

HURON SHORES AREA TRANSIT Annual Report 2025

Huron Shores Area Transit is a local and intercommunity public transit system serving Lambton Shores, South Huron, Bluewater, Plympton-Wyoming and Kettle & Stony Point First Nation with connection to Sarnia, London and Goderich.



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Executive Summary

In 2025, Huron Shores Area Transit (HSAT) transitioned from a pilot project to a sustainable regional transit system, securing \$4.7 million in funding through 2030 from provincial programs and municipal and First Nation transit partners.

The system delivered 21,028 trips across three routes, continuing to provide essential mobility in a large rural service area. While ridership declined due to external factors such as reduced student travel, funding uncertainty and temporary suspension of marketing, financial performance remained stable, with a 14.7% farebox recovery ratio and costs within expected small rural transit ranges.

Key changes included the discontinuation of Route 4 and identification of Route 3 for potential transition to an on-demand model. With long-term funding now secured, HSAT is focused on improving service efficiency, installing infrastructure, increasing ridership and strengthening its role as a vital regional connection supporting economic activity and quality of life.

Vision

Residents and businesses in the Huron Shores Area Transit (HSAT) service area have access to safe, reliable, and affordable public transit that connects local communities and contributes to their economic development, sustainability, and vibrancy.

Huron Shores Area Transit

Huron Shores Area Transit (HSAT), launched December 2020, provides fully accessible local and long-distance public transit connecting transit partners Lambton Shores, South Huron, Bluewater, Plympton-Wyoming, and Kettle & Stony Point First Nation with Sarnia, London, and Goderich.

The service is funded through contributions from its municipal and First Nation transit partners, the Ontario Transit Investment Fund (OTIF), the Ontario Gas Tax for Transit Program, fare and advertising revenue.

HSAT serves a population of 39,687 (2021 Census) across a 1,501 km² (687 sq. mi.) service area. The system operates three routes using two 20-passenger buses and two spares, both equipped with wheelchair lifts and bike racks. In peak spring and summer months, two additional buses are added to meet demand. The HSAT network connects 19 communities with 44 bus stops, including one flex stop supporting connection to intercity coach lines bound for

Toronto, Kitchener, and other major destinations. HSAT shares five stops with London and Sarnia Transit, through which further access to regional bus, rail, and air travel options is possible.

Eighty percent (80%) of HSAT passengers polled in 2024 reported being completely reliant on the bus to get around; 28% to get to work, 24% to attend social activities, 16% for shopping, 10% for medical appointments, and 20% for all other reasons.

Route 1: Sarnia, Wyoming, Forest, Arkona, Thedford, Kettle & Stony Point First Nation, Port Franks, Grand Bend. Three return trips daily.

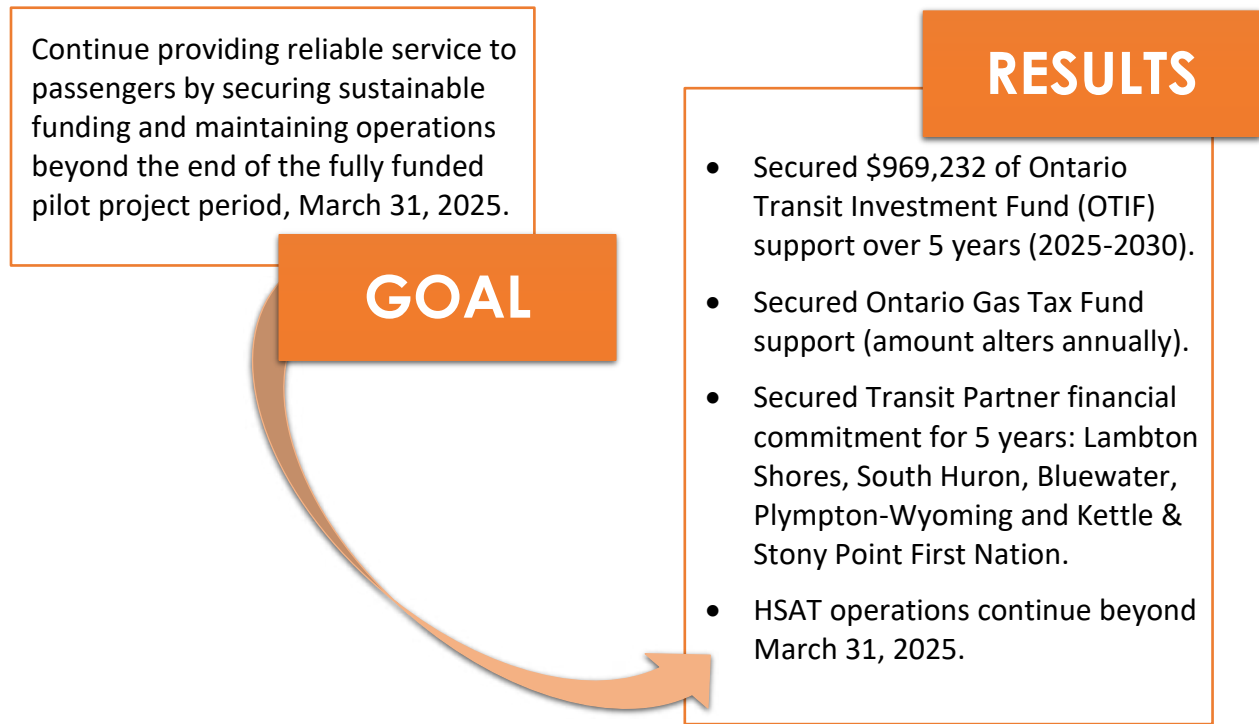
Route 2: Grand Bend, Dashwood, Exeter, Huron Park, Centralia, London. Two return trips daily.

Route 3: Grand Bend, St. Joseph, Zurich, Hensall, Brucefield, Bayfield, Goderich. Two return trips three afternoons per week.

Route 4: Grand Bend, Parkhill, Ailsa Craig, Strathroy. Two return trips two afternoons per week. Service ended May 31, 2025.



2025 Overview



Funding & Partnership

The final quarter of 2024 and the first quarter of 2025 were defined by funding uncertainty. During this time, HSAT focused on budget forecasting for the Ontario Transit Investment Fund grant application to ensure service continued beyond March 31, 2025, while continuing and increasing advocacy at the provincial level, and considering service wind-down scenarios.

Until March 2025, HSAT was fully funded through the Ontario Community Transportation Program (CT Program), which supported transit services in underserved and unserved communities. The scheduled end of this program, without a replacement suitable for small, rural transit systems, posed a significant risk to HSAT’s continued operation. Sustained advocacy by the Municipality of Lambton Shores, Southwestern Community Transit (SCT), and South Central Ontario Region Economic Development Corporation (SCOR EDC), contributed to the Province’s development of a new grant program, the Ontario Transit Investment Fund (OTIF).

Advocacy and partnership building activities included:

- OTIF and Gas Tax Funding meetings, submissions, and discussions.

- Transit Partner Council presentations and the provision of financial modelling to support five-year funding resolutions.
- Direct engagement with provincial officials, including meetings with the Minister of Transportation and local MPPs - Lisa Thompson (Huron-Bruce) and Steve Pinsonneault (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex).
- Continued participation in Southwestern Community Transit (SCT)¹ and SCOR EDC² advocacy efforts at Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) and Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) conferences and Queen’s Park Day.

The OTIF announcement provided a life-line to small rural transit systems, the majority of which outsource the day-to-day operations to a service contractor. Of the half dozen federal and provincial transit funding programs available, only two allow funding for operations and fit the outsourced operational model used by small rural transit systems.

The third quarter (October 2024) release of the OTIF application intake created immediate challenges, as municipal budgeting was already in process and the OTIF application required Transit Partner Councils (Kettle & Stony Point First Nation and the municipalities of Lambton Shores, South Huron, Bluewater and Plympton-Wyoming) to pass five-year financial commitments and Ontario Gas Tax Program resolutions within a short timeframe to be eligible for the first OTIF intake in 2025.

Detailed financial modelling during this time showed that reducing service to lower costs was counterproductive. Service reductions actually increased per-capita municipal costs, since the resulting reduced ridership in turn reduced the financial support for which the system would be eligible under both the OTIF and the Gas Tax Program. Maintaining Routes 1, 2, and 3 as an integrated system was the most financially sustainable option, especially given that 20% of the system costs are fixed regardless of service level.

The Gas Tax Program funding formula further reinforced the importance of multi-partner collaboration leveraging combined populations and ridership. Gas Tax funding is distributed from an annually determined provincial envelope to eligible transit systems based on a formula that weights population served, annual ridership, and municipal

Maintaining service levels is critical to preserving provincial funding levels.

¹ Southwest Community Transit (SCT) is an association of community transit services across southwestern Ontario. SCT is comprised of nine members: Grey Transit, Brant Transit, Ride Norfolk, T-Go, PC Connect, Middlesex Connect, Stratford, Strathroy-Caradoc, and Huron Shores Area Transit.

² The South Central Ontario Region Economic Development Corporation (SCOR EDC) is a regional partnership comprised of the Counties of Brant, Elgin, Middlesex, Norfolk and Oxford, established to support economic diversification, workforce growth and long-term prosperity across the region and provides administrative and financial support for SCT.

contribution, making service area population, ridership, and partnership support critical. Under the Program's formula, \$8.17 per capita is provided toward the base calculation, before ridership and municipal contributions are considered.³

Through discussions with Gas Tax Program staff, Lambton Shores' in-kind and direct costs as the lead and host municipality under the former CT Program were recognized as an eligible municipal contribution that could be considered for the 2025-26 funding year, increasing the funding available to HSAT above what would otherwise have been possible. This meant HSAT was able to qualify for \$124,640 of funding in its first year of operations beyond the end of the CT Program, which made a significant difference to the financial support needed from Transit Partners.

HSAT's five-year funding structure for April 1, 2025 to March 31, 2030 moved to a multi-source arrangement that includes fare and advertising revenue, municipal and First Nation financial contributions, Gas Tax Funding, and OTIF funding.

Formal Council resolutions confirming financial support and Gas Tax Funding participation were received from the Transit Partner municipalities and First Nation. The municipalities of Lucan-Biddulph and North Middlesex chose not to continue participating in the transit program. As a result, HSAT discontinued service to Lucan and Route 4 (Grand Bend–Strathroy via North Middlesex) May 31, 2025. Plympton-Wyoming currently has one stop, and has expressed interest in further participation to expand HSAT's reach within the municipality.

Provincial election timing (January/February 2025) delayed confirmation of OTIF and Gas Tax Funding until June 2025. To ensure uninterrupted service, Lambton Shores provided interim financial support for the months of April and May.

On June 19, 2025, Lambton Shores hosted a media event at which the Honourable Lisa Thompson, Minister of Rural Affairs, and Steve Pinsonneault, MPP for Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, announced HSAT's successful OTIF application.



L-R: MPP Steve Pinsonneault, Bluewater Deputy Mayor John Becker, Lambton Shores Mayor Doug Cook, South Huron Mayor George Finch, MPP Lisa Thompson.

³ Total 2023-24 funding envelope was \$379.6m, with 30% of the amount divided by Ontario's 13,938,742 population for an \$8.17 subsidy per capita and 70% of the pot divided by Ontario's total public transit ridership of 555,783,700 for \$0.478 subsidy per ride. A transit system's eligible funding can then be subject to a cap, as the funding will not exceed 75% of the municipal spend on transit.

Following months of uncertainty, HSAT's funding for 2025–2030 was confirmed at \$4,738,464, comprised of:

- \$969,232 – Ontario Transit Investment Fund
- \$1.3 million – Ontario Gas Tax For Transit Program
- \$969,232 – Transit Partner contributions
- \$1.5 million – Fare and advertising revenue

Routes & Stops

During the year, route and stop adjustments were implemented to strengthen municipal inclusion and ridership, expand access to HSAT, and align stop locations with planned transit infrastructure installations.

Route adjustments were based on distributing the infrastructure across as many communities as possible, bus stop usage (see Appendix A: Bus Stop Usage for full listing of stops), and bus stop location potential to generate advertising revenue for long-term financial sustainability. HSAT's three routes are:

- Route 1 (Grand Bend to Sarnia via Lambton Shores) — remains the busiest route in the system, provides regional connectivity, offers seasonal express services during peak demand periods May through October.
- Route 2 (Grand Bend to London via South Huron) — provides regional connectivity, offers seasonal express services in July and August, includes the London flag stop connecting HSAT passengers with intercity coachlines.
- Route 3 (Grand Bend to Goderich via Bluewater) — stop locations adjusted to improve safety, access, accessibility, and alignment with future service planning.
- Route 4 (Grand Bend to Strathroy via North Middlesex) — ceased operations May 31, 2025 following North Middlesex's decision not to continue participation in HSAT.

Route 3 Changes

As part of the OTIF budget forecasting, Route 3 was identified as continuing to be under utilized in its current form. While fixed-route service was maintained during the year, the route has been identified for future conversion to an on-demand model. Development of the on-demand business case will continue into 2026, with findings expected to be ready for Transit Partner review towards the end of the first quarter. The challenge is to provide Bluewater residents with similar service as other Transit Partners at an affordable price level while working within the established OTIF budget and without additional funding.

Route 3's performance indicates a mismatch between service model and demand.

Stop Optimization & Access Improvements

Stop changes during the year were tied to the Bus Stop Infrastructure Project and focused on improving accessibility, safety, suitability for shelters, benches, and bike rack corrals, and potential to generate advertising revenue. Key updates included:

- Consolidation of two Bayfield stops to a single stop at Clan Gregor Square to support Route 3 extension of service to previously unserved areas of Bluewater.
- Addition of new stops at McKay Park, in Plympton-Wyoming and Brucefield in Bluewater, expanding public transit access and municipal participation in the system.
- Adjustments to stop locations in Zurich, Hensall, Exeter, and Huron Park⁴ to better align with safe pedestrian access, visibility, and planned transit infrastructure.

Collectively, these route and stop changes extend system coverage and access, support potential ridership growth and lay the groundwork for infrastructure upgrades.

Fares & Discounts

As part of the OTIF budget forecasting, HSAT completed a fare review with a focus to improve revenue results and financial sustainability while maintaining affordability and equity.

In comparison to other SCT transit systems, HSAT provides more and longer daily service, including weekends, Statutory and Civic Holidays, seasonal express buses, and multiple payment methods, including convenient Smart Card technology.

While providing arguably a higher level of service, HSAT's monthly pass was priced significantly lower compared to other SCT systems, while single cash fares were comparable. Based on two SCT member transit systems that provided a monthly pass (Tillsonburg T-Go \$211; Ride Norfolk \$164), HSAT's monthly pass at \$120 was not only much lower but also deeply discounted, especially for long-distance riders who typically used the pass, paying an average of \$5.08 per trip for a \$10 long-distance fare, well below the 20% discount level recommended in the Feasibility Study (2019 The Municipality of Lambton Shores Transit System Feasibility Study, page 28).

⁴ Zurich: stop moved from Mill Road to Victoria Lane to provide room for transit shelter; also closer to downtown core. Hensall: stop moved from library parking lot to north side of King Street at the Hensall parkette and outbound stop added on south side near D&D Variety. Exeter: Inbound stop to move from in front of the municipal building and Cenotaph to immediately north of the building beside parking lot entrance. Huron Park: Stops on both sides of Airport Line to move closer to pedestrian crosswalk.

In August 2025, along with a Monthly Pass price increase, cash fares also increased for the first time since launch. At the same time, additional discounted fares were implemented:

- Local cash fare increased from \$5 to \$6
- Long-distance cash fare increased from \$10 to \$12
- Monthly Pass increased from \$120 to \$140
- Seniors and Veterans discount (20% discount)
- CNIB Cardholder discount (free travel)
- Income-related discount (95% discount)

Even after increases, HSAT fares remain competitive when benchmarked against other SCT systems.

All discounted fares are delivered through the Smart Card system, which allows for effective management and accurate tracking of discounted fare usage. In the last quarter of 2025, discounted fares through the Smart Card system totalled 188 rides:

- CNIB Cardholder: 76 rides
- Income Related: 76 rides
- Agency Day Pass: 36 rides

Library Smart Card Program

The Library Smart Card borrowing program continued in 2025. Library cardholders sign out a special Smart Card for a non-renewable, five-day borrowing period during which they can ride for free for as many trips as they like. It’s a way to incent and introduce the use of public transit to those that may be more wary of trying something new. This year, the program saw a 23% increase in use with the special passes used for 299 trips compared to 243 in 2024.

The most used Library Smart Card in 2025 was the Kettle & Stony Point First Nation card, followed second by Goderich.

Table 1

Library Card Pass Usage	Trips
KSPFN	76
Goderich	50
Sarnia - Christina St	42
Grand Bend	28
Bayfield	23
Forest	22
Theford	18
Zurich	18
Hensall	13
Sarnia - Clearwater	5
Exeter	4
Arkona	0
Heritage Musuem	0
Port Franks	0
Wyoming	0

Ridership

Several factors contributed to the overall 17.8% decrease in ridership in 2025: Fewer riders on Route 1 (Sarnia to Grand Bend), Voyago omitting to record the Route 1 Express Bus boardings for May, June and July, uncertainty about HSAT’s continuation beyond March 31, 2025, and no advertising or promotional activities other than social media from September 2024 to May 2025 due to budget constraints.

Route 1 experienced a 26% decrease in ridership, directly attributable to fewer Lambton College students travelling to the area for work following the federal cap on international study permits⁵. Similar impact was reported by other SCT transit systems - Ride Norfolk and Middlesex Connect. At the same time, uncertainty about HSAT’s future funding created confusion and misinformation, with residents mistakenly believing the service had stopped operating. Despite these factors, ridership remained strong.

The Route 2 Express bus (“Beach Bus”) increased ridership for the third year running, up 22% in 2025 compared to 2024.

System-wide and by-route ridership, service hours and revenue results for HSAT’s five years of operation are included in Appendix B: Stats & Facts.

Beginning in 2023, full bus situations and the inability of Voyago to provide extra buses until July, led HSAT to provide a taxi based Route 1 shuttle service beginning mid-May through to the end of June. In 2024, this service cost \$11,342 to run. In 2025, Voyago was able to supply an extra bus earlier in the season eliminating the reliance on taxi services.

As ridership increased and the bus fleet aged, service disruptions became more frequent in 2024. Bus breakdowns, driver shortages, and instances where buses reached full capacity

Stats & Facts

Overall Ridership

- 21,028 boardings
- Route 1 the busiest route
- Route 1 boardings: 12,464
- Route 2 boardings: 8,063
- Route 3 boardings: 462
- Average monthly ridership: 1,752

Route 1 Express Bus

- Days in Operation: 68
- Bus runs: 136
- Passengers: Unknown. Voyago did not record passenger count.

Route 2 Bus Express

- Days in Operation: 20
- Bus runs: 80
- Passengers: 929
- Farebox revenue: \$9,850
- Net cost to run: \$5,162

⁵ Lambton College international student enrolment dropped 12% Fall 2024 and additional 10% Fall 2025. International student enrolment shifted from 7,500 to 3,550 students.
<https://sarnianewstoday.ca/sarnia/news/2025/03/17/lambton-college-could-see-30m-loss-due-to-drop-in-international-enrolment>

contributed to a rise in stranded passengers. As a result, nearly \$30,000 was spent on taxi services to transport stranded passengers either to their destinations or back home. As a result, the Stranded Passenger policy was tweaked for 2025 to be a “return home or to point of origin” service only⁶.

Discussions with Voyago over these situations gave Voyago cause to make additional arrangements for spare buses to be made available to HSAT and increase driver and driver lead hand recruitment efforts. As a result, HSAT’s taxi expense dropped to \$4,906 in 2025.

Boardings Per Hour

A key measure of transit efficiency is boardings per vehicle hour (BpH). In small rural systems, early performance is typically 2 to 3 BpH, increasing to 4 to 6 BpH as the system grows. In 2025, HSAT averaged 2.9 BpH across the system. When Route 3 is excluded, this increases to 3.27 BpH, which is within the expected range. In its current fixed-route format, Route 3 is not performing well and supports the plan to consider an on-demand service model that better matches demand and which likely better responds to Bluewater residents’ needs.

Fare Recovery

As a recipient of Gas Tax Program funding starting with 2025, HSAT is required to report its statistics to CUTA (Canadian Urban Transit Association)⁷. In calculating various performance indicators, CUTA’s formulae were used in preparation for submission. For comparative purposes, previous years’ statistics were recalculated accordingly (see Table 2).

One of the key performance indicators for transit systems is the Farebox Recovery Ratio (R/C Ratio), which measures the percentage of total operating costs covered by fare revenue. Total operating costs include contractor service fees, fuel, salaries and benefits, advertising, administration costs, everything except capital expenses. The only revenue included in the calculation is farebox (no grant or other funding included).

⁶ No Stranded Passengers Policy (return home service only): If HSAT transports a passenger to a destination and cannot return them home the same day due to breakdown, driver shortage, cancellation, or full bus, a free taxi is provided. Since it is possible to book seats on the Route 2 Seasonal Express, this policy does not apply to Route 2 during July and August weekends.

⁷ CUTA members include transit systems, public agencies, suppliers, and mobility experts. It advocates to governments, supports industry collaboration, and leads national transit data collection. CUTA collects data on behalf of the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) for provincial funding.

Despite lower ridership and reduced total fare revenue, HSAT achieved a 14.7% R/C Ratio. This is an achievement in a year of uncertainty and especially for a transit system that's only been in existence since 2020.

For comparison, the 2021 Ontario Urban Transit Fact Book reports municipalities with similar service population sizes recorded the following R/C Ratios: Welland – 13%, Cornwall – 12%, and North Bay – 15%. Each of these systems are mature operations in existence for at least 40 years at the time of publication.

This shows HSAT's fare recovery is consistent with other small rural transit systems serving a similar sized populace.

Table 2

Table of HSAT Key Performance Indicators Since Launch						
<i>(uses CUTA formulas)</i>						
	2025⁶	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020
Service Cost	\$597,097	\$835,992	\$731,042	\$647,794	\$508,051	\$90,778
Fuel Cost¹	\$113,966	~	~	~	~	~
Admin, Marketing, HR & All Other Operating Expenses	\$218,983	\$164,141	\$179,740	\$150,105	\$93,598	\$33,943
Total Operating Cost	\$930,234	\$1,000,133	\$910,782	\$797,900	\$601,649	\$124,721
Passenger Fare Revenue	\$136,768	\$141,486	\$106,037	\$34,664	\$11,464	see note 5
Passenger Trips	21,028	25,587	20,066	7,851	1,553	45
Average Cost Per Ride²	\$44.24	\$39.08	\$45.38	\$101.63	\$387.41	\$2,771.57
Net Direct Operating Cost Per Passenger³	\$37.73	\$33.56	\$40.10	\$97.22	\$380.03	\$2,771.59
Average Fare Revenue Per Ride	\$6.50	\$5.53	\$5.28	\$4.42	\$7.38	~
Subsidy Level	85%	86%	88%	96%	98%	100%
Farebox Recovery Ratio⁴	14.7%	14.14%	11.64%	4.34%	1.90%	0%

Notes:

1. Fuel Cost: Change in accounting procedure separates service fee from fuel cost. Prior to 2025, service and fuel costs were combined.
2. Average Cost Per Ride: Total expenses divided by total boardings.
3. Net Direct Operating Cost Per Passenger: Operating costs minus farebox revenue, divided by boardings.
4. Farebox Recovery Ratio: Farebox revenue divided by total expenses expressed as a percentage.
5. Service was provided free in the first two months post launch.
6. HSAT's 2025 budget detail in Appendix C.

Payment Methods

As a result of recent fare adjustments, particularly to the Monthly Pass, the system's overall average fare rose to \$6.50 in 2025 (see Chart 1 for Monthly Pass impact on system average fare). Since its introduction in 2021, the Monthly Pass has been priced below its intended

discount offering of 20% off pre-purchased regular fares. To address this, scheduled fare increases were implemented annually. The August 2025 adjustment raised the Monthly Pass price to \$140. The goal is for the average trip fare to reach \$7.

Although cash remains the primary method of payment, the Monthly Pass accounts for approximately 23% of all fare payments. Refer to Appendix B: Stats & Facts for annual breakdown of Smart Card usage by type. Because it was underpriced relative to its value, it has exerted downward pressure on the system’s overall average fare. Planned additional increases in 2026 are expected to further align pricing with sustainable cost recovery and reduce this effect.

Payment Methods:

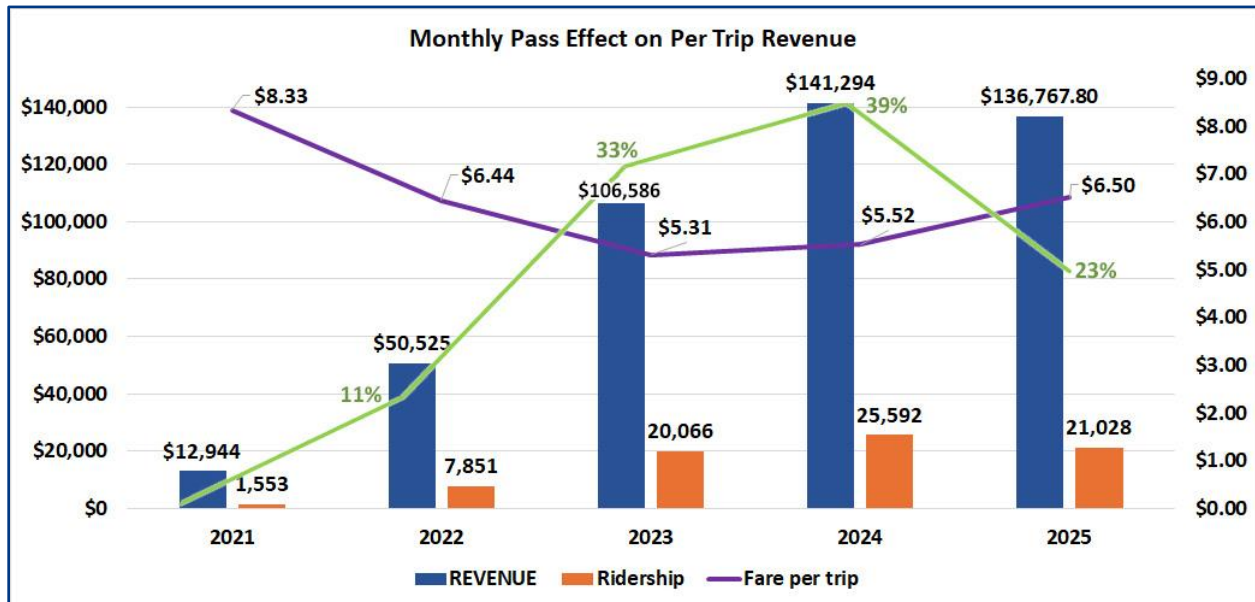
- Cash: 59%
- Smart Cards: 35%
- Online (Route 2 Seasonal Bus): 3.73%
- Free trips: 2%

Smart Card Usage by Type:

Table 3

Breakdown of Smart Card Types	Validations	%
Agency Day Pass	36	1%
CNIB Cardholder Pass	76	1%
Income Related Pass	76	1%
Library Pass	301	5%
Set Dollar Value (\$6 / \$12)	1,434	25%
Monthly Pass (\$140)	3,910	67%
	5,833	100%

Chart 1



Note: 1 Green line shows the percentage of fares paid using a Monthly Pass.

Advertising Revenue

Advertising revenue was \$720 in 2025, down from \$1,890 in 2024.

The main challenge with selling in-bus advertising is low visibility and inconsistent availability. Advertisers are hesitant to pay for space when exposure is uncertain. Only two buses are equipped with advertising frames, and both are regularly taken out of service for maintenance. Because HSAT's buses are aging, they require more repairs and spend more time off the road. This shortens campaign periods and reduces confidence that in-bus advertising is a reliable option.

In addition, advertisers have expressed a preference for bus shelter and bench advertising instead of on-bus placement. These locations stay in one place and offer steady, high-visibility exposure in busy areas from not only passengers, but also pedestrians and drivers. In advertising, visibility and consistency are essential. As a result, it has been difficult to market on-bus advertising as a competitive product.

Bus stop infrastructure will directly support revenue generation through advertising.

Bus Stop Infrastructure Project

In September 2023, HSAT applied to the Federal Rural Transit Solutions Fund (RTSF) for capital funding to install bus stop infrastructure, including shelters, benches, lighting, and bike corrals. The goal was to improve customer service while creating new advertising revenue opportunities.

In October 2024, HSAT was notified the application was successful. The program approved funding for 80% of total project costs, up to \$299,467. Due to the April 2025 federal election, the funding agreement was not finalized until July 2025.

The approved project included:

- 24 Concrete pads
- 10 bus shelters with integrated benches and solar-powered lighting
- 8 additional solar-powered lighting units for HSAT's refurbished bus shelters
- 21 bike rack corrals
- 7 stand-alone benches
- All bus stop furniture to have integrated advertising panels

There was nearly a two-year gap between the original price quotes used for the grant application and the updated quotes received in spring/summer 2025. Over that period, costs

increased significantly, reflecting the elevated inflation experienced across the broader economy.

The lowest bid for 24 concrete pads was \$298k, more than double the \$131k budgeted in the grant application. This increase required changes to the project scope.

As a result, the number of bus stops to be upgraded were reduced from 24 to 13. Locations were prioritized based on ridership and advertising revenue potential. A revised quote of \$132k for the reduced number of bus stops remains within the available budget. Five concrete pads will be completed as part of Lambton Shores' scheduled infrastructure projects. Nine pads were installed in November before winter weather stopped construction. The remaining four pads will be re-tendered and completed in spring 2026.

With fewer concrete pads and bus stop upgrades planned, transit furniture was also reduced to six new transit shelters with solar-powered lighting units, six stand alone advertising benches, and eleven bike corrals. Solar powered lighting kits will be purchased for the eight refurbished shelters already onhand.

At the end of 2025, completed or in-progress project activity included:

- Site inspections and accessibility reviews
- Consultation with Transit Partners and accessibility committees (Lambton Shores Accessibility Advisory Committee, Huron County Accessibility Advisory Committee)
- Development of the *HSAT Bus Stop Accessibility & Guidelines* document
- Construction and installation of concrete pads (partial completion)
- Draft encroachment agreements in negotiation with Transit Partners
- Participation in Metrolinx procurement initiatives with the goal of improved pricing for shelters, benches, and bike corrals

Marketing & Promotion

With uncertainty about future funding and operations beyond March 31, 2025, all available remaining budget was reserved for front line service which ended all paid advertising activity for eight months, from October 2024 to May 2025.

Beginning June 2025, marketing efforts stepped up to promote HSAT as back in business and operating, and that the seasonal express buses were back.

HSAT is a very local service, consequently promotional efforts are hyper-local with a focus on geographically targeted Facebook advertising and posts, community based news outlets (print and web versions), electronic billboards (free and paid). All print publications now offer an online presence with a standard print advertising buy including web advertising often at a

reduced price. This means 72% of all marketing efforts include some form of web/digital platform.

Specialty print media included key local publications such as *It Starts at the Beach* visitors guide, *Stops Along the Way* and *Daytripping*.

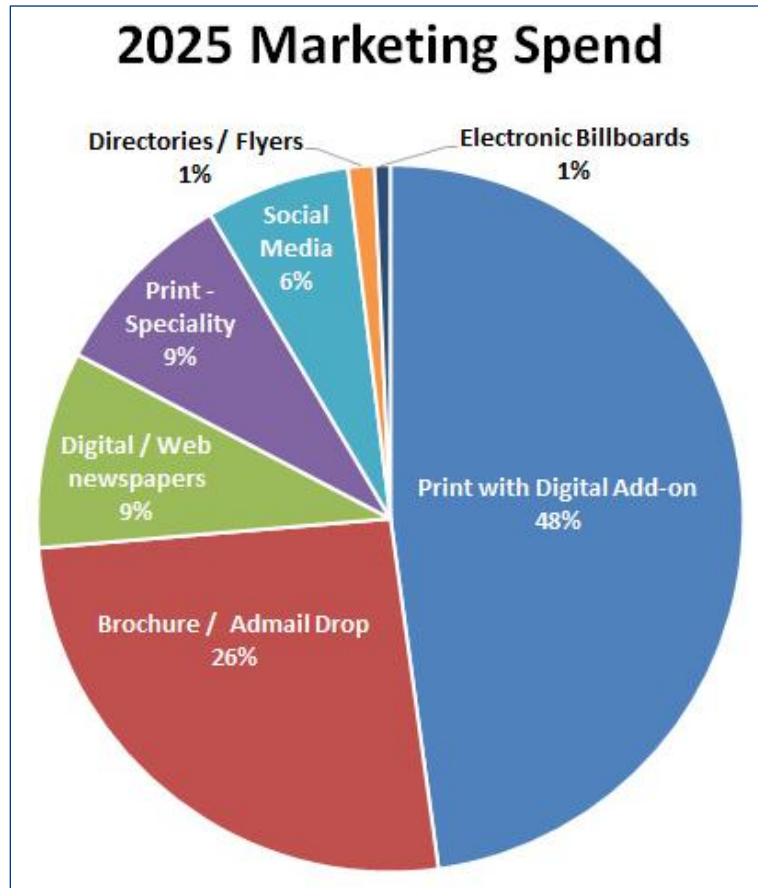
The largest budget item was the new brochure, completely rewritten and redesigned. The brochure was distributed to residents as a mail drop to 22,113 houses and apartments in Lambton Shores, South Huron, Bluewater, Plympton-Wyoming, Goderich, Clinton, and Vanastra and 49 additional locations that included accommodations, business organizations/associations, community groups, employment centres, food banks, retailers, legions, medical centres, seniors apartments, and tourism centres.

Outreach included a March guest panelist spot at ITE Southwestern Ontario⁸ (along with Hamilton Transit and the TTC), and September presentation to Lambton County’s Seniors Advisory Committee.

Overall website traffic was down by 46% in 2025 compared to 2024. Facebook views decreased 3% and engagement with the posts (likes, comments, link clicks) decreased 4%.

According to *Marketing Fuel*, “research consistently shows that when companies stop advertising, they experience a significant and often long-term decline in website traffic, sales, and brand awareness”.⁹

Chart 2



⁸ ITE is a volunteer-driven association of transit professionals that provides opportunities for professional development and community building.

⁹ <https://marketingfuel.co.uk/why-cutting-marketing-spend-in-tougher-times-is-a-big-mistake>

HSAT was unable to advertise for eight months due to the budget crunch at the end of the CT Program funding cycle, putting all remaining budget into maintaining the service itself. In marketing terms, this is considered a long-term absence from public awareness and will take time and consistent marketing effort to regain.

2026 Plans and Initiatives

With long-term funding confirmed through 2030, HSAT will focus on improving service delivery, completing infrastructure upgrades, and strengthening financial sustainability.

A key priority is completing the Route 3 On-Demand Service Business Case, which will examine the feasibility of replacing the current fixed-route service between Grand Bend and Goderich with a flexible on-demand model. This work will evaluate travel demand, service design options, and financial implications. Once stakeholder discussions and public meetings are completed, implementation of the preferred option can begin.

The Bus Stop Infrastructure Project will continue procurement. Completion of the remaining concrete pads and installation of transit infrastructure (transit shelters, benches, solar lighting and bike corrals) will improve accessibility, visibility, and passenger comfort while enabling the launch of a transit advertising revenue program.

As part of this project, negotiations with Transit Partners on encroachment agreements will be finalized to support the installation and ongoing maintenance of transit infrastructure.

HSAT will also finalize a new Voyago service contract extending to March 31, 2030 to ensure performance expectations, fleet availability, and operational capacity align with the system's evolving needs.

Marketing, outreach, and community engagement will focus on rebuilding public awareness following the funding uncertainty experienced in 2025. Outreach activities will include participation in events such as the Ontario Good Roads Conference, the Kettle & Stony Point First Nation Open House, the Sarnia-Lambton Age Friendly Show, and the Lambton Shores Job Fair.

While the first five years of HSAT focused on building ridership and demonstrating the need for rural public transit, the next phase will focus on strengthening and stabilizing the system as a mature regional transit service connecting communities across the region.

Appendix A: Bus Stop Usage

All Stops	Usage TTL (On+Off)
Sobeys Plaza, Grand Bend (BUS HUB)	7,948
Lambton Mall, Sarnia	6,187
Masonville Mall, London	4,556
Lambton College, Sarnia	4,012
King St W @ Library, Forest	2,760
Walper St. @ McDonalds, Exeter	1,838
Points Plaza, KSPFN	1,709
Legacy Centre, Thedford	1,613
Welcome Centre, Grand Bend	1,400
Main St & Sanders St, Exeter	1,283
University Hospital, London	916
Community Centre, Arkona	633
Main St & Huron St W, Exeter	564
Lakeshore Rd @ Grogs, Port Franks	562
Townsend Line @ Foodland, Forest	544
Main St & Highway 21, Grand Bend	383
Walmart, Sarnia (ended in June)	377
Walmart Plaza, Goderich	365
Dashwood Rd & Centre St, Dashwood	327
Lakeshore Rd. @ MacPherson's, Port Franks	263
Stephen Township Arena, Huron Park	223
Stony Point @ Army Camp Rd, Ipperwash	195
McKay Pk., Plympton-Wyoming (started June 22)	181
Ontario St. S. @ Nofrills, Grand Bend	145
Northville Cres @ Ausable CA, Northville	131
Ontario St S @ River Rd, Grand Bend	121
Ontario St S @ Amber Plaza, Grand Bend	107
King St., Hensall	96
Old Town Hall, Bayfield	88
Flex Stop for Inter-City buses (#1820), London	56
Pineview Mobile Homes, Lambton Shores	39
Melbourne St @ Park, Centralia	36
Lambton Heritage Museum, Lambton Shores	32
Victoria Lane, Zurich	22
Cameron St & Highway 21, Bayfield (ended July)	16
West Huron Care Centre, Zurich	10

Appendix B: Stats & Facts

BOARDINGS BY ROUTE						
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Route 1	11	610	3,532	13,252	16,966	12,464
Route 2	23	824	4,057	6,448	8,150	8,063
Route 3	3	26	137	215	379	462
Route 4 (ended Mar. 31 '25)	0	3	125	151	92	39
Forest intown (ended Jan.'22)	8	119	~	~	~	~
Totals	45	1,582	7,851	20,066	25,587	21,028

SERVICE HOURS BY ROUTE						
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Route 1	102	2,163	3,798	4,189	4,105	4,243
Route 2	166	3,493	1,787	2,114	2,003	2,032
Route 3	~	~	808	917	963	754
Route 4 (ended Mar. 31 '25)	~	~	499	487	600	172
Totals	268	5,656	6,892	7,708	7,671	7,201

REVENUE BY ROUTE						
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Route 1	\$0	\$3,234	\$15,798	\$48,799	\$78,102	\$63,282
Route 2	\$0	\$7,030	\$17,150	\$46,029	\$58,886	\$68,128
Route 3	\$0	~	\$560	\$1,668	\$2,461	\$3,399
Route 4 (ended Mar. 31 '25)	\$0	~	\$605	\$845	\$578	\$210
Totals		\$10,264.25	\$34,112.88	\$97,341.85	\$140,027.28	\$135,018.16

Note: Total annual revenue does not match the General Ledger (G/L) figures because it is calculated using ridership and fare data reported by two different service providers (Voyago and Transitfare), each of which uses different data collection methods.

In addition, actual revenue reported in the G/L includes sales of agency day passes and funds loaded onto Smart Cards that have not yet been used to pay for a ride. Since these funds have not yet been redeemed for travel, they are not considered earned revenue.

AVERAGE PER RIDE FARE REVENUE BY ROUTE						
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Route 1	\$0.00	\$5.30	\$4.47	\$3.68	\$4.60	\$5.08
Route 2	\$0.00	\$8.53	\$4.23	\$7.14	\$7.23	\$8.45
Route 3	\$0.00	~	\$4.09	\$7.76	\$6.20	\$7.36
Route 4 (ended March 31, 2025)	\$0.00	~	\$4.84	\$5.60	\$6.28	~

Note: More discounted Monthly Passes are used on Route 1 causing a lower average per ride revenue than routes where cash is primarily used.

SMART CARD USAGE BY TYPE (COUNTS)						
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Set Dollar Value	~	~	322	615	1,234	1,546
Monthly Pass	~	~	874	6,679	9,991	3,910
Average Monthly Pass Revenue Per Ride	~	~	\$3.89	\$3.73	\$4.09	\$4.92

Note: Price of the discounted Monthly Pass has increased from \$50 in 2022 to \$140 in 2025 to raise the average revenue per ride to bring per ride revenue in line with HSAT's Feasibility Study recommendation.

SERVICE QUALITY STATISTICS						
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Vehicle Kilometres	22,221	321,373	330,781	328,606	360,340	411,480
Vehicle Revenue Hours	278	5,656	6,892	7,708	7,671	7,201
Completed Looped Bus Runs	0	1,769	2,001	2,235	2,578	2,624
Breakdown/No Driver Lost Runs	~	~	46	14	53	34
Weather Related Lost Runs	~	~	14	30	18	29

Appendix C: 2025 HSAT Budget

HSAT 2025 OPERATING BUDGET	
REVENUE	\$930,235
Transit Partner Contributions	\$237,555
Provincial Grants (OTIF, CT Program, Gas Tax for Transit)	\$555,148
Fare Revenue	\$136,768
Advertising Revenue	\$720
Interest Revenue	\$44
EXPENSES	\$930,234
Admin Costs	\$143,635
Contracted Services (Voyago, Taxi Services)	\$602,103
Fuel	\$113,966
Marketing	\$38,938
Software / Licensing	\$20,163
Communications/Phone	\$5,103
Materials & Supplies	\$4,321
Bank/Financial Fees	\$2,005

HSAT 2025 CAPITAL BUDGET	
PROJECT FUNDING: (Bus Shelters, Benches, Bike Corrals)	\$374,334
Federal Grant – Rural Transit Solutions Fund	\$299,467
Transit Partner Contributions	\$74,867
2025 REVENUE	\$74,337
Federal Grant – Rural Transit Solutions Fund	\$59,469
Transit Partner Contributions	\$14,868
2025 EXPENSES	\$74,337
Concrete installation	\$74,337
BALANCE FORWARD FOR REMAINDER OF PROJECT	\$299,997