

Subject: Potential Niagara Regional Transit Enhancements

Recommendation:

BE IT RESOLVED THAT Council receive Report #2024-0116 Potential Niagara Regional Transit Enhancements, for information;

AND THAT Council direct this report be circulated to the Niagara Regional Clerk for submission to the Niagara Transit Commission.

Background:

On May 1, 2024, the following motion, moved by Councillor Olson and seconded by Councillor Wink passed unanimously:

WHEREAS accessible and efficient public transportation fosters community connectivity, promotes mobility, and enhances the quality of life of residents;

AND WHEREAS on March 19, 2024, the City of Niagara Falls passed a motion requesting the Niagara Region Transit Commission establish a discounted senior's fare that is competitive with others in the Golden Horseshoe, further seeking endorsement from all local area municipalities in Niagara Region;

AND WHEREAS Council for the Town of Pelham supports the establishment of a discounted seniors fare within the framework of Niagara Regional Transit, acknowledging the importance of affordability and accessibility for senior residents;

AND WHEREAS recognizing the potential for enhancing Niagara Regional Transit, it is imperative to explore additional avenues, including but not limited to building capacity for service reliability, expanded service hours, expanded Saturday and Sunday service, and the introduction of additional varied fare rates;

AND WHEREAS Council acknowledges that the implementation of such service enhancements will directly impact taxpayers;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Staff be directed to consult the Pelham Seniors Advisory Committee, the Pelham Active

Transportation Committee, the Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee, and the Mayor's Youth Advisory Collective to gather input regarding the potential expansion of Niagara Regional Transit services;

AND THAT staff be directed to prepare an information report for Council's consideration, inclusive of cost estimates, as well as the input gathered from the aforementioned Committees.

Analysis:

The Niagara Transit Commission (NTC) has sought direct public input to shape the future of transit in the Niagara Region. To facilitate this, the NTC launched an online survey from May 23, 2024, to June 7, 2024, inviting feedback from the community.

The survey link was shared directly with members of advisory committees, including the Pelham Seniors Advisory Committee (PSAC), the Pelham Active Transportation Committee (PATC), the Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee (JAAC), and the Mayor's Youth Advisory Collective (MYAC). This approach ensured that input was collected firsthand and submitted to the NTC through their preferred channels.

To further support the NTC's feedback request, the Town leveraged its social media platforms and connected with local media to reach and encourage broader community participation.

Following the passing of this motion, Niagara Regional Transit announced several service enhancements, which Councillor Olson presented at the June 19, 2024, Council meeting. These enhancements include, but are not limited to:

- Extended service hours from Monday to Saturday: 7 a.m. to 11 p.m.
- Seamless inter-municipal connection
- In-house booking and customer service
- Defined travel times for On Demand services

To elicit as much feedback as possible, PSAC, PATC, and MYAC were also consulted for their input on potential enhancements, in person.

Consultation

Mayor's Youth Advisory Collective

MYAC provided no comments or concerns.

Pelham Active Transportation Committee

At the June 26th meeting, the PATC provided valuable input on several key issues. One significant topic was the perceived safety of youth riders, both on buses and terminals. This perception was identified as a potential deterrent for young riders. A Committee member, a former driver, identified the standard \$3.00 fare as reasonable. The member recommended that Niagara Regional Transit adopt a more proactive approach to ensuring the safety of its fleet.

Regarding fare structures, the discussion highlighted that the \$63.00 31-day pass poses a potential financial barrier for those unable to pay the total upfront. This often leads individuals to purchase single tickets, which cumulatively exceed the cost of the monthly pass. The Committee proposed a service enhancement to address this issue, suggesting the introduction of an installment payment plan or free ridership for the remainder of the period once a total of the 31-day pass had been paid.

The Committee also discussed the frequent short rides between the educational institutions and nearby neighbourhoods, which benefit students who have their fees waived. Concerns were raised about the value of this arrangement to taxpayers.

Pelham Seniors Advisory Committee

At the July 10th meeting, the PSAC provided insight on current services and potential enhancements. A key focus was on identifying the most suitable communication methods for seniors. Acknowledging that digital tools like apps may not be ideal, the Committee suggested increasing the availability of print materials, such as fridge magnets or flyers.

The Committee identified the importance of quick and efficient transportation for seniors. They recommended routine, communal pick-ups to attend popular destinations like grocery stores and malls to eliminate the need for individual arrangements. Additionally, the Committee emphasized the need for services like NRT On-Demand to assist seniors with loading merchandise, such as groceries, into vehicles. They also proposed a review of the comfort levels at waiting stations and terminals.

The Committee recognized the potential for partnerships with other transportation related services, such as "Happy in my Home," to enhance the visibility and accessibility of such programs. Overall, the Committee provided positive feedback regarding the current fares and services, while also identifying areas for improvement.

Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee

Given the quarterly meeting schedule, the JAAC received information electronically ahead of an in-person meeting. The NTC survey link, along with pertinent details

about the initiative, was distributed to the Committee for their direct response to the NTC. Staff remain available and will continue to gather and relay feedback to the NTC.

Financial Considerations:

There will likely be costs associated with service enhancements for residential taxpayers and possibly also for users of the system. This is not a direct local government taxation issue and Town administration cannot comment upon the impact, if any, to local taxpayers. Ultimately cost increases will be determined by the Transit Commission and if approved, will be included in the Regional portion of the property tax levy.

Alternatives Reviewed:

No alternatives were reviewed.

Strategic Plan Relationship: Enhancing Capacity and Future Readiness

By seeking feedback from the public and key advisory groups, the community can actively participate in shaping the future of transit, ensuring that service enhancements reflect actual needs and preferences. Service improvements enhance future readiness by providing safe, accessible, and affordable transit options. Additionally, promoting regional connectivity and accommodating diverse schedules will foster greater public transit usage, ultimately contributing to a more efficient and inclusive transportation system.

Consultation:

Communications Specialist
Treasurer

Other Pertinent Reports/Attachments:

NRT Media Release

Prepared and Recommended by:

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Prepared and Submitted by:

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