



An on-demand Sunday evening bus service for residents of a small Canadian city.

Sault Ste. Marie On Demand



PARTNER

The City of Sault Ste. Marie

LOCATION

Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario

LAUNCH

September 2019

USE CASE

Optimize underperforming fixed route services on Sunday evening

GOAL

Improve service dependability and maximize fleet efficiency during a period of low-demand

Overview

The City of Sault Ste. Marie sought to optimize routing efficiency at times of low demand by tapping vehicle resources only when needed. The goal was to reduce operating costs while simultaneously enhancing the customer experience.

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PASSENGERS PER VEHICLE HOUR ON AVERAGE PRIOR TO COVID-19

97%

OF RIDES WERE SHARED PRIOR TO COVID-19

“We see this as [an] innovative technology for a community our size and we’re happy with the initial deployment. This is a one-year pilot, we’re only a few months into it and we’ll likely use a phased-in approach to expand as we move along further.”

— Brent Lamming, Sault Ste. Marie Director of Community Services

“Great, almost unlimited choices...this is sooooo convenient.”

— Mariette B., Sault Ste. Marie On Demand rider

“This could essentially be the future of transit.”

— Nicole Maione, Sault Ste. Marie Manager of Transit

Solution

Following a competitive procurement in the spring of 2019, the City selected Via to transition their Sunday evening fixed route network of nine buses to an on-demand transit network of eight buses. Sault Ste. Marie On Demand launched in September of that year, operating on Sunday evenings – a time when ridership has historically been low. Riders may travel from one existing bus stop or approved “Virtual Bus Stop” to another as requested through mobile app booking or by calling a dispatcher, and they pay the regular \$2.95 bus fare or use their transit pass. Sault Ste Marie On Demand uses the City’s existing fleet of full size buses and unionized workforce. Because the service is so successful, Sault Ste Marie is now considering on-demand at other times.

	SERVICE ZONE	50+ SQUARE KILOMETRES
	FLEET SIZE	8 FULLY ACCESSIBLE BUSES
	HOURS OF SERVICE	7:15-11:30PM SUNDAYS
	RIDER COHORTS	UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND OTHER RESIDENTS

Results

In the months since launch, Sault Ste. Marie On Demand has been popular with both transit users, who appreciate the convenience and shorter wait times that comes with Via’s on-demand technology, and city officials, who have reduced the number of buses needed on Sunday evenings while providing an enhanced level of service. The City projects an annual cost savings in the tens of thousands of dollars. Via is optimistic about potentially expanding Sault Ste. Marie On Demand, a service that’s proved how transitioning to an on-demand model helps save money while also improving a rider’s experience during off-peak hours.