
Memorandum

PWC-C 20-2020

Subject: COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in Public Works
Date: June 16, 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. As of May 29, 42 Public Works staff are actively re-deployed in other departments (EMS, LTC, etc) delivering essential services.

The Department Leadership team are actively participating in virtual meetings with their counterparts in the Local Area Municipalities, and provincial committees to share our successes and learn how others have overcome challenges.

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 (QMS) remain active. A Water QMS Management Review was completed on May 28, 2020.

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
- 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.
- Developing a W-WW Division Pandemic Recovery Framework in anticipation for Region entering into the Recovery Phase of the Pandemic Response Plan.
- 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 when required. 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.
- Portable washrooms have been setup at Wastewater facilities to accommodate couriers and sewage haulers.
- Face shields and half mask respirators are being used for additional protection for staff where certain activities do not allow for proper social distancing
- 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

- Development of an on-line virtual Niagara Children's Water Festival

3 months

- Implementing phased W-WW Pandemic Recovery Plan in accordance with Public Health advisement and direction from the Region's Emergency Operations Centre.

6 months

- 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, culvert and roadway works, forestry, traffic control, pavement markings and signage are critical services which continue to be provided.

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

Staff continue to monitor all material shipments, supplies and construction contracts experiencing delays to understand larger impacts to ongoing construction project schedules.

Essential and critical project interpretation based on Provincial announcements continues to change and affects the delivery of projects and levels of service to the residents of Niagara Region. This is continuously monitored and adjusted to meet Provincial directions .

Service/Operational Changes

Dispatch is providing 24 hour support with all calls received by the Region; in particular directing residents for COVID-19 to Public Health and by-law enforcement (Local and Regional) seven days a week.

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 and shields 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

Restrictions to the curbside collection program and at the landfill sites/drop off depots have been lifted with minor restrictions still in place as noted below.

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

Strategic initiatives are continuing such as the MRF Opportunity Review, implementation of new collection contracts and services levels, construction projects, and operational tenders. Staff continue to participate in stakeholder consultation sessions regarding the Blue Box program and other programs transitioning over to a Producer Responsibility model.

Service/Operational Changes

Landfill Service Changes

There are 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.

Collection of large household item resumes

Effective June 1, curbside collection of large household items / bulk goods will resume for single-family homes and apartments with six units or less. Residents could begin scheduling collection on May 27. Restrictions on the number of daily bookings will be in place for the month of June to better manage volumes. The disposal fee at landfill sites/public drop off depots has been reinstated for these items.

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 on [waste management services](https://www.niagararegion.ca/waste), visit <https://www.niagararegion.ca/waste>

Community Events

Presentations, community booths, sites tours and special events recycling have been postponed until further notice.

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, and at the scale houses located at the landfill sites/drop off depots.

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 resuming with other programs and services that were suspended temporarily such as compost give-away days, curbside battery collection and outreach activities.
- Staff working with IT and Finance to offer residents the ability to purchase garbage tags on-line.
- Staff will continue to develop and implement a communication strategy to inform residents about upcoming service changes that will occur with the new waste collection contracts. Initial communication plan adjusted due to COVID. The first direct mail piece (post card) is scheduled to hit mailboxes late June.
- The Business Continuity Plan with Redeployment Strategy of staff for the Division will be administered accordingly, and work that cannot be deferred is being managed by existing staff.

3 months

- The Business Continuity Plan with Redeployment Strategy of staff for the Division will be administered accordingly.
- Staff will continue to implement communications about the service changes that will occur with the new waste collection contracts.
- Staff will continue to meet with new collection contractors to ensure a successful start up

6 months

- New waste collection contracts are set to commence October 19, 2020. Staff will be working to address any major concerns and provide residents with information to fully participate in the curbside programs.
- The Business Continuity Plan with Redeployment Strategy of staff for the Division will be administered accordingly.

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

Passengers are currently 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) which includes no interactions with the fare boxes.

Niagara Specialized Transit (NST) is operating at the normal level of service, except for trips whose origins or destinations are to/from 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 delivered, rather than an hourly rate. Overall, NST trip requests are significantly reduced, however NST continues to deliver all requested trips within the capacity available.

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 provincial accessibility legislation (AODA), fares are therefore also not being collected on NST.

The IMT Working Group is currently exploring plexi-glass type bio-barriers to better protect bus operators, which would then allow for reinstatement of front door boarding and thus revenue collection, to resume. Through the IMTWG coordination, Niagara's transit providers are targeting a full implementation of these driver barriers across the entire fleet by the end of June 2020. This would allow for a July reintroduction of front door boarding with reintroduction of fare collection thereafter.

Significant Initiatives or Actions undertaken

All NRT and NST fleet vehicles have been professionally cleaned/disinfected/sanitized well 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 in order to determine whether additional service reductions are viable. As the provincial guidelines only recently changed to allow for non-essential trips, it is premature to attempt to draw accurate ridership projections. Thus the service levels for the month of June will remain the same as the were in May and any changes would likely begin Monday, July 6 in order to give the local transit service providers time to make the necessary operational changes to staff complements, schedules, etc. As rider demand is beginning to rebound, it is unlikely that additional service reductions will be feasible while maintaining social distancing targets.
- Resumption of fare collection (boarding through the front door, reinstating interaction with the farebox) is being considered as soon as July 1, 2020 as the driver protection barriers are being implemented on transit vehicles across Niagara.
- The IMTWG is awaiting a detailed set of provincial guidelines which is expected imminently, which could affect the capacity allowed on transit vehicles. At present, 40' conventional buses are restricted to 10 rider capacity to comply with provincial guidelines. Revised guidelines could allow for additional capacity on buses and the reduction in any "extras" or "shadow buses" that are currently being deployed to meet rising transit demand.
- Niagara Region Staff continues to work with its service provider Via Mobility to develop the service and communications plan for NRT OnDemand deployment in West Niagara. While a starting date in September is desirable, it is dependent on the timelines of the vehicle manufacturers. More concrete information should be available in the coming weeks with an update to Council.

- Working with our post-secondary partners to review projected enrollment and transit ridership for the Fall 2020 semester at both Brock University and Niagara College. With the percentage of enrolled students on campus undetermined at this time, transit staff are developing scenarios for meeting needs that arise from the campus sites where typically, very significant volumes of students use transit.

3 months

- Front door boarding/revenue collection should be back in full effect throughout this period.
- The communications plan for NRT OnDemand will be in effect during this timeframe. This will involve staff from both Niagara Region, our local area municipal partners in West Niagara, and Via Mobility being present in the communities of the service area to promote the new service.
- Possible further service adjustments based on ridership and in reaction to any provincial changes. Staff will continue to work with the IMTWG in reviewing the available data to ensure that adequate service is being provided while being mindful of the financial challenges faced by each municipality.

6 months

- Service adjustments will have to consider whether schools and universities remain closed for Fall semester, have modified on campus student populations, or have moved entirely online in course curriculum. The IMTWG is working with the post-secondary institutions to ensure that sufficient transit is available to support the needs of the students and that adequate compensation is received for the provision of such services.

Respectfully submitted and signed by,

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