
MEMORANDUM

LNTC-C 08-2019

Subject: Transit Fare Integration Strategy

Date: May 29, 2019

To: Linking Niagara Transit Committee

From: Matt Robinson, Director, GO Implementation Office

At its meeting on April 24, LNTC directed the Inter-Municipal Transit Working Group (IMTWG) to bring an update on the fare integration efforts underway as outlined in the 2019 workplan. In addition to the presentation provided by St. Catharines Transit Commission outlining the successful introduction of mobile ticketing to its customers and the potential for usage on other Niagara systems, the IMTWG offer the following with regard to the efforts underway to align fare integration.

The *Niagara Transit Service Delivery and Governance Strategy, 2017* identified the shortfalls of the current overall fare system, and recommended that a harmonization of a common fare structure and payment technology was a key enabler to a more connective and integrated transit system in Niagara:

“There is little consistency in the existing fare structure within Niagara Region. Each local transit system sets their own local transit fare, including concessions for different demographics and degree of system use. Inter-municipal transit fares are also varied, with a separate fare within the Consolidated Transit Service Area and other fare policies for the Rural Link Route services. Transfer policies and fare integration policies between each of the systems are also not consistent.

In order to create a more integrated transit system within Niagara, it is recommended that a common fare structure be established... [with] a push to extend this common fare strategy to connecting transit systems in the region. This also includes the use of a common smart card to pay for a trip between any municipalities in the region.”

– Dillon Report, Chapter 16, Fare Strategy Pg. 179

Additionally, Niagara Region’s Transportation Master Plan (TMP) also calls for “regular, reliable and coordinated transit connections to GO Stations and major transit stations”, “leveraging emerging technologies through policy”, and “shifting the paradigm of transportation models to multi-modal systems”. These overarching TMP transit policy objectives can be achieved through the introduction of a common fare structure and associated integration of fare payment technologies.

As part of the LNTC/IMTWG workplan, a common fare strategy has been identified, along with associated fare payment technology. The IMTWG has identified a two-phased approach to this overall fare strategy, where the harmonization of the fare structure and the technology to enable seamless travel all coincide in their implementation. In this scenario, the fare media, fare structure, and payment technology would be aligned across systems.

The IMTWG are working toward this objective, with aim to bring about consistency across the existing systems with regard to fare media (i.e. monthly passes, 10-ride cards, etc.). This would mean each system would define their fare media and rider segments using the same categories (i.e. adult (18-64), senior (65+), student (12-18), child (12-under), etc.). Subsequently, with fare media products offered by the systems aligned, the fare structure could then also be aligned. This would bring consistency to the cash fare and discount fares (i.e. seniors, students, etc.) across all of the systems. It is envisioned that local Councils under the current structure may still elect to allow for unique municipal exemptions; however there exists a significant opportunity to enable the large majority of fare media products and associated fare structure to align across systems.

This alignment and associated operational and financial impacts are being advanced by the IMTWG with aim to calculate with precision (based on previous year's ridership and budget actuals) the impact of these policy decisions on the respective local transit authorities. Ultimately these decisions to adopt, align and deploy any fare structure or product changes all require the full consent of the respective local Councils or transit authorities to implement.

With regard to fare payment technology, the IMTWG has been working within the parameters of the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) to align requests. Although not precisely defined at this time, the premise is that all systems would acquire and adopt the same fare payment technology using these external ICIP funding sources to assist in the harmonization of a preferred integrated fare payment option. This could include mobile ticketing (as presented at the previous committee and recently deployed by St. Catharines Transit), on-board fare payment technology, smartcard fare payment, and/or other related hardware and software supports for next generation fare payment. Once implemented, this would accelerate the improved rider experience of a common fare payment technology and assist with the seamless movement of riders across systems in Niagara.

Additionally, the IMTWG is engaging with PRESTO (the fare payment technology agency of Metrolinx) which is used on the higher order provincial GO Transit and UP Express systems, to learn more about the capital, operational and process requirements of that program.

Respecting the need for local transit authorities and councils to ultimately decide on the future of this fare alignment strategy, pending positive local Council support for the new direction combined with successful ICIP applications across transit systems and the outcome from the Niagara transit governance review, could all enable the proposed harmonized fare structure and fare payment technology to be ready for deployment January 1, 2021. This timeframe would include requisite Council/Commission approvals, public notification, selection, acquisition and installation of preferred fare payment technology, and finally deployment. This would represent a significant achievement in the operational integration of the systems and clearly demonstrate to Niagara transit users the seamless connectivity envisioned at the core of the LNTC's mandate.

Respectfully submitted and signed by,

Matt Robinson
Director
GO Implementation Office