



REGION OF WATERLOO

PLANNING, HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES
Transportation Planning

TO: Chair Jim Wideman and Members of the Planning & Works Committee

DATE: August 22, 2006 **FILE CODE:**

SUBJECT: RAPID TRANSIT INITIATIVE – ENVIROMENTAL ASSESSMENT PHASE TWO, PUBLIC INFORMATION SESSION AND WORKSHOP

RECOMMENDATION:

For information

SUMMARY:

The Region of Waterloo is currently undertaking an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the implementation of rapid transit along the Central Transit Corridor, which extends from Cambridge through Kitchener to Waterloo. The three-phase EA process is being carried out based on Terms of Reference prepared specifically for this project, approved by the Minister of Environment in July 2005.

In January 2006, Phase 1 of the Rapid Transit EA was initiated in order to determine a preferred transportation strategy for Waterloo Region out of four possible alternatives. These included: the Rapid Transit Initiative, Baseline, Improved Conventional Transit and Road Improvement/Expansion.

After a thorough evaluation and public consultation, the Draft Phase 1 Report identified the Rapid Transit Initiative as the preferred transportation strategy as it best met the goals of the Regional Growth Management Strategy, adopted by Regional Council in 2003. This report was later unanimously approved by Regional Council on July 12, 2006, confirming the Rapid Transit Initiative as the preferred transportation strategy for Waterloo Region.

With this milestone, staff has initiated the detailed work program for Phase 2, which involves the assessment of alternative methods of carrying out the Rapid Transit Initiative.

In order to engage the public in Phase 2 of the EA, the Region will utilize several strategies to increase awareness and participation, as well as to solicit feedback that will be used by the Consultant Team throughout the technical evaluation. These strategies complement the formal Public Consultation framework outlined in the Terms of Reference and include:

- Rapid Transit Newsletter
- Public Information Session and Workshop (September 21, 2006)
- Public Information Display Opportunities (Fall 2006)
- Rapid Transit Website
- Rapid Transit Infoline

REPORT:

On May 15, 2004, the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario and the Region of Waterloo jointly announced funding of up to \$2.5 million to complete the Regional Growth Management and Transit Initiative Technical Studies and an Individual Environmental Assessment (EA) for the development of rapid transit in the Central Transit Corridor. The EA process is being carried out based on Terms of Reference prepared specifically for this project, which were approved

by the Minister of Environment in July 2005. The EA will fulfill the requirements of the Ontario Environmental Assessment Act (OEAA) as well as the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act (CEAA).

The EA study is being implemented as a three-phase process and encompasses the entire Central Transit Corridor through the urban cores of Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo. The three phases include:

Phase 1: Assessment of the Rapid Transit Initiative and alternative transportation strategies

Phase 2: Assessment of alternative methods (technology, route and station locations) of carrying out the preferred strategy

Phase 3: Assessment of the preliminary design of the strategy and the preferred method for implementation

Phase 1, which began in January 2006, examined rapid transit and three alternative transportation strategies (baseline, road improvement/expansion and improved conventional transit) in order to evaluate and select a preferred transportation strategy. The assessment of the various scenarios using 15 criteria determined by the Terms of Reference, was summarized in report P-06-065, dated June 6, 2006.

On July 12, 2006, Regional Council unanimously approved the results of Phase 1 identifying the Rapid Transit Initiative as the preferred transportation strategy for Waterloo Region. With this milestone, staff has initiated the detailed work program for Phase 2, which involves the assessment of alternative methods of carrying out the Rapid Transit Initiative.

Next Steps: Phase 2

Phase 2 initiates the process of describing, evaluating, ranking and selecting the preferred Rapid Transit alternative that will be used to carry out the undertaking. This will be achieved by combining a specific Rapid Transit technology with a specific route and station locations within the study area.

The Terms of Reference outlines three steps in Phase 2. These include:

Step 1: Screening of Route Design & Associated Technologies

- Using pass/fail criteria, a short list of rapid transit route design and technologies will be determined.

Step 2: Development and Ranking of Reasonable Route Section & Technology Alternatives

- Short-listed technologies (which passed the screening test in Step 1) will be combined with specific route and associated station location alternatives, creating a list of reasonable alternative rapid transit options for each of the seven sections of the entire EA study area;
- Each of the rapid transit alternatives for the seven sections will be evaluated and ranked within their respective sub-area.

Step 3: Evaluation of Reasonable Rapid Transit System Alternative to Identify a Preferred System

- Combinations of the routes for the seven sections that create reasonable system alternatives will be identified;
- The most reasonable system alternatives will be evaluated to identify a preferred system (technologies, routes and station locations) which covers the entire study area.

Public Awareness and Participation

As part of the initiation of Phase 2 of the Rapid Transit EA, several strategies will be used to disseminate relevant information, engage citizens and receive feedback from community stakeholders before detailed evaluation is undertaken. These strategies complement the Public Consultation framework outlined in the Terms of Reference. The following is a brief summary of upcoming initiatives:

Connecting to the Future: Rapid Transit News

To introduce the commencement of Phase 2 more broadly to the public, a newsletter entitled "Connecting to the Future: Rapid Transit News" will be distributed to every household in the Region in early September. The newsletter will provide information on the results of Phase 1, the upcoming Phase 2 EA process (including the decisions that will be made related to technologies and route/station locations), and more specifically the ways in which the public can become actively involved. Future newsletters will be distributed at regular intervals in advance of Public Consultation Centres as a means of communicating findings and soliciting feedback.

Public Information Session and Workshop - September 21, 2006

In preparation for the Phase 2 analysis that will be completed by the Consultant Team, a Public Information Session and Workshop will be held on September 21, 2006 at St. Andrew's Church, 54 Queen St. N., Kitchener, from 6-9 p.m. Invitations to attend the working session will be included in the region-wide newsletter, with those interested in attending asked to RSVP. Participants will be organized into smaller working groups and will be asked to provide their input on a variety of issues, ranging from technology preferences to where members of the community feel route and station locations could best be situated. Materials providing the context for the working session are included in Appendix A. The feedback provided will be collected for use by the Consultant Team as they begin the analysis of technologies required for Phase 2: Step 1. It will also be used in the subsequent analysis of possible route and station locations in Step 2.

Public Information and Display Opportunities

The Region has arranged for several display opportunities, including Conestoga Mall, Fairview Park Mall and the Cambridge Centre. These displays will feature information regarding the Rapid Transit Initiative and the EA, focusing on the process and how the public can become involved. Regional staff will be on hand to answer questions and discuss the project. These display opportunities will provide an additional forum to promote upcoming events.

Rapid Transit Website

In addition to the newsletter and September working session, the Region will continue to use the Rapid Transit Website at www.region.waterloo.on.ca/transitea as a means of providing up-to-date information on the status of the EA. Furthermore, a feature allowing the public to submit comments directly through the website has been added to allow additional opportunities for community participation.

Rapid Transit Infoline

In order to ensure that all members of the public can conveniently obtain information regarding the Rapid Transit EA, a "Rapid Transit Infoline" has been created. This telephone line will provide direct access to Regional staff who can answer questions, comments or concerns in addition to a recorded message that will also be used to provide information to callers. Infoline: 519-575-4757 Ext. 3242.

Phase 2 - Steps 1 and 2 Work Plan

After public feedback from the Public Information Session and Workshop has been obtained by the Consultant Team, it is expected that their analysis required to complete Step 1 (The Screening of Route Design & Associated Technologies) will be undertaken during the Fall of 2006. Preliminary

results of Step 1 will be presented at Facilitated Stakeholder Discussions and a Public Consultation Centre (PCC) in late 2006 / early 2007. Comments received through these channels will be used to finalize the results of Step 1 (the shortlist of route design and technologies), which will then be presented to Council in early 2007 for consideration.

Following the results of Step 1, the Consultant Team will perform the technical analysis required in Step 2 to combine the short-listed technologies with specific route and associated station location options, creating a list of reasonable alternative rapid transit options for each of the seven sections of the EA study area. Following this, each of the alternative rapid transit options will be evaluated and ranked. It is expected that Facilitated Stakeholder Discussions along with a Public Consultation Centre will be held in early spring 2007 in order to receive comments regarding the ranking of station and route locations for the short-listed technologies in each of the seven sections. The results of this process will then be presented to Council for consideration later in the spring of 2007.

Phase 2 - Step 3 Preliminary Work Plan

Step 3 involves the combination of all seven section routes that create reasonable rapid transit system alternatives. The most reasonable alternatives will then be evaluated in order to identify a preferred system which covers the entire route in the EA study area. Technical work will take place throughout the summer of 2007, with Facilitated Stakeholder Discussions and a Public Consultation Centre in the fall of 2007. Following public input, the results of Steps 1, 2 and 3 will be compiled into the Draft Phase 2 EA Report to be presented to Regional Council for consideration.

CORPORATE STRATEGIC PLAN:

The RT Environmental Assessment supports Focus Area 1: Manage Regional Growth to Enhance Quality of Life; Focus Area 3: Protect and Enhance the Environment; and Focus Area 4: Ensure High Quality Transportation System.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The Rapid Transit EA study will be cost shared by the Region and Province with 50% of the cost to be funded by the Province. The Region's share is funded through an approved budget allocation for this initiative in Planning, Housing and Community Services.

OTHER DEPARTMENT CONSULTATIONS/CONCURRENCE:

Members of the Rapid Transit Project Team who have approved the EA Work Plan represent various Regional Departments including Corporate Resources, Finance, Transportation and Environmental Services, and Legal Services.

ATTACHMENTS:

Appendix A - Rapid Transit Environmental Assessment – Phase 2, Public Consultation Centre Information Package

PREPARED BY: *Yanick Cyr*, Project Director, Rapid Transit Initiative

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