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**Subject:** GO Implementation Office Update

**Report to:** Public Works Committee

**Report date:** Tuesday, December 3, 2019

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## **Recommendations**

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

## **Key Facts**

- The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the extensive work undertaken as part of the ongoing collaborative relationship between Niagara's municipal partners and Niagara Region in relation to the expansion of daily GO Rail service to Niagara and the integration of Niagara's transit systems.
- Further to Confidential Report CSD 17-2019, additional discussions have occurred between staff at Niagara Region and Metrolinx to advance the direction provided by Council. A further in-camera report will be provided once the direction provided in CSD 17-2019 is achieved to the satisfaction of Niagara Region's CAO.
- The *Niagara Transit Governance Study* by Optimus SBR and Left Turn, Right Turn is now underway.
- The Transit App now enables Niagara riders to get real-time data for Niagara Regional Transit (NRT), St. Catharines, and Niagara Falls transit routes. Welland should be operational in Q4 2019.
- NRT now services the Meridian Community Centre in Pelham via Route 70A/75A making connections to Welland (via Niagara College) and St. Catharines (via Brock University).
- A proposal for an on-demand NRT solution for Inter-Municipal Transit (IMT) expansion to West Niagara was approved by Public Works Committee on November 5, 2019 subject to budget approval. This would fulfill the multi-year IMT service plan commitment (LNTC 21-22-23 – 2018) to provide IMT connectivity and establish transit to all 12 municipalities.

## **Financial Considerations**

There are no financial costs directly associated with this report. Projects and activities referenced in this report have already been funded through previous capital budgets, or are subject to approval in the forthcoming 2020 budget.

## **Analysis**

### **GO Rail Expansion**

#### ***Service Enhancements***

With the announcement of daily GO Rail service to Niagara in January 2019 four years ahead of the previously scheduled 2023 timeline, service to the St. Catharines and Niagara Falls VIA Rail stations is now established with one Lakeshore West train out in the morning and one back in the evening. Given the arrival and departure times to and from Union Station, Niagara residents are benefitting from a 'peak period' introductory service level (Metrolinx defines peak period as all trains arriving to Union Station before 9:30 a.m. and all trains departing Union station between 3:00-7:30 p.m.).

The Niagara GO CAO Working Group and GO Implementation Office continues to work closely with Metrolinx to advocate for the long term objective which is two-way, all day hourly GO service between Niagara and the GTHA.

Niagara's seasonal GO Train service was recently extended to now provide the weekend frequency year round. Three Niagara bound trains are offered, along with four Toronto bound trains every weekend as part of a significant service expansion of GO Train service for Niagara.

#### ***Negotiations with Metrolinx***

In May 2019, the Niagara GO Working Group met with Metrolinx CEO Phil Verster to continue the dialogue regarding the infrastructure required for expansion, status of negotiations with CN and Metrolinx, and the active role that Niagara can play in the delivery of the station development program. This ongoing dialogue with senior leadership at Metrolinx is part of the deliberate and engaged project delivery to ensure Niagara's collective interests (Regional and Municipal) are reflected in the Metrolinx program delivery.

Further to Confidential Report CSD 17-2019, additional discussions have occurred between staff to advance the direction provided by Council. A further in-camera report will be provided once the direction provided in CSD 17-2019 is achieved to the satisfaction of Niagara Region's CAO.

At its September Board meeting, Metrolinx provided a confidential revised Niagara Initial Business Case. Staff's understanding is this document examines the revised operating,

capital, strategic and economic benefits of the expanded Niagara service and indicate the benefit cost ratio and investment costing for each aspect. Should this document become publicly released, a thorough review and report will be provided to Committee examining any recommendations, outcomes and/or alterations from the current service delivery being proposed or implemented.

Metrolinx has indicated their negotiations with CN Rail (owners of the Grimsby Subdivision, known as the Niagara Corridor) have been progressing positively. This is demonstrated by the extension of Niagara's weekend rail service to year round. Further weekday rail service improvements are part of the Metrolinx-CN negotiation. The ongoing advocacy and discussions between Niagara's GO Working Group and Metrolinx continue on this front, and the objective of two-way, all-day, hourly rail service remains the optimal service level.

*In-Corridor Enabling Works (track, signals, structures)*

Much of the work that Metrolinx has completed in the Niagara Corridor to date is not visible to the public because it is located below York Boulevard in Hamilton. These enabling works in Hamilton, are the necessary precursor to expanding service and frequency to Niagara beyond Hamilton.

These aspects of the enabling track work, referred to by Metrolinx as Phases 2a), 2b), and 2c) include:

- A new third track from just south of Bayview Junction into the Stuart Rail Yard
- Completion of West Harbour GO Station
- Expansion of bridges over Centennial Parkway and Desjardins Canal
- Replacement of the bridge over Valley Inn Road
- New and upgraded signals infrastructure at Bayview Junction, Hamilton Junction, Dundurn and Stuart signal plants

These critical enabling works all support the extension of service; however more work is still required. This includes increasing the track capacity to accommodate more trains without impacting efficiency of train movements through the Bayview Junction bottleneck, requiring a third track and associated signalling and track switching infrastructure between Desjardins Canal and West Harbour GO Station.

Although seemingly distant from Niagara service, these key infrastructure upgrades are directly contributing to the corridor infrastructure required to operate more service through to Niagara. A new east-end connection to the mainline track at West Harbour, scheduled for completion in 2019, will enable the existing Toronto bound trains to pass right through the station where they currently make a reverse movement to access the West Harbour platform. This will directly impact passenger journey times with an estimated 20 minute time savings once operational.

## **Inter-Municipal Transit**

The following is a summary of highlights from the work of the Linking Niagara Transit Committee (LNTC) and Inter-Municipal Transit Working Group (IMTWG). Additional details can be found under reports submitted to the LNTC.

- Regional Council invested a 1.4% separate levy in 2019 for significant transit investments in NRT capital and operating expansion effective September 2019.
  - Allowed for the elimination of the last of the duplicated routes between local and regional services for seamless and efficient scheduling
  - Allowed for the upload of the Port Colborne and Fort Erie Link routes to the Region who now delivers all IMT routes
  - Enabled the procurement of new and replacement fleet (requiring a 12 month procurement process)
  - Ensured standardized service on the majority of NRT routes Mon-Sat from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m.
- A Universal Support Person Pass for those requiring support to ride transit is now in effect, allowing the support person to ride free with a fare-paying card holder.
- The Transit App now enables Niagara riders to get real-time data for NRT, St. Catharines, and Niagara Falls routes. Welland should be operational in Q4 2019.
- NRT now services the Meridian Community Centre in Pelham via Route 70A/75A making connections to Welland (via Niagara College) and St. Catharines (via Brock University).
- Niagara Specialized Transit (NST) has added a transfer hub in Stoney Creek, allowing NST riders to access the DARTS system in Hamilton.
- A common fare structure has been agreed to at the IMTWG and approved by the St. Catharines Transit Commission and Niagara Falls Council, pending full adoption of all parties (a necessary precursor to the introduction of common fare technology).
- The *Specialized Transit in Niagara Study* by IBI Group is nearing completion. Final recommendations will be presented to LNTC at a forthcoming meeting.
- The *Niagara Transit Governance Study* by Optimus SBR and Left Turn, Right Turn is now underway. Led by the CAO Transit Governance Working Group and reporting to the LNTC, the study's objective is to recommend a future consolidated transit model for Niagara with a suggested governance structure and a transition plan (including costs) based on a Business Case. The study is scheduled for completion with a final report with recommendations to the LNTC in late March/early April 2020.
- A proposal for an on-demand NRT solution for IMT expansion to West Niagara was approved by Public Works Committee on November 5, 2019 subject to budget approval. This would fulfill the multi-year IMT service plan commitment (LNTC 21-22-23 – 2018) to provide IMT connectivity and establish transit to all 12 municipalities.

## **Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities**

The investment, programming and single window approach of the GO Implementation Office to advance Niagara's interests in GO Rail Expansion and Inter-Municipal Transit directly supports Council's 2019-2022 Strategic Priority of Responsible Growth and Infrastructure Planning, specifically:

### **Objective 3.1: Advancing Regional Transit and GO Rail Services**

- Advance and advocate for Niagara's effort towards integrated and efficient conventional, specialized and higher order transit, enabling seamless and connective travel for all people throughout Niagara and the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA)

### **Objective 3.4: Facilitating the Movement of People and Goods**

- Commitment to the implementation of Niagara's Transportation Master Plan, creating an integrated network of roads and highways for the movement of people and goods
- Advocate and support for Niagara's transportation projects, safe and healthy streets supporting active transportation, and opportunities in rail

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#### **Recommended and Submitted by:**

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