
MEMORANDUM

LNTC-C 16-2019

Subject: Inter-Municipal Transit Working Group / Linking Niagara Transit Committee 2019 Work Plan Update

Date: November 20, 2019

To: Linking Niagara Transit Committee

From: Matt Robinson, Director GO Implementation Office

This memo provides a detailed update on the Inter-Municipal Transit Working Group (IMTWG) / Linking Niagara Transit Committee (LNTC) 2019 work plan, as well as forecasting the key initiatives proposed for the first half of 2020.

The IMTWG, under the direction of the LNTC, has advanced a number of critical elements related to the implementation of the recommendations based in the *Niagara Transit Service Delivery and Governance Strategy, 2017* (Dillon Report).

Over the last two (2) years, the IMTWG has been consistently and methodically working to improve the transit customer service experience in Niagara with all efforts aimed toward enabling a fully integrated system.

The following are achievements from the 2018 IMTWG/LNTC work plan:

- Standardized, on-bus customer service policies across all four large transit systems effective April 1, 2018
- Established a single digital mobile platform – Transit App – effective March 1, 2018. All Niagara transit systems' routes are now uploaded, enabling riders to find route, schedule and bus information, including a promotional campaign
- 'Moving Transit Forward' promotional campaign on all Niagara Region Transit (NRT) buses (interior and exterior) and on local buses (interior) effective May 2018 aimed at raising public awareness to transit integration activities
- Consolidated all after-hours customer service call handling to a single external provider across all four major systems
- Completed comprehensive Provincial Gas Tax analysis and advocacy engagement with MTO on route rationalization and impacts to local providers
- Finalized a multi-year extension of NRT operations in partnership with the Transit Service Providers to take operations through December 2020
- Finalized the NRT U-Pass agreement summer 2018
- Rationalization of two post-secondary charter routes with existing inter-municipal routes including service enhancements effective September 2018

- Fort Erie and Port Colborne NRT Link route service enhancements effective September 2018

With these achievements in 2018, the 2019 IMTWG/LNTC work plan has been similarly ambitious, with significant operational focus for service enhancements, predicated on the multi-year service plan outlined in LNTC-C-22 2018. It is critical to note that these IMT service expansions would not have been possible without the exceptional planning, engagement and commitment from the local transit operators – particularly Niagara Falls, St. Catharines and Welland. Without their partnership, NRT would not have reached a historical peak of 135,000 service hours in 2019. Their leadership, service planning, scheduling, bus operators/drivers, mechanics and customer service representatives have been instrumental in enabling the network to grow as it has in such rapid, exponential growth over the course of the last two years.

Building on the customer focused successes achieved in 2018, the following are highlights from the 2019 IMTWG/LNTC work plan achievements:

- Developed a common fare strategy/structure, including financial analysis for any required Council approvals (necessary precursor work to enabling a common fare technology). This structure has been endorsed by the St. Catharines Transit Commission and Niagara Falls Council (subject to full buy in from all transit parties)
- Completed the Specialized Transit in Niagara Study which examined ridership, demand projections, a scan of jurisdictional comparators and industry best practices, along with operating improvements to feed into the Transit Governance Study
- Implemented a Universal Support Person Pass common to all Niagara transit systems effective September 2019 to enable those with mobility limitations to travel with an approved support person with valid identification
- Streamlined all data inputs and established a process to ensure all trip planning tools including Google trip planner, Triplinx, Transit App have up-to-date and accurate information
- Secured 2019-2020 U-Pass agreements with Niagara College and Brock University Student Unions
- Real-time bus tracking via the Transit App on all Niagara Region Transit (NRT), Niagara Falls Transit and St. Catharines Transit fleet now fully enabled (Welland to be completed winter 2019/2020)
- Based on historic Regional Council investments in NRT via a separate levy of 1.4% which enabled significant service enhancements on NRT mainline routes effective September 2019:
 - Nearly all NRT mainline routes now 30 minute (or better) peak headways
 - Added express routes for routes 70A/75A and 60A/65A to post-secondary campuses of Niagara College and Brock University

- Working with Pelham Transit, added connection to Pelham's Meridian Community Centre via 70A/75A
- Procured, in partnership with our municipal operators, 14 new buses to meet the NRT fleet requirements for recent service enhancements, ensuring the utilization of the reduced operating rate
- Uploaded Port Colborne and Fort Erie Link routes and eliminated the SCT #26 – removing the last of the duplication of IMT routes in the system. All IMT routes are now operated under the (non-exclusive) jurisdiction of NRT
- Submitted consolidated Niagara feedback to MTO Provincial Gas Tax Program consultations based on comprehensive 2018 financial and local impact analysis
- Secured recommendation for on-demand transit expansion model for West Niagara
- Through a competitive procurement process, launched the Niagara Transit Governance Study, securing Optimus SBR and Left Turn, Right Turn (LTRT) as lead consultants for the study.

The IMTWG has been unwavering in its commitment to improving integration and customer service improvements for transit in Niagara over the last two years. As a result, there are numerous and significant enhancements, expansions and integration of policy and technology which have laid a strong foundation for the governance work that commenced in late 2019 and is being led by the CAO Transit Governance Working Group.

Given the magnitude of analysis, engagement and consultation required for the governance study, the IMTWG recommends its work plan focus on the following for 2020, subject to LNTC approval:

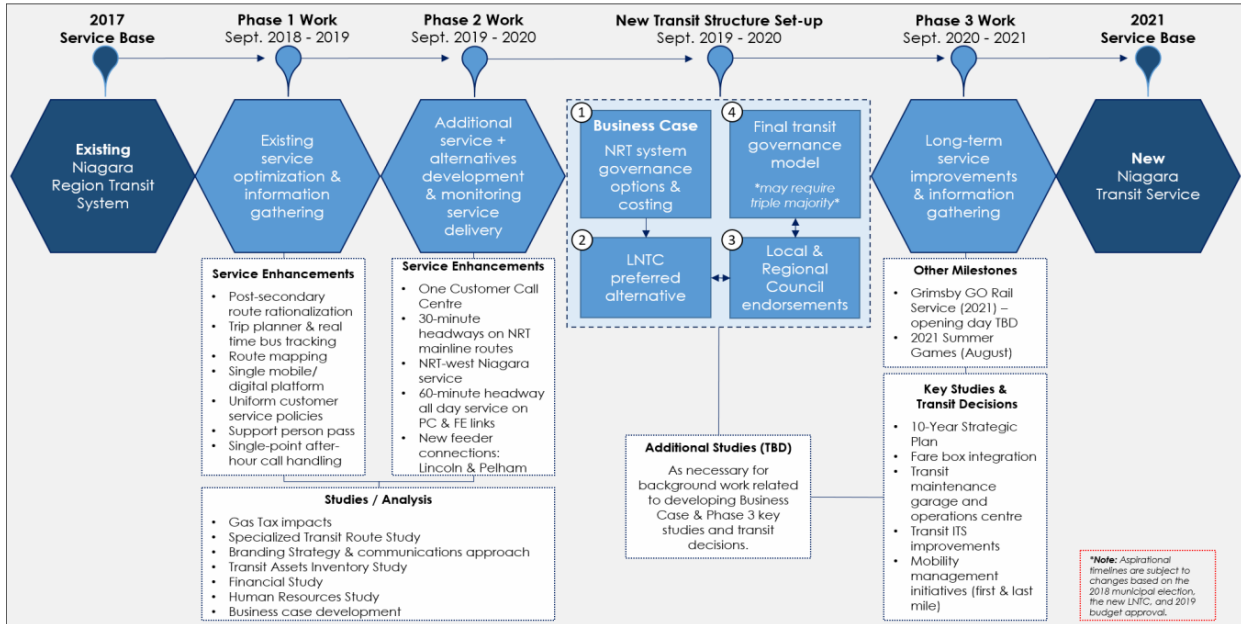
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- Introduce NRT West Niagara service (operational Q2 2020) – subject to 2020 operations budget approval
- Determine preferred fare integration solutions – structure and technology (Q3 2020)
- System capital planning for 2021 – NRT and local services (Q2 2020)
- Review the need to extend the NRT Service Operating Agreement beyond its term of December 31, 2020 (subject to the Niagara Transit Governance Study)

GOVERNANCE

- Complete Niagara Transit Governance Study further to LNTC-C-21-22-23 -2018 outlined below in Figure 1 (Q2 2020)

Figure 1 – IMT Service Implementation and Governance Guiding Framework



Niagara's 12 municipalities, through the IMTWG and under the direction of the LNTC, are working closely to ensure a seamless and integrated system that incorporates the core systems (St. Catharines, Niagara Falls, Welland, Niagara Region) with the smaller feeder systems (Fort Erie, Lincoln, Pelham, Port Colborne, Niagara-on-the-Lake) in a highly collaborative partnership.

Many of these initiatives are led, supported and driven by members of the IMTWG, with significant leadership from Niagara's Transit Operators and Transit CAOs. Through this continued leadership and collaboration, transit in Niagara Region will continue on its transformational path towards giving residents true freedom when choosing their mode of transportation and ultimately reducing the dependence on single occupancy vehicle trips.

The terms of reference for the Linking Niagara Transit Committee include the responsibility of the committee to direct/oversee the work of the Inter-Municipal Transit Working Group. If the Committee supports the IMTWG's 2020 work plan as presented in this memorandum, the following resolution may be put forward:

That the Linking Niagara Transit Committee **ENDORSE** the Inter-Municipal Transit Working Group's 2020 Work plan.

Respectfully submitted and signed by,

Matt Robinson
Director, GO Implementation Office
Chair, IMTWG