



The Town of Niagara-On-The-Lake

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Report:	CAO-21-004	Committee Date:	December 20, 2021
		Due in Council:	December 20, 2021
Report To:	Lord Mayor and Council		
Subject:	Transit Governance Update		

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is respectfully recommended that:

- 1.1 Council consents to the passage of By-law No. 2021-96 of the Regional Municipality of Niagara, being the by-law to provide Niagara Region with the exclusive authority to establish, operate and maintain a consolidated passenger transportation system for the Niagara Region.

2. PURPOSE / PROPOSAL

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the transit governance proposal and outcomes of the November 25 Regional Council meeting, where a strong majority of Regional Councillors supported moving forward with the creation of a consolidated transit commission. Further, the purpose of this report is to seek Council's support in creating a single, consolidated transit system in the form of a new Transit Commission that would formally integrate the Regional and local transit systems currently operating across Niagara. This support is being sought as part of the triple-majority process required to transfer responsibility for transit to the Region.

3. BACKGROUND

The vision for a single regional transit agency for Niagara dates back well over a decade. Today, in Niagara, transit is delivered by a mix of different levels of government providing various services, with different operating hours, standards or frequency of service, and significant barriers to movement across municipal boundaries.

The process towards a consolidated system took a significant step forward in late 2020 with the completion of the Niagara Transit Governance Study (NTGS), which outlined a recommended governance model for a new transit commission and was brought forward with an associated financial strategy.

Through 2021, the Governance Steering Committee (GSC), led by all thirteen Chief Administrative Officers (CAOs) across Niagara, has undertaken significant consultation on the proposed strategies for consolidation (governance, financial, and service standards).

This consultation included two rounds of engagement with the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake. Report No. CAO-21-002 was provided to Council on February 22, 2021. An Information Report titled 'Niagara Transit Governance - Revised Strategies Reflecting Phase 1 Municipal Feedback' (July 22, 2021) confirmed that the previous feedback that was provided by Town Council in early 2021 had been addressed. There was no further feedback received in anticipation of the triple-majority vote.

On September 29, 2021, the Linking Niagara Transit Committee (LNTC) endorsed the final governance model for transit consolidation and recommended initiating the triple-majority process to create the new Commission.

The first step in the triple-majority process took place on November 25, 2021, when Regional Council supported moving forward, voting 24 to 1 in favour of the motion.

Niagara-on-the-Lake Town Council, along with all Niagara Municipalities, is now being asked to provide similar support for creating the new Commission. To achieve full triple majority approval, a majority of local Councils representing a majority of the electors in Niagara would need to provide their support.

4. DISCUSSION / ANALYSIS

Benefits

Staff feel that introducing an integrated Regional transit system would bring dramatic benefits to the residents of Niagara-on-the-Lake and Niagara Region as a whole. The benefits include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Creating a single branded system that can take riders anywhere in the Region, for a single fare, that will break down jurisdictional barriers and connect communities;
- Leveraging and supporting GO rail and bus expansion within the Niagara Region;
- Creating better access to jobs and services in Niagara, developing and supporting the economy, promoting job retention, and creating and driving tourism;
- Promoting socially equitable access to transit;
- Reducing traffic congestion and greenhouse gas emissions;
- Protecting our natural environment by providing residents with more sustainable and environmentally friendly public transit options;
- Supporting accessibility through the standardization of accessibility policies and a better pool of resources to implement improvements; and
- Providing better value and service to the taxpayers of Niagara.

Only through the move to one consolidated agency can these outcomes be achieved. While significant work has been done to improve, integrate, and coordinate the existing systems in Niagara, consolidation will lead to a larger and combined resource pool, which will support efficiencies. When done by separate entities, there is inevitably significant duplication of efforts and resources. A consolidated agency allows consolidated resources to be leveraged and reinvested into the network to enhance service.

Final Governance, Service Standards, and Financial Strategies

Regional Report No. PW55-2021 (Appendix I) summarizes the final board composition, service standards, and financial strategies that comprise the governance proposal to create the new Transit Commission.

- **Service Standards Strategy:** outlines a three-phased approach to the standardization and enhancement of transit service across Niagara to achieve consistent, equitable access to transit for all Niagara residents and communities, including expanded operating hours, the integration of on-demand and specialized service.
- **Financial Strategy:** proposes that all local area municipality (LAM) transit service budgets be uploaded to the Commission in the 2023 budget year, the Region's existing transit budget be consolidated by the Commission and assessed to the LAMs by way of Special Levies to be approved annually by the Region.
- **Governance Strategy:** recommends the creation of a 15-member elected Transitional Commission Board, to be composed of either Regional or local Councillors, including a dedicated representative for Niagara-on-the-Lake, supported by a 20-member Public Advisory Committee. The structure of the transitional board will be re-evaluated as part of an external third-party review, with implementation to coincide with the 2026 municipal election cycle.

These strategies are substantively the same as those previously presented to Niagara-on-the-Lake Council, with only a minor update to the governance strategy confirming the timing for the third-party review.

Next Steps

Should triple-majority be achieved, an approximate one-year transition period would commence during which the commission would be established in advance of the assumption of day-to-day operations on January 1, 2023.

Key activities of this transition period would include:

- Formally creating the commission as an agency of the Region;

- Populating the transitional Commission Board and Advisory Committee;
- Negotiating and executing asset transfer agreements with Niagara Falls, St. Catharines, and Welland; and
- Recruiting a General Manager and transitioning Staff.

Niagara-on-the-Lake Council would also need to forward recommendations to the commission for its representatives on the Commission Board and Advisory Committee in the spring of 2022.

5. Strategic Plan

- ☐ **Protect Distinctive Community Assets**
- ☒ **Deliver Smart Balanced Growth**
 - ☐ Update and create master and secondary plans
 - ☐ Develop smart balanced growth criteria
 - ☐ Identify smart balanced growth priorities
 - ☒ Other
- ☒ **Create a Culture of Customer Service Excellence**
 - ☐ Define, support and acknowledge customer service excellence
 - ☐ Support staff by providing comprehensive training
 - ☐ Use technology to improve levels of service
 - ☒ Other
- ☐ **Excel in a Positive Workplace**
- ☐ **Strengthen 2-Way Communications**
- ☐ **Not Applicable**

6. OPTIONS

- 6.1 **Option 1:** Council consents to the passage of By-law No. 2021-96 of the Regional Municipality of Niagara, being the by-law to provide Niagara Region with the exclusive authority to establish, operate and maintain a consolidated passenger transportation system for the Niagara Region. ***(As Recommended)***
- 6.2 **Option 2:** Council does not consent to the passage of By-law No. 2021-96 of the Regional Municipality of Niagara. ***(Not Recommended)***

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

All local area municipal (LAM) transit service budgets will be uploaded to the new Transit Commission in the 2023 budget year, if approved by a triple-majority vote. Following that, the Region's existing transit budget will be consolidated by the Commission and apportioned to each of the LAMs using twelve Special Levies, one for each municipality.

All uploaded local transit service costs and future incremental costs will be allocated to the Special Levy based on service hours. Existing Niagara Region Transit (NRT) service costs continue to be assigned to the Special Levy based on the municipal share of Regional assessment, as they are already doing today.

The Town currently pays for all Transit services using a combination of Parking Revenues, Provincial Gas Tax, and Bus Parking Fees. Town Staff has confirmed with Regional Staff that this form of payment can continue and a gradual transition will occur to shift the cost to the tax bill. The cost will ultimately show on the tax bill as a separate levy.

Currently, the Town pays approximately \$1.8 million in transit costs. This is composed of the Town's share of \$0.4 million and the Niagara Regional Transit share of \$1.4 million that is levied through the Region. Once the consolidation is complete, the Town would still be paying the same amount, but this would be accomplished through the Special Levy to the Town.

With recent enhancements to the Town's OnDemand service, the cost to the Town will be increasing in 2022. Therefore, costs will be higher in 2023 and are estimated to be \$2.0 million. However, this increase is due to OnDemand service changes and inflationary adjustments rather than the new transit system financial model.

Complete details related to the financial implications are provided in the financial strategy outlined in Regional Report PW 55-2021 (Appendix I) and the links contained therein (LNTC-C 3-2021, Appendix 4).

8. COMMUNICATIONS

The Town's CAO, Treasurer and Communications Staff have been actively working with Regional Staff on this initiative.

Significant consultation was undertaken during the development of the transit governance proposal. In September 2021, a website was launched (movingtransitforward.ca) that included a survey asking the public for feedback on the service standards strategy, financial model, and proposed governance strategy. The survey gathered feedback from a total of 2,251 from across Niagara. 5% of the total survey respondents, or 103 individuals, were from Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Overall, the survey results showed strong approval among Niagara residents for each of the three (3) main components of the transit model:

- **85%** in favour of the Service Standards Strategy;
- **79%** in favour of the Financial Strategy; and
- **82%** in favour of the Governance Strategy / Board composition structure.

Two rounds of consultation were undertaken with each municipality in Niagara, first on

the result of the original Niagara Transit Governance Study (NTGS) and then on the revised strategies developed by the Governance Steering Committee (GSC). Significant change occurred from the initial proposal to the subsequent revised strategies reflecting the feedback received by municipalities.

Lastly, a series of workshops were conducted with interested parties from across Niagara, representing organizations or demographics who either rely on transit or have a closely related mandate. Example attendees included members of environmental and accessibility advisory committees, local business leaders and Chambers of Commerce, institutional administrators, and other advocates.

Many organizations have identified the growing need for public transit and expressed their support for a consolidated regional transit model. These include not-for-profits, academic institutions, and Chambers of Commerce. Examples are provided in Appendix II - Correspondence of Support, attached to this report.

Some of the organizations that have expressed that a consolidated transit model will support Niagara's most vulnerable populations, improve social equity, enhance access to education and improve economic development include, but are not limited to:

- Niagara-on-the-Lake Chamber of Commerce;
- Niagara Poverty Reduction Network;
- Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Niagara Region;
- Pathstone Mental Health;
- Niagara Health;
- Hotel-Dieu-Shaver Health and Rehabilitation Centre;
- Niagara Regional Native Centre;
- Post-secondary institutions, representing approximately 30,500 students:
 - Niagara College, representing approximately 10,500 full-time students
 - Brock University, representing approximately 20,000 students;
- Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce (GNCC)

Should this be approved by a triple-majority vote, the Region will provide information to the public as part of its communication strategy. Town Staff will also provide information to the public via its website and social media channels.

9. CONCLUSION

Public transit is a vital investment that will realize significant benefits for the residents of Niagara-on-the-Lake and Niagara Region as a whole. A consolidated transit system will better connect Niagara-on-the-Lake to its neighbouring municipalities.

When public transit is introduced, residents and visitors alike are provided with a sustainable and reliable way to move throughout a community. This ultimately increases economic opportunities for employees and businesses, improves traffic safety, reduces greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and improves resident health, which helps increase the quality of life. It also provides a foundation for a more inclusive community.

Introducing a Niagara Consolidated Transit system will allow Niagara-on-the-Lake to become a more equitable community both now and into the future. Providing an affordable, harmonized communal transit model will afford Niagara-on-the-Lake residents from all socio-economic backgrounds improved employment opportunities, additional social services and easier access to educational institutions across the Region.

In conclusion, a consolidated transit system is anticipated to bring significant mobility, socio-economic, and equity benefits to the residents of Niagara-on-the-Lake. Adoption of the recommendations of this report will represent the Niagara-on-the-Lake as part of the triple-majority vote in favour of creating this new transit system.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Cluckie', written in a cursive style.

Marnie Cluckie, MS.LOD, B.ARCH, B.ES
Chief Administrative Officer

Subject: Moving Transit Forward in Niagara: Creation of a Consolidated Transit Commission

Report to: Regional Council

Report date: Thursday, November 25, 2021

Recommendations

1. That Regional Council **ENACT** a By-law pursuant to section 189 of the *Municipal Act, 2001*, and substantially in the form attached as Appendix 1 of Report PW 55-2021, to provide The Regional Municipality of Niagara with the exclusive authority to establish, operate and maintain an intra-municipal passenger transportation system for the Region (having previously received inter-municipal authority), and such By-law, if adopted, to come into force and effect on January 1, 2023, provided that:
 - 1.1. a majority of the councils of the local area municipalities pass resolutions consenting to the By-law; and,
 - 1.2. the total number of electors in the local municipalities that have passed resolutions in support of the By-law form a majority of all electors in the Region of Niagara as established in the revised list of electors for the municipal election held in the year 2018.
2. That, subject to the adoption of the aforementioned By-law, a copy of the By-law and Report PW 55-2021 **BE FORWARDED** to the clerks of the 12 local area municipalities with a request that their councils consider adopting the following resolution and advise the Regional Clerk of the results of that consideration, no later than January 31, 2022:

“That the Council of (name of municipality) consents to the passage of By-law No. 96-2021 of The Regional Municipality of Niagara, being a by-law to provide Niagara Region with the exclusive authority to establish, operate and maintain a consolidated passenger transportation system for the Niagara Region ”
3. That subject to the adoption of the aforementioned By-law, the Chief Administrative Officer and General Manager of the future Transit Commission **BE AUTHORIZED** to negotiate municipal asset transfer agreements with the City of Niagara Falls, City of

St. Catharines, and City of Welland, on the basis of the principles in Appendix 3 and in a form satisfactory to the Director, Legal and Court Services.

4. That subject to the adoption of the aforementioned By-law, the Chief Administrative Officer **BE DIRECTED** to report back to Regional Council early in 2022 on the creation of a Regional Transit Commission, as described in this report and the attached appendices, and recommending the roles and responsibilities of the Commission.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to seek Regional Council authority to create a single, consolidated transit system, that would formally integrate all existing Regional and local transit systems, and that will bring dramatic benefits to the residents of Niagara:
 - Creating a single branded system that can take riders anywhere in the Region, for a single fare, that will break down jurisdictional barriers and connect communities;
 - Leveraging and supporting GO rail and bus expansion;
 - Developing and supporting the economy, job retention, and creating and driving tourism;
 - Being environmentally sustainable and reducing traffic congestion;
 - Supporting accessibility; and
 - Providing better value and service to the taxpayers of Niagara.
- Regional Council approval to move forward with consolidation represents the first step in a required triple-majority process that will be followed by seeking similar authorization from each of Niagara's twelve municipalities, as set out in section 189 of the Municipal Act, 2001.
- Should triple-majority be achieved, the new Transit Commission will be created and would begin operation on January 1, 2023.
- The Linking Niagara Transit Committee (LNTC) has endorsed the proposed governance model for the consolidation of transit (September 29, 2021),

comprised of a comprehensive financial, Board composition, and service strategies.

- These combined strategies for the new Transit Commission reflect extensive consultation, including: two rounds of consultation with local municipalities, as well as engagement with interested parties from across Niagara and the public.
 - The recommended strategies reflect the consensus recommendation of the Governance Steering Committee (GSC), balancing the input and feedback received from all parties. The City of Welland has identified ongoing concerns, which are discussed in the companion memorandum to this report.
- Now is the opportunity to take the final step towards the establishment of a consolidated system. Only through a single Commission model – a single decision making authority for transit – can the benefits of these next steps be realized.

Financial Considerations

Should triple-majority approval be achieved, the financial strategy outlined in this report and in further detail in [LNTC-C 3-2021](#) proposes the Region upload the Municipal levy funding of the baseline local transit service net expenditure to the Regional levy, using the combined 2020 transit budgets at \$27.8M and estimated to be \$29.4M in 2023.

The upload to the new Transit Commission will occur in a single year 2023, following which the Regional Council approved budget of the Commission will be apportioned to each of the LAMs using twelve Special Levies, one for each municipality. All existing Niagara Region Transit (NRT) service costs transferred to the Commission will continue to be allocated to the Special Levy based on municipal share of Regional assessment and the local transit service costs will be allocated to the Special Levy based on service hours. Tax bills will show a separate LAM regional transit levy so this is clear for all property owners. An insert in the tax bill will explain to property owners that the Special Levy is not an additional charge, but instead reflects the upload of responsibility for transit, and the tax space associated with the cost of transit also moves to the Region.

The 2023 estimated baseline operating budget of the new Transit Commission will represent a 7.3% increase to the Regional budget resulting from the local transit service costs being shifted from LAMs to the Commission budget; to be levied by the Region. This increase is expected to be offset by equal and concurrent reductions to municipal

budgets to minimize the property taxpayer impact from transit consolidation. In addition, the establishment of a new transit capital reserve, requires an additional 0.5% (\$2.2M) increase to the 2023 Regional budget.

Note that all financial modeling is estimated based on 2020 budgets and would be adjusted prior to 2023 to reflect most recent financials, including final asset inventories and debt to be assumed by the Commission. Future growth and service strategies are subject to future budget approvals and will directly impact the proportion of costs a municipality is apportioned.

Analysis

Moving Transit Forward

The vision for a single regional transit agency for Niagara is a long-standing one, with a significant series of previous milestones having been achieved dating back well more than a decade.

Recent milestones include the formation of the inter-municipal transit working group (IMTWG) in 2015, the Niagara Transit Service Delivery and Governance Strategy Report (*Dillon Report*, 2017), unanimous triple majority approval in 2017 granting the Region legal jurisdiction to move NRT from a pilot to permanent operation – along with unanimous municipal approval to proceed to develop a new governance system for a consolidated transit system for all of Niagara, the establishment of LNTC, the 2017 MOU between Niagara's four major transit properties that endorsed a consolidated transit system in principle, and the completion of the Niagara Transit Governance Study (NTGS) in 2020.

LNTC has now developed and endorsed the final recommended governance proposal, comprised of the financial, Board composition, and service strategies as outlined in this report, and supported the initiation of the required triple-majority approval process.

Now is the opportunity to take that final step towards the establishment of that consolidated system, one that is anticipated to bring dramatic benefits to the residents of Niagara by:

- ✓ Creating **one unified transit system** for Niagara.
- ✓ Breaking down barriers and **connecting communities**, ensuring all residents in Niagara have access to transit.
- ✓ **Expanding and enhancing service** – with new, longer, and consistent operating hours.
- ✓ **Connecting to GO Transit** as service is expanded and enhanced in the near future.
- ✓ **Supporting business and economic development** by connecting employers with new customers and employees with new opportunities.
- ✓ **Driving Tourism** by connecting people to all the destinations and activities that Niagara has to offer.
- ✓ Connecting **Seniors** to their community – to access services, see family and friends, and maintain independence.
- ✓ Establishing **one single fare** that takes you anywhere in the Region, with a new payment system.
- ✓ Being **innovative**, using new methods to serve communities like on-demand transit.
- ✓ Having **one schedule**, with one website and one app to help you plan your trip.
- ✓ Creating a more **accessible and equitable** system by ensuring all residents have similar access to service.
- ✓ Supporting the **environment** by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and support future moves to a zero-emission fleet.
- ✓ Ensuring that **Students and Youth** can get to school, participate in extra-curricular activities, or access a job.
- ✓ Ensuring it is **funded fairly**, with residents only paying for the service they receive directly.
- ✓ Delivering **better value for the taxpayer** through the more efficient delivery of service and eliminating duplication.
- ✓ Providing access to **Health Care**, and improving social determinants of health.
- ✓ Ensuring **maximization of capital** resources.
- ✓ Ensuring consistent, reliable and **accessible infrastructure** which enables all riders to equitably access transit.

It is only through the move to one consolidated agency these outcomes can be achieved.

Significant work has been done to improve, integrate, and coordinate the existing systems in Niagara, and consolidation will mean a larger and combined resource pool, which will support efficiencies that cannot be otherwise achieved as separate entities duplicating efforts, and which will then be reinvested into the network to enhance service.

Operational integration under the current status quo can only go so far before decisions require political authority to make meaningful change – which creates inconsistencies, inequity, and disconnected operations. Only through a single Commission model – a single decision making authority for transit – can the benefits of these next steps be realized. Whether aligned fare policies (i.e. single fare), fare exemptions (i.e. Niagara-wide low income pass), single unified system branding on fare technology or fleet, addressing inconsistent service hours, or an ongoing lack of consistency in capital improvements – these benefits can only be achieved with a single governance model to ensure the consistency, reliability and frequency transit riders expect can be realized.

Under the status quo, if one Council is not aligned for investments, the system is out of sync. This is what has led to the inconsistencies that plague today's system. The IMTWG has made incredible strides to harmonize as much as possible, but obvious gaps and confusion to those using the system prevail.

Building Niagara

A move to a consolidated Region-wide transit agency is critical for ensuring that Niagara remains a competitive destination for people and businesses, and is able to retain those already here.

Regional transit systems have been established in a number of peer jurisdictions previously: Waterloo, Durham and York Regions in terms of bringing together local transit systems to a combined Region wide system for example, as well as those de-facto Region-wide systems established through municipal amalgamations such as in Hamilton.

These jurisdictions have all seen significant growth not only in transit ridership, driven by both the consolidation and expanded investment into the transit network, but also in terms of the associated benefits from transit such as business development and the expansion of their post-secondary institutions.

Niagara Region is experiencing significant and rapid growth. People and businesses coming to Niagara are often relocating from areas such as the GTA with existing transit systems, and accordingly are bringing with them the expectation that a robust transit system will be in place in their new home.

The move to a consolidated transit system will address this expectation - ensuring that Niagara is able to not only meet and support the growth that is already in place but to continue to meet it in the future, including an projected 19% increase in population and 16% growth in employment by 2031 (2019 Municipal Growth Plan). This growth will come from many areas, including: recent trends of relocation from the GTA, newcomers to Canada, the expansion of GO transit to Niagara, as well as the growth of institutions such as Brock University, Niagara College, and new facilities such as the Niagara South Hospital.

Establishing a consolidated transit system is critical to meeting the evolving needs of existing residents, as well as ensuring that Niagara remains an attractive and competitive place to attract new growth.

Creating a Consolidated Transit System - Triple Majority Approval

Creating authority for one consolidated transit system in Niagara will require triple-majority approval of a by-law to transfer to the Region the legislative authority to operate intra-municipal transit service in Niagara (the Region having received inter-municipal authority previously in 2017).

Triple majority support consists of:

- A majority of all votes on upper-tier council [Regional Council];
- A majority of all the lower-tier [LAM] councils passing resolutions consenting to the by-law; and
- The total number of electors in the lower-tier [LAM] municipalities that have passed resolutions consenting to the by-law form a majority of the electors in the upper-tier municipality.

This report is the first step in this process and the represents the Regional approval to move forward into a consolidated system. Should the recommendations of this report be adopted, each of Niagara's LAMs will then be asked to subsequently consider the by-law through the remainder of 2021.

Should triple-majority be achieved, an approximate one-year period would be required to establish the new Transit Commission and to prepare for the assumption of day-to-day operations on January 1, 2023. In the interim, the existing transit systems would continue to operate and deliver service while the Region will take steps to ensure a smooth transition. As outlined in the Municipal Transfer Agreement term sheet (Appendix 3), no additional changes in operation or new assets would be on-boarded after June 30, 2022 in order to provide a 'steady-state' for the final period prior to operations turnover. Changes made between 2021 and June 30, 2022 will alter the previously estimated special levies for each municipality.

The [Transition Plan of the NTGS](#) outlines the major milestones required to establish the Commission during this one-year period, with further discussion later in this report regarding some of the immediate next steps should triple-majority be achieved.

Final Governance, Service Standards, and Financial Strategies

The creation of a regional transit municipal service board to serve as the new Transit Commission, Board composition for the Commission, service standards, and financial strategies comprise the governance proposal for the new Transit Commission, outlining how the new agency would be established and the terms and conditions in which it will ultimately function.

These strategies have been summarized in the sections below, with reference provided to previous reports that provide additional detail where applicable.

Extensive Consultation

The aforementioned strategies were developed and articulated originally as part of the NTGS consultants study, as well as through the work of both local and Regional staff such as the Area CAOs and Treasurers. Since that time, they have been refined through significant engagement and consultation, including:

- **Two Rounds of Municipal Consultation** – Local municipal Councils reviewed the initial proposed strategy and provided feedback on both the original NTGS recommendations and associated financial model; followed by a second opportunity for further feedback based on the revised strategies developed by the GSC in response to the first round of engagement. The proposal was presented to Council of all local municipalities in public session providing an opportunity for members of council and the public to provide input. Significant change occurred

from the initial proposal to the subsequent revised strategies. This was a direct result of the municipal feedback.

A companion memorandum (CL-C 86-2021) has been prepared that outlines the outstanding discussion points raised by the City of Welland and how these items were acknowledged, weighed, considered and responded to throughout the current process.

- **Interested Party Consultation** - Following the LAM discussions, a series of workshops were conducted with interested parties from across Niagara, representing organizations or demographics who either rely on transit or with a mandate that is closely related to transit. Example attendees included members of environmental and accessibility advisory committees, local business leaders and Chambers of Commerce, institutional administrators, and other advocates.

The purpose of these sessions was to ensure that these groups had the latest information regarding the consideration of a consolidated transit system, and had an opportunity to provide feedback prior to the finalization of the proposal.

These sessions were organized thematically, covering a wide variety of topics such as the environment, seniors, youth, business and tourism, post-secondary institutions, diversity and inclusiveness, libraries, health services, and accessibility.

- **Public Consultation** – in September 2021, a website was launched (movingtransitforward.ca) that provided an overview of the proposal for a consolidated transit system, as well as details on the core strategies of the governance model. A survey asked for feedback from the public on the proposed models:

A total of 2,251 individuals took the survey. Respondents included representation from all Niagara municipalities, representing a mix of both transit and non-transit users (38% monthly or more frequent, 44 % non-transit users). Consistent support was expressed for all three of the governance strategies, with 'support' or 'strong support' being indicated by:

- 79% of respondents for the financial strategy;
- 82% of respondents for the Board composition structure; and

- 85% of respondents for the services standards strategy.

The details results of the public consultation survey are including in Appendix 2.

Board Composition Strategy

The LNTC has endorsed and recommends the creation of a 15-member elected Transitional Commission Board, to be comprised of either Regional or local councillors, supported by a 20-member Public Advisory Committee as shown in Figure 1 below.

The Region would be represented by the Regional Chair or the CAO (or their delegate) as ex-officio attendees to ensure that answers to questions concerning Regional operations and matters that impact the Region related to the Commission can be responded to for the Board in a timely way.

Figure 1 - GSC Recommended Board Structure

Transitional Transit Commission Board	Public Advisory Committee
<p>(15) Total Elected Official Representatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (3) St. Catharines • (2) Niagara Falls • (1) Welland • (1) Fort Erie • (1) Grimsby • (1) Lincoln • (1) Niagara-on-the-Lake • (1) Pelham • (1) Port Colborne • (1) Thorold • (1) Wainfleet • (1) West Lincoln 	<p>(20) Total Public Interested Party Representatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (12) Niagara Residents (one per Municipality) • (2) Members representing Accessibility Advisory Committees or other Accessibility Stakeholders • (2) Post-Secondary Representatives (1 student union representative from Brock University and 1 from Niagara College) • (1) Member representing Niagara's Chambers of Commerce • (1) Senior Issues Stakeholder • (1) Youth Issues Stakeholder • (1) Transit Commission General Manager (ex-Officio)
<p><i>Members recommended by local Councils; appointed by Regional Council.</i></p>	<p><i>Resident members recommended by local Councils; all members appointed by the Transit Commission Board.</i></p>

In the development of this recommendation, the GSC considered feedback from all 12 municipalities regarding the overall size, elected composition, and share of representation of the Transitional 15-member Commission Board.

This recommendation balances that input: ensuring that all local municipalities have direct representation during the transition period, providing additional representation to municipalities on the basis of ridership, while respecting the total size of the Board.

The mandate of the Transitional Board will end with the establishment of a future permanent Board structure that will coincide with next municipal election cycle (2026) after the creation of the Commission.

This will be preceded by an external third party review of the Transitional Board structure and governance that will revisit and make recommendations regarding the total Board size, and representation. The Municipal Transfer Agreements discussed later in this report include a specific requirement that this external review, examining alternative Board structures, takes place.

The GSC has maintained the position that the establishment of a hybrid governing model (councillors and independent experts) remains a preferred outcome for the future permanent Board structure and should be strongly considered during this review. Recent recommendations made as part of the Collingwood Judicial Inquiry suggest that the boards of municipally owned corporations should be composed of directors with a variety of experiences and backgrounds, skills and qualifications. These recommendations apply equally to municipal service boards.

Service Standards Strategy

Developed by the transit leaders in Niagara, the Service Standards Strategy, provided as [Appendix 5](#) to *LNTC-C 3-2021*, outlines a three-phased approach to the standardization and enhancement of transit service across Niagara to achieve consistent, equitable access to transit for all Niagara residents and communities:

Figure 2 - Niagara Service Standards Strategy Overview



- **Phase 1 – Standardized Operating Hours Across Niagara** – a move to one set of consistent operating hours to ensure all residents in Niagara have the same level of availability of transit in their community and the ability to make consistent connections across Niagara. Proposed hours are 6 a.m. to midnight (Monday to Saturday), and 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. (Sundays and Holidays). This would represent over 45,000 new annual service hours across Niagara to create this equity and availability in each municipality.
- **Phase 2 – Combine Specialized and Demand-Responsive Services** - combining specialized transit (accessible or Para-transit) with other existing demand-responsive (on-demand) services. The combination of specialized and demand-responsive transit into one combined service delivery model offers an opportunity to both improve the service residents receive, while more efficiently deploying the resources available to the Commission.
- **Phase 3 – Network Review and Growth** - undertaking a detailed network review study that would look for future opportunities to expand and enhance Niagara’s transit footprint and significantly grow ridership in the long-term.

The new Transit Commission will also evaluate the performance of its services on a continual basis – starting right from its creation and in parallel with this strategy. At a minimum, there will be an annual performance review of required changes and service

enhancements, which may include evaluation of route performance, ridership, new housing/commercial development, customer feedback, and opportunities to implement existing expansion priorities such as those identified in municipal transit and transportation master plans, in keeping with industry best practices.

Financial Strategy

The recommended financial strategy proposes that all LAM transit service budgets be uploaded to the Commission in the 2023 budget year, as well as the Region's existing transit budget to be consolidated by the Commission and to be assessed to the LAMs by way of special levies to be approved annually by the Region as part of the budget process:

- The 2023 estimated Commission baseline service budget will require a 7.3% increase due to the transfer of local transit costs to the Regional budget with expected equal and concurrent reductions to municipal budgets therefore minimizing the net residential impact.
- Service levels are different in each municipality; therefore, the Region proposes that twelve Special Levies be adopted in 2023. Each Special Levy will allocate 65% of 2023 net transit costs based on service hours, with all current existing NRT services continuing to be allocated to the Special Levy based on local share of Region-wide assessment.

The full Financial Strategy is described in the Financial Considerations section of [LNTC-C 3-2021](#) and associated Appendices [1](#), [2](#), [3](#) and [4](#).

Over the course of 2022 it will also be necessary for all municipalities to review and make any necessary adjustments to Fees and Charges by-laws, Development Charges By-laws and other related administrative by-laws to ensure a smooth transition effective on January 1, 2023. A further report will be required to address these matters. Also, matters related to insurance coverage will need to be addressed.

Creating the Commission – Next Steps

Should triple-majority be achieved, an approximate one year transition period would commence during which the Commission would be established in advance of the assumption of day-to-day operations on January 1, 2023. The [NTGS](#) identified a total of five phases of transition (Approval, Commission Establishment, Commission Setup,

Service Launch, Enhancement), with *Phase 2 – Commission Establishment* and *Phase 3 – Commission Setup* intended to be achieved during this one year period before the assumption of operations.

Significant work and resources will be required to achieve the transition of operational responsibility on January 1, 2023. This will including the establishment of the Commission as a Municipal Services Board, appointment of the Commission Board, the completion of the Municipal Transfer Agreements, and the transfer of staff and assets. Each of these tasks will require significant coordination between Regional staff, municipal staff, and Commission staff when in place, with additional resources and support to be sought through external consulting assignments to be funded as part of the previously identified transition costs.

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of some of the major activities of this transition period, including where future decisions of Regional Council will be sought.

Legal Establishment of the Commission as a Municipal Services Board

Following triple-majority, work will be required to formally establish the Transit Commission as a Municipal Services Board of the Region, through section 196 to 198 of the *Municipal Act*, 2001 (the “Act”).

A transit commission established under the *Act* is subordinate to Regional Council, unlike an independent board, like the Police Services Board or Board of Health, which are created under different legislation. At the same time, it is a body corporate, and so is independent from the Region in its day-to-day operations.

Regional Council will determine the roles and responsibilities of the Commission, governance structure including the board structure and membership as well as determine if committees are needed. Regional Council will also determine the budgetary process, financial management, transfer of assets and reporting structure of the transit commission. Policies respecting the sale or disposition of land, hiring of employees and procurement of goods and services are mandatory under s. 270(2) of the Act. The Commission would normally establish its own procedure by-law, policies respecting employees, procurement, asset management and board compensation however for efficiency could consider leveraging Regional services and policies. It would also appoint its own Auditor. The role of the Region’s auditor in providing oversight will need to be determined as well. To note, the entities consolidated

financially with the Niagara Region being Court Services, Niagara Regional Housing and Niagara Regional Police all leverage the Region's auditors which creates significant efficiency and cost savings.

As a "local board" the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* will apply to the transit commission and it will require a Code of Conduct. Its budget will be approved by Regional Council as part of the annual budget approval process. What if any corporate support services will be provided by the Region also needs to be considered (and may be the subject of a future agreement between the Region and the Commission, similar to the "shared services" agreement in place between the Region and NRH for example).

The proposed organization of the new Transit Commission will be accomplished through the passage of a by-law by Regional Council at a future date that will create the Board and formalize aspects of the Board composition strategy such as the number of Commission Board representatives and eligibility of persons to hold office as Board members.

That by-law will further establish the relationship between the Commission and the Region, including their financial and reporting relationship. Transitional reports to implement these operational or structural components of the new Commission would be brought to Regional Council as needed during the transition period (2022). Terms of Reference for both the Commission Board and Public Advisory Committee will also be developed and brought forward for Council approval.

Municipal Transfer Agreements

A series of agreements will be required with each of Niagara Falls, St. Catharines, and Welland regarding the manner in which the existing assets used to deliver transit in Niagara would transfer to the new Transit Commission. These Municipal Transfer Agreements (MTAs) will also include principles for the transfer of personnel, guarantees regarding the minimum levels of service to be provided in municipalities in the future, and formalize the requirement that the governance review takes place.

A recommendation of this report is that the CAO, and the General Manager of the new Transit Commission once appointed, be authorized to negotiate these agreements, on the basis of the terms that are outlined in Appendix 3.

The principles outlined in this term sheet represent the consensus recommendations of the CAO GSC reflecting discussion, comments, and input received throughout the multi-year initiative to consolidate transit. The term sheets further include schedules that identify the assets that are to be transferred, as well as the current debt financing to be assumed by the Region as part of the financial strategy.

WEGO

Contained within the MTAs are principles related to the exclusion of WEGO from the initial consolidation of transit in Niagara. This approach has been taken as WEGO is delivered by the Niagara Parks Commission, a Provincial Crown agency, in partnership with the City of Niagara Falls. As such there are a series of pre-existing agreements regarding the operation of the system and the maintenance facility (paid for in part through Provincial funding) that would make consolidation of WEGO with the wider system challenging as part of the initial triple-majority exercise. WEGO also provides a specific a tourism-focused service that is unique from the other public transit systems in Niagara.

It is therefore anticipated that in the early days of the Commission that WEGO service will continue to be delivered as a partnership between the City of Niagara Falls and the Niagara Parks Commission. Accordingly, the WEGO fleet and the WEGO transit facility will remain with the City of Niagara Falls and not be transferred to the Commission.

Transit operators currently employed by the City of Niagara Falls in the joint delivery of Niagara Falls Transit and contracted WEGO routes will transfer to the Commission, with the Commission and the City of Niagara Falls entering into a service agreement, on the basis of an hourly fee, for the provision of operators to deliver the continued contracted City of Niagara Falls WEGO routes.

The initial exclusion of WEGO from consolidation does not preclude its future integration once the Commission has been fully established and/or as existing agreements between the Niagara Parks Commission and the City of Niagara Falls come to term. It also does not preclude agreements being entered into related to WEGO concerning operations in Niagara Falls, at any time.

Appointment of the Commission Board and Public Advisory Committee

Following the legal establishment of the Commission as a Municipal Services Board, the process to appoint members to the Transitional Commission Board and Public Advisory

Committee will commence. As outlined within the Board composition strategy, each municipality will be asked to forward to Regional Council a recommendation for both an elected representative on the Commission Board and a public or citizen representative for the Advisory Committee. Skills matrices and evaluation criteria will be developed for the other public members of the Advisory Committee, with an application process following the existing Regional process for appointment to advisory boards and committees.

The final approval for appointing members to both the Commission Board and the Public Advisory Committee will rest with Regional Council, reflecting the role of the Commission as an agency of the Region.

Recruitment of General Manager and Transition of Staff

An open competition will be held for the position of General Manager of the new Commission, anticipated to be supported through the use of an executive search consultant. The appointment of a General Manager would subsequently be ratified by the Commission Board once established.

The General Manager, along with a working group led by the Regional Treasurer/Commissioner Corporate Services, will finalize the organizational structure and complement of the new Commission for Regional Council approval. The preliminary organizational structure included in the NTGS will serve as the starting point for this discussion.

An external HR consultant vendor will be sought to support the transition of existing employees to the new Commission, and provide additional capacity to Regional staff to facilitate tasks such as the finalization of the organizational structure, development of job descriptions, and other human resources and labour relations components.

Appendix 4 outlines a high level overview of a series of Human Resources and Labour Relations considerations that are applicable to the transfer of staff to the new organization.

Consistent with these requirements and as outlined within the MTA Term Sheet, all full-time and part-time unionized employees employed by the existing transit entities as of June 30, 2022 will automatically transfer to the Commission.

Non-unionized employees will either be directly offered a position with the new Commission where there is anticipated to be a substantially similar role established, or have the opportunity to apply for new roles within the Commission. Any municipal corporate support personnel (i.e. those whose full time role with a municipality includes transit work as a portion of their duties) will remain with the municipality. Any municipal non-union staff who are not offered a position with the new Commission will remain the responsibility of the municipality.

The integration of the three existing Amalgamated Transit Union (ATUs) Locals will take place in through negotiation and in accordance with the defined provincial process as outlined under the *Public Sector Labour Relations Transition Act, 1997* and by the Ontario Labour Relations Board.

Alternatives Reviewed

The NTGS considered a series of alternative governance models for the consolidated transit system, including that of a partial Commission or Regional Division. The Full Commission was recommended on the basis of the level of independence and anticipated benefits arising from a defined budget envelope being set by Regional Council. Additional detail regarding the evaluation of the alternative governance models is contained within the final NTGS report, which was presented as [Appendix 2](#) to *LNTC-C 4-2020*.

Numerous alternative financial models, Board compositions, and service enhancement timelines have been considered throughout the process: both originally within the NTGS and as input and feedback has been received by municipalities. These considerations have included:

- 11 different alternative Special Levy financial models, including ones that considered divisions between conventional and on-demand systems, in addition to the single General Levy originally proposed;
- Alternative Commission Board structures including those that maintained a smaller total Board size; that included public members to retain a hybrid model; that grouped smaller LAMs into rotating seats; and
- Both shorter and longer timelines for the implementation of service enhancements and the external network review.

The original guiding principles of 'Customer Driven', 'Unconventional Solutions', 'Integrated', 'Economically Responsible', and 'Fair' were used throughout to evaluate alternatives. The final strategies and governance model represent the consensus recommendation of the GSC.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

The proposed consolidation of transit services across Niagara into a consolidated transit entity directly aligns with the Council Strategic Priority: Responsible Growth and Infrastructure Planning (Objective 3.1) through advancing regional transit and facilitating the movement of people and goods.

Other Pertinent Reports

LNTC-C 5-2021	Niagara Transit Governance – Phase 2 Consultation Results and Triple-Majority Initiation
LNTC-C 3-2021	Niagara Transit Governance - Revised Strategies Reflecting Phase 1 Municipal Consultation
LNTC-C 2-2021	Niagara Transit Governance – Governance Steering Committee Update
LNTC-C 1-2021	Niagara Transit Governance – Detailed Phase 1 Consultation Summary
PW-9 2021	Niagara Transit Governance Study – Niagara Region Considerations
LNTC-C 6-2020	Councillor Information Request – Niagara Transit Governance – Local Area Municipality Engagement
LNTC-C 4-2020	Niagara Region Transit Governance Study
CAO 8-2017	Niagara Region's Transit Service Delivery and Governance Strategy
LNTC-C 21-2018	Inter-Municipal Transit (IMT) Service Implementation Strategy

Prepared by:

Matt Robinson
Director
GO Implementation Office

Recommended by:

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

Submitted by:

Ron Tripp, P.Eng.
Chief Administrative Officer

This report was prepared in significant consultation with Scott Fraser, Transportation Lead GO Implementation, Heather Talbot, Financial & Special Projects Consultant – Financial Management and Planning; the Governance Steering Committee comprised of the CAOs from all thirteen (13) municipalities across Niagara; and reviewed by; Matt Robinson, Director, GO Implementation Office; Helen Chamberlain, Director, Financial Management & Planning/Deputy Treasurer; Todd Harrison, Commissioner of Corporate Services/Treasurer.

Appendices

Appendix 1	Draft By-law No. 96-2021 of the Regional Municipality of Niagara
Appendix 2	Online Resident Survey Results – Moving Transit Forward
Appendix 3	Municipal Transfer Agreements – Summary Term Sheet
Appendix 4	External Legal Overview: Regional Transit Integration: Labour Relations and Employment Processes and Implications



December 15, 2021

Lord Mayor Betty Disero and Members of Council
Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake
1593 Four Mile Creek Road, Box 100 Virgil, ON L0S 1T0

Object: Support of the Niagara Transit Amalgamation Plan

Dear Lord Mayor, Dear Members of Council,

On behalf of our members, we ask that you vote in favor of the Niagara Transit Amalgamation Plan that was advanced in the Regional Council and that will be presented to you shortly to obtain your assent.

Better public transportation in Niagara is a need that we have consistently identified over the years. The transit system that we currently have is simply inadequate for the needs of our community. Some places in Niagara take hours to get to without a car; others are completely off limits.

The Niagara Community Observatory calculated that poverty costs our region \$1.3 billion every year. A lack of viable public transit contributes to this. Since it is impractical to live and work in Niagara without a vehicle, every household must add the cost of a car, maintenance, insurance, and repairs to their cost of living. Statistics Canada finds that the average household spends 20% of its income on transportation – more than anything else, with the sole exception of shelter. When including depreciation, the average Canadian household will spend between \$8,600 and \$13,000 each year to own a vehicle. Families are already being squeezed by rising prices for rent and homes (increasing by over 25% per year locally), gasoline (up by 33% in one year), and food (up almost 6% year-over-year).

While pre-pandemic trends saw the percentage of Canadian households in poverty slowly decreasing, the combined effects of the COVID-19 economic slowdown and prices rising far faster than wages risk reversing this trend. While the limited resources

of municipal governments make action more difficult than for their provincial and federal counterparts, there are still options for poverty reduction, and the provision of good public transit is one of them.

Investment in public transit should be seen as precisely that: an investment.

Studies of public transportation systems found that investments in public transit paid off in economic activity at a 2:1 ratio. Niagara should not turn down the opportunity to fund this significant driver of economic growth.

We have heard nothing but enthusiasm for this plan, which is the result of lengthy consultation with the community and reflects the needs of the community to the best of its ability. Most feel that it must have been implemented long ago. We urge you to heed and support the wishes of Niagara residents and businesses.

As the primary advocate for our members, the Chamber of Commerce and Tourism NOTL supports the Niagara Transit Amalgamation Plan, while supporting a holistic approach to Niagara's transportation issues.

Sincerely,



Eduardo R. Lafforgue
President & CEO

Cc: Marnie Cluckie, CAO
Cc: Colleen Hutt, Acting Town Clerk



NIAGARA POVERTY REDUCTION NETWORK

October 5, 2021

To: Fort Erie Council
Grimsby Council
Lincoln Council
Niagara Falls Council
Niagara-on-the-Lake Council
Pelham Council
Port Colborne Council
St. Catharines Council
Thorold Council
Wainfleet Council
Welland Council
West Lincoln Council
Niagara Regional Council

Cc: Wayne Gates, Niagara Falls MPP
Jennie Stevens, St. Catharines MPP
Jeff Burch, Niagara Centre MPP
Sam Oosterhoff, Niagara West MPP
Tony Baldinelli, Niagara Falls MP
Chris Bittle, St. Catharines MP
Vance Badawey, Niagara Centre MP
Dean Allison, Niagara West MP

To the members of our Niagara municipal councils (cc'ing our provincial and federal representatives):

We are writing on behalf of the Niagara Poverty Reduction Network (NPRN) in order to share some feedback regarding the inter-municipal Moving Transit Forward plan that our councils will be reviewing and voting on this fall. NPRN is a collective of over 30 agencies and individuals working to wipe out poverty in Niagara through education, collaboration, and advocacy to address poverty's root causes. Our vision is for all Niagara residents to live above the poverty line, which can be achieved through our mission of Niagara residents, businesses and organizations working together to improve the quality of life in Niagara.

We appreciate your consideration of our concerns. In an acute way, we recognize that investment in Niagara transit needs to come from provincial and federal governments just as much or more than from our over-burdened municipalities. In light of this, we are particularly grateful for our councils' leadership on the relevant file. Our MPPs

NIAGARA POVERTY REDUCTION NETWORK

www.WipeOutPoverty.ca

c/o United Way Niagara

63 Church St, Suite LC1, St. Catharines, ON L2R 3C4 email: info@wipeoutpoverty.ca



NIAGARA POVERTY REDUCTION NETWORK

and MPs are cc'd on this letter in order to also inform them of our concerns, and in hopes of hearing their feedback and relevant plans.

Thank you for the years of thought and consultation that you have put into the vital policy debate tied to the Moving Transit Forward plan. Thank you as well for your careful work in developing the plan's various pieces.

Re: Moving Transit Forward Service Plan, Financing, and Governance

The Moving Transit Forward model of improving transit through uploading, i.e. the Region uploading the existing lower-tier transit systems and combining them with the existing Regional system, is one that makes eminent sense to us, as this will improve coordination of our municipalities' scarce transit resources. We thus fully support the plan's core principle of funding transit through the Regional levy.

However, we are concerned by a principle simultaneously enshrined in the current version of Moving Transit Forward, to the effect that taxpayers in the lower tier municipalities are only to pay for the transit that their individual municipalities receive. This will severely limit the available municipal funds for transit expansion and improvement. The proposed rule will decrease the willingness of taxpayers both in the municipalities that currently use transit more and in the municipalities that currently use transit less from supporting significant new investment.

We thus urge you to consider a more collaborative financing model, pursuant to which higher-income Niagara municipalities agree to pay more for transit that their citizens are not currently using – so as to support our impoverished neighbours across the peninsula in a civic way, but also so as to encourage more transit and ridership within our higher-income communities, as taxpayers demand rightly demand better access to the transit that they pay for.

Our hope is that this direction will be fostered by the proposed Moving Transit Forward governance plan, which rightly enshrines a principle of representation from all municipalities on the regional transit governance body. Simultaneously, given the high economic and social stakes of transit policy, our hope is that councils' concerns about the exact appropriate structure of power-sharing within the governance model will not unduly delay the plan's implementation.

We appreciate the plan's proposal of a citizen advisory body within the transit governance model, separate from the primary governance committee. However, we urge you to incorporate citizens into the primary table, rather than leaving them out. This inclusion will permit our transit governance table to draw on the deep well of talent and goodwill among our communities' potential volunteers, and to leverage the lived experience of regular transit riders.

Transit and Intersectional Poverty Reduction

From an anti-poverty perspective, we strongly support the coordination of additional investment into transit for Niagara by all three levels of government, aimed at improving transit accessibility, availability, and quality. It is of course central to our analysis that transit is currently more used people in Niagara living in poverty than by non-impovertised people.

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Disproportionate ridership among people living in poverty flows from the reality that many people living in poverty cannot afford a car and/or gas (notwithstanding the fact that a car is generally essential in order to live anywhere in Niagara, even including the peninsula's denser/more urban areas).

As you know, better transit is key to developing our regional economy as a whole and to linking people to jobs. But our status quo in Niagara is insufficient transit (at both the lower tier/local and peninsular inter-municipal levels) and insufficiently coordinated transit (between our lower and upper tiers). The result is too many people unable to get to work opportunities in a reasonable amount of time, and/or simply unable to get to work opportunities at all.

The economic fall-out of this problem is of course felt most keenly by the low-income families and individuals who most rely on transit. Significantly, we note that the fall-out is intersectional: Indigenous, racialized, female, LGBTQ2S+, and/or disabled Niagarans are more likely to be impoverished than white, male, and/or cisgender Niagarans, due to systemic bigotry, and thus rely more on transit. On many levels, then, the Moving Transit Forward plan is justified from the perspective of human rights.

Transit and Public Health

Better transit is also important from the perspective of improving local health, for all people. In order to get to transit, people have to walk – a small but significant benefit. More use of transit would also be good from the perspective of decreasing emissions from our cars and slowing climate change – developments that would have positive implications for public health. Further, using transit is good from the perspective of mental health. It is certainly less stressful to travel by bus or train, than to drive on our increasingly congested roads.

Transit Improvement: A Positive Feedback Loop

It was observed at our NPRN Roundtable that it will be vital, precisely from an anti-poverty perspective, for our councils to develop Moving Transit Forward as a plan to make transit more appealing to people of all income levels. In reality and in public perception, transit in Niagara is currently a mode of transportation mostly for the impoverished. While the inconvenience and frequent non-availability of Niagara transit is the primary reason why higher-income people use Niagara transit much less frequently, the brand and image of Niagara transit as "the mode of the impoverished" are also a factor.

In a negative, circular way, the current result of this systemic discouragement of higher-income riders is less investment in Niagara transit, by all levels of government. Higher-income taxpayers are less likely to support investment in systems that they do not use and do not see themselves or their children using in the future. In order for Moving Transit Forward to be truly successful, then, it will have to improve the brand and image of transit. The way to achieve this (now in a positive, circular way) is to be more available and more coordinated.

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Investment to achieve the necessary next stages of improvement will thus require courage and foresight on your part as council members. We are thus particularly grateful for your consideration. In light of the above, we add only that, as transit improves through the investments that you are contemplating, more taxpayers of all income levels will be able to use transit. Public support for even more investment in transit from all three levels of government will thus grow too. We urge you to embrace this positive, cascading effect.

More taxpayers across Niagara support significantly better funded and coordinated transit than is widely known. It is our privilege to speak for some of those citizens through this letter. We are grateful to you for considering their priorities.

Thank you to all of you for your leadership in these challenging, unprecedented days. The fact that our councils are prioritizing discussion of how to improve transit, as part of our pandemic recovery, is a cause for real celebration and hope.

Please feel free to reach out to NPRN regarding any aspect of this letter. We look forward to your feedback.

Best,

Aidan Johnson
(they/them/Mx)
Chair, Niagara Poverty Reduction Network

Jennifer Gauthier
(she/her/Ms)
Vice-Chair, Niagara Poverty Reduction Network

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NPRN Member Organizations:

Alzheimer Society of Niagara

Ample Labs

Bethlehem Housing and Support Services

CARP Niagara

Community Care of West Niagara

Community Care of St. Catharines

Credit Canada Debt Solutions

Cultivating Hope Foundation

District School Board of Niagara

ETFO Niagara Occasional Teachers

Goodwill Niagara

John Howard Society of Niagara

Niagara Catholic District School Board

Niagara College

Niagara Community Foundation

Niagara Community Legal Clinic

Niagara Falls Community Health Centre

Niagara Furniture Bank

Niagara Region Anti-Racism Association

Positive Living Niagara

Salvation Army Fort Erie

Social Justice Research Institute, Brock University

Start Me Up Niagara

St. Barnabus Anglican Church

Town of Fort Erie

United Way Niagara

Welland Public Library

Women's Place of South Niagara

YMCA

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**YMCA of Niagara**

3 – 300 Bunting Road
 St. Catharines, ON L2M 7X3
 ymcaofniagara.org
 Charitable No. 11930 7064 RR0001

November 24, 2021

Memo To: Niagara Regional Council Members

Jim Bradley
 Frank Campion
 Jim Diodati
 Kelly Edgar
 Bob Gale
 Brian Heit
 Laura Ip
 Peter Nicholson
 Walter Sendzik
 Leanna Villella
 Gary Zalepa

Barbara Butters
 Pat Chiocchio
 Betty Disero
 Wayne Fertich
 Kevin Gibson
 Diana Huson
 Jeff Jordan
 Wayne Redekop
 Bill Steele
 Tim Whalen

David Bylsma
 George Darte
 Sandra Easton
 Robert Foster
 Barbara Geenwood
 Tom Insinna
 Marvin Junkin
 Tim Rigby
 Terry Ugolini
 Albert Witteveen

C/O Niagara Regional Clerk

Re: YMCA of Niagara's support for a Niagara Wide Transportation System

To Regional Council,

We are sending this statement of support for the development of a Niagara Wide Transportation System.

As a regional charity, the YMCA of Niagara provides critical programs and services to people across 12 municipalities throughout the Niagara Region. Many of the people we serve rely on public transportation to access healthcare, employment, education and other critical services every day. We see the value and benefit to developing a seamless, regional transit system. We endorse the pursuit of safe, accessible public transportation for all and support the development of a Niagara Wide Transit System that meets the diverse local needs of each community and builds on the locally invested infrastructure.

Should you wish to connect with the YMCA, Steven Chuang can be reached by email at [REDACTED] and/or by phone [REDACTED].

Sincerely,

Steven Chuang
 CEO
 YMCA of Niagara

Mike Watt
 Board Chair
 YMCA of Niagara



November 17, 2021

Dear Niagara Regional Council:

The proposed consolidated transit model will contribute to improved access to mental health services for families challenged with mental health issues. The proposed model will create a unified transit system that will build in flexibility and opportunity for our community to access services. We have established access points of treatment in many cities and towns in the Niagara Region. The improved connectedness between towns and cities, seamless transfers, and with residents only paying for the service they receive will allow for our vulnerable sector to access our services.

We are very much in favor and support of the proposed consolidated transit model.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Shaun Baylis", is written over a faint, light blue circular watermark.

Shaun Baylis CEO
Pathstone Mental Health

Treatment Works!



October 5, 2021

Mr. Jim Bradley, Regional Chair
Niagara Region
1815 Sir Isaac Brock Way
Thorold, ON
L2V 4T7

Dear Regional Chair Bradley,

Brock University has welcomed back thousands of students and the Niagara Region is filled with students from Niagara and beyond. With record enrolment for 2021, will be surpassing 20,000 students in the coming years, meaning more students will be travelling to and from campus every day. As the University continues to grow, we remain dedicated to remaining accessible to students from all backgrounds and support improved transit options that provide greater choice and flexibility, reduce costs for our students, and reduce our footprint on the environment.

Brock University supports improved inter-municipal transit service for our students. Better service provides greater options, flexibility, and choice for students to travel to campus and around the Niagara region. This expands the options for students for where they can live, work, and play in the Niagara region rather than be confined to the immediate campus vicinity. It also helps students who commute to Brock from outside the GTA by providing them greater means to get around once they arrive in the region.

Coming to campus is just one part of student life. Many students live, work, and are involved in activities all throughout different parts of Niagara region. For instance, students undertake co-op placements or other extracurricular activities such as volunteering in local community organizations. Getting to places beyond campus requires reliable transit options that can get them to where they need to be. Better inter-municipal transit options reduces barriers that students may face when considering opportunities and ensures Brock's students are able to fully engage and contribute to the broader Niagara community

In recent years, Brock has taken increased steps to enhance our equity, diversity, and inclusion measures and we are working hard to ensure that our campus is accessible to all students, regardless of background and socioeconomic status. This includes making sure that our campus is physically accessible to all students throughout Niagara and beyond. Outside St. Catharines and Thorold, our institution still has a limited number of trips coming to Brock from across the broader Niagara region. With improved intermunicipal transit that is reliable

and fulfills individual needs, students will have a more affordable option to get to campus and around Niagara compared to the cost of car ownership, gasoline, and parking. This supports greater equity and inclusion by reducing cost barriers for students to attend Brock.

Our institution is committed to environmental sustainability and in the past have taken steps to reduce our own footprint. Improved transit options that allow students to commute by public transit rather than drive reduces demand on our roads and vehicle emissions. With fuel prices rising, reliable intermunicipal transit helps provides students an alternative and affordable choice with more stable costs to get around the region. Better intermunicipal transit is a triple win for our students, the Niagara region, and the environment.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to reach out to us. You may contact Jayne Crawley, Government Relations Advisor at jcrawley@brocku.ca.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Lynn Wells', with a stylized, flowing script.

Lynn Wells, PhD
Interim President and Vice-Chancellor
Provost and Vice-President, Academic
Brock University

CC Walter Sendzik, Mayor, St. Catharines

Regional Chair Bradley and Members of Council
C/o Office of the Regional Clerk
Niagara Region
1815 Sir Isaac Brock Way, P.O. Box 1042
Thorold, Ontario L2V 4T7

November 18, 2021

To the Regional Chair and Members of Council,

We, the undersigned, represent four councils of community leaders: the Women in Niagara Council, representing women in business; NEXTNiagara, representing the emerging generation; the Non-Profit Council, representing non-profits in Niagara; and the Government Affairs Council, a policy advisory council to the Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce (GNCC).

On behalf of our councils, we ask that you vote in favour of the transit amalgamation plan to be presented at the November 25th special meeting.

Better public transit in Niagara is a need that we have consistently identified for years. The transit system we currently have is simply inadequate to the needs of our community. Some places in Niagara take hours to get to without a car; others are off-limits entirely.

The Niagara Community Observatory calculated that poverty costs our region \$1.3 billion every year. A lack of viable public transit contributes to this. Since it is impractical to live and work in Niagara without a vehicle, every household must add the cost of a car, maintenance, insurance, and repairs to their cost of living. Statistics Canada finds that the average household spends 20% of its income on transportation – more than anything else, with the sole exception of shelter. When including depreciation, the average Canadian household will spend between \$8,600 and \$13,000 each year to own a vehicle. Families are already being squeezed by rising prices for rent and homes (increasing by over 25% per year locally), gasoline (up by 33% in one year), and food (up almost 6% year-over-year).

While pre-pandemic trends saw the percentage of Canadian households in poverty slowly decreasing, the combined effects of the COVID economic slowdown and prices rising far faster than wages risk reversing this trend. While the limited resources of municipal governments make action more difficult than for their provincial and federal counterparts, there are still options for poverty reduction, and the provision of good public transit is one of them.



Investment in public transit should be seen as precisely that: investment. A U.S. study of public transportation systems in Silicon Beach, CA; Austin, TX; and Durham, NC found that investments in public transit paid off in economic activity at a 2:1 ratio. A 2013 study found that the agglomerating effects alone of public transit yielded returns of \$1.5 million to \$1.8 billion per year, depending on the size of the community. Municipal governments already make investments that do not deliver nearly as great a return as public transit will. Niagara should not turn down the opportunity to fund this significant driver of economic growth.

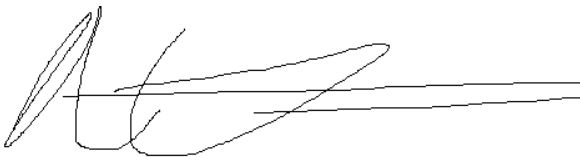
We have heard nothing but enthusiasm for this plan, which is the result of lengthy community consultations and reflects the needs of the community as best they can be met. Most feel it is long-overdue. We urge you to heed the wishes of Niagara's residents and give this plan your support.



Michael Ras
Chair, Government Affairs Council



Clayton Letourneau
Chair, NEXTNiagara Council



Adam Durrant
Chair, Non-Profit Council



Grace Eldajani
Chair, Women in Niagara Council



Mishka Balsom
President & CEO, GNCC

