

## Transportation Case Study

### Town of Innisfil: Powered by Uber

#### Introduction

After considering options for fixed-route bus services, the Town of Innisfil determined it would be too costly and service would be limited. Instead, it looked for a transit system that was on-demand, affordable and could service the needs of all community members. The result was a partnership with Uber to develop Innisfil Transit—an on-demand, shared-ride platform powered by Uber and subsidized by the town. This ridesharing transit service launched May 15, 2017 and continues to operate in Innisfil with incredible results.

#### Service Delivery

The Innisfil Transit service is available 24 hours a day/7 days a week. There are two different types of trips that can be taken either using the Uber service (for general trips) or Barrie Taxi service (for wheelchair accessible trips):

- \$4 for any trip to/from Innisfil Recreational Complex/Town Hall area
- \$4 for any trip to/from the Innisfil ideaLAB and Library, Lakeshore branch (967 Innisfil Beach Road).
- \$4 for any trip to/from the South Innisfil Community Centre (Lefroy)
- \$4 for any trip to/from the Innisfil Community Church/Innisfil Food Bank (1571 Innisfil Beach Road).
- \$5 for any trip to/from closest GO bus stop along Yonge Street
- \$6 for any trip to/from Barrie South GO train station
- \$6 for any trip to/from Innisfil Heights Employment Area and Highway 400 carpool lot
- When you travel anywhere else going within Innisfil boundaries you'll save \$4 off your fare.

#### Motivation

- This initiative was founded under an equity-base strategy focused on quality of life.
- No other municipality has implemented this initiative in North America, if not the world.
- Innisfil enjoys a large driver supply due to its proximity to municipalities such as Newmarket and Barrie.
- Innisfil also has a significant number of drivers who are willing to work for Uber and as a result, this local supply creates a notion of community as the service is door to door; which means that you often get to know community members on a more personal level.
- Demographics show that the immigrant population is growing fast in the Innisfil community.
- With support from Uber, the system can be structured to support low income residents and can help to drive support for citizens in other areas such as subsidies for programs and services.

## Outcomes

- The results from end-user surveys indicated that the number of trips were relatively stable in relation to the cost of the service (as opposed to the initial stages in which there was a very high number of trips taken by residents and costing the municipality a significant amount). The stabilization of trips emerged from measures such as increasing the fare and having a 'soft' monthly cap of trips (30), which residents can apply to be exempt from.
- The high pooling rates of the Town of Innisfil (e.g. upwards of 50% in recent months) have been positively recognized by Uber offices in Toronto and San Francisco.
- Important data have been gathered showing the potential fixed routes that are most economically viable.
- Innisfil Heights, which is an industrial area and the top destination for users in addition to the Go station, implies that many of the users could be using the service for employment, which would represent a positive economic outcome.

According to the *Innisfil Transit – Community Satisfaction Survey (2018-2019)*, Innisfil residents made the following remarks when asked about their transit service:

- “Affordable, fast, friendly, easy...nothing bad about it.”
- “The best and lowest cost transit solution for our Town at this time.”
- “It is a cost effective solution to public transit in a geographically large town that cannot support a bus system. ALL residents can use it rather than everyone paying for a bus system that only services a few areas.”

## Challenges

Some challenges have emerged based on the rapid growth of the system, which demands the Town of Innisfil to provide solutions to the following questions:

- How will the town deal with growing costs?
- Is it a sustainable service? What is the social impact?
- Extra data is required to enhance the program. Ensuring that the subsidy goes to those who need it the most (mainly youth and seniors). Youth and seniors have been able to have job opportunities through this service as well as connect and socialize more.

## Solutions

- Due to the popularity of the survey as found through the end-user surveys conducted in the last couple of years, the Town of Innisfil realized a larger investment had to be made to continue this transportation initiative. Furthermore, The Town of Innisfil has worked closer with UBER to improve the operational side of the project. At the same, Innisfil is working with Ryerson to better assess and understand the relationship between functionality and community value.
- A 'soft' monthly use cap was introduced in order to reduce costs. The cap could be exempted for residents who depended on the service – all residents who applied for the exemption were approved. The average ridership growth and cost per trip has somewhat stabilized which demonstrates the success of the project.

## Future plans

While the stabilization is a good result of the measures taken, it is important to mention that the Town of Innisfil continues to experience population growth, which begs the question: what are the next steps in their partnership with Uber? Possible solutions might have to do with having higher capacity vehicles and/or increasing the time to match trips (time that the Uber application will match you with a trip going to the same direction), which has already been implemented, with the intention of alleviating costs. Some of the limitations to these ideas include certain areas that are not as highly populated and the lack of vehicles/drivers.

Additional questions in relation to the next steps are: what is the appropriate subsidy rate? how many rides should be planned for on an annual basis? These are the results of having a successful system that is growing, making changes, and in high demand.



*Innisfil Transit – Community Satisfaction Survey (2018-2019).*