service provision are being investigated. Ways to decrease net costs to the general taxpayer are also being explored. CTAP may be the life ring for this invaluable service, as funding expires December 1998.

On May 19, 1998 **CTAP** and **Huntsville / Parry Sound Areas Community Transportation Committee** made an agreement to offer the communities transitional assistance to improve the productivity of their transportation systems.

A project co-ordinator was subsequently hired by the Committee and completed the work plan outlined in the initial proposal:

- To prepare an inventory of existing transportation resources;
- To survey the needs of the various user groups in order to be able to arrive at demand estimates, expenditures and revenues;
- To assist the committee in identifying perceived and real barriers to resource sharing;
- To provide interim reports outlining work accomplished;
- To assist in the preparation of an implementation plan including one or more pilot projects for the areas identified.

The approved budget for this first phase was \$9,640. The original timeframe proved overly optimistic. Near the end of August, a two-month extension was approved. Additional funding for the extension was \$6,420. This enabled the facilitator to complete a more comprehensive inventory. The committee was able to examine the results in greater depth prior to drafting this proposal for the implementation phase. **To date therefore, we have operated on a total budget of \$16,060 plus the provision of in-kind services by the Committee members**

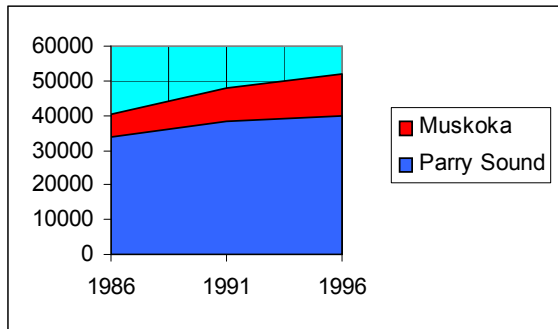
Meetings and discussions took place with the various interested parties throughout the two large geographic areas of Muskoka and Parry Sound. It became clear, that despite political boundaries, the trade areas based on transportation resources and infrastructure are more realistically divided into the Highway 11 corridor and the Highway 69 corridor. (see attached map)

In addition to the larger committee, two working sub-committees are providing assistance, focusing on the resources and needs of the individual areas which are proving to be quite different. One of the sub-committees is focused on the Hwy 69 corridor and the other, on the Hwy 11 area. Both of these groups have representatives on the Huntsville/Parry Sound Area Committee.

At this time, we would like to apply for phase II funding to complete our objectives over a period of 8 months, beginning in November 1998. A workplan will be submitted and letters of support are to follow.

## Demographics

### Total Population Growth 1986-1996

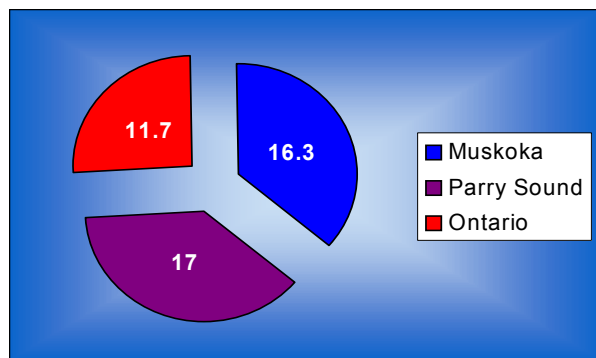


Growth in population in the District of Muskoka and in the District of Parry Sound has increased by 23% or 11,819 and by 16% or 6,065 respectively between 1986 and 1996, according to the 1996 Canada Statistics. The District of Muskoka has a total population of 52,054 covering approximately 4,000 sq. km. The District of Parry Sound has a population of 39,895 over an area of approximately 10,000 sq. km.

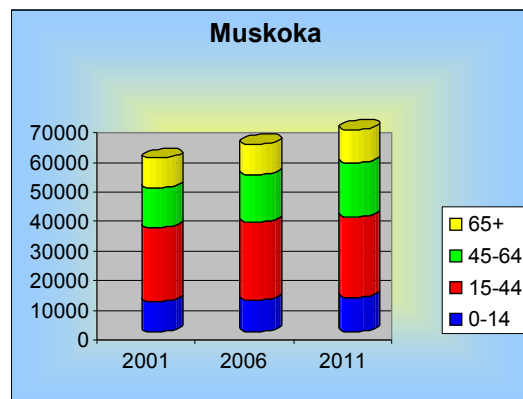
One of the fastest growing population groups in rural Ontario is seniors. In particular, Muskoka and Parry Sound Districts are often seen as retirement destinations.

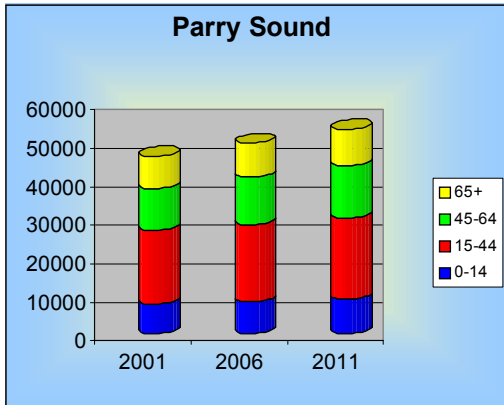
Muskoka 65+ population is currently 16.3% of the total population and Parry Sound District, 17%, substantially larger than the Ontario average.

### Population 65+ as % of total



## Population Projections according to Significant Age Groups





	0-14	15-44	45-64	65+	Total
2001	10,492	24,797	13,684	9,940	<b>58,922</b>
2006	10,821	26,199	16,160	10,454	<b>63,643</b>
2011	11,632	27,441	18,178	11,299	<b>68,558</b>

	0-14	15-44	45-64	65+	Total
2001	7,768	19,012	10,941	8,347	<b>46,077</b>
2006	8,161	20,079	12,332	8,837	<b>49,420</b>
2011	8,927	21,068	13,510	9,428	<b>52,944</b>

Source: Min. of Finance, June 95

## Findings

Also See Appendix 1

### **Local and Provincial Papers that Identify Transportation as a Need**

A number of these papers include more than one sector. They are grouped by predominate emphasis.

#### General

East and West Muskoka Parry Sound District Health Councils released a report titled **"Women's Health in Muskoka/Parry Sound"** in December of 1993. The report was compiled from surveying cross-sections of women in Muskoka and Parry Sound. It identified the lack of transportation as the most significant barrier to women's health services. Limited public transportation (Huntsville is the only town with a bus service), lack of private transportation, especially for seniors, volunteer transportation only for identified groups i.e., cancer patients are all cited as problem areas. Lack of services in rural areas was another transportation problem, necessitating lengthy trips to urban centres.

The report recommended, "That the East and West Muskoka/Parry Sound District Health Councils support and encourage the development of public and voluntary transportation networks within the districts.

Muskoka/Parry Sound District Health Councils also identified availability of transportation as a barrier to individuals in rural areas accessing health, educational, social and recreational programs. In their report, "**Health Promotion Plan**" May 1997, solutions included bringing services to isolated areas through satellite offices and introducing transportation programs.

"**Implementing the Vision**", another Muskoka District Health Council report released in 1996 states that transportation and social supports are critical considerations in supporting individuals in community settings, particularly in rural areas.

Environment and Transport Canada's document titled, "**Sustainable Transportation**" April 1997, focused primarily on the environmental impact of transportation choices. It stated that people are entitled to reasonable access to transportation and viewed transportation systems as critical in building strong economies, communities and enhancing the quality of life. It also emphasized equity for women, the poor, the rural, the disabled, children, and natives in accessing transportation. It would like to see public transportation systems increase in availability for social and environmental benefits.

Ontario's Ministry of Transportation's "**Report of the Community Transportation Review**", was a review by the provincial government to address fragmented community transportation services. It stated that the general consensus among Canadians is that publicly funded programs and services should be accessible on an equitable basis to all residents, regardless of whether they own an automobile. Demand for specialized, client-specific transportation has been increasing because of demographics and policy shifts. Government funding cannot keep up with the demand for transportation for special needs, leading to gaps in service. Community agencies don't know what transportation resources are available. Communities consulted for this review did not feel that existing community transportation systems were meeting user needs or demand. A lack of information, knowledge and expertise made it difficult for them to develop effective transportation systems. Transportation is becoming more of an issue with de-institutionalization and de-hospitalization of special needs individuals (ie day patient as opposed to residential patients)

The goal of the report was to find ways of maximizing the use of existing community transportation resources and services, and increasing equitable access to these services.

The report suggested school buses be available for a wider range of users. The government has established the Community Transportation Office within the MTO to

assist communities that wish to move towards co-ordination. It did provide assistance and support to a limited number of projects in this area. It also provides a framework for co-ordinating transportation services.

## Disabled

**The Environmental Scan Report**, March 1998, was released by RISE (Resource Centre for Independent Living) funded by Human Resources Canada and the Ministry of Community and Social Services, Vocational Rehabilitation Services Branch. The study compiled responses from 63 disabled individuals in Muskoka, Parry Sound, and Almaguin. The study indicated that approximately 1 in 5, or 23% of 57 disabled individuals surveyed, had no accessible transportation. Of 44 respondents from Muskoka and Almaguin, 16 identified transportation as a barrier to some important areas of life, including employment, education, spiritual enrichment, and recreational pursuits. Transportation was third after ability and money as a barrier to employment. One respondent replied, "With respect to transportation, there is no public or accessible transportation within, into or out of Port Sydney. If one is able to walk, it is possible to catch an Ontario Northland bus heading south to Toronto or north to North Bay. It is about a one and a half -mile walk out of town to where this bus stops. The bus does stop at many towns in either direction en route, however, it is not accessible for wheelchairs to the best of my knowledge...Port Sydney, in particular, has no shopping facilities or other public amenities."

## Children/Families

Community Action Program for Children in Muskoka did a study called "**Brighter Futures**" in 1996. The data for this study was gathered primarily through focus groups and telephone interviews with 96 families in 13 small communities across Muskoka. The study targeted families who had 'at risk' children 6 years of age or under. The participants identified a lack of transportation as a high risk factor.

The Muskoka District Community Services Planning Group identified transportation as a problem, in their 1991 report, "**Before and After School Child Care Needs Assessment**", For parents who were unable to find a caregiver in their school bussing area, it was a major problem because school buses have a policy that they will not take children to different locations other than where they are regularly dropped off.

## Long-Term Care

The Muskoka-Parry Sound District Health Council in their January 1996 "**Strategic Multi-Year Service Plan for Community Long-Term Care Services, Phase One**", outlined the need for community support services, in conjunction with provincial support and funding to address transportation services as part of Phase II of their long-term plan. Transportation options would include volunteer drivers, school buses, and private

services.

In August of 1996, The same council released their "**Annual District Service Plan for Long-Term Care Community Services**". Accessible transportation again emerged as a necessary need. The council recommended that , "all potential transportation options be explored within and across Parry Sound and Muskoka... to develop an integrated transportation plan for services, adults with physical disabilities, children with complex medical needs and their caregivers and families." The report estimates that 65% of the population of Muskoka and Parry Sound live rurally with an increasingly high proportion of these people being seniors.

## Seniors

The Ontario Advisory Council on Senior Citizens and Ontario Advisory Council on the Physically Handicapped did a report titled "**The Freedom to Move is Life Itself**" in 1987. The basic premise of the report was that equality in accessibility of transportation is a right mandated by the 1986 "Equality Rights Statute Amendment Act" conforming with the "Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms"

The report made suggestions for organizing volunteer drivers in rural areas, ie, reimbursement for mileage, volunteer co-ordination, driver training, help with insurance, etc. Haliburton was noted as a community where this is being done through Home Support Services. Volunteers take disabled and seniors to medical and dental appointments, hospital visits and shopping. Drivers are reimbursed for their mileage and insurers are notified that the volunteers are providing a non-profit volunteer service.

Kenora and Sault Ste. Marie also have transportation systems in place. Kenora is done strictly on a volunteer basis so there are no administrative costs. Service is available from 7am to 11pm for school and medical appointments . Clients pay \$1.00 each way. Sault Ste. Marie is funded by the United Way.

The report suggests that rural Ontario be divided into transportation regions headed by boards made up partly of senior and disabled people . Primary funding for these boards could come from the Ministry of Transportation and Communications or the Ministry of Community and Social Services. Additional funding could be obtained from the Ministry of Health or the Ministry of Education (ex. school buses when not in use), and from service clubs, local merchants, or churches. The board would administer the funds, decide on user fees, and set up some sort of transportation authority through which agencies could access transportation for their clients.

## Identified Barriers and Opportunities

Barriers and opportunities identified by transportation providers:

### Satellite Offices/Facilities

- ❖ Government policies which focus on the **centralization of social service agencies**, limit high-need residents in smaller communities from accessing required services. Studies have shown, that with careful planning and partnership with other agencies, satellite offices need not cost anymore than a centralized service. **'Centralize administration, decentralize service'**.
- ❖ The committees could identify **'natural' community centres** and support agencies and organizations in finding appropriate satellite facilities in communities, decreasing the need for limited and expensive transportation.

### Transit

- ❖ The cost of sustaining a small bus is extremely high, with low returns in the early years.
- ❖ If a small bus cannot sustain itself, municipal governments cannot afford the large amounts of funding to support it. Huntsville's only bus has conditional funding for 8 weeks. The Town is now contributing 75% of the cost of the service. The Town is unable to continue with this type of commitment for much longer.
- ❖ The municipality could **mentor with the business community**, developing a **solid business and marketing plan**. As well, the municipality could also partner with a number of **different sectors**; there is an opportunity to create a true 'community transit system'.
- ❖ Through this initiative, CTAP has an opportunity to support a **positive model** for the sustainability of a community bus in a rural area.

### Buses

- ❖ A significant barrier to the availability of bussing is the government's **regulations around bus permits**, i.e. school bus, charter and public licenses. These regulations limit free enterprise, thereby making it impossible for small bus companies to take on routes that may not seem profitable for larger bus lines.
- ❖ Whether real or perceived, there is a concern that adults riding on school buses would provide more work for school bus drivers and would create an additional liability issue. However, it was pointed out that in urban areas, students often ride the bus with adults. An opportunity exists to educate concerned individuals to the benefits of a bus monitor, who would enhance safety by allowing the driver to focus on driving.
- ❖ In discussions with the Trillium Board of Education (Muskoka District), it was noted that adult education passengers are able to ride the school bus with special permission of the Board.



- ❖ In very preliminary discussions, the transportation co-ordinator of the board is **willing to explore transportation options**, recognizing that any decisions would have to be approved by the Board.

## Taxis

- ❖ Taxi companies felt that **volunteer drivers programs were competing with their businesses**. There have been instances of extreme hostility towards volunteer drivers in the District of Parry Sound.
- ❖ **Municipal bylaws are ambiguous** when concerning volunteer drivers, causing dissension and hostile conditions. Also, if an individual or group would like to create a new taxi company, municipalities have the right to approve or reject any application.
- ❖ Two taxi companies participated in a meeting in Parry Sound and one taxi company from Huntsville has participated in bi-District meetings.
- ❖ All taxi companies participating in the meetings stated that they were not interested in any type of 'route' or participating in a model that picked up a number of passengers (at different locations) and dropped them off in a systematic manner, for a reduced fee.
- ❖ On a positive note, a local taxi company in Parry Sound, who had received funding for 2 accessible vehicles a number of years ago, has replaced one with a newer model.

## Businesses

- ❖ Businesses tend to **target specific clients groups**. The only exception seems to be the Santa's Village trolley, which allows anyone to access it, at no charge.

## Long -Term Care Facilities

- ❖ Most of the vehicles owned by long-term care facilities are only a few years old. There is strong concern that the vehicles would not be available for their clients use and that the additional mileage would provide **additional wear-and-tear** on the vehicles, causing them to wear out prematurely.
- ❖ One of the facilities in Parry Sound District is a strong supporter of this program and offers space to the facilitator of the Volunteer Drivers Program.
- ❖ One of the facilities is on Hwy 11 and could be a pick-up or drop-off point for individuals travelling between Bracebridge and Huntsville.

## Volunteer Drivers Programs

- ❖ Agencies who rely on government funding fear that that by partnering, they would lose their autonomy and possibly, some of their drivers. In Muskoka, where there are two government funded volunteer drivers programs, there was a fear that by sharing information and/or volunteer drivers, they would lose the rapport and commitment they had built. As well, because one organization does not require any training and another requires extensive training, there was concern about combining

volunteers. Finally, the fact that one agency specializes in 'frail elderly', while another has a much broader mandate, caused much discussion about real or perceived needs of clients.

- ❖ The volunteer drivers programs in Parry District, where there is only one government funded agency providing transportation, saw partnering as an opportunity to increase the drivers pool and share co-ordination of services, policies and procedures, screening and training, and bookkeeping.

### Community Living

- ❖ Community Living agencies are concerned about wear and tear on their vehicles, and **availability for their clients**.
- ❖ However, they are interested in participating in the project as their vehicles are limited and they are unsure of their ability to replace them.

### Rentals

- ❖ The high cost of wheel-chair accessible vehicles discourage rental businesses from offering them as an option.

### Ambulances

- ❖ Government regulations make ambulances **limited to 'medical' runs**.
- ❖ At least one ambulance agency is **willing to provide training to volunteer drivers** and participate in general education programs

### First Nations

- ❖ **Internal policy** is that transportation is for **members only**. Vehicles are often filled to capacity

## **Organizations, Businesses and Agencies who Participated**

### **Muskoka/Parry Sound Members**

Karen Harmon – Caregivers Voice  
Linda Taylor - Community Support Services  
Kathie Horne– RISE  
Rita McWhirter – Town of Parry Sound  
Colleen Veitch – Town of Huntsville  
Fran Coleman – Town of Huntsville  
Bob Taylor – Hammond’s Transportation  
Jill Tettmann – District Health Council  
Leslie Emerson - The Friends

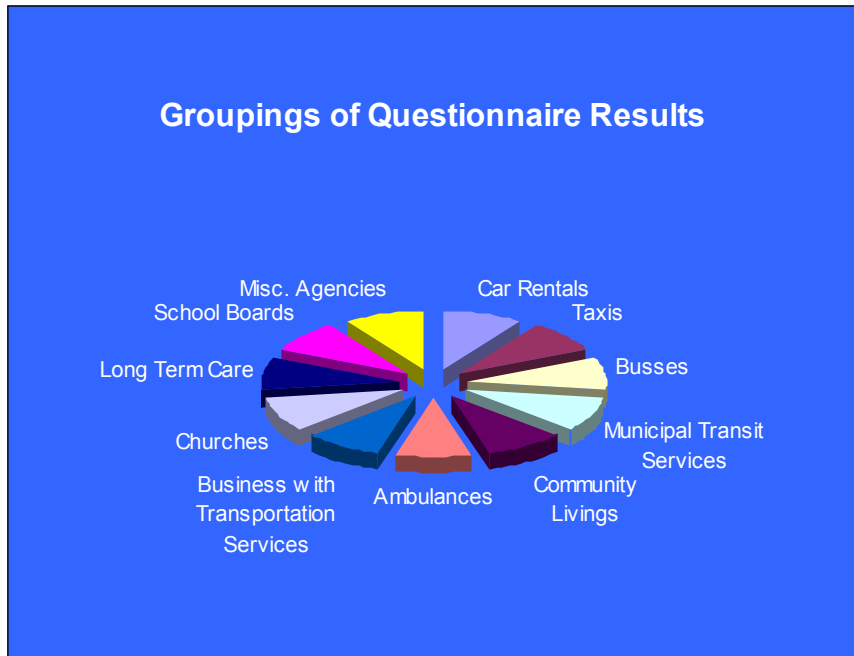
### **Hwy 69 Corridor**

Kathie Horne – RISE  
Brad Horne – Community Living  
Rita McWhirter – Town of Parry Sound  
Linda Taylor – Community Support Services  
Rob McEwen - The Friends  
Nancy Pabobandung – Parry Sound Friendship Centre  
Florence Alleway - Cancer Society  
Stephen Heder/Lloyd Skinner - The Children’s Aid Society  
Sherri Malcho - CNIB

### **Hwy 11 Corridor**

Colleen Veitch – Town of Huntsville  
Fran Coleman – Town of Huntsville  
Reg Orr – Al’s Taxi  
Roger Campbell – Campbell’s Bus Lines  
Judy Moore – Muskoka Ambulance  
Louise Parrott – Muskoka East Parry Sound Community Care  
Mary Ager – Trillium Board of Education  
Dan Armour – Huntsville Ambulance  
Mike Yale - RISE (Disabled)  
Kelly Sawyer - The Friends

## Summary of Findings



### Transportation Providers for Both Districts

#### **Municipal Transit Services**

There are only two communities with a municipal transit service. The first is the community bus in Huntsville. It is a chartered wheelchair accessible bus that runs an established route 5 days a week, but also does individual pickups for wheelchair dependent individuals. The second is the Village of Burk's Falls. They have a bus owned by the village, driven by volunteers and mainly used by seniors and disabled individuals. The availability of the van depends on the availability of a volunteer driver and is limited to the boundary of the village.

#### **Bus Organizations**

There are 21 bus lines in the Districts of Muskoka and the District of Parry Sound. Most of the smaller bus lines are exclusively school oriented and do not make any alternative use of the vehicles due to licensing practices, cost of maintenance or lack of available drivers. The buses are not always booked to their full capacity. Only PMCL, Hammond's, Honey Harbour/Port Severn Bus Lines, Ontario Northland run public routes. Bus lines that charter are: Campbell's who charters vans and a car; Hurd's who has contract CPR (Railway); Hammond's who has a number of charter buses, used for

several different purposes; Bogart, Utterson who uses vehicles for wedding shuttle; and Moore's in Port Loring who transports mail from Trout Creek to several post offices in the area.

### **Taxis**

There are 11 Taxi companies in the Districts of Parry Sound and Muskoka. Only two of them have specialized wheelchair accessible vehicles. Seven companies work exclusively with passenger cars, three have cars and vans and only one has only vans. Three of the companies have regularly shared rides with more than one passenger and multiple pickup points or destinations, while the other companies have usually individual rides.

### **Businesses with Transportation**

Four private businesses provide transportation for their clients. The businesses include two hotels/ resorts, Santa's Village Fun Park and the Farmer's Market in Gravenhurst. All of them have transfer rides from their location into town and all are free. The two Hotels/ Resorts also have vans available for individual rides for their customers, the rides can be booked at the switchboard.

### **Long Term Care**

There are five long-term care facilities that provide transportation. All of them organize and provide transportation for their clients for recreational, shopping and local medical appointments. Individual trips to doctor's appointments are available, as well as planned trips to town. The centre owns their own vehicles, which are then driven by staff members. There no fee required and the rides are generally by appointment. Emergency trips to i.e. to Toronto have to be booked through Muskoka Seniors Home Assistance, who then organize a ride with a volunteer driver at .30/ km.

### **First Nations**

Five of the seven First Nation's Communities have a van to provide transportation for their community members, including one with 2- 7 passenger medical vans. One of the remaining two communities have a school bus, while the other offers no transportation. Restrictions allow only community members

### **Community Living**

All four Community Living organizations in the two Districts provide transportation for their clients. They have either vans or cars owned by the organization and driven by staff members, or organize rides on private vehicles of volunteer drivers. The rides are made by the individuals by appointment and have to be booked a reasonable time ahead.

### **Rentals**

There is only one rental car business that provides an accessible vehicle: Saunder's Motors in Gravenhurst. Saunders has at least one wheelchair accessible vehicle

available rent or lease. The booking has to be done at least one week ahead of the rental day.

### Churches

There are two churches, the Salvation Army and the Pentecostal Church, both in Parry Sound, who offer transportation services. The Salvation Army organizes trips in private cars driven by volunteers basically for elderly people or in emergencies, whereas the Pentecostal Church owns a van, driven by volunteers, used for transportation to and from church related events.

### Ambulances

There are 6 Ambulance Services within the two Districts. Their non emergency services are focused on the transfer of patients from one hospital to another facility. These services are funded by the Ministry of Health. The Ambulance Services would be willing to assist in the training of volunteer drivers and participate in the public education.

### Miscellaneous

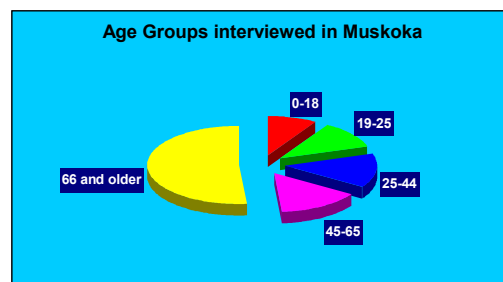
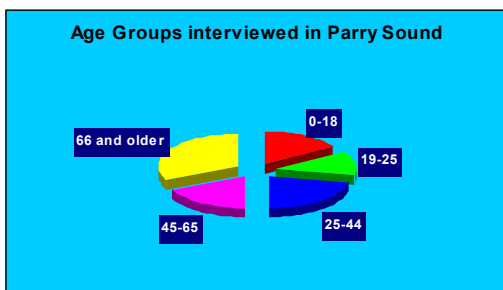
Fourteen organizations and agencies organize rides and provide transportation for their customers or clients on a regular basis. Nine of them have to rely on private cars and volunteer drivers, only five own vehicles, none of the organizations charter vehicles for rides. Only two own wheelchair accessible vehicles. All of the volunteer drivers program expressed difficulty in attracting and keeping available drivers.

### Potential Users

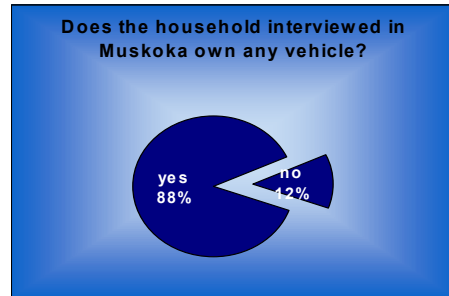
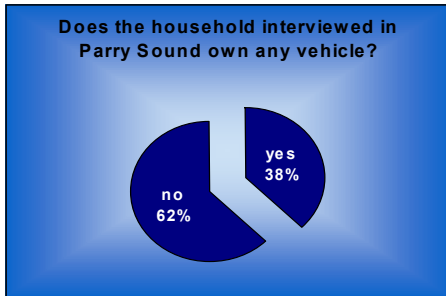
Based on a survey of potential users:

- ❖ In the town of Parry Sound 80 surveys were distributed and 42 were returned. They included seniors, disabled, native and youth.

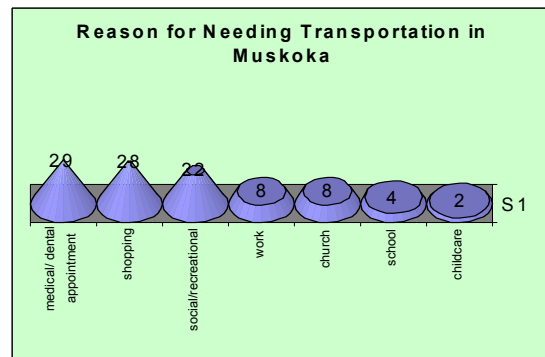
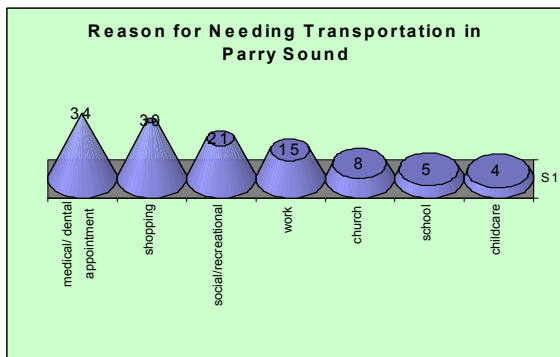
60 survey were distributed and 34 returned. They covered 3 large outlying areas of Huntsville, including Utterson, Port Sydney area; Dwight, Dorset area; and Aspdin, Yearly area.



The availability of those surveyed who owned vehicles

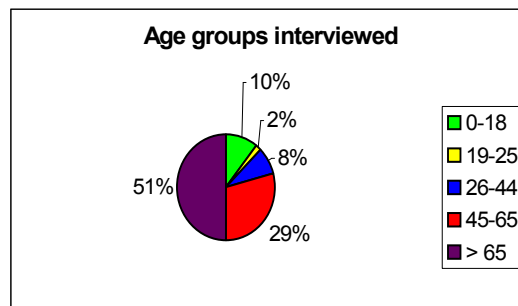
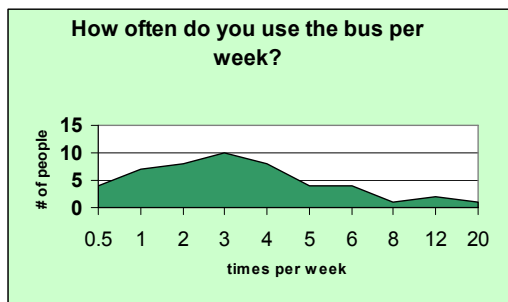
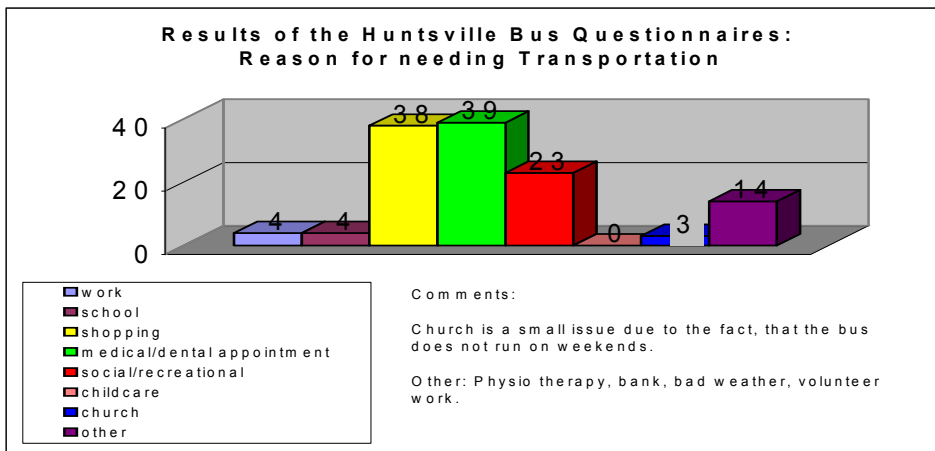


Service identified as areas of potential use of transportation:



## **Huntsville Transit**

The 48 surveys returned by riders of the Huntsville Transit Bus confirmed the above findings, that most people who use transit do so for shopping and medical appointments. It should be noted that there is only one bus, which does not run on Sundays and currently takes 2 hours to make a full circle of the community.



## Volunteer Driver's Programs



Muskoka has 11 agencies or organizations that provide some sort of volunteer driver program. Some of these programs are more formalized than others. They cover over 50,000 people in an area of approximately 4,000 sm. km.



Parry Sound District currently has 6 agencies and organizations with some sort of volunteer driver's programs. They service approximately 35,000 people over 10,000 sq. km.

