



REGION OF WATERLOO

**PLANNING, HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES
Transportation Planning**

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

DATE: January 27, 2009

FILE CODE: D28-50

SUBJECT: PILOT TRANSIT SERVICE TO ELMIRA

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the Regional Municipality of Waterloo approve pilot transit service to Elmira, effective Tuesday April 6, 2009, as described in Report P-09-009, dated January 27, 2009.

SUMMARY:

This report details the proposed pilot transit service to Elmira which would begin operation on April 6, 2009 on a one-year trial period. The proposed pilot service would connect Elmira with the Conestoga Mall transit terminal, including stops in the St. Jacobs' core, at the St. Jacobs Farmer's Market/Outlet Mall and the new Wal-Mart Centre (Appendix 3).

The provision of a pilot transit service to Elmira was an initiative recommended by the Grand River Transit (GRT) Business Plan 2008 – 2010, approved by Regional Council on May 21, 2008. Elmira was selected for the pilot service because it has the largest population size of the rural township centres and therefore, the greatest ridership potential. Results from a survey of Elmira households also indicated strong support for the pilot transit service. In addition, many of the 170 residents who attended a public consultation centre in October 2008, indicated support for and willingness to use the pilot transit service. The experience with the Elmira pilot service would assist with the planning of future transit services to other rural settlement areas (should Regional Council approve such expansions).

Three route alternatives were developed for the pilot service and evaluated based on a number of factors including service coverage, travel time and potential destinations. The recommended routing was selected because it can provide a 30 minute frequency of service during peak periods and therefore maximizes connections with other routes at Conestoga Mall. This service integration minimizes travel times to major destinations such as the universities and the core areas of Waterloo and Kitchener.

REPORT:

This report details the proposed pilot transit service to Elmira which is planned to begin operation on April 6, 2009, and is being funded through Regional Council's approved 2009 budget. Elmira was selected for the pilot service because it has the largest population size of the rural township centres and therefore the greatest ridership potential. The experience with the Elmira pilot service will assist with the planning of future transit services to other rural settlement areas.

The provision of a pilot transit service to Elmira was an initiative recommended by the Grand River Transit (GRT) Business Plan 2008 – 2010, approved by Regional Council on May 21, 2008 (P-08-054). The extension of transit service to rural township centres provides the opportunity for rural

residents to access employment, education and services within the urban area by means other than auto. Similarly, residents in the urban area would have greater access by transit to destinations in rural areas.

During the development of the GRT Business Plan 2008 – 2010, a survey was distributed to households in Elmira in 2007 to determine demographic and travel characteristics, and to gauge residents' interest in a public transit service. Approximately 91% of survey respondents indicated support for a pilot public transit service

Transit Planning Process

In developing the pilot transit service to Elmira, staff conducted a thorough review of the existing service (Route 21 St. Jacobs), consulted internally with GRT staff and a review of customer feedback. Based on this review, it was determined that the pilot service should connect Elmira with the Conestoga Mall transit terminal, including stops in the St. Jacobs' core and at the St. Jacobs Farmer's Market/Outlet Mall.

Route Alternatives

Three route alternatives for the pilot service to Elmira were developed. All of the alternatives would travel between the Conestoga Mall Transit Terminal and Elmira using King Street, Farmer's Market Road, Weber Street, King Street, Sawmill Road, and Arthur Street (Hwy 86). (see Figure 1)

The three route alternatives differ in how they circulate within the town of Elmira as described below and illustrated by Figure 2:

Option A – Arthur Street S., First Street, Snyder Avenue, Church Street, and then back to Arthur Street. S.

Option B – Arthur Street S., Oriole Pkwy., Flamingo Drive, First Street, Barnswallow Drive, Church Street, and then back to Arthur Street S.

Option C – Arthur Street S., Church Street, Snyder Avenue, First Street, Meadowlark Drive, Oriole Pkwy., Flamingo Drive, First Street, Barnswallow Drive, Church Street, and then back to Arthur Street. S.

Public Consultation

The three route alternatives for the pilot service were presented at a Public Consultation Centre (PCC) held at the Elmira Public Library on October 22nd 2008. The PCC was very well attended with approximately 170 persons at the meeting. More than 200 people have contacted GRT via the public consultation centre, on the phone or the internet, to provide feedback on the proposed pilot service. A summary of all public feedback from the PCC is included in Appendix 1, including means of public notification.

Some of the key feedback from the public is noted below:

- Most are supportive of the pilot transit service, and many intend to use the service
- Strong preference for the route to stop in St. Jacob's and at the Farmers Market/Outlet Mall
- Hours and days of operation should meet the travel needs of commuters, students, shoppers and individuals traveling for personal services.
- Options B and C were preferred because they provide increased service coverage (implications on scheduling/connections at Conestoga Mall were determined following the PCC)

Evaluation of Alternative Routings

The three route alternatives were evaluated based on a number of factors including service coverage, travel time and potential destinations. The advantages and disadvantages of each route alternative are detailed in Appendix 2 and summarized below:

Option A – is the shortest route and therefore a 30 minute frequency of service can be provided during weekday peak periods. A 30 minute frequency maximizes connections with other routes at Conestoga Mall including Route 7 MAINLINE and iXpress. Option A provides less service coverage within the town of Elmira requiring some residents to walk longer distances to a bus stop.

Option B – provides better service coverage but the large one-way loop is inconvenient for in town travel. The route length results in a 40 minute service frequency and therefore less connections with other routes at the Conestoga Mall transit terminal.

Option C – provides better service coverage and is more convenient for in town travel than Options A or C. Similar to Option B, its route length results in a 40 minute service frequency and therefore fewer connections with other routes at the Conestoga Mall transit terminal.

Recommended Routing

Based on the above noted route considerations, route Option A is being recommended as the preferred alternative. The main reasons for selecting Option A is that is it highly desirable to maintain a 30 minute frequency on the route to allow for an increased number of connections with other routes at the Conestoga Mall Transit Terminal. Also, maintaining this frequency will be easier for customers to understand and will provide more frequent trips to the St. Jacobs Farmers Market on market days.

While the overall coverage of Option C is better, the reduction in service frequency required to complete this longer route would result in fewer timed connections at Conestoga Mall which can significantly increase trip times. The final schedule analysis was completed following the PCC and it was concluded that the connections at Conestoga Mall were more critical than in town travel. Therefore, Option A is being recommended. This information was developed following the PCC and may have led to the preference for Options B and C. People who have participated in the process and have been asked to be kept informed of this project have been notified about the recommendation.

Level of Service

It is proposed that the pilot service operate Monday to Saturday with 2 buses deployed during weekday peak periods and Saturdays and 1 bus during the midday on weekdays. Weekday frequency would be 30 minutes during the peak periods and 60 minutes in the midday. The hours of operation would be approximately 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on weekdays and 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Saturdays. Service frequency on Saturday would be every 40 minutes.

The proposed pilot service would replace the existing Route 21 St. JACOBS which operates Thursdays and Saturdays only, from approximately 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., serving only St. Jacobs and the market area.

It is proposed to initially operate the rural pilot service with GRT buses from the existing fleet. If the proposed pilot service is successful, it would be recommended for ongoing operation including the acquisition of the necessary additional buses.

Monitoring and Next Steps

Following implementation of the pilot transit service to Elmira, staff will monitor the route in terms of ridership, financial performance and operational reliability. Based on the operating experience of new service and customer feedback, staff may refine the pilot service in terms of route, service frequency and/or hours of operation. Based on the performance of the pilot service during the trial period, staff will recommend either the service be continued, modified or discontinued.

This pilot service represents the initial phase of a rural transit service strategy, which will determine servicing options and priorities for all of the township urban areas in the Region. Following the implementation of this pilot project, the service will be reviewed and the potential to expand similar services to other township urban areas within the region, such as Baden and New Hamburg, Breslau and the Region of Waterloo International Airport, Wellesley and Ayr, will be explored. Ultimately, Regional Council approval would be required for any such expansions.

Area Municipal Consultation/Coordination

Township of Woolwich staff and Mayor Strauss are on the project team and are supportive of the recommended routing and level of service.

Regional staff is also working with Area Municipal staff to identify locations for bus stops on the proposed new route and to identify where pedestrian improvements would complement this new transit service.

CORPORATE STRATEGIC PLAN:

The Pilot Transit Service to Elmira supports the implementation of Council's Strategic Focus, identified under Focus Area 2: Growth Management: Manage and Shape Growth to Ensure a Livable, Healthy, Thriving and Sustainable Waterloo Region. The plan will aid with Strategic Objective 2.3 to enhance, develop, promote and integrate sustainable and active forms of transportation (public transit, cycling and walking).

This new service also supports Focus Area 5: Infrastructure: Provide High Quality Infrastructure and Asset Management to Meet Current Needs and Future Growth.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Based on an April 2009 start date, the estimated net (one-time) operating costs for the rural service pilot are \$240,000 in 2009, as approved during the 2009 budget process. The annualized costs (if the service was made permanent) would be \$320,000. These costs include the addition of midday and Saturday service.

The pilot service to Elmira will require an additional 3 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) employees and two additional buses. Initially, the pilot service will be by buses from the existing GRT fleet. If the service continues beyond 2010, expansion buses will be required to provide this service.

These operating costs include the re-allocation of costs for the existing Thursday and Saturday Route 21 service, which is being replaced by the new pilot service to Elmira.

It is proposed to fund the net operating costs for 2009 of the Elmira pilot service from the GRT

capital reserve fund.

OTHER DEPARTMENT CONSULTATIONS/CONCURRENCE:

Staff from Planning, Housing and Community Services and Transportation and Environmental Services work together to develop transit service expansion plans.

ATTACHMENTS:

Appendix 1 - Summary of public feedback to service proposals

Appendix 2 - Advantages and Disadvantages of route options

Appendix 3 - Proposed Route

Appendix 4 - Route Alternatives

PREPARED BY: *Neil Malcolm*, Principal Planner (Transit)

APPROVED BY: *Rob Horne*, Commissioner of Planning, Housing and Community Services

Appendix 1 - Summary of public feedback to service proposals

Summary of responses to Elmira Pilot Service Proposals			
	Nature of Response	Count	Staff Response
Route Option Preferences	Option A	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Option B or C would require a lower frequency of service and would also have minimal connections at Conestoga Mall.
	Option B	28	
	Option C	56	
Route Option Comments	Option A does not provide enough service coverage in Elmira	56	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Option A does not provide the same level of service coverage as the other options. • Option A can provide more frequent service and better connections at Conestoga Mall Transit Terminal.
	Option A provides less in-vehicle travel time	16	
	Option A is better than no service at all	8	
	Option B provides sufficient area coverage	20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Option B does not provide the same opportunities for easy in-town travel as Option C.
	Option B provides a good compromise of speed and coverage	6	
	Option B covers only the periphery of town	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Option C provides superior in-town service coverage, but cannot operate at a 30 minute frequency.
	Option B does not adequately service schools and the new recreation centre	7	
	Option C provides sufficient service coverage	39	
	Option C service school, recreations centre and seniors residences	15	
	Option C best for in-town service	9	
Option C is overly circuitous and has a longer travel time	16		
Option C uses smaller residential streets	8		
Serving St. Jacobs	Supports routing via St. Jacobs	32	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong support for travel to / from St. Jacobs is provided for with the preferred route.
Level of Service	Support full-day service	45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong preference was noted for full weekday and weekend service, which is being recommended.
	Support full-week service	33	
	Support peak-hour only service	20	
With New Service, Would Ride ...	Daily	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responses provide an indication that potential riders would use the new service a few times a week or a few times a month.
	Frequently	34	
	Infrequently	37	
	Rarely	5	

Public Notification and Advertising

In advance of the Public Consultation Centre, an extensive notification campaign was undertaken. Methods used to help ensure residents were aware of this potential service include:

- Advertisements were sent to residents using unaddressed aemail. Notices for the Public Information Centre included a full colour map of route proposals;
- Roadside signs were placed two weeks in advance of the Public Consultation Centre;

- Signs were placed on board buses;
- Advertisements were run in The Record, the Elmira Independent and the Woolwich Observer;
- Direct mail was sent to all households on streets where transit service was proposed to be added. All households received a letter explaining the project and how changes may affect their neighbourhood. The letter included a full colour map of the potential route.
- Maps of proposed routings were displayed on www.grt.ca for public review

Appendix 2 - Advantages and Disadvantages of route options

Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
A	- shortest travel time	- provides least service coverage within town with a significant portion of residents outside the minimum walk distance
	- 30 minute service frequency available in peaks; 60 minute frequency in midday	- not as attractive for travel in town
	- provides adequate service coverage to main streets and neighbourhoods surrounding the downtown	
	- stays on major roads	
	- passes arena / community centre on Snyder	
	- maximizes connections with other routes at Conestoga Mall Transit Terminal	
B	- provides good coverage of residential areas	- does not pass arena / community centre on Snyder
		- stays close to edge of town creating a long walk for residents in the middle of town
		- one-way service makes it difficult to get from downtown Elmira back to the outer neighbourhoods
		- route length allows only 40 minute service frequency
		- less connections with routes at the Conestoga Mall Transit Terminal
C	- provides best travel opportunities within town	- longest route / longest travel time
	- can get to / from downtown easily for in-town trips	- some difficult right turns on smaller streets within town
	- best service coverage	- route length allows only 40 minute service frequency
	- passes arena / community centre on Snyder	- less connections with routes at the Conestoga Mall Transit Terminal

Appendix 3 - Proposed Route

- Possible bus stop locations



