

County Transit System Backgrounder

September 2023



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Background and History



Picture of the County Transit bus with branding and sponsor advertising on the side. The driver smiles from the driver side window of the vehicle.

Public Transit History - A Brief Timeline

- 2013** The County Foundation's 2013 [Vital Signs report](#) indicated that getting around The County was a challenge for many residents. The lack of transportation options limited access to services such as recreation, education, jobs, housing and sources of fresh and healthy food. At this time, the Foundation created a "Getting Around Group" comprised of many community organizations, agencies, and transit providers to discuss the transportation needs in Prince Edward County. The Foundation then partnered with the municipality to form a Prince Edward County Transportation Project Steering Committee.
- 2018** As a result of this work, Council approved a [transit plan and business case](#) in May 2018. The municipality secured \$685,660.44 in funding through the Ministry of Transportation's [Community Transportation Grant Program](#) to implement this plan between 2018-2025
- 2020** In 2020, the municipality engaged [Quinte Access*](#) to operate as "County Transit" and provide the public transit services described in the plan. Quinte Access was already providing specialized services for seniors (55+) and people with disabilities in The County and had been since 2007. Through an RFP process, the municipality hired them to expand their services to include public transit. County Transit was formally launched with on-demand and fixed route services in 2020.
- 2023** In 2023, the municipality of Prince Edward County adopted a Strategic Plan for the period of 2023-2026. The Strategic Plan includes a goal to "Refresh The County's public transit strategy in the post-pandemic context to meet current and future employment and educational transportation needs of residents, especially youth."

**Throughout this document "Quinte Access" and "Quinte Transit" are used interchangeably. Quinte Access Transportation Company Inc. is the legal name of the organization, while Quinte Transit is the operating name.*

Community Transportation Goals

"Community transportation" refers to all of the transportation services and resources that exist within a community. In Prince Edward County, County Transit is the municipally-funded public transit system. Public transit is just one part of a community transportation system that includes solutions like volunteer driver programs (i.e. Community Care for Seniors), ride hailing (i.e. Uride), traditional taxis, private businesses' solutions for their staff and customers, school bussing, carpooling, bicycle infrastructure and more.



Picture of six County Transit riders of varying ages posing in front of a bus, wearing masks. The driver stands at the door to the bus, also masked.

Community transportation solutions are, by definition, unique to the community that they serve. All of the solutions, considered together, should address the specific mobility challenges within a community. The focus of a community transportation system should be on practical solutions that move people around the community, with the overarching goals of combatting social exclusion, improving health and education outcomes, enhancing civic engagement, promoting economic participation, and supporting environmental sustainability.

For these reasons, the return on investment for community transportation solutions must be measured not only in economic terms, but also in terms of social impact. According to the *Prince Edward Public Transit Plan and Business Case Report* authored by Dillon Consulting in 2018: "All transit systems in North America and the world operate with a deficit. The revenue collected from passengers using transit will not exceed capital and operating costs of providing the services. Therefore, the business case is not a measure of revenue exceeding costs, but a measure of community impact relative to costs."

The success of County Transit is measured by the system's ability to provide transportation solutions that achieve the greatest community impact possible, relative to municipal investment.

The County Transit system

Types of Services

The County Transit system consists of two types of services: **specialized services** for seniors 55+ and people with disabilities, and **conventional services** available to everyone. The specialized service is provided as **scheduled on-demand** rides, while the conventional service is a mix of **fixed routes**, **flex routes** and scheduled on-demand rides.

Scheduled on-demand means that the passenger calls ahead to book their ride, indicating their preferred date and time of travel. The dispatcher works with the rider to organize a ride that works for them and the routing of available buses. Riders may need to be flexible about their travel timing, but this type of service allows the system to meet the needs of people living across The County's large and often sparsely populated area. The specialized on-demand services and conventional on-demand services are integrated, meaning that all on-demand passengers can ride the same buses regardless of their age or needs, with specialized clients given priority in routing.

Fixed routes are what most people think about when they think of public transit: a regularly scheduled bus route that follows the same schedule and path every time. County Transit has one fixed route between Picton, Bloomfield and Belleville.

Flex routes are built around common routes of travel but do not operate on a fixed schedule. In Prince Edward County there are two flex routes. Because there is a consistent demand for specialized clients to travel through the western County to Trenton, County Transit offers a flex route for non-specialized clients looking to travel between Trenton, Wellington and Bloomfield. The timing of this route isn't consistent, but buses run frequently enough in this area that passengers can rely on it as a scheduled on-demand option for getting around. Another example of a flex route in Prince Edward County is the 5km radius around the Picton-Bloomfield-Belleville fixed route. With advance notice, the fixed route bus can divert up to 5km from its route to pick up passengers at on-demand stops and then return to the regular fixed route.

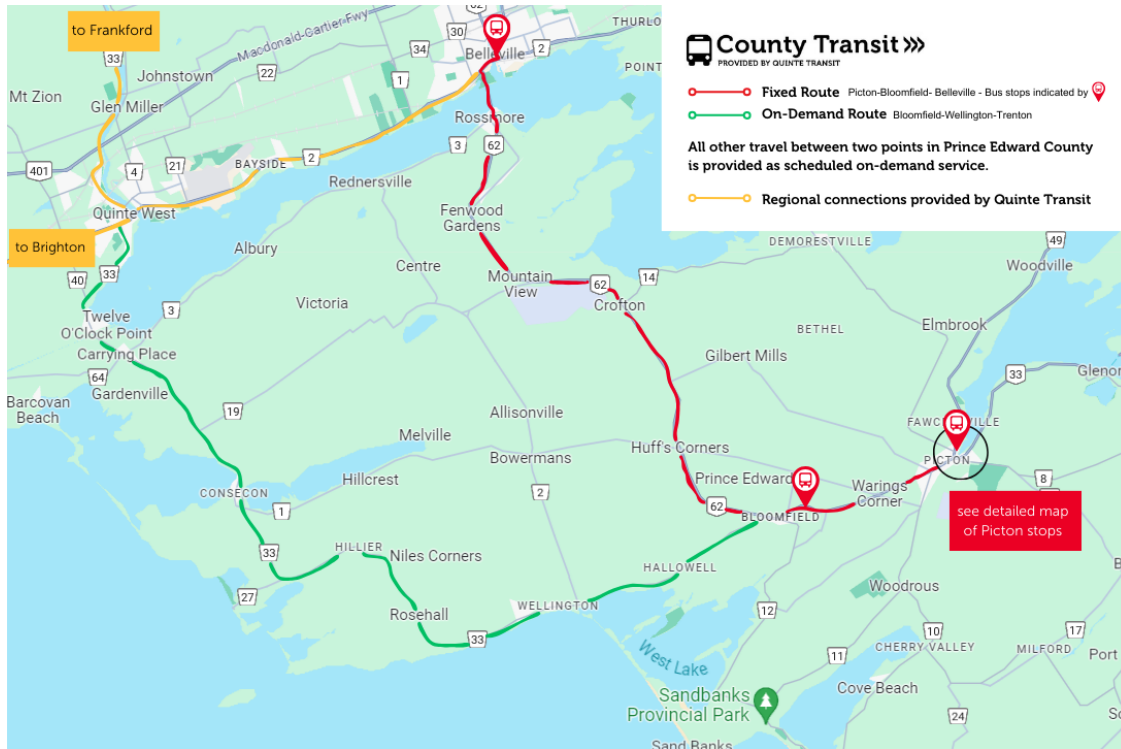
Residents are encouraged to contact County Transit to find out which service is right for them, and if the system can meet their transportation needs. Residents will be happy to learn that the answer is most often "YES!"

Service Area

County Transit's scheduled on-demand services are available throughout Prince Edward County.

County Transit is part of a regional transit network connecting seamlessly with Belleville Transit and with Quinte Transit (Trenton, Frankford and Brighton). The County Transit fixed route (shown on the map below in red) terminates at the Belleville Bus Terminal. The route is scheduled so there is only a 5-minute wait for a transfer to all Belleville bus routes. County Transit will also connect residents to Quinte Transit's services in Trenton through the flex route/scheduled on demand service (shown on the map below in green).

Quinte Transit's routes connect Brighton, Frankford, Trenton and Belleville, and are shown in yellow on the map below.



A graphic of a map showing County Transit's service area.

The nine bus stops in Picton are shown on the map below with "S" representing scheduled stops that depart at a specific time, and the solid red dots representing unscheduled stops on the route. If there is a passenger there when the bus drives by an unscheduled stop, the bus will pick them up, but it is not scheduled to depart from there at a specific time.



A graphic of a map showing the fixed route bus stops in Picton.

Current Service Levels - September 2023

	Specialized Transit		
	Conventional Public Transit		
	FIXED ROUTE (PUBLIC TRANSIT) SERVICE	DOOR-TO-BUS-STOP and STOP-TO-STOP SCHEDULED ON DEMAND	DOOR-TO-DOOR SCHEDULED ON DEMAND
Who can use it?	Open to everyone	Open to everyone	For registered clients 55+ and people with disabilities
Current service level	4x daily route Picton to Bloomfield to Belleville and return. Weekdays between 6:30AM and 6:30PM	Flex route option Bloomfield-Wellington -Trenton or on-demand anywhere in PEC. Weekday daytimes with evening and weekend service if available.	Weekday daytimes with evening and weekend service if available.
How to access	Wait at bus stops	Phone ahead to book 613-392-9640 or 1-855-283-9640	Phone ahead to book 613-392-9640 or 1-855-283-9640
Cost	<p>\$11 one way to Belleville \$7 Senior, Student, Registered Client \$4 Children 6-11 No cost for <5</p> <p>Monthly/2-week passes & 10-ticket books available</p> <p>Reduced fares to travel Picton to Bloomfield (\$3.50-\$5.00), or within Picton (\$1.75-\$3.50)</p>	<p>Zone-based pricing. Depends on route. (\$5 base rate plus \$1 for each "zone" that is crossed in the route of travel)</p>	<p>Zone-based pricing. Depends on route. (\$5 base rate plus \$1 for each "zone" that is crossed in the route of travel)</p>
Service features	<p>Fare includes transfer to Belleville Transit.</p> <p>Riders can call ahead to request special pick up or drop off locations within 5km of the route including the VIA Rail station in Belleville.</p> <p>Route has nine stops within Picton, including Macaulay Village, fairgrounds area, PECL and downtown.</p>	<p>This service often uses temporary bus stops rather than offering door-to-door service. You may need to get yourself to a designated pick up spot within 1km of your home.</p>	<p>Clients must pre-register with County Transit to determine if they are eligible to receive this level of service.</p> <p>Drivers are trained to assist passengers with disabilities.</p> <p>Registered clients are prioritized in scheduling and routing integrated on-demand rides.</p>

System Performance and Impact - Specialized

Specialized Transit - Impact

The specialized transit service builds on a legacy of community transportation solutions that started decades ago with services provided by the [PEC Women's Institute](#) and [PEC Community Care for Seniors](#). The municipality began funding specialized transit services in 2007 as a result of advocacy from the Women's Institute.

The impact of specialized service cannot be understated; it is an essential service for many riders who use the system to access medical appointments, community programming, shopping, recreational and social visits and more. County Transit has collected a number of testimonials over the years.

"Our daughter was born with Spina Bifida, affecting her balance when walking. She also has some developmental delays. She has been lucky enough to be going to an adult day program in Belleville a couple of days a week for many years now. My husband and I are retired and have medical issues that have made it impossible for us to drive her. County Transit is a vital part of our life because it enables her to go to her program in town. It gives her a sense of independence and confidence to do activities on her own. We are so thankful to have County Transit available to us to enrich our daughter's life." - Parents of adult specialized transit rider

The specialized system is serving approximately 400 active, registered riders in 2023. While the number of registered riders dropped during the pandemic (as low as 180 in 2020), the number of active registered riders has now rebounded to match 2019 numbers.

Specialized Transit - Funding

The County Transit specialized service is funded through the [Provincial Gas Tax program](#), an annual donation from the PEC Women's Institute, fares paid by riders and a municipal contribution from the tax levy. In addition, Quinte Transit does independent fund raising to be able to extend these services to clients on evenings and weekends across all of their service areas (including The County, Quinte West and Brighton).

The table below shows the specialized transit system cost and the revenues that have supported it for the last five years.

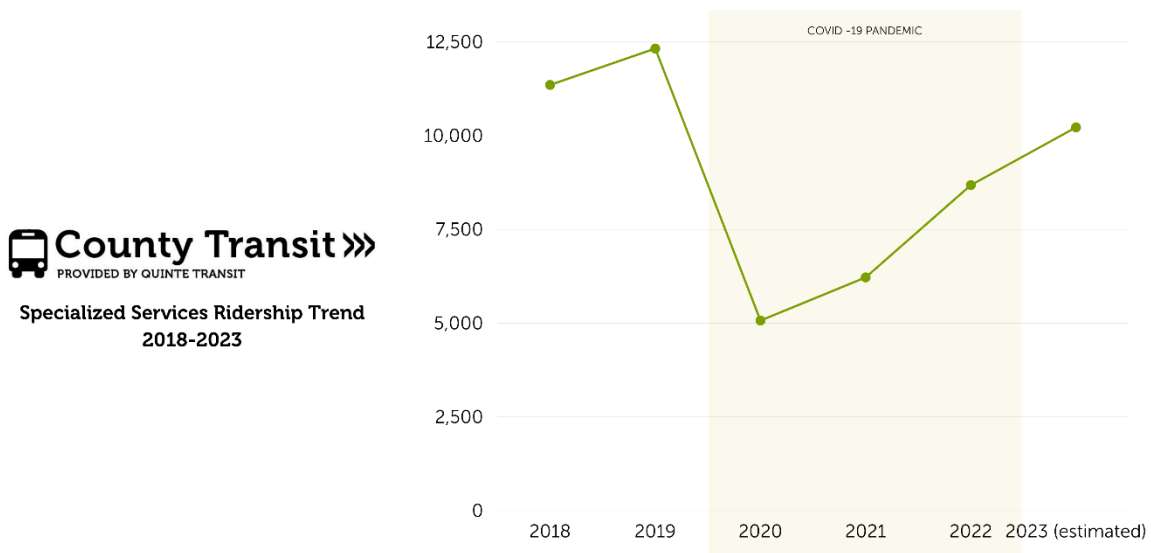
Specialized Transit System	2022 (Actual)	2021 (Actual)	2020 (Actual)	2019 (Actual)	2018 (Actual)
System cost	\$300,732	\$284,819	\$274,695	\$237,506	\$198,079
System revenues	(\$182,589)	(\$140,172)	(\$121,177)	(\$201,446)	(\$141,066)
<i>Gas Tax Funding</i>	<i>(\$115,736)</i>	<i>(\$89,624)</i>	<i>(\$82,220)</i>	<i>(\$118,007)</i>	<i>(\$79,562)</i>
<i>Donations</i>	<i>(\$3,000)</i>	<i>(\$5,000)</i>	<i>(\$5,000)</i>	<i>(\$5,000)</i>	<i>(\$0)</i>
<i>Fares</i>	<i>(\$63,853)</i>	<i>(\$45,548)</i>	<i>(\$33,957)</i>	<i>(\$78,439)</i>	<i>(\$61,504)</i>
Impact on tax levy	\$118,143	\$144,647	\$153,518	\$36,060	\$57,013

Specialized Transit - Ridership

This is a well-used service within the community with ridership rebounding after a 59% drop in 2020, the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The table below shows the system ridership from 2018 to June 2023, including the percentage change in ridership year over year.

Period	Riders/year	Year over Year % Change
2018	11,354	
2019	12,324	+8.5%
2020	5,069	-59%
2021	6,220	+23%
2022	8,681	+28%
2023 (Jan – Jun, 6 months)	5,111 (6 month period Jan-Jun)	
	10,222 (Estimated trend for 12-month period Jan-Dec)	+17% (Estimated trend for 12-month period Jan-Dec)

The graph below shows the same information in line graph format.



To determine the rebound in ridership following the pandemic, staff have compared the six-month period of January to June in 2019 (the last comparable non-pandemic year) with 2023 (the first year without pandemic restrictions) Ridership was 5,111 in 2023 vs 5977 in 2019. This shows that ridership has not yet recovered fully after the pandemic, with a -14% variance between these two periods.

Specialized Transit - Reliability

The specialized transit service utilizes Quinte Access' fleet of buses. When a bus is not available or is not a practical solution, Quinte Access works with local taxi companies to provide a ride. A key performance indicator for Quinte Transit is the number of "unaccommodated" rides that were requested but were unable to be fulfilled. In 2022, the "unaccommodated" rate for the specialized services was 0.01% (12 rides total).

System Performance and Impact - Conventional

Conventional Transit - Funding

County Transit's conventional public transit system was launched in 2020. The system is funded through the provincial Community Transportation Grant Program, private sector sponsorship, fares paid by riders and a municipal contribution from the tax levy. This system has also benefitted from Safe Restart funding (to respond to COVID-19 impacts) and a Rural Economic Development Grant (for promotional costs for the system launch). Both of these funding programs are finished, but staff continue to seek other funding opportunities to support the system.

The chart below shows the cost of the conventional transit system and the revenue sources for the first three years of the system.

Conventional Transit System	2022 (Actual)	2021 (Actual)	2020 (Actual)
System cost	\$237,270	\$257,201	\$118,337
System revenues	(\$131,675)	(\$198,382)	(\$151,313)
<i>Community Transit Grant funding</i>	<i>(\$91,382)</i>	<i>(\$167,701)</i>	<i>(\$148,377)</i>
<i>Sponsorship</i>	<i>(\$16,207)</i>	<i>(\$6,675)</i>	<i>(\$0)</i>
<i>Other grants</i>	<i>(\$2,715)</i>	<i>(\$7,707)</i>	<i>(\$0)</i>
<i>Fares</i>	<i>(\$21,371)</i>	<i>(\$16,299)</i>	<i>(\$2,936)</i>
Impact on Tax Levy	\$105,595	\$58,819	(\$32,976)

Conventional Transit - Ridership

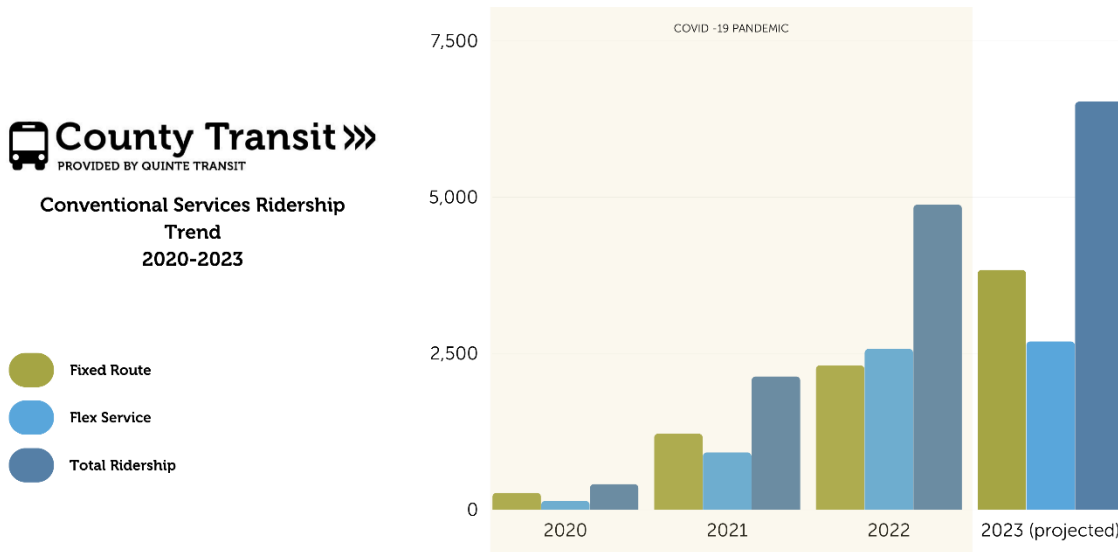
While the system got off to a slow start due to the pandemic, ridership is growing steadily. The chart below shows the conventional system's ridership trends since its launch in 2020.

Period	Fixed Route Ridership	Flex Route Ridership	Total Riders/Year	Year over Year % Change
2020 (Apr-Dec, 9 months)	268	139	407	
2021	1215	915	2130	+423%
2022	2308	2571	4879	+129%
2023 (Jan-Jun, 6 months)	1726 (Jan-Jun, 6 months)	1211 (Jan-Jun, 6 months)	2937 (Jan-Jun, 6 months)	

			6526 (Estimated trend for 12-month period*)	+34% (Estimated trend for 12-month period*)
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(*The estimated trend for the 2023 12-month period is based on the month-by-month ridership trend in 2022, where only 45% of ridership was achieved in the first 6 months of 2022, the remaining 55% was achieved in the second half of the year.)

This data is presented in a different format in the chart below. Visualizing the data this way demonstrates the steady increase in ridership over the years, with the fixed route system growing at a faster rate than the scheduled on-demand (flex) service in the post-pandemic context.



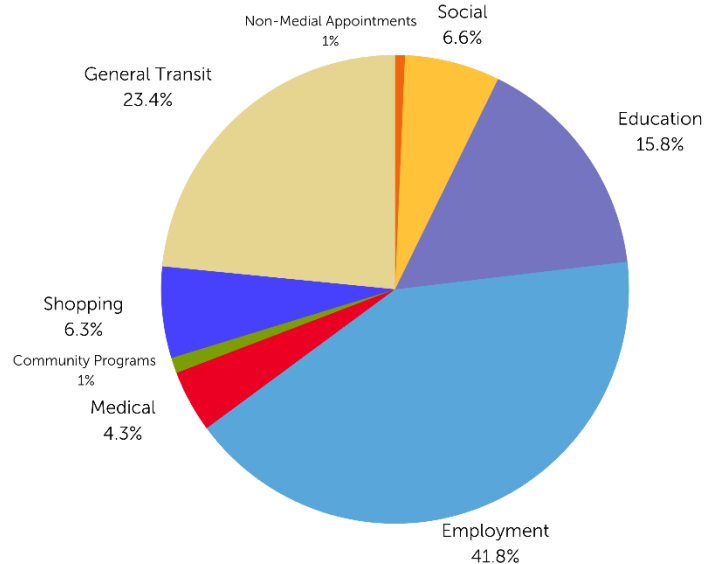
Conventional Transit - Impact

The County Transit conventional transit system can be used by anyone and is used for a wide variety of reasons. While we do not have access to "purpose of trip" data for the fixed route, we do have access to this data for the scheduled on-demand rides. A rider survey is on the workplan for 2024, to gain a better understanding of how the fixed route is used.

The pie chart below shows the purpose of trip data for conventional, scheduled on-demand rides in 2022:



**Conventional Services
Scheduled On Demand
Purpose of Trip Data
2022**



Some notable trends for conventional transit in 2023 include a sharp increase in requests for connection to VIA Rail trains (both for outbound residents and inbound tourism purposes), increase in number of students using the bus to travel to Loyalist and special programs for high school students, and steady use of the system for employment, particularly for those coming from Belleville into the County for work.

"I am proud to live in a rural municipality that has County Transit. Belleville's VIA rail station is the destination when my job requires me to be in the Hamilton office. Reliable, affordable, pleasant – County Transit is often my best transportation choice. County Transit keeps my personal vehicle off Hwy. 401. County Transit allows one more person to use public transportation to get to work." - Regular transit rider

Increasingly, County Transit is being used as a charter service to move groups of people around The County and to support special events in the community. In 2022 and 2023, County Transit offered custom transportation services for the following events:

- PECelebrates and Canada Day events in Picton and Wellington
- Free transportation for seniors to attend Picton, Milford, and Ameliasburgh Fairs, the Community Care for Seniors' Mobility Workshop and Scooter Rodeo, as well as upcoming Pumpkinfest, Seniors Active Living Resource Fair, holiday craft sales and Remembrance Day ceremonies
- Greater Than County Youth Collective Pride in the Park and movie night
- 2022 municipal elections

The conventional transit system uses an 18-passenger bus, which was funded by the municipality and is owned, maintained and operated by Quinte Transit. This bus is dedicated to the fixed Picton-Bloomfield-Belleville route. The scheduled on-demand service uses this and the Quinte Transit specialized fleet to fulfill ride requests.

Accessibility

The County Transit system is an accessible transit system that meets or exceeds the requirements for public transit as laid out in the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*. Drivers receive special training in order to provide safe, helpful and dignified service to people with disabilities and seniors. All of the buses used in the County Transit system - whether specialized or conventional - are capable of transporting people using mobility devices.

Quinte Transit was recently the subject of a random AODA compliance audit. A report on this audit was presented to the municipal Council of Quinte West in June 2023. Quinte Transit's services met or exceeded all requirements under the *Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (Ontario Regulation 191/11)*. Quinte Transit's most recent presentation to the Prince Edward County municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee was in September 2023.

Service improvements and modernization

Quinte Transit has implemented a number of modernization and customer service improvement projects in recent years. Additional improvements are currently being studied or in the process of implementation. Examples include:

- Security cameras were installed on all buses (interior and exterior) to provide additional safety and security for passengers and drivers.
- Bike racks are scheduled to be installed on all buses in Spring 2024, providing the opportunity for multi-modal transportation.
- Quinte Transit is in the final stages of configuring a new fare box system with tap cards for fare payment. This will supplement the cash-only system currently in use and provide more flexibility to passengers in terms of fare payment. Cards can be programmed to account for the fare type (senior, student, adult) and the pre-loaded card balance will be deducted the appropriate fare amount when tapped on the bus. The cards can also be programmed as monthly or multi-week passes. This system will improve passenger experience, make the system more accessible and provide easier access to ridership data collected by the fare box.
- Quinte Transit is currently seeking funding to implement "Rides on Demand," an app-based on-demand transit technology that would allow passengers to request, confirm and track their on-demand ride requests through a smartphone app. Rides on Demand is compatible with the myRide trip planning platform that Quinte Transit currently uses to help passengers plan their travel within Quinte West.
- Quinte Transit is currently studying the possibility of introducing electric vehicles into their fleet. The study is funded by Infrastructure Canada and the municipality of Quinte West. As such, the primary focus is on transit services provided to that municipality, but County Transit is considered within the scope of this study.

While Quinte Transit is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the system, the municipality is responsible for marketing, communications and funding. Over the last six months, municipal staff have been focused on in-person promotional events to support County Transit including transit presentations and transit training with youth groups, service clubs, church groups, new-comers clubs etc. Upcoming projects include a marketing campaign to reintroduce County Transit to the community and a renewed sponsorship and advertising program to generate earned revenues for the transit system.