

Memorandum

PWC-C 13-2020

Subject: COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in Public Works
Date: May 12, 2020
To: Public Works Committee
From: Bruce Zvaniga, P.Eng., Commissioner of Public Works (Interim)

Public Works has remained focused on keeping the critical public infrastructure operational while responding to the COVID19 pandemic. Departmental staff continue to ensure that the community has: safe drinking water, reliable wastewater systems, recycling and waste collection/disposal, regional specialized and regular transit and a well-maintained regional road system. Public Works staff recognize and are dedicated to the essential role they play ensuring that healthcare, social services, emergency responders and the community-at-large can depend upon the reliable availability of these core municipal services.

Public Works leadership is actively participating in the Operations Section of the Municipal Emergency Control Group. Working with all other departments, the Business Continuity Plan and staff redeployment strategy is monitored and adjusted to respond to changing conditions.

The following provides a brief highlight from each of the four divisions on their respective status, service changes, actions taken and future outlook.

Water & Wastewater Services

Current Status of Operations

High quality, safe and reliable water and wastewater services in accordance with health regulations and standards continue to be provided.

Both the Drinking Water and Wastewater Quality Management Systems remain active.

Capital infrastructure projects are deemed essential and continue to be delivered.

Service/Operational Changes

- Cancellation of the Niagara Children's Water Festival
- Cancellation of the Water Wagon service for May and June
- Suspension of Recreational Vehicle wastewater holding tank disposal service (re-opened April 19 for Sundays only, and only at the Niagara Falls Wastewater Treatment Plant)

Significant Initiatives or Actions undertaken

- Developed a full divisional staffing mitigation strategy to deal with any staff shortages that may occur due to COVID-19.
- Received license from Health Canada to produce disinfectant spray and hand sanitizer for Regional workplace use during the COVID-19 emergency response to alleviate supply chain shortages. Currently able to produce 40 litres per week.
- Cancellation of all non-essential meetings, plant tours, training activities, visitor access.
- Implemented COVID-19 protocols for consultants, contractors and project managers at plant facilities.
- Enhanced focus on the health and well-being of staff operating the essential systems including limiting access to the plant and deferring all non-essential contracted services.
- Assigned maintenance staff to dedicated areas and implemented flexible start and end work locations to avoid both unnecessary travel and exposure.
- One employee per vehicle where possible; installation of barriers in vehicles requiring two employees.
- Setup static sanitation stations in all staffed W-WW facilities and deployed mobile sanitation kits for all fleet vehicles.
- Implemented W-WW tailored daily COVID-19 spot check reports including regular reporting of facility sanitation supply inventories.
- Adopted changes to ensure no physical interaction on deliveries, courier and lab samples.
- Changes to pickup and handling of uniform laundry.
- Screening signage, screening protocol and limited door access have been implemented at all Water-Wastewater buildings. Daily reports of staff well-being and screening are being provided to management for recording and documentation purposes.

- Screening protocol for all vendors and contractors also implemented at all worksites.
- Constructors at various worksites have put into place proper distancing, working measures and PPE for the well-being of all staff.
- Accepting digital signatures for MECP form approvals.

Operational Outlook

1 month

- No further change

3 months

- No further change

6 months

- There are no anticipated changes to the water and wastewater service delivery in the six month timeframe. The focus continues to be on the maintenance of all key components, the sustainable supply of key chemicals and materials and most importantly on the well-being of the staff managing these essential systems.

Transportation Services

Current Status of Operations

Essential bridge and roadway, streetlighting, forestry and traffic control critical services continue to be provided.

Design, construction management and environmental assessments continue from staff and consultants.

Some contracts are experiencing delays in material shipments that are coming from locations outside of Canada.

Essential and critical project interpretation based on Provincial announcements will affect the delivery of projects and levels of service to residents of Niagara Region. This is currently under review.

Service/Operational Changes

Dispatch is supporting after-hours calls for COVID-19 and by-law enforcement (Local and Regional) support from 4:30 p.m. - 9:15 a.m. and coordinating with Public Health as required.

Earlier in assessing the separation of staff in field operations, the normal weekday shift and management oversight had been split into two groups scheduled to not physically interact with each other. As a result, the hours of operation were stretched from 5 a.m. - 9:30 p.m. with the support of the union and management.

Since the implementation of two (2) shifts, management have continued to review staffing levels and needs. Due to the number of redeployments to Long Term Care (LTC) and EMS in support of the pandemic, vacancies, plus sick time, management reassessed the two shifts and converted back to one shift per day from 7 a.m. - 3 p.m. Management is continuing to assess service levels against staffing needs and safety protocols and will adjust accordingly.

Significant Initiatives or Actions undertaken

Separation of field staff in vehicles where possible is being administered. Vehicle assignment to specific staff with the responsibility to clean / maintain on a daily basis.

Face masks have been ordered for additional staff protection in certain circumstances.

Staff continue to monitor supplies out of Fleet stores such as wipes, hand sanitizer, N95 masks and are supporting other Divisions with resources as required.

Screening signage, screening protocol and limited door access have been implemented at all yards and the service center. Daily reports of staff well-being and screening are being provided to management for recording and documentation purposes.

Screening protocol for all vendors and contractors also implemented at yards and service centers.

Constructors at various worksites have put into place proper distancing, working measures and PPE for the well-being of all staff.

Updated protocols based on provincial regulations/guidelines for working on construction sites has been sent to Heavy Construction Association of the Region of Niagara to notify their members that they must adhere to these measures.

IT equipment to assist with working from home has been provided where applicable.

A number of Transportation Staff have already been trained and redeployed to assist other Departments where needed. In assisting with the redeployments to LTC, Staff manufactured personal screening barriers for screener positions at entry points of the homes as an additional safety measure.

Operational Outlook

1 month

- Essential and critical project interpretation based on Provincial announcements will affect the delivery of projects and levels of service to residents of Niagara region. This continues to be under review. The Business Continuity Plan with Redeployment Strategy of staff for the Division will be administered accordingly.

3 months

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6 months

- Contractors have shared their concern that once non-essential work can recommence, there will be shortage within the trades due to demand.

Waste Management Services

Current Status of Operations

Changes to the curbside collection program, as noted below, have been implemented to ensure that front line collectors can prioritize the weekly collection of garbage, recycling and organics.

Landfill sites and drop-off depots are open for essential loads and are accepting:

- Collection vehicles
- Commercial / contractors (including farmers)
- Municipal vehicles
- Commercial / municipal brush
- Residential Household Hazardous Waste disposal
- Residential large household / bulky goods and move outs as noted in Service Changes below.

There are occasionally delays at the sites due to the recent changes implemented, including limiting the number of people on the drop-off pad to support COVID-19 physical distancing guidelines.

Preferred methods of payment are debit and credit, using the tap option.

Environmental compliance at all waste management sites continues to be maintained.

The processing of recyclable materials is being maintained, despite a shortage in staffing.

- Plans to remove restrictions at landfills/public drop off depots are being prepared, to be effective Wednesday, May 13. Due to anticipated high demand for site access and limiting the number of residents on the drop-off pad to support COVID-19 physical distancing guidelines, wait times will be longer than normal. Residents will be encouraged to only access sites if necessary.
- Preferred methods of payment are debit and credit, using the tap option.
- Communication pieces are being drafted to advise residents.

Service/Operational Changes

Landfill Service Changes

In order minimize non-essential trips in the community, restrictions have been put in place at our sites. Residents are permitted one trip, every two weeks, to dispose of the following:

- Leaf and yard waste, which is still being collected at the curb
- Grass clippings, but residents are being encouraged to grass cycle
- Oversize brush bundles, tree limbs

Large household item suspension

Curbside collection of large household item / bulk goods for single-family homes and apartments with six units or less is suspended until May 30. This will prioritize regular curbside collection of waste, recycling and organics. Residents are encouraged to hold on to their large household items until service resumes. For those who need to dispose of a large household item due to a residential move out, residents are restricted to one visit per month per license plate for the duration of the service changes. Eligibility for this service will be confirmed by requiring home address information to be provided. Large items brought to Walker Environmental, in Thorold, require a disposal fee.

Leaf and yard waste collection

On April 13, 2020, a limit was set of only three (3) bags/cans of yard waste per collection day for single-family homes and apartments with six (6) units or less. Effective Monday, May 11, this limit was increased to five (5) bags/cans.

The collection of garbage, food waste and recycling will be prioritized over leaf and yard waste. Residents may experience delays with leaf and yard waste collection due to contractor staff shortages from COVID-19 and the increase in volume of waste at the curb due to residents being at home.

Ripped leaf and yard waste bags must be re-bagged or placed in another container to ensure material can be collected. Communication of these changes to advise residents is underway.

Curbside Battery Collection

Battery collection originally scheduled for April 20-24 has been postponed until further notice.

Compost Giveaway

Compost giveaway originally scheduled for May 4-9 has been postponed until further notice.

Recycling/Green Bin Distribution Locations Closed

Residents can use alternative rigid plastic containers.

For more information, visit <https://www.niagararegion.ca/waste>.

Community Events

Presentations, community booths, sites tours and special events recycling have been postponed until June 30.

Significant Initiatives or Actions undertaken

Screening signage, screening protocol and limited door access have been implemented at all facilities. Daily reports of staff well-being and screening are being provided to management for recording and documentation purposes.

Screening protocol for all vendors and contractors has also been implemented at all facilities and sites.

Installation of a portable washroom and hand washing station for commodity drivers to avoid visitors entering the Recycling Centre.

Staggering breaks and lunch to reduce amount of people taking breaks at one time at the Recycling Centre.

Increased cleaning being completed at night and during the day (i.e. between lunch breaks and in high traffic areas).

Installed plexi-glass between sorters on the processing line.

Staff are travelling in separate vehicles to maintain physical distancing per health guidelines.

On-road staff working from home to start and end their day due to lack of public washroom availability, and to reduce the need to enter their work location.

Operational Outlook

1 month

- Staff will assess the viability of commencing with other programs and services that were suspended temporarily such as compost give-away days, curbside battery collection and outreach activities.
- Staff will be working on developing and implementing a communication strategy to inform residents about upcoming service changes that will occur with the new waste collection contracts.
- The Business Continuity Plan with Redeployment Strategy of staff for the Division will be administered accordingly.

3 months

- The Business Continuity Plan with Redeployment Strategy of staff for the Division will be administered accordingly.
- Staff will be developing and implementing communications about the service changes that will occur with the new waste collection contracts.

6 months

- New waste collection contracts are set to commence October 19, 2020. Staff will be working to ensure changes are communicated to the community and that the transition is as seamless as possible.

Niagara Region Transit/Specialized Transit & GO Implementation

Current Status of Operations

Niagara Region Transit (NRT) is operating at a modified version of the “Saturday” level of service:

- All express routes were eliminated (40a, 40b, 45a, 45b, 60a, 65a, 70a, 75a) March 23
- 7:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m. operating hours effective May 4
- Hourly service on Routes 22, 25, 50, 55, 60, 65, 70 & 75
- Routes 40 and 45 were eliminated as of May 4

Passengers are only permitted to board using the rear door of the buses to maintain physical separation with the driver (as is the case across the province).

Niagara Specialized Transit (NST) is operating at the normal level of service, except trips whose origins or destinations are for a location with reported cases of COVID-19 are not being provided. Reducing hours of operation is not a necessity in this case as Niagara Region only pays for trips that are delivered rather than an hourly rate.

Service/Operational Changes

"Rear door boarding" policy enacted on NRT (unless a wheelchair ramp deployment was required to utilize the front door). This was enacted as of March 23 to limit driver contact and respect physical distancing. This temporary measure of no interaction with the farebox has remained in place across all of Niagara's municipal providers and all transit operators in Ontario. As per AODA legislation, fares are also not being collected on NST. The IMT Working Group is currently exploring bio-barriers to better protect the drivers, which would then allow for reinstatement of front door boarding and thus revenue collection, to resume. However, there is no estimated time for implementation and is still early in the review period.

Significant Initiatives or Actions undertaken

All NRT and NST fleet vehicles have been professionally cleaned/disinfected/sanitized beyond regular protocols, and Aegis antimicrobial spray was applied to all interior surfaces. This work was completed by the local transit service providers as they manage and operate the NRT fleet as part of their own.

Due to the low volume of trips, BTS has made every effort to deliver trips with only a single occupant in each vehicle, although this has not been formalized as a public policy.

Operational Outlook

1 month

- NRT staff will be reviewing ridership data from May 4 to May 30 (inclusive) in order to determine where additional service reductions are viable. Any changes would likely begin Monday, June 1 in order to give the local transit service providers time to make the necessary operational changes to staff complements, schedules, etc. Due to the likelihood that these trips are being taken by essential workers (Long Term Care homes, grocery store staff, access to municipal/regional services, etc.), additional service reductions will require careful evaluation of the resulting effects.
- Resumption of fare collection (boarding through the front door) is being considered as soon as possible, but is currently limited by a number of physical distancing and passenger/driver protection requirements still in place by provincial authorities. Staff will continue to explore ways to mitigate these risks with the aim to resume fare collection in line with transit agencies across the province.

3 months

- Possible further service adjustments based on ridership and in reaction to any provincial changes.
- Front door boarding/revenue collection will be examined in line with provincial regulations.

6 months

- Service adjustments will have to consider whether schools and universities remain closed for Fall semester.

Respectfully submitted and signed by,

Bruce Zvaniga, P.Eng.
Commissioner of Public Works (Interim)