
MEMORANDUM

PWC-C 41-2020

Subject: COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in Public Works

Date: November 10, 2020

To: Public Works Committee

From: Bruce Zvaniga, P.Eng., Commissioner of Public Works

As reported previously, Public Works has remained focused on keeping the critical public infrastructure operational while responding to the COVID19 pandemic. Departmental staff continue to ensure that the community has: safe drinking water, reliable wastewater systems, recycling and waste collection/disposal, regional specialized and regular transit and a well-maintained regional road system. Public Works staff recognize and are dedicated to the essential role they play ensuring that healthcare, social services, emergency responders and the community-at-large can depend upon the reliable availability of these core municipal services.

Public Works leadership is actively participating in the Municipal Emergency Control Group. Working with all other departments, the Business Continuity Plan and staff redeployment strategy is monitored and adjusted to respond to changing conditions. Public Works staff who have been re-deployed outside of the department delivering essential services are returning to their home positions to address the increased needs in Public Works and to prepare for winter maintenance readiness.

The Department Leadership team continue to actively participating in virtual meetings with their counterparts in the Local Area Municipalities, and provincial committees to share our successes and learn how others have overcome challenges.

The following provides a brief highlight from each of the four (4) divisions on their respective status, service changes, actions taken and future outlook.

Water & Wastewater Services

Current Status of Operations

High quality, safe and reliable water and wastewater services in accordance with health regulations and standards continue to be provided.

Both the Drinking Water and Wastewater Quality Management Systems (QMS) remain active. A Water QMS external audit was completed July 6 to 10 where the Division retained its long standing QMS accreditation. Capital infrastructure projects are deemed essential and continue to be delivered.

Memorandums have been distributed to all W-WW staff and contractors regarding compliance with the new Niagara Region mask by-law.

Service/Operational Change Highlights

- Recreational Vehicle wastewater holding tank disposal service extended to seven (7) days a week at the Niagara Falls Wastewater Treatment Plant and Baker Rd Wastewater Treatment Plant. Both facilities will be open Monday through Saturday 5 - 7 p.m. and all day on Sunday 7 a.m. - 7 p.m.
- Wastewater Treatment Plants are now accepting heavy wine waste as the wine producing season has started.
- The new Niagara-on-the-Lake Wastewater Treatment Plant has started to receive wine waste and septic haulage since the week of September 28.

Significant Initiatives or Actions undertaken

- Developed a full divisional staffing mitigation strategy to deal with any staff shortages that may occur due to COVID-19.
- Developed a W-WW Division Pandemic Re-opening Framework to supplement the Region Re-opening Phase of the Pandemic Response Plan.
- Received license from Health Canada to produce disinfectant spray and hand sanitizer for Regional workplace use during the COVID-19 emergency response to alleviate supply chain shortages when required.
- Cancellation of all non-essential meetings, plant tours, training activities, visitor access.
- Implemented COVID-19 protocols for consultants, contractors and project managers at plant facilities.

- Enhanced focus on the health and well-being of staff operating the essential systems including limiting access to the plant and deferring all non-essential contracted services.
- W-WW training activities resumed in early September for mandatory Health and Safety courses only. Facility set-ups devoted to classroom(s) with registration numbers suitable for physical distancing practices. Training activities ongoing through 2020 Fall Learning Calendar.
- Assigned maintenance staff to dedicated areas and implemented flexible start and end work locations to avoid both unnecessary travel and exposure.
- One employee per vehicle where possible; If employees need to travel together they are required to wear a mask.
- Setup static sanitation stations in all staffed W-WW facilities and deployed mobile sanitation kits for all fleet vehicles.
- Implemented W-WW tailored weekly COVID-19 spot check reports including regular reporting of facility sanitation supply inventories.
- Adopted changes to ensure no physical interaction on deliveries, courier and lab samples.
- Changes to pickup and handling of uniform laundry.
- Portable washrooms have been setup at Wastewater and Water facilities to accommodate contractors, couriers and sewage haulers.
- Face shields, half mask respirators and surgical masks are being used as a form of source protection for staff where certain activities do not allow for proper physical distancing or when a facility is open to non-employees (ie. contractors, consultants, etc.); current protocols remain compliant with Niagara Region face covering by-law (By-law 2020-46) and Ontario Regulations 364/20 - Rules of Areas in Stage 3.
- Mandatory face masks for Contractor site visits/meetings (i.e. pre-tender meetings).
- Meeting room max occupancy signage, screening signage, screening protocol and limited door access have been implemented at all Water-Wastewater buildings. Daily reports of staff well-being and screening are being provided to management for recording and documentation purposes.
- Screening protocol for all vendors and contractors also implemented at all worksites.
- Constructors at various worksites have put into place proper distancing, working measures and PPE for the well-being of all staff.
- Accepting digital signatures for MECP form approvals.

- Capital project delivery through all phases continuing with proper protocols for consultants, contractors as well as for internal staff in place.
- Collaborating with Corporate Communications to develop strategies for Public outreach/engagement to satisfy the requirements of the MECP.
- Reducing production of hand sanitizer and sanitizing spray due to increased availability of commercial supplies.
- Increasing sampling as MECP regular relief expired August 30.
- Increasing by-law inspections and sampling while maintaining staff safety.

Operational Outlook

1 month

- Implementing phased W-WW Pandemic Re-Opening Plan in accordance with Public Health advisement and direction from the Region's Emergency Operations Centre.
- Developing 2021 Operational and Capital Budgets.

3 months

- Implementing phased W-WW Pandemic Re-Opening Plan in accordance with Public Health advisement and direction from the Region's Emergency Operations Centre.

6 months

- The focus continues to be on the maintenance of all key components, the sustainable supply of key chemicals and materials and most importantly on the well-being of the staff managing these essential systems.

Transportation Services

Current Status of Operations

Essential bridge, culvert and roadway works, forestry, traffic control, pavement markings and signage are critical services which continue to be provided.

Design, construction management and environmental assessments continue from engineering staff and consultants.

Staff continue to monitor all material shipments, supplies and construction contracts experiencing delays to understand larger impacts to ongoing construction project schedules.

Service/Operational Changes

- Dispatch has resumed to afterhours call support received by the Region; in particular directing residents for COVID-19 to Public Health and by-law enforcement (Local and Regional) seven days a week.
- Earlier in assessing the separation of staff in field operations, the normal weekday shift and management oversight had been split into two groups scheduled to not physically interact with each other. As a result, the hours of operation were stretched from 5 a.m. - 9:30 p.m. with the support of the union and management.
- Since the implementation of two (2) shifts, management have continued to review staffing levels and needs. Due to the number of redeployments to Long Term Care (LTC) and EMS in support of the pandemic, vacancies, plus sick time, management reassessed the two shifts and converted back to one shift per day from 7 a.m. - 3 p.m. Management is continuing to assess service levels against staffing needs and safety protocols and will adjust accordingly.
- As staff are returning from Long Term Care redeployments, staff are being limited to 1 to 2 staff per regional vehicle where possible; Health and Safety is being engaged for those instances where 2 or more staff per regional vehicle are being assigned due to a certain operational need or lack of fleet complement.

Significant Initiatives or Actions undertaken

- Separation of field staff in vehicles where possible is being administered. Vehicle assignment to specific staff with the responsibility to clean / maintain on a daily basis.
- Face masks and shields have been ordered for additional staff protection in certain circumstances.
- Staff continue to monitor supplies out of Fleet stores such as wipes, hand sanitizer, N95 masks and are supporting other Divisions with resources as required.
- Screening signage, screening protocol and limited door access have been implemented at all yards and the service center. Daily reports of staff well-being and screening are being provided to management for recording and documentation purposes.

- Screening protocol for all vendors and contractors also implemented at yards and service centers.
- Constructors at various worksites have put into place proper distancing, working measures and PPE for the well-being of all staff.
- Updated protocols based on provincial regulations/guidelines for working on construction sites has been sent to Heavy Construction Association of the Region of Niagara to notify their members that they must adhere to these measures.
- IT equipment to assist with working from home has been provided where applicable.
- A number of Transportation Staff have already been trained and redeployed to assist other Departments where needed. In assisting with the redeployments to LTC, Staff manufactured personal screening barriers for screener positions at entry points of the homes as an additional safety measure.
- In meeting essential service levels throughout the pandemic, management continue to review staffing; in particular the redeployment numbers and will be phasing the return of Transportation staff throughout Q4. Key operations (i.e. Winter Operations) will require staff to be recalled for training and availability to meet legislated service level requirements in keeping Niagara's roads safe.

Operational Outlook

1 month

- Essential and critical project interpretation based on Provincial announcements will affect the delivery of projects and levels of service to residents of Niagara region. This continues to be under review. The Business Continuity Plan with Redeployment Strategy of staff for the Division will be administered accordingly.

3 months

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6 months

- Contractors have shared their concern that once non-essential work can re-commence, there will be shortage within the trades due to demand. Contracts are continuing to be monitored by staff with regards to any shortages (supplies and trades) and updates will be highlighted.

Waste Management Services

Current Status of Operations

Restrictions to the curbside collection program and at the landfill sites/drop off depots have been lifted with minor restrictions still in place as noted below.

The processing of recyclable materials is being maintained. Storage capacity has become an issue. Staff have applied, and have been granted by the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks to work on Sundays and during the hours of 11 p.m. - 6 a.m. to process the backlog of recyclables. When necessary, unprocessed recyclables have been shipped to other recycling facilities for processing resulting in additional costs and loss of revenue.

An online tool was successfully implemented in June to provide residents the ability to purchase garbage tags, CFC stickers and recycling and organic bins on line. Garbage tags and CFC stickers are mailed to the residents. For recycling and organic bins, payment is made on line and residents can pick up the bins at one of the Regional distributions centres. Some local municipalities have begun to sell or distribute recycling boxes and green bins, by appointment.

Strategic initiatives are continuing such as the MRF Opportunity Review, implementation of new collection contracts and services levels, construction projects, and operational tenders.

Service/Operational Changes

Landfill Service Changes

Preferred methods of payment are debit and credit, using the tap option.

Some /Green Bin Distribution Locations Remain Closed

For more information on [waste management services](https://www.niagararegion.ca/waste), visit <https://www.niagararegion.ca/waste>.

Community Events

Presentations, sites tours and special events recycling have been postponed until further notice. Requests for participation in 'modified' Santa Claus parade and staff will comply with Public Health protocols.

Significant Initiatives or Actions undertaken

- Screening signage, screening protocol and limited door access have been implemented at all facilities. Daily reports of staff well-being and screening are being provided to management for recording and documentation purposes.
- Screening protocol for all vendors and contractors has also been implemented at all facilities and sites.
- Staggering breaks and lunch to reduce amount of people taking breaks at one time at the Recycling Centre.
- Increased cleaning being completed at night and during the day (i.e. between lunch breaks and in high traffic areas).
- Installed plexi-glass between sorters on the processing line, and at the scale houses located at the landfill sites/drop off depots.
- Staff are travelling in separate vehicles to maintain physical distancing per health guidelines.

Operational Outlook

1 month

- After the commencement of the new waste collection contracts, staff will be working to address any major concerns and provide residents with information to fully participate in the curbside programs.
- Award the Humberstone Landfill Operations tender.
- RFP will be issued for the division's Long-term Strategic Plan.
- 2021 operational budgets to finalized.
- Review final draft Blue Box Final Regulations (issued Oct. 19/20) and report to Council.

3 months

- 2021 work plan will be developed.
- Recommendations brought forth as a result of the NRFP MRF Opportunity Review.

6 months

- Work to continue to on strategic initiatives.
- Preparation for the start of the new Humberstone contract.

Niagara Region Transit/Specialized Transit & GO Implementation

Current Status of Operations

Niagara Region Transit (NRT) is operating at a reduced level of service when compared to a typical September through December schedule. This is due to Brock University being 95% online, and Niagara College having significant enrollment reductions combined with many online programs and lower Niagara-based student residency:

- Express routes 40a, 40b, 45a, 45b, 60a, 65a were reinstated but only during morning and afternoon peak periods, 70a, 75a) effective March 23
- 7:00 a.m. - 11:00 p.m. operating hours effective Sept 7 (back up from 7:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m. from May 4 to Sept 6)
- Hourly service (60 minutes) on most routes except 60 and 65 as those are typically well utilized student routes.

Niagara Specialized Transit (NST) continues operating at the normal level of service, except for trips whose origins or destinations are to/from a location with reported cases of COVID-19 are not being provided. Reducing hours of operation is not a necessity in this case as Niagara Region only pays for trips delivered, rather than an hourly rate. Overall, NST trip requests are significantly reduced, however NST continues to deliver all requested trips within the capacity available. Ridership has continues to show small signs of recovery but still sits at approximately 40-50% of typical usage.

NRT OnDemand service operates in Grimsby, Lincoln, Pelham, Wainfleet and West Lincoln from Monday to Saturday, 7 a.m. - 10 p.m. Now two months in, NRT OnDemand has continued to see significant growth despite challenges stemming from COVID-19.

Mandatory mask usage is required as per the Region's Face Covering By-law.

Service/Operational Changes

The "Rear door boarding" policy enacted on March 23 to temporarily limit driver contact and respect physical distancing has been lifted on July 2. Because Niagara's transit

providers have installed plexi-glass bio-barriers across the entire fleet of vehicles to protect bus operators, even if COVID-19 numbers increase, there will not be a need to return to rear door boarding and thus fare collection will be maintained as well.

A lower than typical service level began on September 7, however staff elected to maintain an adequate amount of express service as the student demand from Niagara College was unclear.

Significant Initiatives or Actions undertaken

- All NRT, and NST fleet vehicles continue to be professionally cleaned/disinfected/sanitized well beyond regular protocols, and Aegis antimicrobial spray was applied to all interior surfaces. This work was completed by the local transit service providers as they manage and operate the NRT fleet as part of their own.
- Due to the low volume of trips, BTS has made every effort to deliver trips with only a single occupant in each vehicle, although this has not been formalized as a public policy.
- NRT OnDemand does not permit the use of the front passenger seat in order to maintain distance between the drivers and passengers.

Operational Outlook

1 month

- NRT staff continue to review ridership data closely in order to determine appropriate levels of service.
- Staff continues to work with Brock University and the Brock University Student Union to maintain the U-Pass Program for the 2020-2021 academic year. Niagara College terminated the U-Pass agreement in response to COVID-19 and thus students will be purchasing monthly passes in September.

3 months

- Schedules for January through April 2021 have already been set. Due to the extremely low ridership, the loss of the bulk U-Pass revenue (i.e from Niagara College) and increasing COVID-19 numbers, the service level has been significantly scaled back as of January.
- Possible further service adjustments based on ridership and in reaction to any provincial changes. Staff will continue to work with the IMTWG in reviewing the

available data to ensure that adequate service is being provided while being mindful of the financial challenges faced by each municipality.

- The Niagara Transit Governance Study report will be complete by summer 2020. Introduction of the final report to LNTC with recommendation on a new governance model by the Project Team and study consultants will be done in consultation with the CAO Working Group and the LNTC Chair.

6 months

- The IMTWG will begin working towards the implementation of a new fare payment technology through the funding provided by the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP). Due to the complexity of the program, an implementation date in 2021 is most likely. Staff will continue to provide updates once a timeline has been established and at the major milestones.

As both the Province and Region move through the recovery process, staff at each of Niagara's transit providers will continue to collaborate in monitoring service levels, processes, and policies to ensure the safety of the residents and employees remain a priority and that decisions are made and communicated jointly wherever possible.

Respectfully submitted and signed by,

Bruce Zvaniga, P.Eng.
Commissioner of Public Works (Interim)