

Concerns remain over consolidated transit financial and governance models; Council requests Region hit the brakes until updates provided

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Welland, ON – City of Welland Council is again asking the Region to delay the triple majority vote on a consolidated transit system until they provide critical updates to all lower-tier municipalities.

City staff maintain that it would be prudent to delay a triple majority vote into 2023 until the following actions are completed:

- Updated financial models reflecting Welland, St. Catharines, Niagara Falls, and Inter-Regional transit operating costs based upon council-approved 2022 budgets.
- Updated five-year transit capital budgets for Welland, St. Catharines, Niagara Falls, and Inter-Regional transit, including costs and allocation percentages to lower-tier municipalities.
- Updated capital assets schedules for Welland, St. Catharines, Niagara Falls, and Niagara Region summarizing assets including revenue, fleet, non-revenue vehicles, and facilities.

"The City of Welland is committed to fully supporting the enhancement of public transit services throughout the Niagara Region," said Steve Zorbas, CAO. "However, out of an abundance of caution for those who have been hit hard by the pandemic, staff believe there needs to be further work performed on the ridership modelling, commensurate service levels, and capital investments, which should be undertaken before a 2023 implementation date."

Levels of Transit service and representation on the commission board are also a significant concern. The latest governance strategy model continues to disadvantage the City by providing only a single vote. Additionally, the disproportionate representation does not capture the investment Welland has committed to its residents for almost five decades and the City's dynamic growth.

At the outset of the consolidated transit discussion, Council developed and adopted a series of guiding principles for inter-municipal transit that guides their decision making:

- Fiscal responsibility and affordability for the City of Welland. Thus, no negative impacts to the City's tax levy and receipt of the provincial gas tax are not negatively impacted.
- Ease of implementation in the City of Welland.
- Operational viability for the City of Welland.
- Improving economic development opportunities for the City of Welland.
- Local transit services will not be adversely impacted.
- Respecting existing transit collective agreements in each respective municipality.

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For media inquiries, please contact:

Marc MacDonald

Manager, Corporate Communications

905-735-1700 x2337

marc.macdonald@welland.ca