
Subject: Service Enhancements - September 2019

Report to: Linking Niagara Transit Committee

Report date: Wednesday, September 25, 2019

Recommendations

That this report **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to provide Committee members with an update on the transit service enhancements which began in September 2019.
- The Niagara Region Transit enhancements are a result of the continued collaboration between Niagara Region and the local municipalities through the Inter-Municipal Transit Working Group (IMTWG).
- The Niagara Specialized Transit enhancements are the result of client feedback combined with collaboration with the current service provider.
- Each of the enhancements identified within align with the 2019 Operating Budget.

Financial Considerations

The service enhancements outlined in this report were approved as part of the total 2019 Transit Operating Budget increase of \$7.9 million, therefore there are no incremental impacts.

Analysis

Niagara Region Transit (NRT)

Starting on September 3, 2019, NRT expanded service on many of its routes and added a connection to the Town of Pelham. As a result of these changes, almost all NRT routes have standardized service hours available Monday to Saturday from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. The only exceptions being Route 25 (Port Colborne Link) which runs from 6:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. in order to prioritize connections in Welland, and Route 22 (Fort Erie Link) due to resourcing challenges at Niagara Falls Transit. This is in keeping with the focus and principles laid out in the IMT Service Plan LNTC-C 21-2018.

A specific operational deliverable of the Inter-Municipal Transit Working Group (IMTWG) on its 2018-2019 workplan was to consolidate routes which provided duplicate services in a given corridor. This iterative process began in 2017 and has now concluded with the following changes:

- 40B/45B – Effectively an upload of the St. Catharines Transit Route #26, this express route connects the St. Catharines Bus Terminal to the Niagara College Glendale Campus, now providing 15 minute peak service through the corridor
- 70A/75A – This new Route connects Niagara College Welland Campus, Pelham's Meridian Community Centre and Brock University and replaces the Brock Link

In addition to the route consolidations, a number of enhancements were made to the following routes:

- 25 (Port Colborne to Welland) – Eliminated midday breaks in service and extended the service hours
- 40A/45A (Express Niagara Falls to Niagara College Glendale Campus) – Extended service hours to eliminate the service break in the middle of the day
- 50/55 (Niagara Falls to St. Catharines) – Standardized and extended the operating hours Monday to Saturday
- 60/65 (Niagara Falls to Welland) – 30 min service all day (Monday to Friday) and added two additional hours of service on Saturdays
- 60A/65A (Express Niagara Falls to Welland) – Morning and afternoon Express service every 15 minutes (Approximately 7:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.)
- 70/75 (St. Catharines to Welland) – Increased the frequency of service to 30 minute intervals all day (Monday to Friday only) and increased service hours by two hours (Monday to Saturday)

Niagara Specialized Transit (NST)

As of September 1, 2019, NST formalized the use of the transfer hub in Stoney Creek off Highway 8, as outlined in PW 40-2019. The hub will connect NST riders from Niagara with D.A.R.T.S. who will then take riders to their desired location in Hamilton. In order to implement the new Hamilton transfer hub, NST is discontinuing its current practice of only providing medically-related trips to Hamilton via a direct trip. Instead, riders will be able to book all types of trips to the hub, including work, social and medical, but are now required to make use of the transfer hub. This enhances the convenience of the service, especially for the NST clients residing in West Niagara.

An additional benefit of implementing the new Hamilton transfer hub is the reduction of the Hamilton trip fare from \$15 to \$6. With the D.A.R.T.S. cash fare being roughly \$3, a NST rider's trip total to Hamilton will be approximately \$9.

One of the recommendations from the ongoing Specialized Transit Study, as approved by Niagara Regional Council through PW 39-2019 and PW 40-2019, is that riders will now be able to book their trip just 24 hours in advance (rather than 48 hours) with this new updated booking window. It is anticipated that this will provide NST riders with more flexibility in booking their trips and help reduce trip cancellation rates which are some of the highest in the industry. Staff is continuing to review available data and will work with the service provider to look for opportunities to further reduce the cancellation rate.

The pickup window for scheduled rides has been adjusted from 25 minutes to 30 minutes for the sake of consistency and ease of scheduling. When riders attempt to book a specific pickup time, they are now advised of their pickup window and that they are required to be ready during that period as the vehicle will only wait for 5 minutes. While this policy is actually an existing policy, our service provider had previously desired to be more flexible. This flexibility resulted in their inability to meet the on-time performance requirements of their contract; hence the need to begin enforcing the policy more consistently.

In addition to these changes, the Universal Support Person Pass has now been implemented. This pass makes transit more accessible for people who require assistance while travelling by allowing their Support Person to accompany them on transit at no additional cost. This program is another deliverable of the IMTWG 2018-2019 workplan and was discussed in additional detail in LNTC 4-2018 and LNTC 20-2018. It should also be noted that this pass can be used on all transit services, conventional and specialized, in Niagara and is a standard pass for all systems.

Additionally, NRT, working with its partners from the IMTWG, has implemented real-time departure and arrival data into the Transit App – another IMTWG 2018-2019 workplan deliverable. In addition to the app, digital screens at a number of key transit locations now enable riders to access the real-time route and bus information. These locations currently include:

- St. Catharines Bus Terminal
- Morrison/Dorchester Hub in Niagara Falls
- Brock University
- Niagara College

Staff will continue to work with its transit partners and local agencies to identify opportunities to expand the deployment of this amenity where feasible.

Alternatives Reviewed

As this report is for information purposes only, there were no alternatives reviewed.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

Advancing Regional Transit is an objective under Priority 3: Responsible Growth and Infrastructure Planning and is one of the six (6) implementation projects identified. The enhancements outlined in this report represent significant service improvements for residents, students and tourists alike. NRT provides inter-municipal connections and supports equitable access to a variety of educational, medical and employment opportunities.

Other Pertinent Reports

LNTC 4-2018
LNTC 20-2018
PW 39-2019
PW 40-2019

Prepared by:

Robert Salewytch
Program Manager, Transit Services
GO Implementation Office
Public Works Department

Recommended by:

Catherine Habermehl
Acting Commissioner
Public Works Department

Submitted by:

Ron Tripp, P.Eng.
Acting Chief Administrative Officer

This report was prepared in consultation with Heather Talbot, Financial and Special Projects Consultant, Financial Management and Planning, and reviewed by Matt Robinson, Director, GO Implementation Office.