



parkland
county

TRANSIT

2023 TRANSIT REPORT – PARKLAND COUNTY



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Introduction

This report has been prepared to provide an update of transit services in Parkland County, Spruce Grove and the Town of Stony Plain, Tri-Region area. Collectively, the Tri-Region area serves an estimated population of 93,700 (Parkland County 34,400, City of Spruce Grove 40,800 and Town of Stony Plain 18,500).

Providing transit service offers an alternative, environmentally friendly mode of transportation to our residents. The benefits include reducing vehicular traffic from our roads and highways and reducing greenhouse gases.

The City of Spruce Grove was instrumental in starting the transit movement for the Tri-Region area. In 2006 through an agreement with Edmonton Transit Services, the Spruce Grove to Edmonton commuter transit service began. Since then, Spruce Grove Transit has grown and now includes a local bus service. Spruce Grove Transit currently owns 6 – 38 passenger commuter buses, 4 – 22 passenger local buses, a Transit Operations Building, numerous transit shelters and bus stop pads.

Parkland County and the Town of Stony Plain have benefited from Spruce Grove Transit's success and partner with the City of Spruce Grove on different transit services and initiatives. As the Spruce Grove Transit services became established, opportunities arose for Parkland County and the Town of Stony Plain to participate in offering transit services to their municipalities.

In 2016, in partnership with Spruce Grove Transit, Parkland County began offering transit service between Edmonton and Acheson. In 2020, the Town of Stony Plain purchased 2 – 22 passenger local buses and implemented a local bus service in 2021 within the town and to the TransAlta Tri-Leisure Centre in the City of Spruce Grove.

As part of the Inter-Municipal Collaboration Committee, Parkland County together with our Tri-Region partners, the City of Spruce Grove and the Town of Stony Plain, continues to work with the 2018 Tri-Municipal Region Transit Plan to jointly improve transit services for our residents. The 2018 Tri-Municipal Region Transit Plan has served as an excellent framework for continued collaboration on transit.

In 2019, the Chief Administrative Officers of the Tri-Region area municipalities signed a Memorandum of Agreement on Tri-Region Transit. This Agreement details our mutual understanding of how the three Tri-Region area municipalities will work together to provide and enhance transit services for the Tri-Region area. The Agreement is found in Appendix A.

In 2023, Parkland County Council supported discontinuing the Edmonton to Acheson fixed route and replacing it by servicing Acheson through expanding Spruce Grove's On-Demand Local Service. Servicing Parkland Village with the On-Demand Local Service was also part of this decision. At the same time, Stony Plain also decided to change their fixed route local service by replacing it with On-Demand service. This Tri-Region collaboration allows riders from Stony Plain, Spruce Grove, Parkland Village, and Acheson improved local transit accessibility within the Tri-Region.

At the April 13, 2023, Edmonton Metropolitan Transit Service Commission (EMTSC) Board meeting, the Board of Directors voted unanimously to disestablish the Commission effective May 31, 2023. Edmonton regional municipalities have decided to continue to support regional transit through regional collaboration. The Region's CAOs and transportation administrators have met and discussed drafting the framework for continued regional transit collaboration, goals, objectives, and action items for regional transit collaboration to better serve the region's transit users.

Tri-Region Commuter Transit 2006 to 2022

Ridership boarding numbers have increased annually since implementation of the Tri-Region Commuter Transit service. In January of 2017 Tri-Region area post-secondary students were able to use their U-Pass on the Tri-Region Commuter Transit service. U-Pass fees were now a mandatory component of all post-secondary student tuition fees. This resulted in rapid growth in transit boardings. In 2017 U-Pass ridership represented 25% of the total boardings (25% of 107,218 riders = 26,804 riders). In 2019 the number of students taking transit increased to 34% (34% of 145,022 = 49,307 riders). Over this period additional peak hour trips were added to meet overcrowding. In 2018, additional 2-hour mid-day service was introduced which was a positive step for students as their schedules are highly variable across the day. This also helped to free up some over-crowding issues during the peak hours.

Boardings significantly increased year to year until the onset of COVID. The COVID Pandemic effectively shut the economy down after mid-March of 2020 and transit as a preferred mode of transportation has been greatly impacted. Ridership levels are down compared to pre COVID but have been steadily rebounding and are close to pre pandemic ridership.

With expansion of On-Demand service to Acheson in January 2023, Parkland County discontinued commuter Route 561 from Edmonton to Acheson on February 3rd, 2023. Route 560 between Edmonton and Spruce Grove continues to run as a regional connection, and in May 2023 stops were added at the Edmonton Michell ETS garage in the morning and the afternoon. This allows Edmonton commuters needing to get to Acheson more available times to travel to Spruce Grove and catch transfer to an On-Demand bus to Acheson. These added stops utilize the deadhead from the bus leaving the garage in the morning and returning to the garage at the end of the day.

Tri-Region commuter transit total annual boardings between 2006 and 2022 are shown in Figure 1.

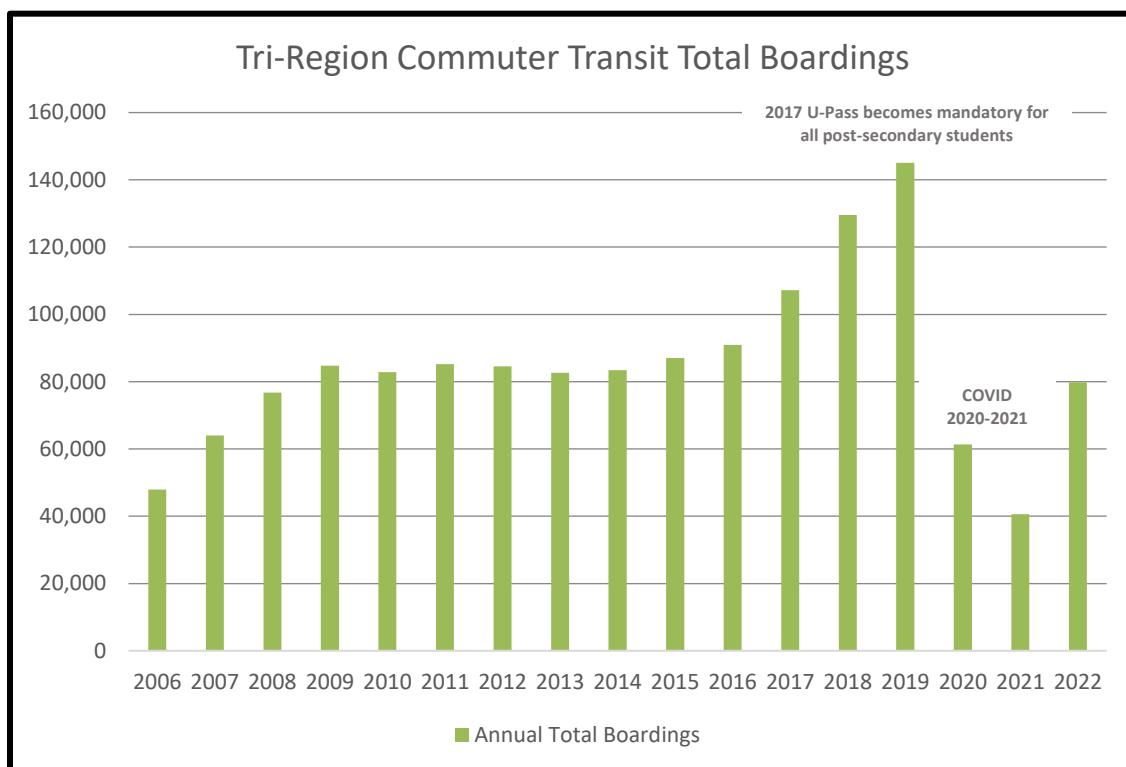


Figure 1 Spruce Grove Transit – total transit boardings 2006 to 2022

Figure 2 that follows illustrates the distribution of transit riders across the Tri-Region area. Taken from the November 2018 on-board survey, the location is based upon home postal code data. There is a concentration of riders in Spruce Grove and Stony Plain, but riders are also coming from Parkland County, as far away as east of Entwistle, as well as from the east side of Edmonton. A few riders are shown outside of the Tri-Region service area as well demonstrating the expanse and interest level beyond our borders.

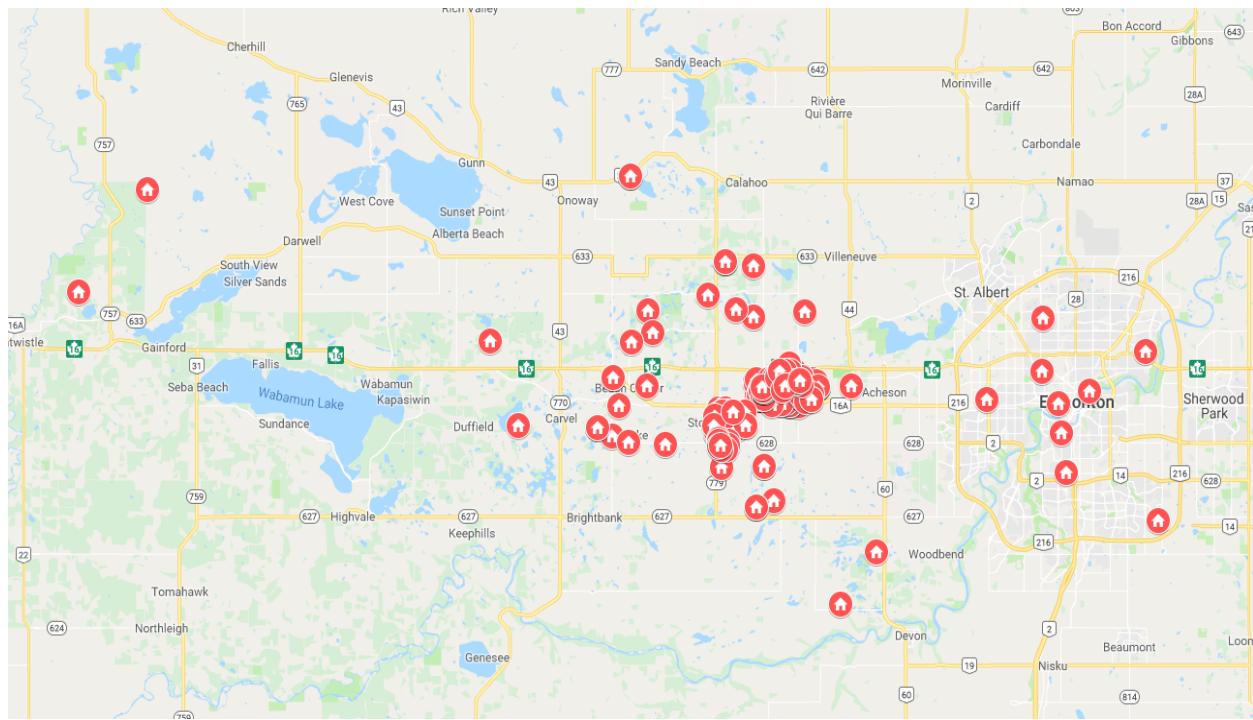


Figure 2 Home postal codes of transit riders (November 2018)

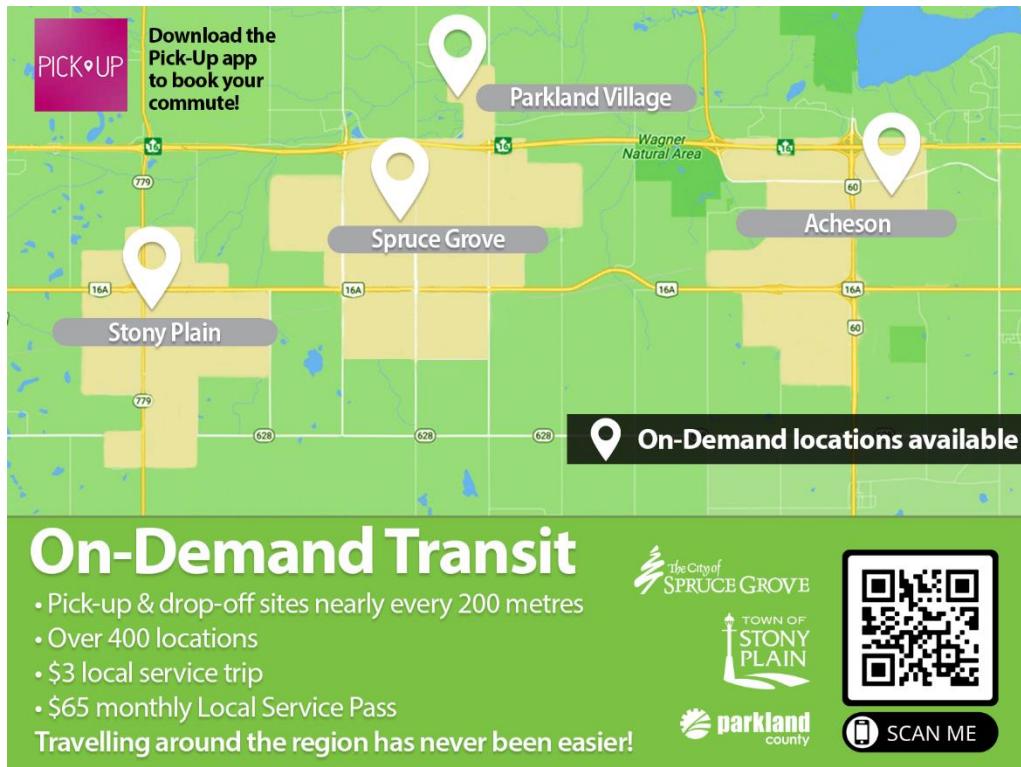
Based on data averaged from four on-board rider surveys conducted by the City of Spruce Grove between 2016 and 2020, percentage of rider origin was calculated for the three Tri-Region area municipalities. Riders who did not reside in the City of Spruce Grove, the Town of Stony Plain or Parkland County were excluded from the calculations.

Rider Origin Percentage 2016 to 2020

City of Spruce Grove	73.7 %
Town of Stony Plain	13.8 %
Parkland County	12.5 %
	100 %

Tri-Region On-Demand Local Transit 2023

In 2023, Parkland County Council supported discontinuing the Edmonton to Acheson fixed route and replacing it by servicing Acheson through expanding Spruce Grove's On-Demand local service. Servicing Parkland Village with the On-Demand local service was also part of this decision. At the same time, Stony Plain also decided to change their fixed route local service by replacing it with On-Demand service. This Tri-Region collaboration allows riders from Stony Plain, Spruce Grove, Parkland Village, and Acheson improved local transit accessibility within the Tri-Region.



The On-Demand service operates from 6:00 AM to 7:00 PM in Spruce Grove and Stony Plain, and from 6:00 AM to 9:00 AM and 3:00 PM to 6:00 PM in Acheson and Parkland Village. There are two types of bus stop locations, marked and unmarked. Marked locations either have a permanent structures or bus stop signs, while unmarked are virtual locations shown on a map. The flexibility of On-Demand allows administration to easily add new virtual stop locations upon request or can define any existing virtual stops to better accommodate users. Stops were also added at the County Centre and the County Services Building, just north of the Town of Stony Plain. Through using the Pick-Up app, riders are able to book On-Demand rides to the service area right away or up to one week in advance. With over 400 locations in the Tri-Region area, it has never been easier to travel around our communities.

The ridership for the Tri-Region has been steadily increasing since implementation and is consistently reaching new daily ridership goals. The Tri-Region team has been seeing an average of 3,500 riders a month with approximately 100-140 of those being from Parkland Village (approx. 80-120/month) and Acheson (approx. 20/month). While the growth in Acheson has been slow, these changes in service delivery model have already seen an increase in ridership as opposed to the previous Acheson fixed route – shuttle bus service. Parkland Village which previously did not have service, has shown a continuous growth of ridership after only a few months. With an average of 4-6 riders daily, Parkland Village ridership is showing an upward trend.

Through continuing engagement and conversations with Acheson businesses, commuters, and the bus drivers, Parkland County has identified more opportunities to expand ridership interest by adjusting the service timelines.

This will allow more flexibility to potential riders and will better align with operating hours of existing Acheson businesses. Minor tweaks and amendments will help employees get to work on time and could result in greater interest, increased opportunity, and higher volume of ridership in the near future. Parkland County has reviewed some of these options and increased the existing service times to 5:00 AM to 9:00 AM and from 2:15 PM to 6:15 PM, effective May 1, 2023.

Since the May 1st service time adjustments, Acheson has already seen an increase in ridership to an average of 4-6 riders daily. This will translate to approximately 80-120 riders per month. We are expecting to see increases and growth and will make the appropriate changes to continue to improve the service for riders.



Parkland County Transit Costs 2016 to 2021

In 2016 Parkland County implemented a Public Transportation Utility Bylaw for businesses in Acheson to partially fund the Parkland Transit Service. This bylaw was in place for the past seven years. With the decision, on October 25, 2022, to transition from a fixed service and partner with Spruce Grove to expand the On-Demand Transit service to Acheson and Parkland Village the bylaw funding model was no longer applicable. For 2023 to 2024 the transit funding model transitioned to taxation with supplement from the business attraction restricted surplus fund to ease the transition to taxes. This results in 2023 being supplemented in the amount of \$243,600, 2024 being supplemented in the amount of \$121,800, and transit being funded fully by taxation for the years thereafter.

Table 1 shows Parkland County's total cost of transit services between 2016 and 2022. The total cost shown is after ticket revenue was accounted for:

Year	Parkland County's total cost of transit;
2016 – partial year	\$139,000
2017	\$527,000
2018	\$577,700
2019	\$674,300
2020 - Covid	\$472,400
2021 - Covid	\$439,000
2022	\$454,560
2023 Projected	\$514,870

Table 1 Parkland County's total cost of transit services

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Table 2 provides further breakdown of Parkland County's total cost of transit services for 2023.

<u>2023 Proposed Transit Service Delivery Model</u>	<u>2023</u>
Base Administration Totals	\$99,500
Acheson Transit On-Demand Peak AM/PM	
On-Demand Spruce Grove to Acheson	\$129,685
On-Demand Transit Ticket Sales	-\$10,000
Subtotal Acheson Transit	\$119,685
Commuter Transit – Route 560 (Spruce Grove to Edmonton) (Parkland County accounts for 12.5% of total cost/revenue of route)	
Transit Cost & Revenue Sharing agreement Spruce Grove	\$243,000
Commuter Ticket Sales	-\$67,000
Subtotal Commuter Transit	\$176,000
Total Base Admin + Acheson + Commuter	
Parkland Village On-Demand Peak AM/PM	
On-Demand Spruce Grove to Parkland Village	\$129,685
On-Demand Transit Ticket Sales	-\$10,000
Subtotal Commuter Transit	\$119,685
Total Base Admin + Acheson + Commuter + Parkland Village	\$514,870
<p><i>**Parkland County's 12.5% share of Spruce Grove Transit commuter service – this 12.5% proportional ridership agreement started in September of 2020, when Spruce Grove, Stony Plain and Parkland County agreed to contribute to commuter based on ridership. Prior to this Parkland County paid half of the deadheading cost associated with Acheson trips.</i></p>	

Table 2 Breakdown of Parkland County's total projected costs of transit for 2023

Transit Fares

Transit fares are divided into two main categories, commuter and local. The Tri-Region municipalities have aligned their transit fares so residents in any of the three municipalities pay the same fare.

Residents of the City of Spruce Grove, Town of Stony Plain, Parkland Village, and Acheson pay a specific rate for local trips within the local service area. The current local adult fare is \$3.00 per trip, one-way or \$65.00 for an adult monthly pass. Residents of the City, Town, County, or other areas pay a higher rate for accessing the commuter service operating between the City of Spruce Grove and the City of Edmonton. For the Tri-Region area residents, the current local adult fare is \$6.25 per trip, one-way or \$135.00 for an adult monthly pass.

An electronic fare payment system was implemented across the Edmonton region in late 2022. The Arc system utilizes a tap on and tap off system to create fluidity across the Edmonton region. This is a pay as you go system that allows commuters to load as much funds as they would like conveniently online, at vending machines, over the phone or in person. Fare caps ensure riders do not pay more than the maximum daily or monthly cost and once you reach that fare cap, riders ride for the rest of the day or month for free. Seven transit agencies within the Edmonton region are all using the same system. These include Spruce Grove, St. Albert, Strathcona County, Fort Saskatchewan, Leduc, Beaumont, and Edmonton. Once the Arc system is fully implemented and stable, the paper transit fare products (monthly passes and ticket books) will be discontinued in January 2024.

Commuter service, riders still have options of purchasing 10-ticket booklets, monthly pass without transferability to ETS, monthly pass with transferability to ETS or can use their U-Pass if they are a student enrolled in post-secondary programs, but the new smart fare card is preferred. Reduced rates are offered for children and students accessing both the local and commuter transit services.

Tri-Region Accessible Transportation Service

Accessible Transportation Service (ATS) in the Tri-Region area operates separately from the commuter and local transit services. The Tri-Region ATS service operates in the City of Spruce Grove, Town of Stony Plain and an area of Parkland County in the immediate vicinity of the City or Town. The service offers door-to-door transportation for seniors (65+) and persons (16+) with mobility or cognitive disabilities. The service is used by individuals for travel to medical appointments, shopping trips or accessing entertainment in the areas in which the individual services operate.

The Tri-Region Accessible Transportation Service is a shared service owned by both the Town of Stony Plain and the City of Spruce Grove, operated by the Town of Stony Plain. The ATS fleet consists of 4 City of Spruce Grove and 2 Town of Stony Plain owned ATS busses. Through agreement, all busses are housed and maintained by the City of Spruce Grove. Each municipality insures and registers its busses separately.

Parkland County's involvement is strictly funding contributions to ATS. Community Services maintains a budget for funding towards the Tri-Region area Accessible Transportation Service.

Regional Transit Collaboration

At the April 13, 2023 Edmonton Metropolitan Transit Service Commission (EMTSC) Board meeting, the Board of Directors voted unanimously to disestablish the Commission effective May 31, 2023. In anticipation of the disestablishment of the EMTSC, the Edmonton Regional Area CAOs discussed continuing to support regional transit collaboration through building on these four principles:

1. Collaboration will build upon established positive working relationships and existing agreements between regional transit providers and a history of collaboration and mutual support.
2. Municipalities retain control of their assets and workforce.
3. Municipalities retain control of local service decisions.
4. Efficient use of resources and managed with existing staff and fleet.

The CAOs have drafted a Framework for Regional Transit Collaboration which discusses the following: governance, pillars for regional collaboration, timing of short, medium and long term goals, and next steps.

Currently the region's CAOs and transportation administrators are facilitating chartering sessions to; establish the governance model and terms of reference for the Board and Operational Implementation Team, develop a Memorandum of Understanding to formalize participation, build a detailed implementation plan for actioning in Q3 of 2023, and communicate publicly to ensure the region knows that regional transit is being built quickly.

Chartering sessions began in late March 2023, and have continued to date. Parkland County's CAO has attended meetings with the other regional CAOs, and Parkland County's transportation administrators have attended meetings with the regions' transportation administrators.

Current meeting participants are:

- City of Beaumont
- City of Edmonton
- City of Fort Saskatchewan
- City of Leduc
- City of Spruce Grove
- City of St. Albert
- Town of Devon
- Town of Stony Plain
- Parkland County
- Strathcona County
- Leduc County

Parkland County will continue to participate with this new Regional Transportation Collaboration.

Current Tri-Region Transit Initiatives

There are several initiatives that are currently in progress in the Tri-Region area. These initiatives will directly or indirectly improve the transit level of service delivery to our own residents:

- Construction of the Park n Ride facility, located in the east end of Spruce Grove. Opening is scheduled in 2024.
- Parkland County and the Town of Stony Plain considering applying for Infrastructure Canada Rural Transit Solutions Fund grant funding. Projects being considered include, applying for an additional 24 passenger local bus and / or ATS bus, standardizing virtual bus stop signs, shelters, and pads across the Tri-Region, and moving ATS booking from in-house being done by Stony Plain to RideCo app booking system similar to the On-Demand booking system.
- Continued collaboration with City of Spruce Grove, Town of Stony Plain, and Parkland County to improve and modify the On-Demand Local and Commuter Transit services through regular meetings and marketing strategies.
- Tri-Region partners collaborating with other regional transit administrators as part of the regional transit Operational Implementation Team, working towards improving regional transit as discussed in the previous section of this report.



Looking Forward

The effort and support the City of Spruce Grove has put towards growing transit services in the City as well as in the Tri-Region area, coupled with continued collaboration and support from both the Town of Stony Plain and Parkland County, has resulted in successful commuter and local transit services being made available to the residents of all three Tri-Region area municipalities.

Looking forward, Parkland County will continue to work with our Tri-Region partners as well as with the Edmonton area regional transit administrators to continue to improve transit services for our residents.

Parkland County will seek opportunities to engage, collaborate and align with Acheson Area businesses. Marketing, communication, information sharing and open house discussions will continue with the Acheson Business Association (ABA), Acheson development community and any interested party that would be a potential supporter of the service.
