
MEMORANDUM

LNTC-C 7-2020

Subject: 2021 Inter-Municipal Transit Working Group – Linking Niagara Transit Committee Workplan

Date: November 25, 2020

To: Linking Niagara Transit Committee

From: Inter-Municipal Transit Working Group

This memorandum provides a detailed update on the Inter-Municipal Transit Working Group (IMTWG) / Linking Niagara Transit Committee (LNTC) 2020 workplan, as well as forecasting the key initiatives proposed for the first half of 2021.

The IMTWG, established in 2018 under the direction of the LNTC, has advanced a number of critical system-wide improvements related to the implementation of the recommendations based on the *Niagara Transit Service Delivery and Governance Strategy, 2017* (Dillon Consulting). A comprehensive listing of these key milestones and operational achievements to date have been captured in Appendix 1.

With the global pandemic disrupting operations across the transit industry starting in March 2020, the intended IMTWG workplan noted below was intentionally refocused as a result of the immediate and critical need to address the health & safety, service level and coordination aspects of transit services in Niagara brought on by COVID-19. It is worth noting that despite the pandemic shifting the IMTWG's priorities, all but one of the intended objectives were achieved.

Beginning in March 2020 when the pandemic was declared, the IMTWG began meeting twice a week to ensure alignment of changing policy, health & safety protocols, capital improvements, service levels and public communications. With new COVID-related provincial direction affecting transit operations coming out at times daily, it was critical the IMTWG were aligned to ensure consistent, clear and cooperative changes were made to the system(s) and communicated similarly to our transit riders and the public.

The following are examples of pandemic-related activities of the IMTWG over the course of 2020:

- Implementation of emergency-driven frequent communication cycles
- Aligned public roll out of COVID-induced transit service reductions
- Regularized joint media releases communicating policy and service changes
- System-wide application of Aegis anti-microbial agent on all fleet
- Coordinated installation of driver protection barriers on all fleet
- Creation and installation of 'mask required' bylaw signage on all fleet
- Rear-door boarding policy enacted simultaneously
- Coordinated return to fare collection
- Coordinated bus seating capacity measures to enable social distancing

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.

The original 2020 IMTWG-LNTC workplan approved in LNTC-C 16-2019 set out to achieve the following (also indicated is the status of each objective):

- Introduce NRT West Niagara service – subject to 2020 Regional budget approval (STATUS: COMPLETED – launched August 17, 2020)
- System capital planning for 2021 – NRT and local services (STATUS: COMPLETED – ICIP applications aligned and approved)
- Review extension of NRT Service Operating Agreement beyond December 31, 2020 (STATUS: ONGOING – 2-year extension request to Regional Council Dec. 17)
- Complete Niagara Transit Governance Study further to LNTC-C-21-22-23 -2018 (STATUS: COMPLETED – Study submitted to LNTC October 21, 2020)
- Determine preferred fare integration solutions – structure and technology (STATUS: ONGOING)

Originally intended to be launched in April 2020 but delayed due to vehicle production delays brought on by COVID-19 closures of the auto manufacturing plants, the new NRT OnDemand system for west Niagara was launched August 17, 2020. Recent ridership and growth reports submitted to Niagara Region Public Works Committee (Nov. 10, 2020) have shown the system to be highly effective, with 200%+ growth over the first 8 weeks of service.

With the advent of new Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) funding for transit, the IMTWG also aligned 2021 capital projects to ensure continued progress on

harmonization of standardized bus specifications. The IMTWG also included joint applications with similar language around common on-board technology, hardware and fare technology as part of this coordinated effort.

Agreement on a 2-year extension for the NRT operating agreement (the municipalities of St. Catharines, Welland and Niagara Falls operate NRT on behalf of Niagara Region) has been reached by the IMTWG and submitted to Regional Council for approval in December 2020.

Although the pandemic impacted the original schedule for delivery of the Niagara Transit Governance Study (NTGS) launched in November 2019, the Study continued with the support of the IMTWG and the NTGS Project Team. A key deliverable of the LNTC's mandate, with the Study complete and submitted to LNTC October 21, 2020, work on next steps will continue to involve the IMTWG and LNTC as feedback comes in from the local area municipalities as they consider the recommendations of the NTGS by February 28, 2021.

A single, harmonized and seamless fare technology solution has long been considered a significant step forward for Niagara's transit. The IMTWG continues to pursue innovative, next generation fare technology that will enable contactless payment solutions. A report from the IMTWG on next steps by the respective transit operators is expected at a future meeting, and will remain a focus for 2021.

Given the magnitude of analysis, engagement and consultation required for the implementation of the NTGS, the IMTWG recommends its work plan for 2021 focus on the following:

- Provide local Councils with support and information required as part of Transit Governance considerations identified in LNTC-C 4-2020
- Support transition efforts (should triple majority be achieved) as outlined in the NTGS Transition Plan found in LNTC-C 4-2020
- Selection, procurement and implementation of a single, seamless, fare technology system

Many of the aforementioned and future initiatives are led, supported and driven by members of the IMTWG, with significant leadership from Niagara's Transit Operators and Transit CAOs. Through this continued leadership and collaboration, transit in Niagara will continue on its transformational path toward giving residents freedom when

choosing their mode of transportation and ultimately, reducing the dependence on single occupancy vehicle trips.

The terms of reference for the LNTC include the responsibility of the committee to direct/oversee the work of the IMTWG. If the LNTC supports the aforementioned IMTWG's 2021 workplan as presented in this memorandum, the following resolution may be put forward:

That the Linking Niagara Transit Committee **ENDORSE** the Inter-Municipal Transit Working Group's 2021 workplan as outlined in Report LNTC-C 7-2020.

Respectfully submitted and signed by,

Matt Robinson
Director | GO Implementation Office
Chair, Inter-Municipal Transit Working Group

Appendix 1 – LNTC-IMTWG Achievements 2018-2020