The Region of Waterloo
Central Transit Corridor
COMMUNITY BUILDING STRATEGY
FORWARD

December 2013

Waterloo Region is a vibrant global community experiencing unprecedented investment, growth and change. Already the fourth largest community in Ontario and the tenth largest in Canada, Waterloo Region continues to grow. With over half of new development already happening in built up areas, and the opening of a new rapid transit system in 2017 to further link Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo, a framework is needed to guide growth around over 20 new transit stations. As a key means of guiding this growth, it is our pleasure to present “A Community Building Strategy for Waterloo Region’s Central Transit Corridor”.

This initiative has been led by the Region of Waterloo with the Cities of Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo, and overseen by our very experienced consulting team at Urban Strategies. The Community Building Strategy (CBS) recommends how our community should grow around rapid transit stations, such as the types of buildings and uses, their design and their connections to the surrounding community, while remaining sensitive to the need for compatibility with adjacent areas, like established neighbourhoods. The CBS also provides valuable information to investment and development interests about the many opportunities that exist in these station areas and beyond.

This Community Building Strategy is about us all. While much of the focus is on building around transit investment, it also recognizes that cars need to be accommodated. For our rural communities, the CBS is designed to support a broader transit system that gets you from your home to many important locations along the rapid transit corridor, and beyond.

Not all of the costs for many of the initiatives identified in the CBS are currently contained in municipal budgets. The reality is that we must identify what should be done, and then set priorities. This process will be an evolving one, and opportunities like development proposals will affect those priorities from time to time. The Region and Area Municipalities will continue to work collaboratively and respond to these ongoing opportunities.

In recent years, we have seen a series of significant economic, environmental and social changes in our community. We often refer to these changes collectively as “The Big Shift”. This includes shifts from more outward suburban sprawl to more compact development, greater investment in transit, higher densities of development, and a greater focus on design excellence. In response to these changes, we created “The Big Shift Toolbox” (www.regionofwaterloo.ca/bigshift) to help our many stakeholders be part of our community vision. The Community Building Strategy is an important element of that Toolbox.

Finally, this document captures valuable input generously provided by so many people. We offer our sincere thanks to everyone who has been a part of helping to shape our community. I look forward to seeing our vision become reality.

Rob Horne
Commissioner
Planning, Housing and Community Services
Thank You!

This document could not have been possible without the guidance of the Project Team and contribution of the hundreds of individuals and stakeholders who participated in the process. Your valuable input was critical to the directions in the Community Building Strategy.

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THE CORRIDOR TODAY

‘The Corridor Today’ introduces the Central Transit Corridor and explains what the Community Building Strategy is and why it is needed. It describes the study area and outlines the role of the study within the context of current planning, investment and development initiatives in the Waterloo Region.

Chapter 1 includes the following:

1.1 The Region is Growing – This section outlines the population changes occurring in the region and the role the Central Transit Corridor will play in accommodating growth and shaping communities.

1.2 Growth is Being Focused Along a Central Transit Corridor – This section describes the patterns of mobility found throughout the region and how people are moving in the Central Transit Corridor today.

1.3 The Region and Cities have been Planning for Enhanced Transit – This section outlines how the Community Building Strategy builds on regional and local planning direction while integrating with complementary projects including the Region’s Growth Management Strategy and the implementation of the Rapid Transit Project.

1.4 The Market is Changing to Reflect a More Urban Lifestyle Choice – This section looks at the current real estate market conditions and the already changing nature of investment within the Central Transit Corridor.

1.5 The Mobility Network is Being Adapted to Support Growth in People and Jobs – This section describes the integration between Rapid Transit, planned changes to the region’s ixpress bus services and regional and local active transportation networks. It outlines the importance of connecting many key destinations away from the Corridor and the opportunities that exist to enhance mobility throughout the region.
The Region is Growing

The Waterloo Region is experiencing and planning to accommodate significant growth. The majority of this growth is occurring in the three urban municipalities of Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo.

Swift population increases have made the Waterloo Region one of the fastest growing areas in Canada. Over the next 20 years, the region is expected to grow by 185,000 people and 80,000 new jobs. Though this growth will serve to stimulate new investment and opportunities for redevelopment, it will also create new challenges for the region that must be carefully managed in the short and longer terms.

Since the creation of the Regional Official Policies Plan in 1976, the Region has prioritized balancing growth with quality of life. Its long history of managing growth has led to the implementation of policies that work to protect the area’s rural landscape whilst promoting initiatives that support intensification and compact growth. In 2003, a Growth Management Strategy was approved by Regional Council to identify when and where new residential and employment growth could be accommodated. Historically, new growth within the region has spread outwards to suburban areas with available land for new community development. In more recent years however, shifts in lifestyle choices, local growth management initiatives and investments in urban properties have gradually moved growth back to the region’s urban areas. The Growth Management Strategy has encouraged this inward trend by introducing policies that limit urban sprawl and focus growth in existing built up areas including the Central Transit Corridor (CTC).

The CTC is the central spine that runs through the heart of the urban communities in Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo. A high quality, rapid transit (RT) system is being put in place in this Corridor to support the concentration of existing and planned residents and jobs. Underutilized areas surrounding the new rapid transit system offer some of the best opportunities to enhance and establish vibrant and liveable mixed-use communities.

Recent investment in business development, arts & culture, innovation and neighbourhood revitalization reinforce Waterloo Region’s focus on healthy and vital communities.
The Central Transit Corridor is the central urban spine of the Region, the three cities and surrounding communities.
To help the Region optimize available urban land, a key focus for new growth will be along the CTC. Through integration of land use and transportation planning, areas along the Corridor will be distinguished by having a greater mix of housing, jobs, retail, and leisure choices all within close proximity to enhanced transit.

At the heart of the CTC is the Region’s planned rapid transit line. The line will be developed in two phases and will include 23 stations connecting the three cities. This integrated transportation corridor connects many key destinations throughout the region including places to live, work, play and shop. Along with improving access to existing places, the Corridor will become the focus for new medium and high density residential, retail and commercial development. Over time, this will lead to the creation of new and enhanced neighbourhoods, corridors and urban centres in each of the cities.

Current Land Use: Rapid Transit along the CTC will serve and connect downtowns, neighbourhoods, shopping areas, campuses and employment areas.
The Many Places Along the Corridor

The CTC is comprised of many distinct places including opportunities to live, work, study, play, and shop. The pattern of distribution for each of these uses means that the Corridor will be experienced in many different ways depending upon where you live, the type of job you have and what you choose to do in your spare time.

Living
The Corridor today contains a range of housing choices. High and medium density residential communities are located in Uptown Waterloo and Downtown Kitchener but are also clustered around the Universities, Block Line Road and Fairview Park Mall. Within Cambridge, much of the high and medium density can be found around the Preston, Can-Amera and Ainslie Stations. Though some housing variety exists along the RT line, a greater mix of housing options in close proximity to enhanced transit will be needed to encourage greater intensification along the Corridor.

Working
The Waterloo Region is home to a great number of advanced high-technology manufacturing and industrial businesses. Office campuses for predominately technological firms are found in Waterloo. Downtown Kitchener houses financial and creative industries and Cambridge contains the largest portion of the region’s manufacturing. While many of the smaller employment clusters are easily accessed by RT, the larger more built-out employment areas lack the necessary infrastructure to support employees wishing to walk, cycle or take transit to work.

Source of Data: Region of Waterloo
Parks, open spaces, and community services along the Corridor

Places of learning along the Corridor

Places to shop and dine along the Corridor

Playing
The Rapid Transit line will provide direct links to some of the region’s parks and open spaces, including access to the Grand River Valley through Preston and Galt and the Dumfries Conservation Area, Riverside Park, Kitchener’s Victoria Park and Waterloo Park. It will also facilitate greater access to community centres and recreational facilities located within the urban cores. However, the significant population increases that are expected for these areas will result in a greater demand for new facilities and parks and enhanced access to existing open spaces.

Learning
Over 50,000 full-time students attend the region’s three post-secondary institutions: the University of Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier and Conestoga College. The University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier have campuses at the north-end of the region that neighbour the RT stations at the R&T Park, University of Waterloo and Seagram. There are additional satellite campuses in Kitchener and Cambridge. Conestoga College’s main campus in Kitchener is situated away from the line and is currently accessed by local bus. A series of elementary and secondary schools are located near the RT line including magnet schools which offer specialized programs or courses. Enhancing connections from home to school and from one school to another will be an important consideration as the student population grows and collaboration between institutions increases.

Shopping
Three regionally scaled shopping malls are located along the Corridor: Conestoga Mall, Fairview Park Mall and the Cambridge Centre. Additional shopping districts are situated in Uptown Waterloo, Downtown Kitchener, Downtown Cambridge (former Galt City Centre), along Hespeler Road and in areas away from the Corridor such as in St. Jacobs and Hespeler Village. Over time, the Corridor has the potential to expand retail offerings to support growth.
Patterns of Living Along the Corridor

The patterns of people living along the Corridor vary greatly depending on age, stage of life, and life style choices. Generally, the highest population densities are located in proximity to the RT line with the greatest concentrations of people living today between Fairview Park Mall and Conestoga Mall.

Population Density
Higher population densities within the region are found in the urban cores of the three municipalities and are particularly focused within the CTC. Significant population increases have occurred in these areas over the last several years and have been generally accommodated in higher density forms of development.

Students
The largest concentration of students living in the region reside in housing near the University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier campuses. These students are largely living in rental housing including apartments and duplexes off campus. While a majority of students live within the City of Waterloo, a smaller percentage of students attending one of the region’s colleges or specialized programs at a satellite campus also reside in Kitchener and Cambridge. The introduction of RT may create opportunities for students to live in areas further from campus but accessible by transit.

Source of Data: Region of Waterloo and Census 2006
Youth (Ages 0-19)
Suburban communities contain the highest concentration of youth. Though there are areas neighbouring the Corridor that have larger youth populations, the majority of young people are currently living away from the Corridor. Their proximity away from urban areas presents a challenge to accessing youth services, shopping and recreational opportunities.

Senior (Ages 65+)
A high proportion of seniors aged 65+ are living in areas within or very close to the Corridor. These urban areas offer seniors better access to a range of specialized services and also provide smaller, more manageable housing options.

Young Adults (Ages 25-40)
Young adults in the region live in both Downtown areas and suburban communities. Generally, those with children are opting to live in suburban areas with larger housing while single professionals live in the urban cores.

Source of Data: Region of Waterloo and Census 2006
Patterns of Travel

Today, patterns of mobility are related to proximity within the CTC. Generally, there are higher levels of walking, cycling and transit use close to the universities and in higher density neighbourhoods along the Corridor.

Travel patterns reflect the range of transportation choice available. A key objective in shaping communities and moving people is to increase the transportation choices available to people living, working and visiting Waterloo Region. The travel patterns today demonstrate a greater transportation choice in higher density urban areas where an integration of activities and range of transportation choice exist. These urban areas reflect historic settlement patterns where a finer grid of streets and blocks support walkability and proximity to places of living, working and shopping. Further away from the Corridor, distances between living, shopping and work increase and land use patterns favour automobile travel. Investment in enhanced transit is a key strategy for increasing the level of transportation choice within the CTC and to communities, shopping centres, campuses, employments areas and other destinations throughout the region.
Fewer Take Transit
More Take Transit

11%
0%

Percentage of the Population that Commutes by Transit

The majority of transit commuters reside in urban areas near the CTC. Today, the network of existing transportation options offered through the iXpress and local bus services in these areas facilitates a greater use of transit.

Fewer Cycle
More Cycle

4%
0%

Percentage of the Population that Commutes by Cycling

The core areas of the three cities have higher percentages of cyclists compared to the rest of the region. Residents of these areas are more likely to cycle because of the close commuting distance to places of work, learning and shopping. For short distances, cycling often offers a faster alternative to driving or taking transit.

Fewer Walk
More Walk

15%
0%

Percentage of the Population that Commutes by Walking

Similarly to transit and cycling, those choosing to commute by walking reside closer to the Corridor. As you move further away from the Corridor, the percentage of commutes by walking decreases as result of longer travel times between important destinations.

Source of Data: Region of Waterloo and Census 2006
The Region and Cities Have Been Planning for Enhanced Transit

The three cities have each recently developed new Official Plans that complement enhanced transit by directing higher levels of intensification and a greater mix of new uses within the CTC.

The delivery of enhanced transit is being led by the Region of Waterloo, which includes the Rapid Transit and Grand River Transit division, in conjunction with the Cities of Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo.

The following provides a brief summary of the key complementary policies and directions in the Cambridge and Waterloo Approved Official Plans and the Kitchener Second Draft Official Plan.

Cambridge

- New growth will be accommodated where municipal services are available within the urban area, and a significant portion will be shifted from greenfield areas to intensification within the built up area.
- The City of Cambridge will plan for “compact urban development that maintains a balanced land supply, including residential, employment and commercial uses, and promotes mixed-use, transit-oriented development.” Intensification is encouraged in the built up area, particularly within the Urban Growth Centre (Downtown Cambridge), community core areas, nodes, regeneration areas, reurbanization corridors, and major transit station areas.
- The City, in collaboration with the Region, will, where appropriate, establish minimum density targets for intensification consistent with existing or planned transit service levels.

Kitchener

- There is limited vacant land left so new growth will be accommodated through intensification. To meet urban growth targets, the City of Waterloo will provide opportunities for new growth within the Urban Growth Centre (Uptown Waterloo), nodes, corridors, and major transit station areas.
- At least 45 percent of new residential development will be in existing built-up areas.
- The City of Waterloo aims to develop a compact urban form to facilitate reduced reliance on the automobile, while supporting transit, and promoting connectivity, safe and efficient movement, and sustainable transportation.
A collage of the area municipal official plan land use policy directions.
As the Waterloo Region has grown, a greater diversity of housing and new forms of development have emerged. Presently, residential, commercial and institutional developers in the region are seeking properties that are more urban, offer integrated uses and have greater amenities in their surroundings.

The Market is Changing to Reflect a More Urban Lifestyle Choice

An Evolving Market
In advance of RT, Waterloo Region continues to experience significant growth and investment. The existing 20–30 year supply of greenfield lands will mean that some of this growth will occur in suburban communities in the outer areas of each city. However, unlike traditional suburban neighbourhoods these new communities are being developed to be more compact and vibrant and they are providing more opportunities for people to live, work, study, play and shop within a close proximity.

While growth is not new to the region, this community having seen positive growth for many years, there are some important changes in real estate demand and development trends that indicate the market is already responding to demographic trends, economic conditions and policy directions.

In order to ground the CBS in the reality of Waterloo Region’s market conditions, a high level assessment of current market trends and the future potential market demand within the CTC was undertaken.

The following section outlines key trends in the current residential, office, industrial and hotel sectors in the region. Using this as a departure point, an assessment of future market potential can be found in Section 2.3.

Residential
The housing mix is changing dramatically. In 2010, the number of apartment unit starts exceeded the number of single detached units being built (Fig. 1). Annual growth in apartment units is expected to continue over the next 10–20 years and is showing a strong propensity to locate within the CTC (Fig. 3). Further, new housing being built is increasing in the form of rental and condo and there is a decrease in freehold ownership (Fig. 2). Finally, significant demand now and in the next 10 years exists for rental housing in the region. These three residential trends are the result of a shift in consumer demand, new location-efficient development, the region’s aging population, a significant student population, and a transition to a ‘lock the door and go’ lifestyle. They also support an ongoing and increased demand for higher density housing along the Corridor.

Source of Data: CMHC (Starts & Completions Survey) and Region of Waterloo
Office
Throughout the latest economic recession, Waterloo Region continued to see office supply increase and vacancy rates remain at a reasonable level (Fig 4). While in the past decade, much of the office development has occurred in suburban locations, the greatest demand recently has been for "brick and beam" space in amenity rich locations such as the Lang Tannery and continued investment is seen in sites such as the retrofitted Breithaupt Block. Since 2008, over 20% of the office space built has been within RT station areas (Fig. 5).

Industrial
A strong industrial presence is expected to continue in Cambridge. The Cambridge Business Park, including Boxwood, and proximity to the Region of Waterloo International Airport represent opportunities for strong industrial districts, with future potential to connect to rapid transit. In Waterloo and Kitchener, the employment focus is expected to shift to tech-based businesses and institutional jobs.

Hotels
Tourism is a growth sector within Waterloo Region and beyond. In particular, the cluster of natural heritage, cultural attractions and vibrant traditional and historical urban centres, many of which are in the CTC, have the potential to attract significant investment and visitation. The cities of Kitchener, Waterloo and Cambridge have an existing supply of over 3,000 hotel rooms. The hotel market in the region is performing at levels that will justify new hotels soon. Presently there are 6 hotel and lodging projects in the region that are either under construction or have been proposed and it is estimated that there will be an 11% increase in hotel rooms over the next five years. This will likely occur in the cities of Waterloo and Kitchener.

Parking
Today, parking remains a key consideration in site location for all market sectors. Once RT is in place, it is anticipated that there will be an opportunity to reduce parking provisions and move toward structured and underground solutions in some areas. In the interim, partnerships and alternative standards for parking may be considered for residential and office development.
The Mobility Network is Being Adapted To Support Growth in People and Jobs

In order to accommodate the projected new growth, the Region has decided to invest in a new and improved transit and active mobility network.

The RT first phase will open in 2017 and will include Light Rail Transit (LRT) and an Adapted Bus Rapid Transit (aBRT). The LRT will connect Conestoga Mall in Waterloo to Fairview Park Mall in Kitchener. An aBRT will then link to Cambridge from Fairview to the Ainslie Terminal. The second phase of the project replaces this aBRT with LRT. The CBS considers both phases of planned rapid transit.

The introduction of RT will support new growth by promoting reurbanization and intensification through more efficient use of land and existing infrastructure. An important piece of work being undertaken to support the investment in a RT line is the re-orientation of the current conventional transit system away from a radial pattern to a grid network.

A major component of the grid network is a new pattern of iXpress corridors which will cross the RT line at regular intervals and extend convenient express transit service to the edges of the three cities. This re-alignment expands the current level of services to the rapid transit stations along the Corridor and takes advantage of improved access to important destinations.

These transit improvements will be complemented by investments in Active Transportation Networks at the local and regional level that will make it easier for people in the region to walk or bike. The integration of more active forms of transportation provides additional transportation choice and encourages sustainability.

Together these transportation systems create an integrated and accessible mobility grid that connects all areas of the CTC.
An integrated RT, iXpress and Active Transportation Network create the foundation of a new mobility grid.