



Report: PDL-CPL-19-39

Region of Waterloo
Planning, Development and Legislative Services
Community Planning

To: Chair Tom Galloway and Members of the Planning and Works Committee

Date: November 5, 2019 **File Code:** D10-20

Subject: **Monitoring Change in the Central Transit Corridor: 2018**

Recommendation:

For information

Summary:

The report “Monitoring Change in the Central Transit Corridor – 2018” (attached) provides information about progress on the two goals of the ION rapid transit system: moving people and shaping the community. This report is the most recent in a series of annual monitoring reports, and covers the period to year-end 2018. This year’s report focuses on the theme of urban vibrancy.

Highlights of this year’s monitoring results are:

- an increase in transit riders;
- continued investment in new buildings for housing and workplaces;
- more people living in the CTC, primarily in more walkable neighbourhoods;
- improved vibrancy, with more restaurants and cultural establishments;
- less land area devoted to surface parking lots; and less land that was assessed as vacant;
- increased attendance at festivals and city events in the CTC; and
- a small rebound in the number of families with children living in the corridor.

The theme of the previous (2017) report was housing affordability. It concluded that the indicators should be re-measured in 2018 due to the volatility of housing prices that both

the rental and ownership markets were experiencing. The 2018 results were generally consistent with the previous year, with a small improvement in the affordability of home ownership.

In addition to housing affordability, there are two areas to keep an eye on, in order to ensure that important aspects of the CTC are preserved as building intensifies in the corridor. These two areas are heritage building retention, and perception of safety.

It is intended that annual reports be produced until 2021 at which point it will have been ten years since the announcement of ION, and the system will be in its early operation phase.

Report:

Background:

The goals of the CTC monitoring program are to measure and report on changes happening in the ION corridor, to provide an indication of the influence of ION, and to encourage discussion about the nature of the changes. A set of indicators was established to measure the base state of the CTC prior to the establishment of ION, and annual reports and an on-line dashboard are produced to publish the results of the monitoring.

ION was approved by the Council of the Region of Waterloo to achieve two goals: to move people, and to build community. The indicators provide a lens for monitoring the achievement of ION's dual goals. Monitoring will continue until at least 2021, after ION has been constructed, opened for service, and is functioning within the community.

During 2018, construction of Stage 1 ION was complete and testing of the trains was ongoing. Planning for Stage 2 ION continued in Cambridge, with consultation on the proposed route, which would lead to a preferred route to be identified in 2019.

Building Community and Moving People:

In 2018, investment in the CTC was strong, as the total value of building permits since 2011 climbed to \$2.5 billion. Growth was particularly strong in residential activity, with almost 1,000 units of housing in building permits, valued at \$150 million. Even greater increases are expected to be reported in 2019: it is anticipated that the total value of building permits since 2011 could reach \$3.2 billion by the end of this year.

Continued investment in the CTC is leading to an increase in the assessed value of properties in the CTC, which grew to \$15 billion; in 2011 the value was \$10 billion. As a result, properties in the corridor are contributing more to the overall taxes generated in the Region.

Transit ridership in the Region rebounded, and in the CTC, there were over 6,000 more

riders, each day, getting on or off a transit vehicle compared to the previous year.

Vibrancy:

As new housing and employment space is occupied, the corridor is becoming more lively. This report focuses on vibrancy in the CTC and the changing urban character, and shows favorable results in achieving key community-building goals:

- The number of people living in the CTC has increased by over 12,500 people since 2011, a rate of 1.8 per cent annual growth. This brings the number of people living in the CTC to over 109,000 people. For context, the overall growth rate for Waterloo Region was 1.2 per cent over the same period.
- The areas of the CTC that are experiencing the greatest growth are those that are more walkable: 8,750 more people are living in neighbourhoods that are considered 'high' or 'very high' in walkability.
- An indicator of vibrancy is the number of restaurants, which has shown consistent growth along the LRT route since 2011. In 2018 there were an estimated 550 restaurant venues in the CTC.
- There was a marked increase in the number of culture-related businesses, with product manufacturing (breweries, bakeries) showing a 100 per cent increase.

New indicators of vibrancy were developed for this year's report. These indicators show that the area around ION is becoming more vibrant as vacant properties and surface parking lots are redeveloped into more active uses, and more people attend festivals and events. It is hoped that as more people live downtown that the number of families and of amenities such as grocery stores increases from the small improvements to date. Specifically, the indicators show:

- The amount of land that was assessed as being vacant, either because it had no building on it, or the building was not in use, has declined by 26 hectares (10 per cent) since 2011, equivalent to about 50 football fields.
- The land area covered by surface parking lots has decreased by a net area of 10 hectares since 2012. While surface parking has increased in areas around the endpoints of the LRT, the amount of paved surface parking has decreased in the core areas. At the same time, new parking capacity has been created in above-ground and under-ground parking structures.
- There were 28 grocery stores in the CTC that offered a broad range of food product choices. Counting the number of small format (eg convenience) stores, specialty food stores, and farmer's market vendors brought the count to about 250. Grocery stores are an important aspect of a liveable community.
- Attendance at public events hosted by the cities has increased from over 600,000 people in 2011 to over 800,000 people, an increase of 33 per cent. In addition, privately-organized events such as the Oktoberfest parade draw

hundreds of thousands of people to the corridor.

- The number of families with children living within the CTC has increased by 2 per cent from 2011 to 2016, according to Census data, a trend reversal from the previous Census period that showed a small decline in the number of families with children . Non-family households and families without children showed even greater growth rate at 12 per cent and 11 per cent respectively.

Housing Affordability:

Due to the ongoing concern about affordability of housing, and awareness of the possibility of negative effects of gentrification in the corridor, the 2018 data for housing affordability indicators was updated and shows:

- Home ownership affordability has moderately improved in the CTC since the previous year. Twenty per cent of resale singles in the CTC were below the affordability cut-off of \$350,000, compared to 6 per cent of singles outside the corridor.
- There was a small increase in the number of Community Housing units within the CTC, although growing demand outstrips supply.
- Households that receive assistance with rent through a program called Housing Allowance With Supports (HAWS) continue to find housing in the CTC.
- Rental affordability data is not available for 2018. This indicator will be updated after the 2021 Census of Canada data is released.

Sense of place:

In 2018, there were only eight demolitions of older buildings (pre-1920) in the CTC, of which two were formally recognized structures (those listed on the Municipal Heritage Registry or designated under the Ontario Heritage Act), the lowest number since this monitoring program was initiated. While positive changes are happening in the economic and social characteristics of the corridor around ION, it is also important to preserve our historical past through retaining heritage buildings.

As more people are living and visiting downtowns in the CTC, it is anticipated that people will feel safer there. The Wellbeing Waterloo Region survey indicates that 58 per cent of people living in the three cities of Waterloo, Kitchener and Cambridge feel safe from crime even when walking alone after dark in their downtown areas. Interestingly, this increases to 82 per cent when considering only the responses of those people who actually visit or live downtown.

Looking Ahead:

The year 2018 showed a continued evolution of the Central Transit Corridor, the area around the ION light rail transit system. Building activity was strong, but will be surpassed by the spike in building permits in 2019 as the City of Kitchener's exemptions

from development charge fees expired, and developers worked to meet the deadline to submit building permits. Due to this flurry of building permit applications, the value of building permits is anticipated to be \$3.2 billion dollars from 2011 to the end of this year.

All changes reported in the CTC monitoring reports to date have occurred in anticipation of the LRT operation. However, also in 2019, the ION light rail transit system began operation in Stage 1 of the corridor, connecting Waterloo and Kitchener. At the same time, bus routes were re-aligned to connect in to the LRT stations. Free service attracted 300,000 riders in the first 11 days of operation, and ridership numbers have been strong to the date of writing of this report. Next year's 'Monitoring Change in the CTC' report will be the first to include a (partial) year of system operation.

In Stage 2, which will extend light rail transit from Kitchener to Cambridge, Regional Council endorsed a preferred route for the LRT system, and the location of the future LRT transit stops have been identified. However, funding has not been secured. Indicators published in the 'Monitoring Change in the CTC' report have shown the majority of growth and positive change to be occurring in Stage 1 to date, however, this may begin to shift towards Cambridge as Stage 2 system planning moves ahead.

Corporate Strategic Plan:

Monitoring of the Central Transit Corridor directly addresses Focus Area 2: Growth Management and Prosperity (Manage growth to foster thriving and productive urban and rural communities) including Strategic Objective 2.1. Encourage compact, livable urban and rural settlement form.

Financial Implications:

Nil

Other Department Consultations/Concurrence:

Departments across the Region of Waterloo, as well as the Waterloo Regional Police Services, participated in the creation of this annual report. A list of contributors is included in the report.

Attachments

Summary of Indicators for the Central Transit Corridor (CTC) Monitoring Program.

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Approved By: Rod Regier, Commissioner, Planning, Development and Legislative Services

Table 3. Indicators for the CTC Monitoring Program (2011 to 2018)

Goal	Dimension	Indicator	Metric	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Moving People	Mobility	Transit Ridership	Number of trips made using Grand River Transit (million)	19.7	21.3	22.0	21.6	20.3	19.7	19.7	21.1
		Daily Transit Activity	Per cent of daily average transit activity in the CTC	67%	65%	67%	64%	63%	63%	61%	60%
	Sustainable Modes of Transportation	Transit Mode Share	Per cent of mode of travel share on transit across the CTC	-	-	-	-	5%	-	-	-
		Active Transportation	Per cent of mode of travel share which was pedestrian and cyclist in the CTC	5%	-	-	-	-	8.6%	-	-
		Walkability	Per cent of population living in "high" or "very high" walkable areas in the CTC	55%	56%	56%	56%	56%	56%	57%	57%
Building Community	Vibrant Communities	Land Use Mix	See indicators below								
		Population	See indicators below								
	Art and Culture	Cultural Vibrancy	Number of arts and culture establishments in the CTC	241	-	-	-	-	318	-	336
		Restaurants	Per cent of the Region's restaurants in the CTC	50%	51%	52%	52%	52%	52%	54%	54%
	Heritage	Heritage Resource Retention	Number of demolition permits on pre-1920 and designated built heritage resources in the CTC	13	36	11	9	12	17	16	7
	Investment	Building Activity	Dollar value of building permits in the CTC for new construction (million, adjusted)	\$491	\$262	\$227	\$548	\$259	\$308	\$222	\$190
		Assessment Value	Assessed value of properties in the CTC (billion)	\$10.0	-	-	\$12.0	\$12.8	\$13.6	\$14.7	\$15.3
	Environment	Emissions	Tonnes of net air emissions per capita in Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo	2.52	-	-	-	-	-	2.66	-

Table 3. Indicators for the CTC Monitoring Program (2011 to 2018)

Goal	Dimension	Indicator	Metric	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
	Crime and Safety	Perception of Safety	Per cent of people in the Tri-Cities who perceive that their downtowns are safe at night	65%	-	-	-	-	-	62%	58%
		Calls for Service	Per cent of police calls for service related to potential public perception in the CTC	40%	41%	43%	43%	42%	43%	45%	-

Table 6. Inclusive Community

Dimension	Indicator	Metric	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Inclusive Community	Affordability of Home Ownership Transactions	Per cent of housing transactions which were affordable to low and moderate income households in the CTC	55%	56%	53%	54%	57%	57%	33%	38%
	Renter Affordability	Per cent of renters spending less than 30% of their household income on shelter related costs in the CTC	64%	-	-	-	-	61%	-	-
	Supply of Community Housing	Number of community housing units in the CTC	2,687	2,610	2,631	2,631	2,633	2,645	2,645	2,701
	Location of Households Receiving Rent Assistance	Per cent of Housing Allowances with Supports (HAWS) in the CTC	-	-	-	-	50%	60%	56%	57%

Table 7. Urban Vibrancy

Dimension	Indicator	Metric	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
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Dimension	Indicator	Metric	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Vibrant Communities	Land Use Mix	Per cent of all regional land uses found in the CTC	69%	69%	69%	69%	69%	70%	70%	71%
	Population	Per cent of Region's residents who live in the CTC	17.5%	17.4%	17.8%	18.1%	18.4%	18.8%	19.4%	19.8%
	Surface Parking	Area of land dedicated to surface parking in the CTC	-	543 Ha	-	-	-	-	-	533 Ha
	Vacant Lands	Area of land assessed as vacant land in the CTC	293 Ha	285 Ha	276 Ha	274 Ha	280 Ha	272 Ha	268 Ha	268 Ha
	Grocery Stores	Number of Grocery Stores in the CTC	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	28
	Demographic Shifts	Number of Families with children	9,384	-	-	-	-	9,539	-	-
	Festivals/Events	Event attendance in the CTC (thousands)	609	624	675	730	818	803	781	810