APPENDIX D– RESPONSE TO COMMENTS: PHASE 2, STEP 1

As part of the Rapid Transit Environmental Assessment (RT EA), Phase 2, Step 1: Screening of Technologies/Route Designs, the public was asked to provide input on the recommended short list of BRT & LRT operating on a mix of on/off road route design. In all, 104 public input packages, e-mails, letters and faxes were received. Below is a summary of the key themes brought forward by the public during the public consultation phase and the related staff responses.

Preferences for LRT or BRT

Overall, the majority of respondents indicated support for the recommended shortlist. However, several individuals took the opportunity to indicate a preference for one of the technologies listed in the shortlist. The reasons mentioned in support of LRT included; clean, non-obtrusive, fast, environmentally friendly, supports/more influence on reurbanization, gets vehicles off the streets (as opposed to buses), distinguish the community, enhanced rider experience, permanent, and visible. The reasons mentioned for support of BRT included; buses already here, flexibility, less costly, first phase of implementation, easiest to implement.

Staff Response:

If Council approves the shortlist of recommended technologies and route designs, the Region will proceed with Phase 2, Step 2 of the RT EA . This step will allow for a more in-depth evaluation of BRT and LRT by combining alternative route designs/technologies with specific route location alternatives for each of the seven sections of the study area. Station locations will also be identified in this process.

These alternatives will then be ranked based on 21 criteria identified in the RT EA Terms of Reference including: ridership potential, system reliability/speed, system performance, property requirements, travel time competitiveness with auto, roadway network demand, ability to serve residential uses, ability to serve institutional uses, vibration, noise, contribution to cultural environment, contribution to recreational environment, contribution to public health, contribution to built health, ecological impact, water quality, air quality, mineral aggregate resources, ability to serve concentration of employment, ability to serve retailers, and cost. The result will be a series of ranked alternatives for each of the seven sections.

Once step 2 is complete, the final technology and route design will be determined by Phase 2, Step 3, where the ranked alternatives in each section of the study area will be evaluated overall and a preferred system identified to serve the entire study area.

Agree with Shortlist with addition of one or more technologies

Some individuals agreed with the recommended shortlist, but thought that several of the more advanced technologies should have been included. Some felt that certain technologies had been evaluated using incorrect information or in a biased manner.

Staff Response:
Each of the 10 technologies was evaluated in the same manner, using three criteria as outlined in the Terms of Reference. These three criteria were assessed using 13 measures that were developed based on input from the community about the characteristics of a rapid transit system most important to them. The information for each technology used in the assessment process was researched by the Region's expert consulting team and was taken from various examples of other systems constructed elsewhere and from their experience in planning, designing and construction transit systems employing various technologies. The purpose of Phase 2, Step 1 was to short list technologies and route designs to be further evaluated in Phase 2, Step 2.

Technologies and route design alternatives that did not meet one or more of the three evaluation criteria are not expected to meet the future needs of our community or the objectives of the Regional Growth Management Strategy specifically related to municipal urban design, intensification and reurbanization objectives and the Province's Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, and thus are excluded from the short list.

Disagreed with Recommended Shortlist

Some individuals disagreed with the recommended shortlist, stating that several of the more advanced technologies should have been included, or that the evaluation was flawed or biased. One individual stated that that they did not agree with the Rapid Transit project overall, unless provincial or federal funding is provided for both initial capital and future operating costs. It was also suggested that the existing conventional transit system be improved rather than undertaking the Rapid Transit Initiative.

Staff Response:
Each of the 10 technologies was evaluated in the same manner, using three criteria as outlined in the Terms of Reference. One of the criterion assessed whether there are proven applications of the technology and route design in similar conditions, including operations in climates to Ontario. These three criteria were assessed using 13 measures that were developed based on input from the community about the characteristics of a rapid transit system most important to them.

Further, in Phase 1, the Region examined the Rapid Transit Initiative in comparison to several other strategies to meet the capacity needs of the future population of Waterloo Region, which is expected to grow to 729,000 people by 2031. These other strategies included a baseline (do nothing) approach, improving and expanding roads, and improving conventional transit.

The Phase 1 evaluation criteria address the goals of the RGMS as approved by Regional Council in 2003. These goals are: enhancing the environment, building vibrant urban places, providing greater transportation choice, protecting the countryside, fostering a strong economy, and ensuring overall coordination and cooperation.

On the basis of evaluating each transportation strategy in considering the thirteen

criteria, it was concluded that the Rapid Transit Initiative be selected as the preferred transportation strategy.

On July 12, 2006 Regional Council unanimously approved the Rapid Transit Initiative as the preferred solution for Waterloo Region as it met the evaluation criteria better than any of the other transportation solutions that were considered. Thus, the Environmental Assessment proceeded to Phase 2.

Ability of Rapid Transit to Promote Reurbanization:

Several individuals stressed the need to ensure that the Rapid Transit system be located in the most appropriate location in order to encourage reurbanization as a means of helping to preserve the environment. Some members of the public stressed the important of development being located in appropriate locations, with sensitivity to issues such as noise and heritage conservation.

Staff Response:

This issue will be studied in more depth in Phase 2, Steps 2 and 3 of the Rapid Transit Environmental Assessment to determine the long-term benefits and impacts of the preferred transportation system. Reurbanization potential is a key consideration when looking at potential station areas as are other transportation, socio/cultural, environmental and economic factors. This is reflected in the 21 criteria that will be used to rank the various reasonable route and technology alternatives in Phase 2, Step 2 as outlined in the RT EA Terms of Reference.

The experiences of other communities that have implemented rapid transit demonstrate that rapid transit can stimulate the economy over the long-term, promoting higher densities and creating more opportunities for mixed-use development featuring a wide range and variety of business uses, along rapid transit routes and around stations. The Region will continue to focus efforts to ensure that reurbanization and land use is connected to and integrated with the rapid transit initiative.

Additional issues related to the design of the project will also be addressed in Phase 3, the Assessment of the Preliminary Design of the Undertaking. The Region will consider a full range of environmental issues affecting the design of the rapid transit system.

Ability to Service Suburban Populations/ Feeder Routes & Conventional Transit:

Some members of the public questioned whether Rapid Transit would adequately serve the entire Region as it would be concentrated in the Central Transit Corridor. They also noted that the feeder routes and the redesign and improvement of conventional transit is important to ensure better transit service for the Region overall.

Staff Response:

The Rapid Transit Initiative features rapid transit in the Central Transit Corridor as well as improved conventional transit in other areas of the Region to provide feeder

routes that will link to rapid transit stations and other commuter services, in order to create an integrated transportation system.

Studies in other communities with rapid transit demonstrate that it benefits everyone, even those who don't use transit. It can be an important tool for managing land use and future growth. In addition, it helps to reduce the increase in congestion on the roads and negative impacts on air quality, decreases urban sprawl, and provides significant opportunities to encourage and stimulate economic development in urban areas.

Ability of Rapid Transit to Attract New Riders:

Some individual respondents noted that the challenge would be to attract the level of ridership needed to make the system economically feasible, or attract drivers away from single-occupant vehicles in order to have a positive impact on road congestion. To this effect, some people also mentioned that it will be important for the new Rapid Transit system to have a speed advantage over car travel and that transfers be minimized.

Staff Response:

Ridership projections will be generated in Phase 2, Step 2 in order to evaluate potential route and technology alternatives. Travel time competitiveness with auto will also be addressed.

The RT Initiative also includes the development of policies and programs that will foster ridership growth. These include transportation demand management programs and incentives to encourage other modes of travel (employee transit pass incentive programs, integrated transit planning to improve transportation services that connect at rapid transit stations), as well as urban design initiatives around RT Stations that support transit users and other modes (sidewalks, cycling lanes, mixed used development around stations).

Suggested Route & Station Locations

Several comments were made related to suggested route and station locations and service to other destinations. It was suggested that existing rights of way be used, connections to destinations such as the Sunrise Centre, St. Jacobs, the Waterloo Regional Airport, Elmira and artistic centres. There were also several preferences indicated for actual routes, and concern about on road routes (including the widths of certain roads), and waterway crossings.

Staff Response:

Destinations outside of the Rapid Transit EA Study Area will be addressed in Phase 2, Step 2 – Rapid Transit Route Alternatives – in examining alternative modes to serve these areas. Such modes would include: feeder bus, park and ride, and kiss and ride to provide connections between major destinations and the Rapid Transit line.

Pedestrian/Cycling Facilities

Several members of the public noted the need to prioritize pedestrian and cycling facilities in conjunction with the new rapid transit system. Issues such as how vehicle and pedestrian traffic will be managed at intersections, diagonal pedestrian crossings, and patron safety at Waterloo Park were also mentioned.

Staff Response:
In Phase 3 of the Rapid Transit EA, impacts of the rapid transit line will be examined on road traffic, intersection operation, pedestrian crossing and trails, and in particular as relate to the rapid transit stations.

Connections to Toronto
Connections to Toronto were a common theme identified in the public input. It was noted that much of the congestion near the 401 is related to people trying to get to Toronto. Thus it was suggested that the Rapid Transit system include a connection at the 401 and that a GO Transit connection would also be helpful.

Staff Response:
While a new GO connection to Toronto is beyond the scope of the RT EA, providing for multi-modal connections as a part of an integrated transportation system is a key consideration. Potential station locations within the EA Study Area will be ranked in Phase 2, Step 2. Given the RT EA Study Area includes a portion of the 401 between Cambridge and Kitchener, this issue will be considered further as the EA progresses.

Cost:
The cost of the Rapid Transit Initiative was a point of discussion at the Public Consultation Centres and was mentioned in several individual responses. In addition, questions were asked about the availability of Federal and Provincial funding and the possible impact on the local tax rate. While some wanted no tax increases, others indicated that they would have no problem with higher taxes to support the Rapid Transit initiative. Some suggested that the Regional debt be paid before proceeding with the initiative.

Staff Response:
The final costs for rapid transit in Waterloo Region will depend on the rapid transit technology, route and station locations that are chosen in Phase 2 of the Environmental Assessment process. More detailed cost estimates will be provided in Phase 3.

The Federal and Provincial governments provided 50 per cent of the funding to complete the Growth Management Strategy and Transit Initiative Technical Studies and the Environmental Assessment, and remain potential funding partners for the project. Rapid Transit is a significant part of the Province's Places to Grow Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. The Plan identifies the need for Rapid Transit in Waterloo Region, and recommends that priority funding be given to infrastructure projects that support an integrated regional transportation network for the movement of people and goods throughout the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

Comments related to the EA Process

Several comments related to the RT EA Process were made. It was suggested that presentations at the malls, universities, high schools and bus terminals be made. It was also suggested that the process involve more students and seniors and further that all citizens in the region should be involved, not just those in the study area. Some people felt that the process was moving too slowly, and that the Rapid Transit System is needed as soon as possible.

Staff Response:

Pubic Consultation for the RT EA is an ongoing and essential part of the process. Efforts are being made to reach a wide cross section of the population, through an ongoing newsletter delivered to every household across the Region in advance of key consultation opportunities, on the Region's website, through news media, newspaper ads, e-mail updates and written correspondence as well as individual presentations and mall display opportunities. As part of the public consultation, the Region created the Regional Growth Management Strategy/Rapid Transit Initiative Public Advisory Committee which includes members of the public from the three cities, professionals in the fields of business, health, environment, education, development, social services, as well as student representatives from the local post-secondary institutions.

It is also necessary that the EA process be followed as outlined in the Terms of Reference approved by the Ministry of Environment. While timeliness of the project is a key priority, this must be balanced with the need to follow due process and ensure that public consultation is not rushed.

Other Suggestions

There were several suggestions provided by the public in terms of possible methods of operation, parking, financing, and environmental considerations. Researching other transportation systems around the world, including those operated privately was mentioned. The need for incentives and deterrents to core traffic, as well as increased parking costs was also a theme.

Staff Response:

As the Rapid Transit Initiative evolves, a number of additional studies, projects and initiatives will be undertaken to ensure that a comprehensive package of policies and programs is delivered along with a new rapid transit system.

Other financial incentives and transportation demand management practices will also be investigated as planning for the implementation of the rapid transit initiative continues.