

Region of Waterloo
Planning, Development and Legislative Services
Community Planning

To: Committee of the Whole
Meeting Date: February 8, 2022
Report Title: Monitoring Change in the Central Transit Corridor, 2020 Report

1. Recommendation:

For information.

2. Purpose / Issue:

To monitor progress on ION's two goals of 'moving people' and 'building community', the Central Transit Corridor (CTC) Monitoring Program measures and reports annually on indicators of the social, economic, and environmental state of the Region's rapid transit corridor.

The purpose of this briefing note is to update Council on the changes in the CTC from 2011, the year that Council approved the ION route, to 2020, the year after ION began operations. A detailed report is attached.

3. Strategic Plan:

The CTC Monitoring Report provides information to support the focus areas of Sustainable Transportation, Environment and Climate Action, and Healthy, Safe and Inclusive Communities.

4. Key Considerations:

Moving People

Mobility and Sustainable Modes of Transportation: The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on Regional transit ridership due to stay-at-home orders, closures of schools, businesses, and non-essential activities. Ridership to essential services such as health facilities and employment areas was relatively stable. Total transit ridership fell 48 per cent from 2019 – a level of ridership last seen in 2003. Due to the significant decrease in ridership throughout the Region, any interpretation of the impact of the CTC should be taken with caution. The share of daily transit activity occurring in the CTC increased to 63 per cent in 2020 from 59 per cent in 2019, as Conestoga College – one of the major draws outside the CTC – had essentially no ridership. The overall decrease

in service was not as significant as the ridership decrease; some level of service was still required throughout the community to assist with essential trips, and the vehicles had a lower capacity imposed. The proportion of the CTC population living in 'high' or 'very high' walkable neighbourhoods remained stable at 57 per cent for both 2019 and 2020.

Building Community

Vibrant Communities: By 2020, almost one-fifth of Waterloo Region's population, or 115,800 people, lived in the CTC. Between 2011 and 2019, the CTC gained 22,000 new residents, comprising one-third of the Region's total growth, with double the population growth rate outside the CTC. From 2019 to 2020, the CTC saw a decrease of 6,100 residents, as a significant number of the Region's post-secondary students were not present because of a shift to online learning in response to COVID-19. The Regional population outside the CTC remained essentially flat, with 264 new residents in 2020. Sixty-nine per cent of all land use types in the Region can be found within the CTC.

Heritage: The number of heritage resources (defined as buildings built before 1920 or formally recognized) lost in 2020 decreased to 11 – lower than the ten-year average of 15. One of these was a formally recognized structure (listed on the Municipal Heritage Register or designated under the Ontario Heritage Act), which is in line with most years.

Investment: Forty-three per cent of new construction value in 2020 was within the CTC: permits were issued for 2,350 new residential units (45 per cent) and 520,000 square feet of new industrial, commercial, and industrial floor space – almost half of the total non-residential square footage added across the Region. The total cumulative building permit value since 2011 was \$3.8 billion.

The number of new developments and renovations are evident in assessment value growth from \$10 billion in 2011 to more than \$18 billion in 2020, an average annual increase of \$991 million (7.2 per cent). Municipal taxes generated on properties within the CTC were estimated at \$213 million in 2020, 60 per cent higher than in 2011.

Crime and Safety: Calls to police for reasons related to public perception of safety (e.g., unwanted persons, liquor offenses, graffiti) have increased from 41 per cent in the CTC in 2011, to 47 per cent in 2019. A long-term increase was expected with more activity and people living in the corridor, although calls decreased by almost 4,200 (7.4 per cent) between 2018 and 2019. Most calls that police respond to are not necessarily criminal in nature.

Inclusive Community: Upward pressure in the housing market continued to decrease the number of affordable transactions inside the corridor and across the Region. In 2020, there were 1,141 residential resale transactions in the CTC, with 24 per cent considered affordable to low and medium-income earners. Only ten per cent of transactions were affordable across the Region.

Two other affordability indicators are stable. There were 2,758 Community Housing units in the CTC – the same number as 2019. The percentage of households receiving rent assistance through the Housing Assistance with Supports (HAWS) program has increased slightly to 60 per cent, indicating that people on this program continue to find affordable rental units within the CTC.

5. Background:

Following ION's approval in 2011, it was recognized that the new rapid transit system would do more than just increase transit access throughout the Region; it also created an opportunity to build healthy and vibrant communities along the route. Accordingly, the CTC Monitoring Program was established in 2015. The program has monitored change in the CTC throughout the pre-construction, construction, and post-construction/operations phases of the ION LRT.

Under the overarching goals of 'moving people' and 'building community', 18 indicators have been selected for their capacity to describe key aspects of the corridor. These are updated annually and reported to Council. With previous reports, a specific theme such as The Environment, Investment, or Housing Affordability has been explored. The theme of Mobility, which was originally scheduled for the 2019 report, was postponed again this year due to COVID-19.

6. Area Municipality Communication and Public/Stakeholder Engagement:

Nil

7. Financial Implications:

Nil

8. Conclusion / Next Steps:

The CTC Monitoring Program is currently scheduled to conclude later this year with an annual update report in fall 2022, which will feature a Ten-Year Review following a final year of monitoring for 2021.

Given the strong success of Stage 1 ION in accomplishing its dual goals of 'moving people' and 'building community', Staff see value in continuing to monitor the Central Transit Corridor. Stage 2 ION is currently in the preliminary business case phase, with construction estimated to begin in 2028 and revenue service beginning as early as 2032. Accordingly, it will be important to monitor progress in the CTC throughout the Stage 2 project cycle, as was done for Stage 1. Staff will bring forward any recommendations on extending this program through the next CTC Monitoring report in the fall of 2022.

9. Attachments / Links:

Attachment 1: Monitoring Change in the CTC, 2020 Report (DOCS # 3868173)

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