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**REPORT TO:** Planning and Development Services Committee

**MEETING DATE:** Wednesday, September 28, 2016

**SUBJECT:** Phase 1 Interim Summary Report  
Niagara GO Hub and Transit Stations Study

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That this report **BE RECEIVED** for information
2. That a copy of this report **BE FORWARDED** to all the local municipalities.

## KEY FACTS

- Phase 1 of the GO Hub and Transit Station Study (HTSS) is complete. A summary report has been prepared and is attached as Appendix 1. The report confirms the GO Transit “*Niagara Rail Service Expansion Environmental Study Report, 2011*” (2011 ESR) findings, proposes the study areas around the stations, examines existing and current planned land uses and identifies key issues and opportunities for the station areas.
- The preferred station locations are as follows; in Grimsby at Casablanca Boulevard, in Beamsville (Lincoln) at Ontario Street, in St. Catharines at the existing VIA Station and in Niagara Falls at the existing VIA Station.
- Phase 2 of the study, is underway and will develop a vision and guiding design principles for each station area.

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Financial

The GO HTSS has an estimated total cost of \$750,000 which is funded from the 2015 budget. There are no additional financial requests at this time.

### Corporate

GO Rail expansion has been identified as one of Council’s most significant priority projects. The project aligns with Council’s strategic priority of moving people and goods.

## **Governmental Partners**

The successful completion of the HTSS requires a commitment from the Region and the four participating municipalities (Grimsby, Lincoln, St. Catharines and Niagara Falls). A close working relationship has been established and has resulted in the successful completion of the first phase of the study.

Regional staff have been working closely with Metrolinx, the operating agency for the GO train, to ensure alignment with their mandate and practices. Metrolinx staff have reviewed and provided support for the Phase 1 Interim Summary Report.

## **Public and/or Service Users**

The HTSS project supports the efforts that have secured a commitment from the Province for GO Rail expansion to Niagara. With station stops identified in Grimsby, St. Catharines, Niagara Falls and a future stop in Beamsville, the expansion of GO Rail service into Niagara will provide a new level of direct transportation connectivity for Niagara residents and businesses to the Greater Toronto-Hamilton Area. GO train stations will also act as the cornerstone for current and future local transit options, supporting enhanced transit alternatives and opportunities.

Users of GO Transit must complete the first and last portion of their trip on their own; they must first walk, drive or cycle themselves to the nearest station and once they get to the destination they must again walk, drive, or cycle to complete their journey. This is referred to as the “first-last mile” of the users trip. The streets and infrastructure surrounding the future transit stations are critical elements of an effective transportation system. For that reason, as part of the work plan the HTSS will review the issues and opportunities the future GO users will contend with in the first-last mile.

## **ANALYSIS**

Phase 1 of the HTSS project has been completed. The findings and analysis of the first phase of the study is presented in the ‘Phase 1 Interim Summary Report’ attached as Appendix 1. The first phase of the study focused on data collection and review, an examination of the 2011 ESR findings to confirm station locations and identification of the preliminary study area boundaries for each station area. The consultation program also commenced with the establishment of the Technical Advisory Committees (TAC) and Stakeholder Advisory Committees (SAC) for each of the four municipalities (Grimsby, Lincoln, St. Catharines and Niagara Falls). The study area boundaries for each station area will be further refined during Phase 2 of the HTSS project.

Station locations for Grimsby, Lincoln, St. Catharines and Niagara Falls identified in the 2011 ESR were reviewed based on the input from the local municipalities, the Region, Provincial agencies and local stakeholders. Alternative station locations for Grimsby and

St. Catharines were also reviewed. The evaluation of the sites considered Transportation Connectivity and Ridership/ Operations, Planning and Land Use, Technical Feasibility, Financial Feasibility and Policy criteria.

### *Grimsby*

Three potential station locations were reviewed in Grimsby; one site included the 2011 ESR recommended site at Casablanca Boulevard, the second site was located on the South Service Road just east of Casablanca Boulevard and the third site was located in Downtown Grimsby by the existing Amtrak station on the west side of Ontario Street.

The Casablanca Station Site has been identified as the preferred site for a number of reasons. The site has the least technical challenges, is consistent with provincial policy, can accommodate the station layout and circulation requirements including parking, pick-up and drop off and station platforms required on opening day and is well situated to serve future population growth.

### *Lincoln*

The 2011 ESR reviewed two potential station locations in the Town of Lincoln; one in Beamsville at Ontario Street and one in Vineland at Victoria Street. The study recommended the Beamsville location at Ontario Street for various reasons including the following. The site is or has:

- Situated in a relatively developed area (industrial lands) with no natural heritage features or watercourses to be impacted;
- Compatible with surrounding lands, which are primarily industrial uses;
- Outside of the Tender Fruit and Grape designated lands of the Greenbelt area; and
- Good potential for parking

The Beamsville site was identified as a future potential GO train station to be developed once the Niagara GO line is established and as ridership grows. In the 2011 ESR, the Grimsby, St. Catharines and Niagara Falls stations were identified as occurring first along the line with the Beamsville station to be developed at a later date. The development of the station will be based on ridership needs.

### *St. Catharines*

During the Phase 1 of the HTSS, the St. Catharines location identified in the 2011 ESR was reviewed along with four other potential station locations. Station locations were reviewed based on input from the local municipality, the Region, Provincial agencies and local stakeholders. As a result of input received from the St. Catharines TAC and

SAC members and background research completed, five potential station locations were reviewed. The locations were as follows:

- The 2011 ESR recommended site at the existing St. Catharines VIA Station;
- West of Louth Street, on Benfield Drive;
- Between Vansickle Road and First Street Louth, north of St. Paul Street;
- On the east side of Mountain Street, west of Highway 406 and north of Glendale Avenue; and,
- On the south side of Glendale Avenue, east of the Welland Canal.

Figure 9 in Appendix 1 provides the locations of all five sites considered in the review for the St. Catharines station location.

The analysis of the five potential locations in St. Catharines indicated that overall the VIA Station is preferred, which confirms the findings of the 2011 ESR. This site provides the combination of features needed to achieve a successful GO Transit Hub. Unlike the three other stations being planned, the St. Catharines station is to be planned as a Hub which requires a central location for multi-modal connections (cycling, walking, transit) and the opportunity for vibrant residential and employment development in close proximity to the station to create a place not only that people move through but that is a destination in and of itself. The VIA site provides the necessary components for a successful Hub station including size, multi-modal connections including walkability, opportunities for main street connections to the downtown, proximity to an identified intensification area and interest in revitalization of the surrounding community.

Impacts on the local and Regional road network as a result of the station will be assessed in the later phases of the HTSS. The improvements to the roads and facilities around the station will be identified during the transportation technical analysis phase.

### *Niagara Falls*

The 2011 ESR reviewed the potential for a new station at the location of the existing VIA station. The existing VIA station site was identified as the preferred location for the following reasons:

- The site is situated in a developed urban setting (downtown) where there are no natural heritage features or watercourses to be impacted;
- The site is compatible with the surrounding lands, which are primarily industrial;
- The site is well connected to the existing local transit system; and
- The site has good potential for parking.

Phase 1 of the HTSS confirmed the findings of the 2011 ESR. The VIA station site in Niagara Falls and surrounding station area presents an opportunity to connect existing

transit services in the municipality and is located in an area that has significant redevelopment potential.

#### *Next Steps*

- **Phase 1 Study Context and Site Review** (completed)
- **Phase 2 Prepare and Development Visions, Principles, Options** (underway)
- **Phase 3 Prepare Secondary Plans** (to be started in Q4 of 2016)
- **Phase 4 Primary Zone Technical Analysis** (to be started in Q1 of 2017)
- **Phase 5 Station Area Design and Layout** (to be started in Q1 of 2017)
- **Phase 6 Implementation Plan and Planning Framework Update** (to be started in Q2 of 2017)

## **ALTERNATIVES REVIEWED**

Undertaking the GO Hub and Transit Stations Study is warranted. The study supports the commitment received from the Province in Q2 of 2016 to bring GO Rail service to Niagara by 2023.

## **ORIGIN OF REPORT**

This report is brought forward by staff to notify Regional Council of the results of Phase 1 of the GO Hub and Transit Stations Study.

## **OTHER PERTINENT REPORTS**

- PDS 9-2016, Project Initiation Report, Niagara GO Hub and Transit Stations Study, March 9, 2016

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### **SUBMITTED & SIGNED BY:**

Rino Mostacci, MCIP, RPP  
Commissioner  
Planning and Development Services

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### **APPROVED & SIGNED BY:**

Mo Lewis  
Acting Chief Administrative Officer

*This report was prepared by Denise Landry, Planner and reviewed by Diana Morreale, MCIP, RPP, Manager of Community Planning.*

## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 Phase 1 Interim Summary Report