
Subject: GO Implementation Office – Quarterly Update

Report to: Public Works Committee

Report date: Tuesday, May 7, 2019

Recommendations

That Report PW 27-2019 **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the extensive work undertaken as part of the ongoing collaborative relationship between Niagara's municipal partners and the Region in relation to the expansion of daily GO Rail Service to Niagara, and the integration of Niagara's transit systems.
- The GO Implementation Office is a dedicated, single-window, proactive conduit to our municipal partners, Provincial Ministries, public agencies (i.e. Metrolinx) and Niagara transit operators with the express focus to implement daily GO Rail Service and work towards an integrated Niagara transit system.
- Daily GO rail service commenced January 7, 2019, four years ahead of the previously announced schedule.
- A draft MOU to establish a municipal road at the St. Catharines GO Station will be presented to Planning and Economic Development Committee at its May 8 meeting.
- The Linking Niagara Transit Committee workplan is well underway with operational and governance components advancing for execution in 2019.

Financial Considerations

There are no financial costs directly associated with the projects outlined in this report that are not already covered in the approved 2019 Budget.

Analysis

GO Rail Expansion

The GO Implementation Office has been aggressively and proactively advancing the objective of securing daily, two-way, hourly GO rail service and associated station infrastructure. In December 2018, along with Niagara West MPP Sam Oosterhoff, Transportation Minister Jeff Yurek announced that daily commuter GO service to Niagara would be introduced effective January 7, 2019 – a full four (4) years ahead of the previous timetable. Now three (3) months into the inaugural service, ridership

continues to see a steady increase, with Metrolinx indicating they are very pleased with the uptake.

The summer seasonal weekend GO Train service will launch again this year for its eleventh season on the long weekend in May, returning June 21 through Labour Day. In 2018, the Niagara seasonal weekend GO Train service saw a 42 percent increase in ridership over 2017; a number expected to increase further in 2019 with the advent of additional tourism partnerships being secured. Furthermore, Metrolinx is set to implement a new fare harmonization policy effective April 20 with aim to align GO bus and rail fares with deeper discounts for those taking GO using PRESTO at \$17.79 one way from Niagara Falls to Union Station.

With regard to government relations, the Niagara GO Working Group, comprised of the Regional Chair and Mayors of Grimsby, Lincoln, St. Catharines and Niagara Falls (along with their respective CAOs), continue the ongoing dialogue with Metrolinx to advance the goal of securing hourly, two-way rail service to Niagara. An upcoming meeting with Metrolinx CEO Phil Verster and the Niagara GO Working Group regarding service acceleration is currently being scheduled. Additionally, planned connections with the City of Hamilton regarding alignment of strategy and impacts on the Grimsby Subdivision (the CN-owned rail corridor along which the Niagara extension operates) are being considered to ensure mutually beneficial goals are advanced in a coordinated partnership.

Negotiations with CN for increased service levels and infrastructure needs through the corridor continue to be led through the Metrolinx CEO's office with positive results for expected further announcements in 2019.

Lastly, the GO Implementation Office continues to work closely with Metrolinx to align the new daily commuter rail service at the St. Catharines VIA station to GO's Route 12 Bus which carries Niagara-bound passengers between Niagara Falls and Burlington GO station.

In-corridor Enabling Works (track, signals, structures)

A key component of the successful acceleration and enhancement of service to Niagara stations is predicated on the enabling in-corridor track and signaling works through Bayview Junction in Hamilton. Metrolinx, together with CN who owns the corridor, have been undertaking significant track improvements through this segment en route to the new Confederation Station in Stoney Creek. With these enabling works underway, track connections at West Harbour station will allow for more seamless transfers and train movements. At present, Toronto-bound Niagara trains must reverse on the CN mainline to enter the West Harbour Station. This is not operationally advantageous and new works commencing fall 2019 will allow for seamless pass through at West Harbour Station.

Niagara Region's GO Implementation Office continues to work very closely with Metrolinx to understand the extent of in-corridor rail infrastructure required to enable hourly service through to Niagara Falls.

Off-corridor Enabling Works (stations, associated road and access facilities)

Through Niagara Region's GO Implementation Office, Niagara is working diligently to determine whether or not there is a role for the Region and its partners to play within the provincial government's new transit oriented development (TOD) framework. Metrolinx is now advancing the TOD directive, and Niagara continues to actively pursue its role in the interest of fully leveraging daily GO train service to Niagara. Metrolinx is looking at both public and private sector partnerships for delivery of new station buildings. At this time it is early on in this process and staff do not have further information, but expect to be providing an update to Council before the end of Q3 2019.

The Metrolinx-led detailed design process is underway in St. Catharines and Niagara Falls, and staff are working closely with Metrolinx and our municipal partners to determine the role and scope for the Region and/or Cities at each of these sites throughout this process.

In St. Catharines, a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Niagara Region, City of St. Catharines and Ridley College (if adopted by Regional and Municipal Councils), will enable a new municipal road to be constructed that will not only unlock the development potential around the new GO station, but also serve as the ideal primary station access.

At Niagara Falls Station, new federal and provincial funding opportunities through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) could provide a window to realize the broader Niagara Falls Station precinct vision. Staff are working closely with Metrolinx and our municipal partners to determine the role Niagara can play at these stations sites with a strategy for Council's consideration forthcoming.

Staff are also working with the Town of Lincoln to explore TOD opportunities on the site identified in GO Transit's 2011 Environmental Study Report (ESR). The GO Implementation Office continues to enable any and all opportunities for Niagara to leverage the current and future potential service at all of the locations identified in the 2011 ESR.

Niagara Region continues to work with rail partners CN and VIA Rail to explore options and opportunities to effectively and fully maximize the existing GO/VIA station lands and facilities at the St. Catharines and Niagara Falls sites, and the role the Region can play in achieving this. Further investigative works are underway with staff anticipating a report to Council in the coming committee cycles.

Metrolinx is also seeking Regional and Municipal support for installation of corridor radio communication towers along the Grimsby Subdivision. This infrastructure is required in order for Metrolinx to operate rail service through the corridor and the GO Office is working closely with municipal peers to ensure Metrolinx can facilitate this process as expeditiously as possible. Further updates related to this component will be brought forward to Committee at a future date once further details are solidified.

Inter-Municipal Transit

At the direction of the Linking Niagara Transit Committee (LNTC), the Inter-Municipal Transit Working Group (IMTWG) comprised of transit managers and transit staff from all 13 municipalities have been advancing the key elements of the 2019 workplan. This workplan is broken into two main components: operational and customer service enhancements; and governance options and business case development.

Operational and Customer Service Enhancements

- Options for an integrated call centre are being actively explored by the IMTWG in an effort to streamline operational customer service needs across transit providers for an enhanced user experience.
- 2019 U-Pass negotiations are underway with post-secondary student unions
 - A new provincial government policy regime has been announced that alters the rules surrounding mandatory and non-mandatory student fees. The changes will affect the way student unions and academic institutions deliver services by giving students the ability to opt out of certain fees.
 - The IMTWG is working closely with our post-secondary partners to examine the operational and financial impacts on transit providers as they relate to existing post-secondary agreements.
 - Committee will be apprised of the potential revenue risks and opportunities resulting from the development of prospective options throughout the negotiation process.
- 2019 Regional budget deployment for Niagara Region Transit (NRT)
 - A new service model for west Niagara is in early stages of development, intended for fall 2019 or January 2020 deployment, as it could be done in two phases. Staff are exploring the potential for other system integration opportunities to maximize coverage and budget resources.
 - The existing Port Colborne and Fort Erie Link routes are being coordinated with local staff for upload and service enhancements.
 - New fleet has been ordered as outlined in the 2019 capital budget. Transit staff, together with our local transit partners, will coordinate September 2019 service improvements according to expected bus delivery timelines. Regional transit staff are working with Niagara Falls Transit to lease buses to ensure

- operational continuity to meet increasing demand and ridership during the procurement and delivery phase (which could be up to 12 months).
- MTO Provincial Gas Tax (PGT) Program / ICIP
 - As directed by the LNTC, initial discussions are underway with Port Colborne, Lincoln and Pelham to explore potential for joint reporting with mutual benefits realized through this strategy, as reported in LNTC-C 1-2019.
 - The 2019-2020 provincial budget will need to be reviewed and analyzed for any potential impacts to transit funding through the PGT. Transit staff will continue to monitor, work with provincial transit agencies, and discuss ongoing PGT requests with the MTO. Any additional impacts on Niagara's overall PGT position and/or impacts to Regional allocations will be reported to Committee when known in detail.
 - The joint federal/provincial ICIP Transit funding stream for transit is now open, closing May 28. The IMT Coordinating Committee are reviewing opportunities for joint applications which will enable further operational alignment referenced above. Projects requiring Council endorsement as part of the application process will be brought forward to committee under separate reporting.

Governance Options / Business Case

- An area CAO-led committee has been established to lead development of transit governance options. The terms of reference are under development and will be shared with the LNTC at its April 24 meeting.
- As outlined in the LNTC workplan, the Specialized Transit Study is now under way. This will undertake an operational and jurisdictional review, a customer service review and survey, and provide recommendations for future alignment.
 - PICs for the Specialized Transit Study are being held:
 - Tuesday April 23, 5-7 pm, Civic Square in the Community Room, 60 East Main St., Welland
 - Wednesday April 24, 5-7 pm, St. Catharines Public Library, 54 Church St., St. Catharines
 - This information has been shared by the transit team with members of the LNTC, Transportation Steering Committee and the Accessibility Advisory Committee. A further update will be provided at the April 24 LNTC meeting.
- The IMTWG are advancing a common fare strategy as outlined in the workplan:
 - Harmonization of fares across Niagara transit systems
 - Introduction of new technology (hardware and software)
 - Engagement with PRESTO for information and demonstration
 - A further update from the IMTWG will be provided at the April 24 LNTC meeting

Other Pertinent Reports

CL-C 41-2017 (GO Implementation Office – Supplementary Information)
CSD 46-2017 (GO Transit Capital Project – Debt Substitution and Initiation of Funds)
PW 20-2017 (Establishment of GO Implementation Office)
PW 47-2017 (GO Implementation Office – Quarterly Update)
PW 13-2018 (GO Implementation Office – Quarterly Update)
LNTC-C 20-2018 (IMT Universal Support Person Pass)
LNTC-C 21-2018 (IMT Service Implementation Strategy)
LNTC-C 22-2018 (IMT Financial Impact Analysis)
LNTC-C 23-2018 (IMT Capital Plan 2019)
PDS 15-2018 (OPA 6 – Grimsby GO Transit Station Secondary Plan)
PDS 24-2018 (OPA 125 – Niagara Falls Transit Station Secondary Plan)
PDS 28-2018 (OPA 19 – St. Catharines GO Transit Station Secondary Plan)
PDS 30-2018 (OPA 4 – Beamsville GO Transit Station Secondary Plan)
PDS-C 23-2018 (Functional Station Designs – Niagara’s GO Stations)
PW 39-2018 (GO Implementation Office – Quarterly Update)
PDS-C 3-2019 (Update on the Status of GO Service to Grimsby)
PDS-C 4-2019 (Niagara Falls GO Station Functional Design)
PDS-20- 2019 (Ridley MOU)

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