



Niagara Transit Governance Study

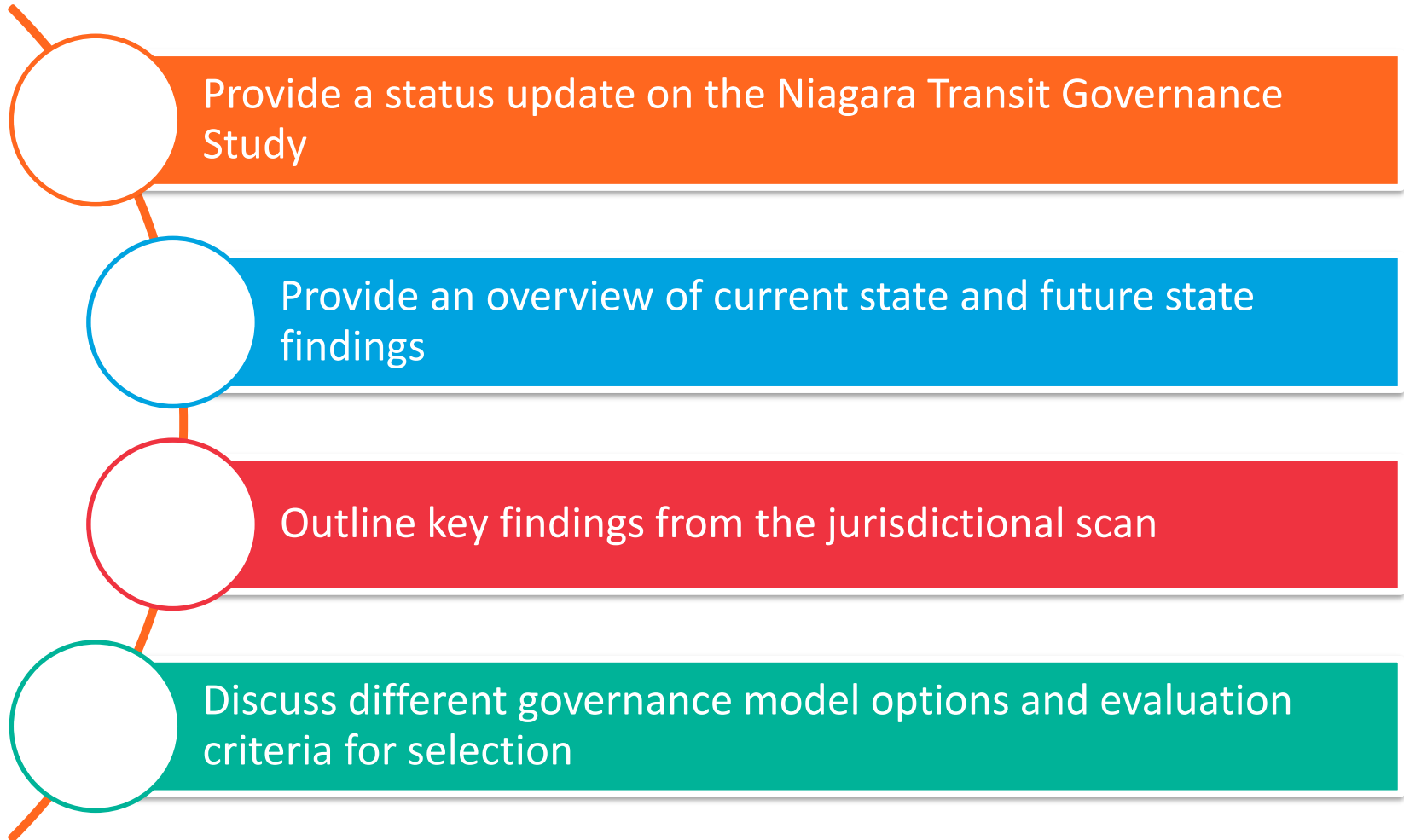
LNTC Meeting



March 4, 2020

Niagara  Region

Objectives



About Us

Optimus SBR and Left Turn Right Turn (LTRT) have partnered with the Region of Niagara and the local municipalities on this endeavour.



Optimus SBR is an independently owned management consulting firm that works with organizations across North America.

Left Turn Right Turn (LTRT) is a consulting firm providing services to public transit agencies across North America.



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Project Overview

Project Mission & Success

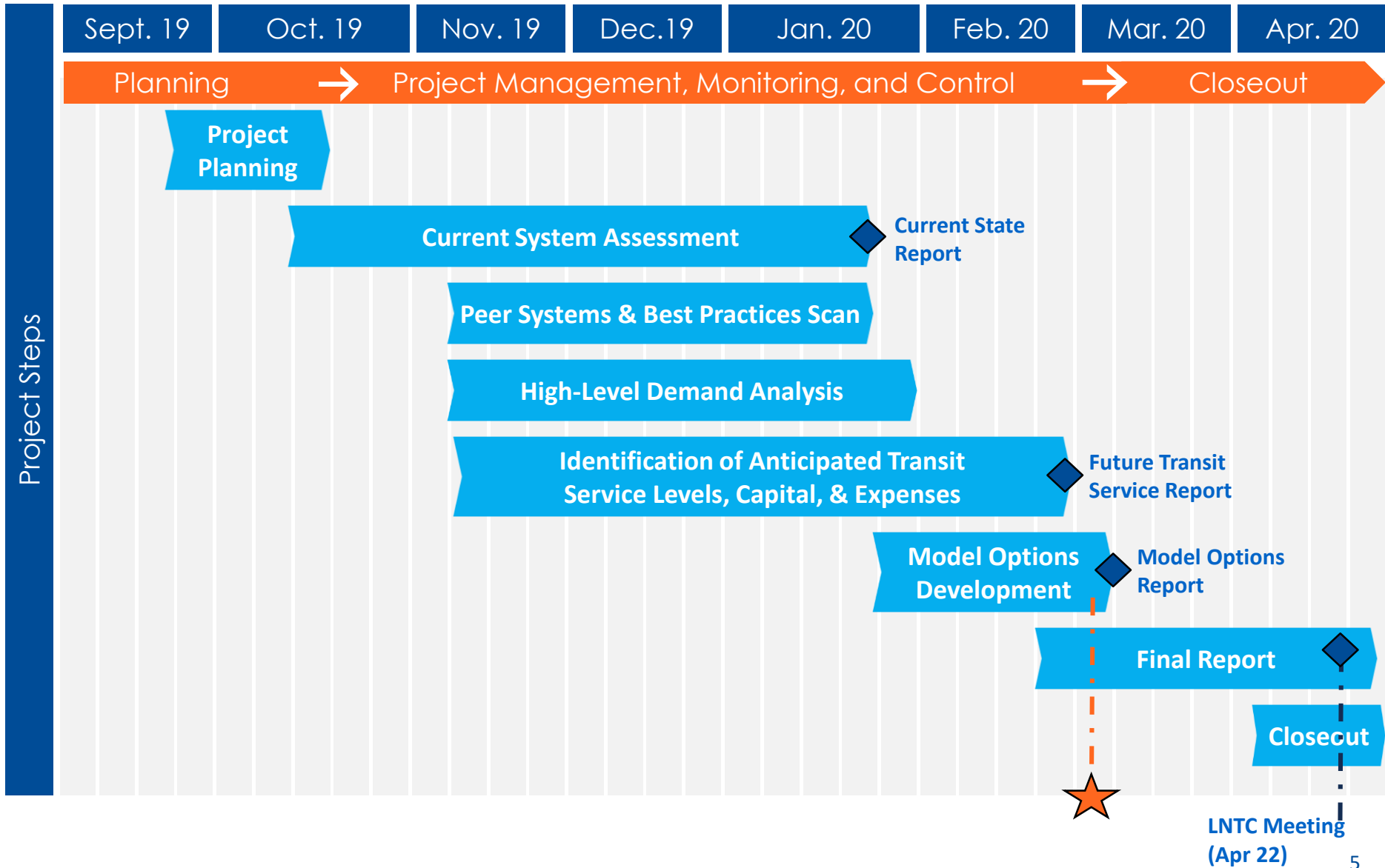
→ Project Mission

To evaluate and recommend a future Transit Model for Niagara Region, including an associated governance structure and transition plan that encompasses all municipal transit service operations in the region.

→ Project Success

- Detailed review of Niagara's current municipal transit systems and local service delivery operations
- A high-level 10-Year projection of future transit demand to meet future ridership demands for both inter-municipal and local service delivery
- Recommend a future Transit Model option comprised of a detailed governance structure and transition plan
- Buy-in, understanding, and excitement surrounding the region's future Transit Model from employees and key stakeholders

Project Timeline



Guiding Principles

The Guiding principles have been endorsed by the Linking Niagara Transit Committee (LNTC), and inform the development of a new transit governance model for Niagara.

1 Customer Driven

- Continuously improve the rider experience, including improvements throughout the pilot phase
- Understand customers, particularly those who rely on transit the most
- Provide seamless connections and routes based on demand
- Take people to work, school, healthcare, shopping and recreation as efficiently as possible
- Respect established local service levels and routes
- Maintain and improve transit to Niagara College and Brock University users

2 Unconventional Solutions

- Investigate leading-edge technologies and delivery systems that establish Niagara as an innovator in the transit field
- Explore partnerships with other providers (e.g. GO Transit) where service delivery gaps exist

3 Integrated

- Be seamless with other modes of transportation and evolve according to overall transportation plans across Niagara (e.g. Transportation Master Plan and local Master Transit plans)
- Integrated with and support daily GO train service
- Connect municipalities at hubs that are most appropriate for customers and the community
- Evolve according to long-term transportation planning, growth planning, and economic development opportunities
- Promote interconnectivity with systems that connect Niagara with the GTHA (e.g. GO Transit, Hamilton Street Railway)

Guiding Principles (cont.)

The Guiding principles have been endorsed by the Linking Niagara Transit Committee (LNTC), and inform the development of a new transit governance model for Niagara.

4 Economically Responsible

- Recognize inter-municipal transit is a public service funded through property taxes, grants, and partial cost recovery through user-fees
- Balance financial costs with potential ridership and benefits
- Build on past transit investments by enhancing, not duplicating, existing services
- Explore alternative modes of delivery, particularly in small communities and rural areas

5 Fair

- Respect existing investments made by communities with public transit and existing service levels
- Provide a basic level of services that can be accessed by as many Niagara residents as possible.
- Balance respect for taxpayers with the ability of transit riders to pay fares
- Respect existing transit collective agreements.

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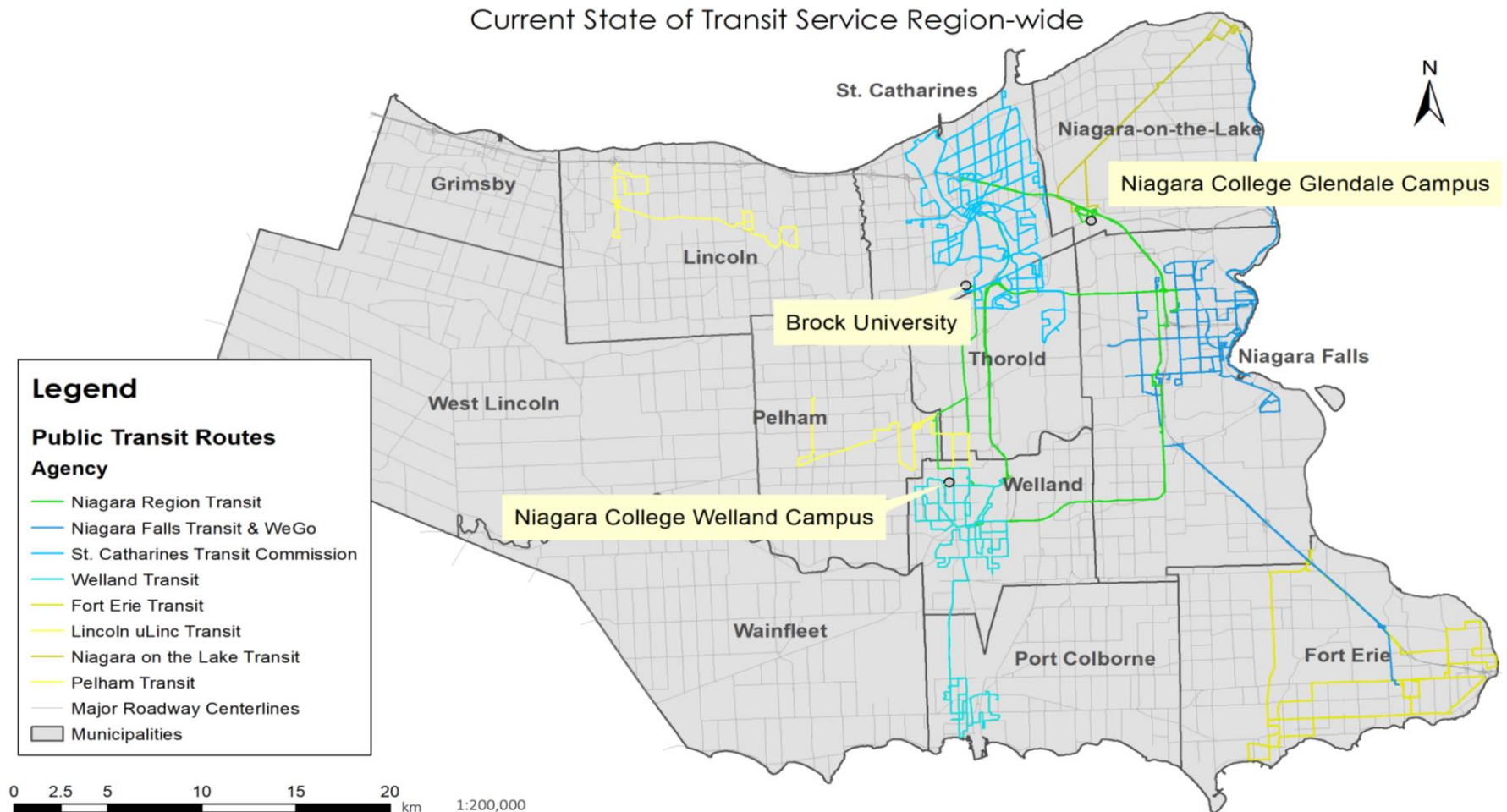
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Current State Summary

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Transit Services

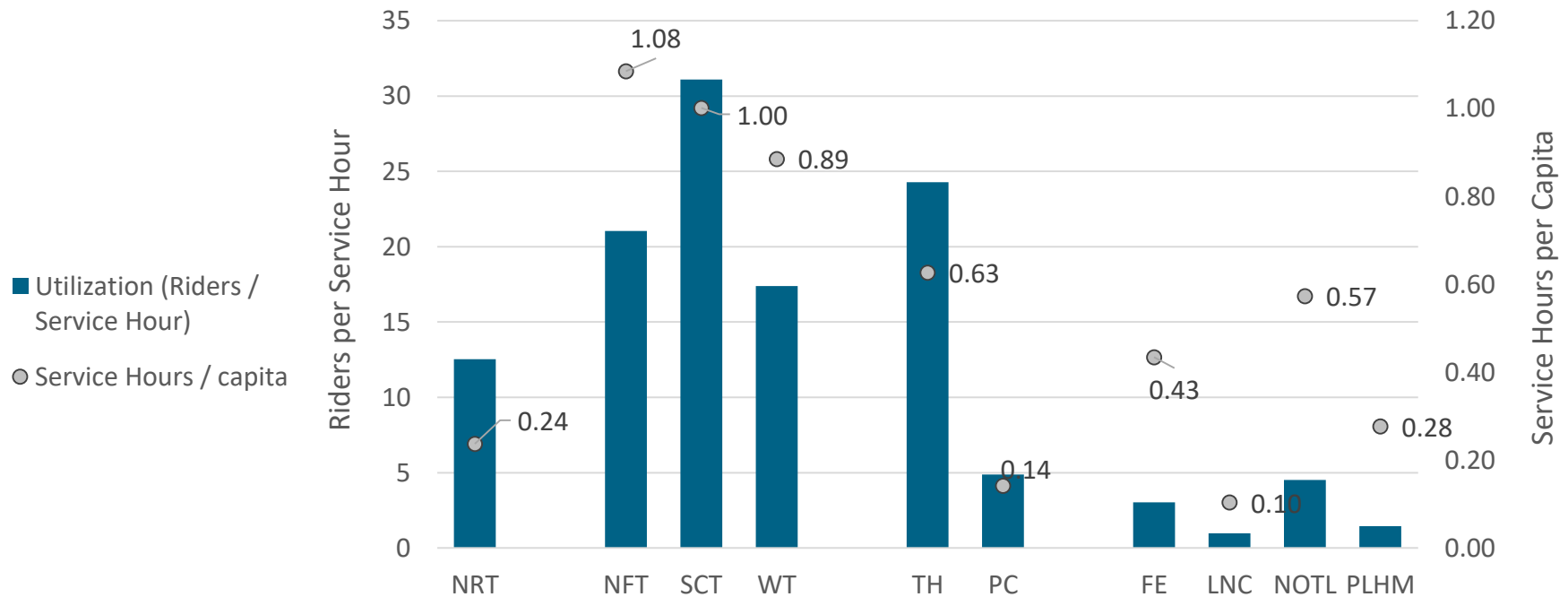
Despite the relative lack of population density in a large part of the Region, 85% of the Region's population still lives within a 15-minute walk of transit services, and over half of the population lives within a 5-minute walk



A System Overview

Conventional transit services are accessible to over 390,000 people or approximately 85% of the Region's residents, however there is a stark discrepancy in the amount of service and the utilization of that service in the urban areas versus the smaller municipalities

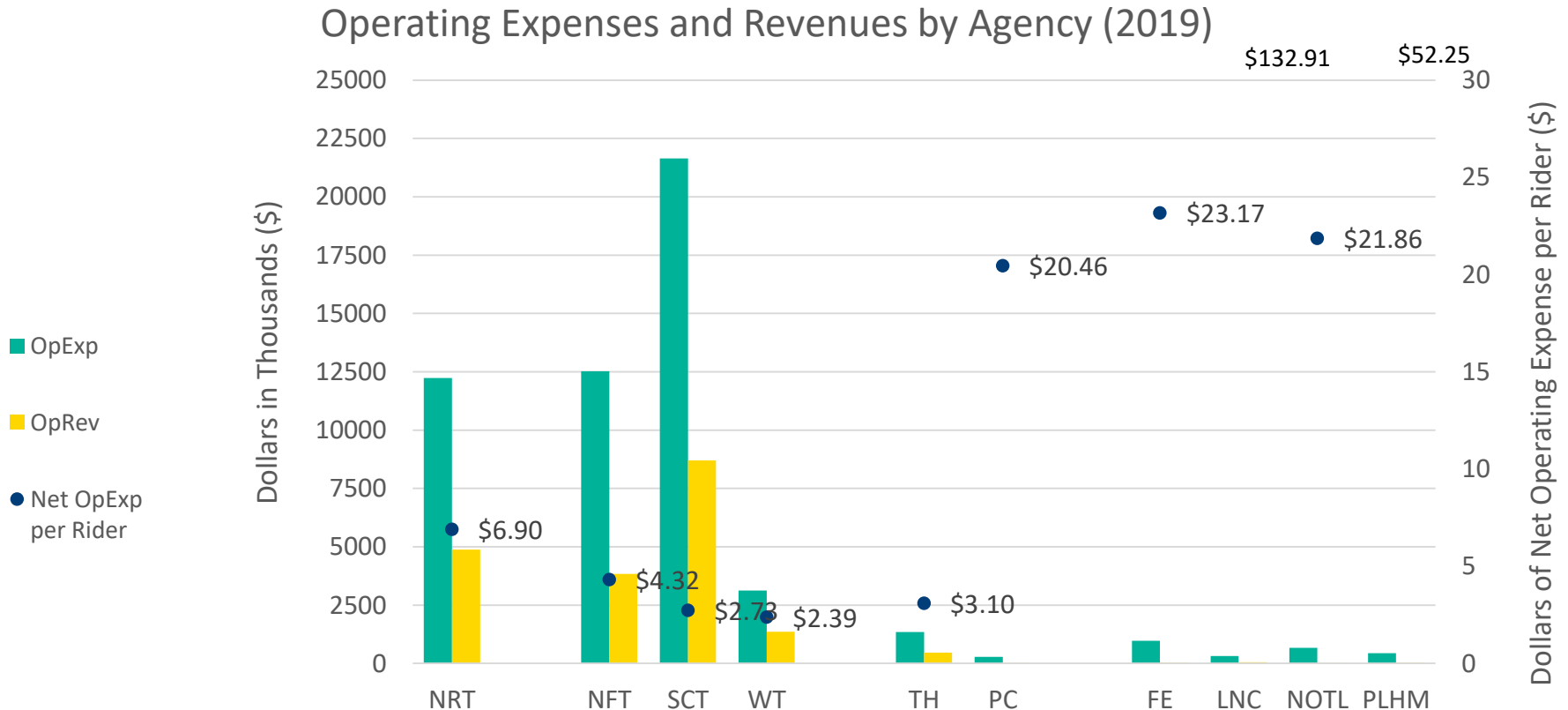
Ridership and Service Hours by Agency (2019)



- While this could be largely related to the density and urban form, it does call attention to the fact that utilization is driven by availability and utility of the service
- Note that service in Thorold is provided by St. Catharines Transit Commission and is considerably better performing than other smaller municipalities on the basis of riders per service hour.

Financial Performance

This chart represents the considerably large disparity in the investment in service and the service area that these agencies are responsible for.



- The three largest systems provide the most service per capita and ultimately have a lower cost per trip and the highest revenue recovery since increased service frequency results in more ridership and revenue
- The contracts for UPasses at Brock University and Niagara College generate significant revenue and service obligations

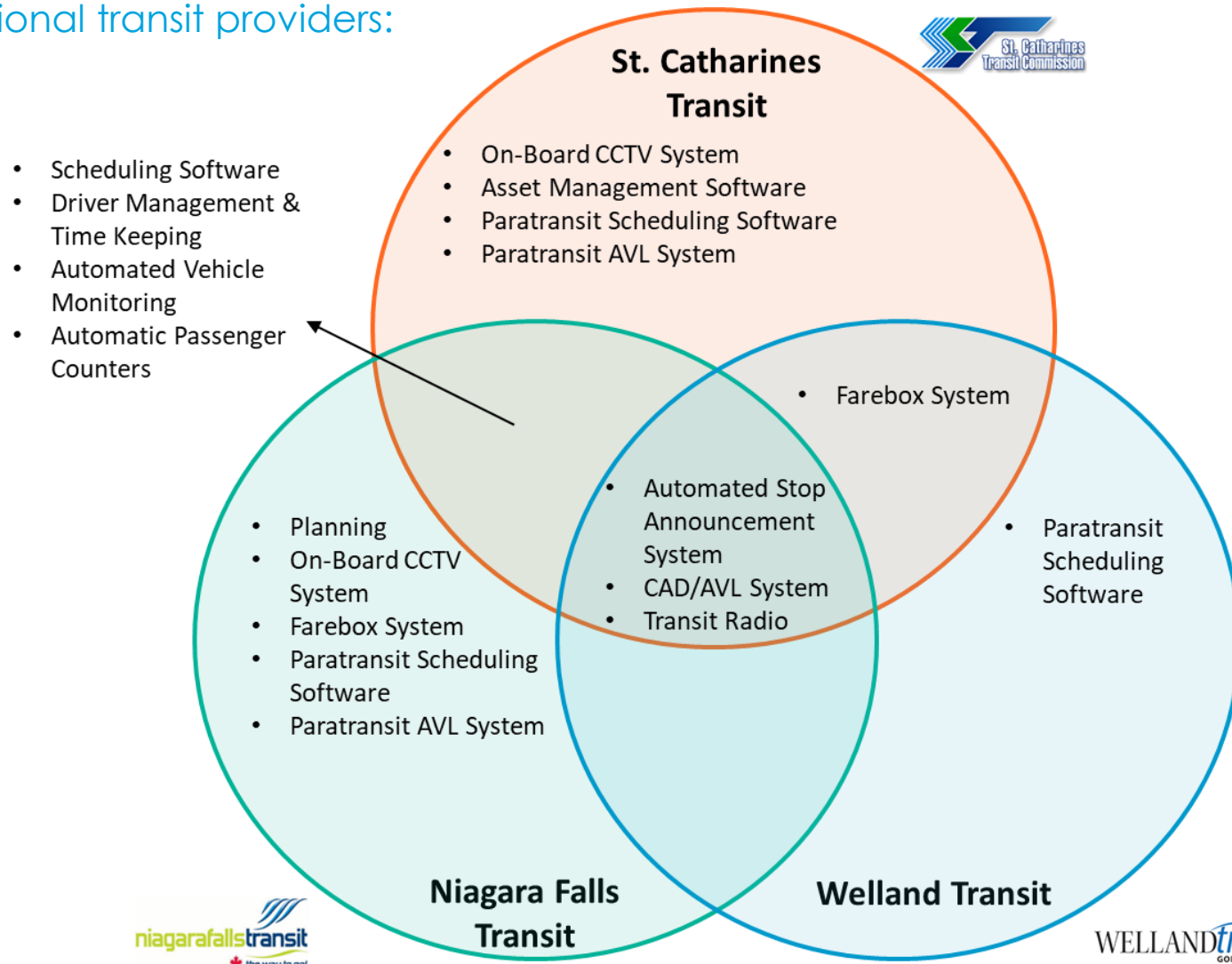
Human Resources Overview

Across Niagara's three major transit agencies, approximately 360 staff are employed, with over 320 of them being unionized. While wages appear to be fairly aligned, a thorough review of Collective Bargaining Agreements will be needed to understand which is most likely to be selected by the union.

	Niagara Falls	St. Catharines	Welland
Total Staff Complement (#)	105	203	55
# Operators	82	151	45 FTE
# Mechanics	8	14	3
# Servicemen	6 (includes 1 storekeeper)	2	1
# Supervisors and Managers	7	16	4
# Administrative Staff and Other	2	13	2
Average Hourly Rate	-	-	-
Operators (\$)	\$29.29	\$29.77	\$29.07
Mechanics (\$)	\$35.10	\$35.66	\$36.49
Servicemen (\$)	\$26.22	\$29.02	\$29.07
Unionized Staff	-	-	-
# Unionized Staff	98	175	49
# Non-Unionized Staff	7	28	6

Technology

Many of the technologies currently in use are shared across municipal and regional transit providers:



Note that vehicles procured for Niagara Region Transit are configured based on the specifications of the local agency that will be providing the service and maintenance on the vehicle

Key Considerations

The current state has broad implications for the design and development of an integrated transit agency in the Region, and its governance model. A future system will need to consider:

1. The disparity of services across the Region between smaller and larger municipalities with respect to availability and frequency of service, and ensuring basic levels of equity for accessing services
2. The large swathes of rural and undeveloped land, with low population density, while 85% of the Region's population still lives within a 15-minute walk of transit services, and over half of the population lives within a 5-minute walk
3. The differences in financial contribution and planned investments of the three largest municipalities, per capita, compared to the smaller transit agencies
4. Agencies have already begun to integrate technologies across the Region, possibly mitigating challenges in future transition
5. The financial and legal impact of transferring existing contracts municipalities have to the future integrated system
6. How the three Collective Bargaining Agreements with the ATU will be consolidated into a single agreement
7. The means and degree to which the new integrated agency will take on the current staff of the different transit agencies, and the method by which leadership positions will be filled

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Future State
Service Plan

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Transit Ridership Growth

Transit ridership region-wide could grow by about 10% by 2031

- A model was developed that incorporated existing service patterns with the proposed transit service network detailed in the 2017 Transit Service Delivery Strategy
- The model was based on Transportation Tomorrow survey data, observed ridership from 2018 and 2019 and the 2019 Ontario Growth Plan
- Several adjustments were made to ensure that the GO Transit rail expansion, post-secondary student enrollment, and new employers such as South Niagara Hospital were adequately represented in the model

	2019 (observed)	2031 (forecast)
AM Peak	6,980	7,610
Annual	8,924,700	9,740,800
Growth		9.2% Increase

- Post secondary student enrollment is expected to remain relatively constant. However, demand for transit will continue to increase as students from outside of the region chose to move here
- GO Transit will drive up overall transit usage, but it is expected to have a marginal direct impact on local transit services, with many riders elected to drive to the stations

Transit ridership growth is expected to be primarily centred on regional services as well as in Niagara Falls and St Catharines

Municipality / Agency	2031 Annual Ridership (% growth from 2019 ridership)	AM Peak Ridership (2031)
Niagara Region	1,472,000 (38%)	1350
Niagara Falls	2,124,800 (6%)	1710
St. Catharines	4,992,000 (6%)	3,700
Thorold	281,600 (0%)	220
Welland	755,200 (2%)	540
Port Colborne	12,800 (0%)	10
Fort Erie	40,960 (0%)	30
Niagara-on-the-Lake	29,440 (0%)	25
West Niagara On-Demand	32,000 (N/A)	25
Niagara Region Subtotal	9,740,800	7,610
GO Transit	690,000	920
Total Transit Usage	10,430,800	8,530



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Jurisdictional Scan
Findings



Leading Practice Overview

The following is a summary of the findings from the jurisdictional scan of four municipalities, including the regions of Durham, Waterloo and York, and the Edmonton Metropolitan Region.

Governance



Both Commission model and Centralized Delivery in use

Transit & Operations



Service Enhancements requires prioritization of, and considerable, investment

Lessons Learned

Transfer of human resources to a new organizational structure is significant undertaking

Magnitude of cultural change and legacy systems involved in transition planning

Single tax levy has been more successful

Ongoing communication an important factor in bringing key stakeholders onboard

Financial



Cumming Principle used for most asset transfers and there is a varied approach to levies

Transition



Significant communications efforts required to engage staff, unions and the public

Summary of Findings: Leading Practices

The following is a summary of the findings from the jurisdictional scan of four municipalities, including the regions of Durham, Waterloo and York, and the Edmonton Metropolitan Region.

Governance

- A governance body was set up for both the study for amalgamation, and the transition period. Membership often continued into the transition planning period.
- Except for Waterloo Region, which was a staff-only led Committee (and reported directly to Regional Council), the remaining amalgamations had an operationally focused oversight body that reported to a politically appointed oversight body.
- York and Waterloo Regions both selected a governance model where transit resided as a department within the Regional Corporation, and reports to Regional Council through the Chief Administrative Officer. Edmonton and Durham selected a Commission model.

Transit Service Planning & Operations

- Due to the difference in transit services across the amalgamated municipalities, often considerable service enhancements were identified. These were prioritized and completed in a phased approach over 5 to 7 years.
- Significant planning and resourcing is required for the transfer of human resources related matters, including contract negotiation, and placing staff within a revised organizational structure.
- Fares were integrated across the amalgamated regions.
- Collection of service metrics continued to be a challenge well after the transition period as amalgamated bodies reconciled legacy systems across local transit providers.

Summary of Findings: Leading Practices

The following is a summary of the findings from the jurisdictional scan of four municipalities, including the regions of Durham, Waterloo and York, and the Edmonton Metropolitan Region.

Transition Planning

- All municipalities documented the transition plan in a joint agreement between transit providers and established a transition period between 1 to 2 years.
- Most Plans focused that transition period on bringing the transit systems together, not on significant changes to services and service levels.
- Significant communication resources required to inform and engage both impacted staff and unions, and members of the public.

Lessons Learned

- Consideration needs to be taken on how and why resources are transferred to the amalgamated organizational structure.
- A single tax levy being implemented from the beginning, through a phased approach had been made successful through a concurring commitment to provide service in areas that had no transit services.
- Do not underestimate the magnitude of cultural change and legacy systems involved in transition planning.
- Ongoing communication to the public, province, and municipal governments is an important factor in bringing key stakeholders onboard

Spotlight on Financial Considerations

Levies

- A range of tax assessment practices were used, including area rating, a single rate, urban vs rural rates
- There was a varied approach to the fee levy: Durham and York Regions instituted a unified levy, Waterloo implemented a differentiated fee levy (with the goal of a unified levy), and Edmonton will receive funding from municipalities based on budgeted operating revenues and expenses
- York Region introduced a single assessment and Durham phased it in over 7 years, using area rates while increasing service in various municipalities, Waterloo phased to an urban service rate over 4 years while increasing transit service in Cambridge, the rural areas are area rated

Assets and Obligations

- Transit Assets and related liabilities were transferred to the Region at no cost (in most cases) based on an OMB ruling known as the **Cumming Principle** since these assets were already purchased by taxpayers
- Transit related development charges were transferred to the regions of Durham and Waterloo
- Transit budgets were transferred between Municipalities using a net cost basis to Regional taxpayers
- All Regional services apply Development Charges to generate capital funds for transit and Municipalities who were collecting DCs previously transferred reserves to the Region
- Transit reserve funds and related obligations (i.e.; retiree benefits, WSIB) were also transferred
- Any transit legal agreements and their obligations were reassigned to the new organization

Service and Fares

- All Regional services introduced a single transit fare
- Transit services were transferred to the new agency based on a status quo service delivery for year one

Cumming's Principle

As part of this engagement Optimus SBR and LTRT are developing an asset inventory that will list all vehicles, facilities, equipment and technology being used to deliver transit services in the Region. Based on our discussion with municipalities, it has been agreed upon that the Cumming's Principle is the most appropriate approach. A brief description is provided below:

- The premise of the Cumming Principle is to transfer assets (and related outstanding liabilities), from one municipality to another with no additional compensation since transferring assets for additional compensation results in the taxpayer paying twice for the same public asset.
- Adopting the Cumming Principle to transfer transit assets between Niagara municipalities aligns with the Region of Niagara Transit Guiding Principles since it is:
 - **Customer Driven** and demonstrates respect for established local services.
 - **Economically Responsible** because it recognizes inter-municipal transit is a public service funded through property taxes, grants, and partial recovery through user fees, and will build on past transit investments by enhancing, not duplicating existing services.
 - **Fair** and will respect existing investments made by communities with public transit.

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Governance Models for Discussion

Governance Options Under Consideration

A. Limited Commission Model

- Transit Service is governed by a regional commission with representation from local elected officials, with restrictions around decision making autonomy

B. Full Regional Commission Model

- The new Regional Commission plans and delivers all local and inter-municipal transit, with the amalgamation of the multiple local municipal transit systems throughout Niagara

C. Regional Division

- Municipalities upload the planning and delivery of services to Niagara Region

Transit System Examples

- Durham Region

- Edmonton
- TTC
- St. Catharines

- York Region
- Waterloo Region

Limited Commission Model

Key things to consider for the Limited Commission Model are:

- Transit Service is governed by a regional commission with representation from local elected officials from those municipalities
- Regional council would retain an important role in decision making for key decisions, including service standards, service plans, fare increases, annual budgets, etc.
- Municipalities could contract for enhanced service from this commission, leaving a high degree of autonomy for municipalities to decide what level of service they would prefer
- Leverages Regional infrastructure by having heavy reliance on shared services with the Regional government, including for HR, Payroll, IT, Asset Management, Finance, etc.
- Tax levy would be area rated, with each community paying for the services they receive to recognize variances in service

What are your initial thoughts on these options:

The advantages?

The disadvantages?

Full Regional Commission Model

Key things to consider for the Full Regional Commission Model are:

- The new Regional Commission plans and delivers all local and inter-municipal transit, with the amalgamation of the multiple local municipal transit systems throughout Niagara
- Each municipality granted representation on governance board, which could also include members of the public
- The Commission would develop transit service standards, service and ridership growth plans and annual fare strategies
- Regional council would be responsible for approving annual budget of the entity and funding the shortfall between revenue and budget
- Support staff could be hired directly, or a shared services arrangement could be developed with Niagara Region
- Tax Levy area rated by services provided initially but phased to a single transit rate over time

What are your initial thoughts on these options:

The advantages?

The disadvantages?

Regional Division

Key things to consider for the Regional Division Model are:

- Municipalities upload their individual services to a new central delivery organization to better support seamless inter-community travel, GO integration, and ridership growth
- The Division would develop transit service standards, service and ridership growth plans and annual fare strategies for Regional Council
- Regional council is decision making body for Transit Division regular and specialized service
- Transit division makes use of existing internal Regional corporate services rather than having dedicated support staff required by a Transit Commission
- Improved integration of Transit planning with Regional Economic and Transportation Plans
- Tax Levy area rated by services provided initially but phased to a single transit rate over time

What are your initial thoughts on these options:

The advantages?

The disadvantages?

Key Considerations for Implementation

Some key considerations for implementing the preferred model that will be important for its success include:

- A hybrid model may be an option for moving forward
- A model that views transit regionally while also giving flexibility to respect local authority
- Gaining and maintaining political/public support for the desired future state
- Developing a financial model for cost allocation and tax collection
- Creating a system to meet the current and future needs of a growing region
- Getting shared or dedicated resources to successfully transition, and then achieve the future plan for transit services in Niagara
- Which Governance Model will be most politically viable to grow transit service in Niagara to its fullest potential

What other key implementation considerations exist?

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Evaluation Criteria

Proposed Criteria

A number of different criteria have been proposed to assess the different governance model options. Some examples include:

- The guiding principles
- Local autonomy to decide particular transit needs
- Financial considerations:
 - Cost of implementation
 - Cost effectiveness of the transit entity
- Political viability
- Risk Assessment
- Building a system that is flexible and adaptable to future growth

**What are the key evaluation criteria for selecting a model?
Which are the most important?**

