

Subject: Niagara Transit Commission Brand Recommendation
Report to: Niagara Transit Commission Board
Report date: **Tuesday, July 16, 2024**

Recommendations

1. That the Niagara Transit Commission (NTC) Board **APPROVE** the proposed operating brand name change of Niagara Region Transit to Niagara Transit;
2. That the Niagara Transit Commission Board **APPROVE** the proposed brand for the Niagara Transit Commission as presented; and
3. That this report **BE FORWARDED** to Regional Council for consideration at its meeting on July 25, 2024, seeking approval of the name proposed in recommendation 1 pursuant to section 2.1 of Niagara Transit Commission's Establishing By-law.

KEY FACTS

- The purpose of this report is to seek the approval by the NTC Board to change the brand name of the Niagara Transit Commission's service now operating as Niagara Region Transit to Niagara Transit, and to adopt the recommended new brand for the Niagara Transit Commission as presented.
- On August 2, 2022, the Interim Board for NTC approved report NTC 11-2022, recommending that the brand name of the transit system be Niagara Region Transit, and that staff initiate the Request for Proposal (RFP) process to undertake a full re-brand of the system, ensuring that accessibility considerations were a key element of this work.
- Section 2.1 of NTC's Establishing By-law states the Commission may make a recommendation to Council for approval to change the name of the NTC service. Accordingly, subject to NTC Board approval of the name it is required to be submitted to Regional Council for approval.
- Section 3.1 of By-Law 2022-038, states: The purposes of the NTC are: to operate, manage and maintain a comprehensive regional transit system known as "Niagara Transit" within the region of Niagara, and provide advice to the Region on matters

related to the delivery of transit across the region which could include specialized, conventional and on-demand services;

- The new name and brand will provide the public with a cohesive logo, look and feel for Niagara's transit services, replacing the different legacy branding of the previous systems which include; St Catharines Transit, St. Catharines Paratransit, Niagara Falls Transit, Niagara Falls Chair-a-Van, Welland Transit, WellTrans, Fort Erie Transit On-Demand, Fort Erie Accessible Specialized Transit, Niagara Region Transit, Niagara Specialized Transit and NRT OnDemand.

Financial Considerations

The current request to approve the brand has no direct impact on the 2024 approved budget of NTC. As part of the rebranding scope of work, HDR Inc., the consultant awarded through the Request for Proposal process, will be developing a comprehensive marketing plan to support implementation of the new brand. This marketing plan will be rolled out over 2024 and 2025, ensuring a strategic and phased approach to introducing and reinforcing the new brand identity across all channels. The costs associated with this rollout will be allocated from the approved operating budget relating to advertising, ensuring that the financial resources are in place to effectively promote and establish the brand. Outlined in the 2024 approved Capital Budget were costs relating to the branding of the current fleet, stops and shelters. This investment will be crucial in achieving widespread recognition and acceptance of the new brand, ultimately contributing to the NTC's long-term success. If the rebranding strategy identifies additional costs, these pressures will be built into and addressed through future budget approvals.

Analysis

On August 2, 2022, the Niagara Transit Commission Board was presented with an interim branding strategy for consideration. The objective of this strategy was to establish a unified brand for public-facing assets in preparation for the NTC's launch on January 1, 2023. During this meeting, the Board decided to adopt "Niagara Region Transit" as the interim name, leveraging its existing community recognition. The proposed interim brand was not approved due to the significant costs associated with rebranding and the aversion to repeating the process. Instead, the Board approved the motion to retain the "Niagara Region Transit" brand name for 1-2 years, until a comprehensive rebranding could be conducted through an RFP, with a priority on accessibility.

In November 2023, staff issued an RFP seeking a consultant to undertake the work to build a new brand for the NTC. A key element of the RFP was accessibility, ensuring that we partnered with a consultant capable of incorporating this crucial aspect to the brand for use across all channels. HDR Inc. was the successful proponent, chosen based on their extensive experience in transit branding.

The branding work commenced in early 2024, and the process included comprehensive engagement activities to ensure broad input and buy-in. Workshops were conducted with the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 846, the Public Advisory Committee, the Accessibility Advisory Committee, the NTC Board, the Senior Leadership Team, and staff at each of our transit locations through pop-up events. Additionally, a public survey was jointly undertaken to support both the branding project and the Master Plan project, receiving 582 responses. This extensive consultation process ensured that the new brand would be inclusive, reflective of community input, and aligns with the NTC's strategic goals, as well as the recently adopted Mission, Vision and Values.

In light of the operational requirements and the need for a cohesive identity, we are now seeking the approval for the new, permanent brand for the NTC. While the interim brand, Niagara Region Transit, has served its purpose by ensuring consistency and familiarity during the initial transition, moving away from legacy brands is imperative to avoid public confusion and to present a unified look and feel for our riders. A new brand will serve as the cornerstone both internally, and for public-facing harmonization, encompassing our assets, signage, fare media products, marketing campaigns, and web applications. Furthermore, the investment in asset re-branding necessitates sufficient duration to ensure value for money, while allowing for thorough implementation of the permanent branding options. Having already completed extensive consultation with riders and the community, we are now ready to move forward. This process, which is then required in accordance with By-law No. 2022-38, has culminated in a recommendation to this Board, and then to Regional Council for approval, ensuring that the new brand reflects the collective vision and identity of the NTC.

Alternatives Reviewed

Should the Board and Regional Council decide not to adopt the rebranding strategy as proposed, NTC could continue using the interim brand, Niagara Region Transit. Costs associated with maintaining multiple brands across Niagara would necessitate repeated investments in marketing, materials, and public communications. Furthermore, any delay in adopting a permanent brand would mean repeating the consultation, design,

and implementation processes in the future. Committing to a permanent operating brand ensures consistency, cost-effectiveness, and a strong, cohesive public image across all levels of conventional, Micro Transit and paratransit services.

Relationship to Niagara Transit Commission Strategic Priorities

The proposed name change and rebrand aligns with the Strategic Core Values of the Niagara Transit Commission, as well as the adopted Guiding Principles of the Niagara Region. Specific elements which directly relate to the proposed are highlighted below:

Service Excellence:

A unified, new single brand contributes significantly to service excellence by creating a cohesive identity that aligns all aspects of the NTC. This unified approach ensures that all service touchpoints, from vehicles to customer service interactions, consistently reflect the same high standards. It eliminates the confusion and inefficiencies associated with maintaining multiple legacy brands, allowing us to streamline operations and focus on delivering superior service. A clear, recognizable brand instills confidence in our riders, reinforcing their trust in the reliability and quality of our transit services.

Customer Focus:

The adoption of a new, unified brand underscores our commitment to customer focus by providing a seamless and consistent experience across all channels. A single brand simplifies the messaging and communication with our riders, making it easier for them to navigate and utilize our services. By integrating accessibility into the brand, we ensure that all customers, including those with disabilities, have a positive and inclusive experience. This focus on the customer journey enhances satisfaction, as riders feel more connected and valued when their transit system speaks with one clear, coherent voice.

Employee Success:

A cohesive brand plays a crucial role in fostering employee success. When employees operate under a unified brand, it creates a sense of pride and

belonging, enhancing morale and engagement. Clear branding guidelines provide staff with a shared understanding of the organization's mission and values, promoting consistent behavior and service delivery. This alignment helps employees feel more connected to the NTC's goals and empowers them to act as brand ambassadors, further elevating the quality of service provided to our riders. Ultimately, a strong brand supports a positive and unified workplace culture, contributing to the overall success and satisfaction of our employees.

Other Pertinent Reports

NTC 12-2022 Interim Branding Strategy

Prepared by:

Leah Tracey
Communications Consultant
Customer Experience

Recommended by:

Edward Zahra
Deputy General Manager
Customer Experience

Submitted by:

Carla Stout, DPA
General Manager

This report was prepared in consultation with Anneli Thomson, Legal Counsel; Heather Talbot, Manager of Integration and Transformation and Stephanie Muhic, Program Financial Specialist.

Appendices

N/A