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**MEMORANDUM**

**PWC-C 17-2021**

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

**Date: April 13, 2021**

**To: Public Works Committee**

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

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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.

The Department Leadership team continues to actively participate 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**

The focus continues to be providing high quality safe and reliable water and wastewater services to the residents of Niagara while continuing to implement the necessary safety

and social distancing protocols in accordance with Niagara Region Public Health directives and Ontario Regulations.

Both the Drinking Water and Wastewater Quality Management Systems (QMS) remain active. Capital infrastructure projects are deemed essential and continue to be delivered.

Capital Projects in design, construction and environmental assessment phases continue to move forward. All meetings are held virtually whenever possible.

All W-WW staff, contractors and consultants continue to be reminded of their obligations to comply with the Niagara Region mask by-law and other pandemic mitigation policies and procedures.

### **Service/Operational Change**

The following mitigation measures have been adopted at all W-WW locations as of March 1, 2021 “Red–Control” zone:

- All non-essential staff must work from home wherever possible and limit any on-site work to essential tasks only; designation of essential staff is at the discretion of the manager based on business needs identified in the Business Continuity Plan.
- Closure of all plant meeting rooms to non-essential in-person meetings. All essential in-person meetings must adhere to posted occupancy limits.
- Essential outdoor site tours must be limited to a maximum of five (5) people with all participants wearing face coverings where physical distancing cannot be maintained.
- Cancellation of all non-essential indoor site visits.
- All in-person mandatory Health and Safety training has been reinstated; all other training continues to be offered via virtual learning.
- Deferral of non-essential drone flights and Matterport (360 View) scanning.
- Deferral of all non-essential contracted services.
- Limiting operations/maintenance staff from working/moving between multiple W-WW facilities to an as needed basis at the discretion of the operations and/or maintenance managers.
- Provision of manager’s vehicles will be made for staff as per business need and at the discretion of the operations and/or maintenance managers.
- Using Regional courier to send items between facilities instead of in-person drop off as much as possible

- Re-adoption of no-contact drop-off/pick up for courier, deliveries, uniforms and lab supplies if not currently being practised

### **Operational Outlook**

- 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 that 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**

Transportation continues to operate with the following measures which were implemented January 14, 2021:

- Transportation staff have been redeployed to assist with pandemic needs as required.
- Staff able to perform work duties from home must do so and limit any on-site work to essential tasks only.
- Essential work as outlined by the Province and identified by Management in the Transportation Business Continuity Plan will continue in accordance with the State of Emergency Declaration.
- Essential construction projects and contracted services are under review based on information coming from the Province and staff, contractors, constructors, etc., will be notified as required.
- All non-essential in-person meetings are cancelled until further notice.

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- Closure of all Transportation facilities and yards to visitors. Visitors requiring stock items from our stores at Thorold Service Center must now call Fleet Services Department, Materials Technician Leadhand at **905-227-2220, press 2** in order to place and arrange for curbside pick-up only.
  - Essential construction project on-site meetings (per bullet 3) must be limited to a maximum of five (5) participants wearing face masks until further notice.
  - In-person training has commenced meeting all safety guidelines
  - Staggered shifts and locations are under review and will be implemented as deemed necessary.

Staff continue to follow existing measures diligently and already in practice:

- Pre-screening is mandatory before entry into a Regional work location.
- Stay home if you have any of the symptoms and contact manager.
- Sanitation of workstations, regional property and vehicles per procedures put in place.
- Maintain physical distancing and mask wearing, especially in break rooms, vehicles and shared spaces

### **Operational Outlook**

- 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.
- 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**

- Waste Management services and programs continue to be offered in accordance with Niagara Region Public Health directives and Ontario Regulations. The following modifications remain in place: Staff who are able to perform work duties from home have been asked not to attend their work location. On-site work has been limited to essential tasks only.

- Essential work as outlined by the Province and identified in the Waste Management Business Continuity Plan will continue.
- Essential site tours outdoors must be limited to a maximum of five (5) with all participants wearing face coverings where physical distancing cannot be maintained.
- Cancellation of all non-essential indoor site visits.
- Continuation of operational modifications at public drop-off depots to ensure appropriate social distancing.
- Enhanced cleaning at all Waste Management Facilities
- Recycling bin distribution centres are now open; however, modifications are still in place to limit in-person interactions. Residents are encouraged to visit Niagara Region's website for [waste management service/program updates](#).

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

### **Operational Outlook**

- Continue to provide waste management services as an essential service.
- Review contingency plans with contractors to ensure plans are updated and current.
- RFP will be issued for the division's Long-term Strategic Plan Q2.
- NRFP MRF Opportunity Review will be issued Q2.
- Preparation for the start of the new Humberstone contract.

## **Niagara Region Transit/Specialized Transit & GO Implementation**

### **Current Status of Operations**

There have been no additional changes to Niagara Region's transit services as a result of the Provincial Government's restrictions. Since November 23, 2020, every transit service in Niagara has reduced its onboard passenger capacity to 50% of the vehicle's seated capacity rating. For Niagara Region, this includes NRT, NST and NRT OnDemand. After additional consultation with the IMT Working Group, these capacity changes will remain in place for an indefinite period of time, however further reductions are not recommended at this time.

Effective March 15, 2021, Niagara's transit services are providing free transit to/from vaccination appointments. This includes all three of Niagara Region's transit services

NRT, NST and NRT OnDemand. Riders are required to show proof of their appointment prior to boarding in order to be eligible for the free trips. Transit related questions are being managed by each individual service provider, while vaccination related questions are referred to Public Health.

Niagara Region Transit (NRT) is operating at a reduced level of service when compared to a typical January through April 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:

- 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 40, 45, 60 and 65 as those are typically well utilized student routes.
- The only Express routes currently running are the 60A, 65A but only during typical morning and afternoon peak periods to help prevent potential crowding.

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 continued to show small signs of recovery but still sits at approximately 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. and in Niagara-on-the-Lake from 7 a.m. - 7 p.m. Staff are monitoring the ridership levels. Since moving out lockdown, ridership has begun to recover and is comparable to NST.

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

### **Service/Operational Changes**

Despite the reduction of vehicle capacity, there is no need to return to rear door boarding as each vehicle has a partition separating the operator/driver from the passengers.

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 January 4, however staff attempted to maintain an adequate amount of 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.
- Free transit to/from vaccinations

### **Operational Outlook**

#### **1 month**

- Staff will continue to monitor the COVID-19 numbers and categorization for Niagara. Service adjustments may be required as the situation worsens, however the current belief held by the IMT Working Group is to continue offering existing service for essential workers.
- 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 continue purchasing monthly passes.

3 months

- Staff has set the schedules for May through August 2021 at the same consistent service level as is currently available.
- 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 being targeted, however orders for the hardware are just beginning to be made. 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,

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



## **Other Pertinent Reports**

CAO 10-2020, April 23, 2020 COVID-19 Response and Departmental Updates

PWC-C 13-2020, May 12, 2020 COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in Public Works

PWC-C 20-2020, June 16, 2020 COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in Public Works

PWC-C 24-2020, July 14, 2020 COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in Public Works

PWC-C 27-2020, August 4, 2020 COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in Public Works

PWC-C 33-2020, September 8, 2020 COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in Public Works

PWC-C 37-2020, October 13, 2020 COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in Public Works

PWC-C 41-2020, November 10, 2020 COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in Public Works

PWC-C 47-2020, December 8, 2020 COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in Public Works

PWC-C 1-2021, January 12, 2021 COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in Public Works

PWC-C 3-2021, February 16, 2021 COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in Public Works

PWC-C 7-2021, March 9, 2021 COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in Public Works