

# THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF NIAGARA

## COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

### REPORT COTW 8-2009

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The Municipal Council of the Regional Municipality of Niagara met in Committee of the Whole at the Quality Hotel Parkway Convention Centre, St. Catharines, Ontario, on Thursday, October 29, 2009 commencing at 4:20 p.m.

#### ATTENDANCE

**Council:** Regional Chair Partington; Councillors Augustyn, Badawey, Baty, Burroughs; Bylsma, Casselman, Cordiner; Garcia; Forster; Gabriel; Goulbourne; Greenwood; Heit, Henderson; Hodgson, McMullan; Puttick; Rigby; Salci; Timms, Trombetta, Zimmerman.

**Staff:** Messrs. Trojan, Chief Administrative Officer; Bergsma, Commissioner, Corporate Services; Robson, Commissioner, Integrated Community Planning; Hutchings, Commissioner, Community Services; Brothers, Commissioner Public Works; McQueen, Operating Officer (Health); Cousins, Director, Transportation Services; Ms. Pilon, Deputy Clerk; Ms. McManus, Legislative Assistant.

**Staff (Other):** Messrs. Roberts, Executive Officer to the Regional Chair; Weir, Director, Administration; Steele, Associate Director, Strategy Business Management; Flora, Associate Director Transportation Systems; Ranjan, Transportation Engineer Ms. Cousins, Director, Operational & Support Services; Ms. Papaiz, Senior Manager, Corporate Communications.

**Guests:** Mr. Len Stack, Councillor City of St. Catharines and member of Transportation Strategy Steering Committee; Ms. Marion Dawson, member of Inter-Municipal Specialized Transit Advisory Committee; Mr. Ross Gillett, Vice Chair Inter-Municipal Specialized Transit Advisory Committee; Ms. Kathy McArthur, Canadian Red Cross Transportation; Ms. Anne Brown, Canadian Red Cross Transportation; Mr. Geoff Eden, member of Accessibility Advisory Committee; Mr. Ken Todd, Chief Administrative Officer, City of Niagara Falls; Mr. Werner, St. Catharines Transit; Mr. Mwanzia, Chamber of Commerce; Mr. Dren, City of Niagara Falls, Director of Transportation Services; Mr. Sherlock, St. Catharines Transit; Ms. Stout, Town of Fort Erie; Mr. Fletcher, ENTRA Consultants; Ms. Iannuzziello, ENTRA Consultants.

**CALL TO ORDER**

83. Regional Chair Partington called the Committee of the Whole meeting to order at 4:20 p.m.

Regional Chair Partington stated that this facilitated session on Inter-Municipal Transit, focuses on one of the three top priorities of the Region and Council business for the remainder of the 2006-2010 term.

He further stated that Council had identified that the integrated transportation system is one of the key strategic Business Plan objectives for this Council therefore; this evening's Committee of the Whole would provide an opportunity to discuss this most important issue and that it was his hope that, at the end of the evening, Council's understanding of inter-municipal transit options would be enhanced, and Council would be engaged in discussion around ways of improving inter-municipal transit options and have a sense of what is possible.

Regional Chair Partington advised that he would suspend the normal rules of procedure for Committee of the Whole, which will allow information presentations and enable the facilitator for this evening, Jim Thomas, to guide the discussion about inter-municipal transit, for Council to achieve a better understanding of areas of agreement and potential options.

The agenda was overviewed as follows:

- Information session focused on the ENTRA report
- Context from Public Works staff on the background facts related to the existing municipal transit, and options on how we may improve integrated service in the future
- Overview of inter-regional integrated transportation by Public Works
- Presentation from ENTRA Consulting, regarding the recently completed inter-municipal transit study
- Session facilitated by Jim Thomas; who will ensure that there is ample opportunity to focus on the discussions, and facilitate Council's interaction on the information presented and possibilities of improving inter-municipal transit in the Niagara Region.

Regional Chair Partington proposed that he retain the Chair's position for Committee of the Whole and would later request that a motion to suspend the normal rules of procedure for this meeting be considered.

Regional Chair Partington further advised Council members that the discussion this evening should form the basis of our future staff report with respect to Inter-Municipal Transit however; we are not looking for decisions this evening, nor any resolutions arising during this discussion from the Committee of the Whole. Staff will be listening to the discussions and be guided by any direction or consent that may be achieved this evening to formulate the recommendations to be contained in the final report, for debate and resolution at the appropriate Committee and Regional Council.

Regional Chair Partington introduced Mr. Jim Thomas, as the Committee of the Whole session facilitator for the evening.

Highlighted points of interest were offered, by stating that Mr. Thomas:

- acts as the President of the Centre for Creative Change, a consulting firm that has extensive experience in the public and private sector board governance, facilitation and issues resolution
- is a lawyer, an engineer, and had previously served as Assistant Deputy Minister of Employee Relations, Deputy Minister of Labour, and Deputy Minister of the Management Board of the Ontario Government
- had assisted a number of organizations, and had been successful in resolving difficult issues, in particular, those that included a governance component
- is a skilled workshop facilitator and was recently appointed by the President of York University to facilitate a process to improve the labour relations climate at the university, in light of the recent prolonged CUPE strike
- had conducted hundreds of planning and governance workshop sessions for associations, government departments, and many other clients.

In closing Regional Chair Partington stated that it was his pleasure to welcome Mr. Thomas this evening, and that he looked forward to Mr. Thomas providing the issues for engagement on inter-municipal transit that will allow Council to more fully explore the information, options, and opportunities to improve inter-municipal transit in the Niagara Region.

Following the Regional Chair's introduction, it was:

Moved by Councillor Rigby  
Seconded by Councillor Burroughs

That, pursuant to the provisions of Section 2.4 of Procedural By-law 96-2007, the Rules of Procedure be suspended in order to allow for a meeting facilitator for this meeting, and to follow the agenda distributed.

Carried.

### **FACILITATOR AGENDA OVERVIEW**

84. Mr. Jim Thomas thanked Regional Chair Partington for the introduction and advised Council members of the evening's agenda format and expected outcomes. He stated that he would be testing for common ground, leading discussion on tough issues (e.g. funding, governance), highlighting areas of priority and trying to assist in bridging the gap between "How" and "Whether" to commit to Inter-Municipal Transit.

### **REGIONAL INTEGRATED TRANSPORTATION CONTEXT – PUBLIC WORKS**

85. Mr. Ken Brothers, Commissioner Public Works stated that, as mentioned by others earlier, this evening is focused on inter-municipal transit however; the broader Integrated Regional Transportation context has not been forgotten. Inter-municipal transit is a major component of this broader integrated Regional concept, and is therefore the focal point of this evening's discussion.

Mr. Brothers hoped that as a prelude and context of the transit, he could provide Council members with a brief overview of the other elements of Integrated Regional Transportation that may form the basis of some of later discussions during the evening.

Mr. Brothers provided a context of inter-municipal transit in the broader perspective of integrated Regional transportation opportunities and stated that with the background to this evening's facilitated discussion, Regional Council could focus on inter-municipal transit as the hub of an integrated discussion linking transit to the other modes of integrated transportation throughout the Niagara Region.

Mr. Brothers presented an overview of the Backgrounder information report that was circulated, and consolidated those points in to the following final slides:

- Integrated Regional Transportation Opportunities
- Inter-Municipal (IMT) has been a Regional Priority for over 40 years
- IMT has been the subject of various studies
- Niagara Region lags behind other Regions in providing robust IMT
- There are lots of Transit Services & Opportunities

In closing Mr. Brothers stated that in his discussions with many Regional Councillors regarding Regional Transit and other important policy matters, many had suggested that there is inadequate time to properly discuss, explore opportunities, and be engaged in a more roundtable discussion forum on key matters of importance to Regional Council; it was his hope that this session would provide the appropriate forum to advance some thinking, share points of view at the Council level, which staff will listen to and take away to formulate a report for debate at committee and Council.

### **PRESENTATION**

86. Mr. Dennis Fletcher, ENTRA (GENIVAR) Consultants, provided Council members with a presentation respecting the Inter Municipal Transit Work Plan.

Highlights of Mr. Fletcher's presentation slides were, in part, as follows:

- Study Background; what have we done
  - Background Review
  - Regional Travel Demand
  - Stakeholder Consultation
    - Stakeholder Input and Public Survey
  - Building Opportunities from Success
  - Vision Elements
    - Achieving the vision (graphic map)
  - Ridership and Costs
  - Funding Considerations
  - Governance / Decision-making
    - Immediate
    - Short to Medium Term
    - Long-Term

Council members proceeded to discuss the presentation's details and questioned Mr. Fletcher, in part, respecting the following:

- Is a pie graph available showing the percentage breakdown of each sector (students, employees, clients, tourists)?
  - Not currently however; students do make up approximately 80%
- Are “Park n’ Rides” offered in other municipalities?
  - Yes.
- Clarify the York Region “Over-night Success” quote.
  - York Region defined success by ridership; costs have been an issue, this year they were just below double digits
- Were percentages based on “For Fare” box (50%) and (50%) Subsidy?
  - Average fare with amount of ridership not cost recovery target; actually fare needs further research
- Is there a capital reduction with Private Carrier capacity?
  - Possibly, yes.
- Is it safe to assume that if Inter-Municipal Transit is offered to students, they are more likely to stay in that community?
  - Certainly something that could apply.
- Density and Cost Recovery, how did you come up with Revenue?
  - Not based on RC target; conservative in capture rates
- Respecting Migration rates, frequency and density; how do you attract?
  - Start with travel demand
    - How many people can we capture
- Respecting the presentation, did you start with the Vision and then list specific steps? Is that how you developed this Model?
  - Absolutely; identify what is easily implementable
- The Report with respect to the Airport quoted “Regional Component” (base case vs. base level) (number or amount)?
  - Details not within the Study, but personal belief is yes; it provides good local service, some opportunity to connect and everyone has opportunity to get to work, school, Doctors etc.,

### **FACILITATOR – TEST FOR COMMON GROUND**

87. Mr. Thomas thanked Mr. Fletcher for the informative presentation and Council members for the constructive questions and discussion.

Mr. Thomas resumed the floor and posed the following questions to Council members:

- **The Vision;** Do you agree with the consultant's findings around the vision for inter-municipal transit?
- **The Importance;** Do you agree that inter-municipal transit remains a priority for Niagara Region? Do you believe status quo is NOT an option?
- **The Service map;** Do you agree that the ENTRA service map describes a reasonable and supportable approach to achieving the vision?
- **A Regional role;** Does Niagara Region have a role to play in achieving the service concept, and if so, what might that role be?

Council members proceeded to discuss the proceeding four points; comments, statements and questions were, in part, as follows:

- Vision; agree partially, but the fourth bullet needs more detail because it will be travelling further distances therefore the distinction sets up problems in the way in which Regional Council see an enhanced GO service
- Vision; doesn't speak to influencing Growth Plan (Places To Grow, Greenbelt, Grow South), put transportation where you want Growth
- Vision; supported and agree with the consultant's report, does not believe that status quo is an option, agree with service map
- Role; Region needs to step forward with operating shortfall
- Congratulations offered to Transportation Strategy Steering Committee Chair Zimmerman, Vice-Chair Augustyn and committee members for their dedication and hard work on the IMT subject
- Vision; supports but needs interpretation on the size of buses, can Regional Council not utilize 'feeder service' with vans and smaller vehicles
- Role and Region; first step to success is a strong Regional Role, the Vision needs to be the second step
- Authority; needs to be only one, either a Commission or the Region
  - Synergy between municipalities and Region
- We need to "Define what Regional Council wants", "Establish Authority", "Identify how service is to be provided", "How to Fund"

- Supportive of concept however; need to know what Regional Council need to do to accommodate local demand (acknowledge and supplement municipal service)
- Buy in for process but is it feasible to have 2<sup>nd</sup> run utilizing school buses or rail lines
- Vision; agree but a Customer Focused Service needs to be added
- Service Map; key is in the way it comes together
- Role; very important to finalize the Vision first and then identify the Region or Authority role, the Vision will keep us together
- Better to utilize “user pay” system; if not, the taxpayer will go further in to debt
- Provide better service; busses are empty (numerous calls received), have to run every hour, make the service regular (people can't be waiting)
- City and Region 50/50 split; concern that St. Catharines, Welland and Niagara Falls will be affected via bottom line if we decide to run a parallel system, cost is a concern
- Don't push the envelope too far and then realize we can't afford the costs involved
- Vision; agree. It's clear that student transportation is needed, it's difficult to find jobs, Job Bus is successful (Fort Erie to Niagara Falls)
- Vision Map; clearly indicates that GO would be integrated, would like to see this go forward
- Congratulations for progress so far, Niagara 2031 set road map; challenges are determining the Region's Role and Funding
- Need to get a consensus that we have support of the Vision and Service Map, hold consultations with local and Provincial members respecting Growth Plan and Transportation, identify “Region's Role” and see if it can be transitional, first step is to move forward with Inter-Municipal Transit (IMT) and ask for Staff Report

- This is a big issue, Regional Council thinks too small, Council needs to make a decision to have experienced people putting IMT in each municipality; Regional Council needs to grow up if the Region wants to compete
- Vision; in support, with no real opinion on 'who' will operate other than the fact that a system being run by the Private Sector would not work. Private Sector should have a role; but not an operating one.

Mr. Thomas, in an effort to capture the feel of the room thus far, offered the following points respecting the previous statements/observations:

- Vision; for the most part is agreeable, needs some minor tweaking
- Service Concept; fair for Inter-Municipal Transit
- "Devil is in the Detail" (funding and governance)
- 3 municipalities are on side; strong sense of willingness
- Status Quo is not an Option

*Committee of the Whole recessed for dinner at 5:50 p.m.*

*Committee of the Whole reconvened at 6:25 p.m.*

### **UPDATE – GOOGLE TRANSIT ARTICLE**

88. Mr. Joe Cousins, Director Transportation Services responded to Councillor Baty's request for clarification of a recent Google Transit article that ran in the St. Catharines Standard.

Mr. Cousins advised that Mr. Tom Jamieson, Manager, GIS Services, on October 27, 2009, had provided the Transportation Strategy Steering Committee members with a presentation respecting Google Transit Trip Planner.

In short Niagara Region is working with Google to release the Google Transit application in the near future. Google Transit is a web-based transit trip planner mapping application. It integrates transit data to provide complete itineraries using origin and destination points, date and time of travel. Because it is an integral part of Google Maps, people can use place names as the origin or destination instead of addresses. In addition, people can get information on attractions and businesses along the route. Trip planners can also turn on the Street View function to look at the stops before they get off and can compare the trip to one using a car.

### **FOCUSED DISCUSSION OF KEY ISSUES**

89. Mr. Thomas resumed his position as facilitator and advised Council members that during the dinner break he had taken it upon himself to develop a synopsis of what he felt was voiced during the first portion of the evening's discussion; he had done this in an effort to assist in bridging the disconnect.

With that synopsis in mind, Mr. Thomas offered the following as a "possible approach:

- Can you accept that the Status Quo is not an option?
  - No longer "whether", but how, when and how much
- If you were directing further work on this, what instructions / assumptions might be required?
  - Accept the Vision (with a few modifications)
  - Accept the Service Concept Map
  - Start with the funding assumptions - \$1.6M, \$3.1 M
    - Seek offsets – e.g. gas tax, federal programs, social services, private sector
  - Agree in principle on an equitable contribution formula
    - Levy (base) plus targeted allocation
  - Governance to be done by a sub-committee or other "say for pay" group

Council members proceeded to discuss the proceeding points; comments, statements and questions were, in part, as follows:

- Will this be a Regional Levy on all 12 municipalities or only those who have service?
  - Council needs to start identifying ways to gather Options
- Feel as though Regional Council was being 'corralled' into consensus?
  - Not at all, the facilitator was merely trying to get a sense of comfort level from members around the room
- How will this play out for the smaller municipalities? The Equitable Contribution Formula; how would this work for the rural/smaller municipalities?
  - You would have to ensure that the Staff Report and any Models/Options suggested included 'value' for as many areas as possible
- Concern that this service comes at a huge price
- The Equitable Contribution Formula would have Regional value/benefit, local benefit (to the triangle service). Lots of Regional projects benefit one municipality more than another

- A stronger Region strengthens municipalities
  - The end result will justify the means
  - Need to have faith
  - Need to establish 'how' (links, work with the 3 municipalities, incorporate feeder lines, incorporate smaller rural areas)
- Trust needs to be established
  - Improving Inter-Municipal Transit is important; how does Regional Council get there?
    - Formulate a staged Work plan
    - Show costs, stages
    - Have discussion with lower tier
    - Governance; get to Policy decision first
    - Establish realistic way to deliver service
    - Create a "Plan to Implement"
      - 3 year steps
        - Establish what each stage will cost
        - Measure cost and outcome
- Have staff prepare to go to Steering or Standing Committee with something to discuss
  - Someone needs to formulate a proposal and the debate needs to be had
  - Public endorsement and consultation needs to be addressed
- Is the Region charging Wainfleet for Water Service treatment? It's the same thing for transportation; the "have not" will not want to pay for:
  - Enhancing the triangle
  - Expanding the triangle
- Can Regional Council accept that the Status quo is not an option; move forward now, identify what is an Option, ask the questions "When", "Where", "How much"? But governance has been identified in the Immediate, Short and Long-term slides

Mr. Thomas interceded at this point to ask Council members these questions:

- What is the minimum/maximum specifications that Regional Council can give to someone so that a Model can be put together; Staff need more than "Status Quo is not an Option"
- Give someone a Vision
- Give someone the Service map
- Give someone some guidance respecting Funding and Governance

Council members continued to discuss key issues; comments, statements and questions were, in part, as follows:

- Three things need to happen to improve the Triangle service
  - More frequency
  - Provide service later in the evening
  - Consider weekend service
- Better service is going to cost more money
- Piece that is missing is the expectation that staff glean consensus with all three transit Managers
- Regional Council should make decisions and create policy; not ask Staff to do it
- It's important to realize that Regional Council is not just supporting the economy and growth; there are some savings to be seen through Social Services as a result of an enhanced Inter-Municipal Transit
  - Commissioner Hutchings stated that Ontario Works services 14,000 people (6,000 of which are children)
  - 1.8 million is spent on transit
  - In Community sessions with Poverty and Prosperity the number one issue identified is affordable housing; but a very close second is Inter-Municipal Transit
    - Clients can't afford cars or insurance
    - Huge Regional staff requirement to arrange for transportation
  - Approximate savings that could possibly be identified; \$5-600,000.00 savings in transportation/travel costs
- Years ago it was established that status quo was not an option:
  - Welland, St. Catharines, Niagara Falls; not coming forward
- Third bullet respecting Specialized Services; need to know more
- Equitable Contribution Formula (ECF); what does this mean to Regional and City taxes, for the same service
- Transportation Plan; felt that Regional Council was corralled into accepting Airport services, stop "piecemeal"
- Need to see a Report with numbers (e.g. savings etc.,) respecting Social Services, Niagara Health Systems and Tourism
- Local transportation (triangle service) consideration will only improve Status Quo
  - Governance; the Region taking over transit will only be creating a 4<sup>th</sup> authority
  - The larger regions are playing ball, they are contributing Transit Authorities and not via piecemeal; the Regional Council needs to decide whether the Region is ready for Inter-Municipal Transit (economy, growth, density) or not, and if we're not that's okay, but Regional Council needs to decide

- Where do we see governance in 10 years
- Can acknowledge the benefit and need; maybe Regional Council is thinking too small scale, if Regional Council is going to do it, let's do it
- Light rail is the answer
- In depth numbers, details and components have to be reported before any decisions can be made
- Suggestion to change ECF to "Fair Contribution Formula"
- Regional Council needs to think about people coming in to Niagara
  - How does Regional Council take advantage of the entire Region
  - Send staff away with options on 'how'
  - 12 municipalities are one Region
  - Step outside of the box
  - Grow up
- Two words are the main focus, "Integrated" and "Fairness"
- Elephants in the room are funding and governance; both need to address fairness
- More liberty: Niagara one voice; establish a common vision for IMT

Mr. Thomas interceded to assist in breaking the circular discussion by offering the following suggestions:

- In his original "possible approach" slide; wouldn't change the first three bullets
- Moving forward; how does Regional Council build principles in going forward?
  - Integrated approach with outcome
  - Fair is better than equitable
  - Costs need to be known before you sign on the dotted line
  - Next Council:
    - Give some thought to the motion, "It's not whether, but how?"
      - Not just the three municipalities; it's a Regional solution
      - Funding numbers are approximate, they are for start-up, now start giving some thought to figuring out how to distribute it fairly

Council members, in closing, offered the following remarks:

- Can recognize that a decision can't be made today however; Staff have to start looking at numbers, working with Transit Managers and Regional Council needs to request that a Staff Report be brought forward
- Governance; it isn't going to happen right away
- Construct a Working Group with municipalities, Region staff and Transit Managers
  - Find solutions
  - Let go? Run it?
- Direct the Commissioner of Public Works to move forward with a Report that shows the different ways to proceed, design a staged approach, enhance the system, show different options/models that open the service up, show options for Management (e.g. how, when, how much)

Mr. Thomas, in closing, thanked Council members for the level of discussion and stated that it was beneficial and proved that the current model is not right. He further stated that Council members had managed to encourage staff to develop new Options and that he felt Regional Council was very close to breaking out of the impasse.

#### **CLOSING REMARKS – CHAIRMAN PARTINGTON**

90. Regional Chair Partington, on behalf of Council members, thanked Mr. Thomas for an outstanding job and the citizens in attendance for showing their support and interest in Inter-Municipal Transit. He stated that this evening had been worthwhile and the information gathered respecting moving forward would prove to be valuable.

Regional Chair Partington further stated that this year, the year of our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a Region, should be the year that Regional Council puts in place an enhanced Inter-Municipal System that will service our citizens of Niagara for the next 40 years.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The Committee of the Whole meeting adjourned at 7:45 p.m.

Peter Partington  
Regional Chair

Janet Pilon  
Deputy Regional Clerk

Lisa McManus  
Legislative Assistant