

Trans-County Transportation continues speedy growth

Contributed by Geoff Agombar

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Trans-County Transportation Society (TCTS) has acquired a 2008 14-passenger GMC minibus with wheelchair accessibility and capacity for four wheelchairs, continuing its rapid expansion of services since nearly closing its doors in 2004.

The TCTS was created as a volunteer organization in 1999 and serves residents of Annapolis County and part of Kings, in particular the elderly, disabled, and economically disadvantaged. Under the determined leadership of manager Debbie Decker and a revitalized board of directors, the not-for-profit charity narrowly escaped death in 2004, and has since expanded to employ six drivers and three volunteer drivers (who have been there since the organization's inception).

"It is really amazing how far we've come in the last four years. Everyone was saying it was dead, done, we should just close the doors. But we refused to give up. And, once we got that ball rolling again, it's just amazing how quickly it has grown," says firebrand Decker of the re-birth of this increasingly essential link in the local transportation chain.

As Decker explains, the turnaround began with the purchase of a Corolla, and the fleet has since added a wheelchair-accessible minivan, three seven-passenger minivans, one seven-passenger medical van (for runs to medical facilities in the Halifax area), and two 14-passenger, wheelchair accessible minibuses.

Users of the service pay an annual membership fee of \$20. Members can schedule pick-up and drop-off throughout Annapolis County and part of Kings (from the western county line to the Berwick area, from the South Mountain to the Fundy shore).

While medical appointments take priority, many clients use the service for shopping, community and social events, or family visits. "It might be a simple social outing, such as a group of retirees for a drive up the shore for ice cream," says Decker.

A minimal fee is charged for trips based on distance traveled. Members also have the option of chartering the minibuses or vans on an hourly basis, for a cost of \$65/hour for a minibus or \$45/hour for van. (Contact information is listed below, for anyone desiring more detailed information). "We do our best to keep our rates as low as possible for the sake of our people, but gas prices are making this harder and harder," Decker admits. In appreciation of these efforts, some users who can afford it have been known to donate a bit extra on top of the per-trip fee.

This latest \$86,000 purchase of a 2008 GMC minibus would not have been possible without investment from various governmental departments and agencies.

The province participated heavily in this acquisition with the largest share of public support coming via the province's Green Mobility Capital Grants* to the tune of \$22,000 plus further provincial support under the Accessible Transportation Assistance Program** which contributed \$10,000. The Federal Public Transit Funds (through the Canada-Nova Scotia Agreement on the Transfer of Federal Public Transit Funds) contributed an additional \$20,000. A \$10,000 portion of Annapolis County's annual operating funding of TCTS is earmarked for vehicle acquisition bringing total public funding for this purchase to \$62,000, or 70 per cent of the total price tag. The remaining \$24,000 would be allocated from the organization's regular budget.

To inquire about Trans-County Transportation membership or to make a tax-deductible donation, contact Debbie Decker at (902)665-1212 or toll free at (877)305-7433 ext. 7

tcts@ns.sympatico.ca

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*The Green Mobility Capital Grants is a pilot project funded by Conserve Nova Scotia and managed by the Ecology Action Centre. Notice of project's continuation or cessation is this October.

**The Accessible Transportation Assistance Program is a cross-departmental program administered by Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations in partnership with Transportation and Public Works, the Senior Citizens' Secretariat, Health, Community Services, the Disabled Persons Commission, Education, and the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board.