



INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Mayor and Members General Issues Committee
DATE:	January 22, 2021
SUBJECT:	(Re)envision the HSR Update and Guiding Principles (PW20005(a)) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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SIGNATURE:	

COUNCIL DIRECTION

N/A

INFORMATION

The (Re)envision the HSR project launched in mid-2018 and aims to both reconfigure the transit network and transform customer experience. The project is based on broad stakeholder engagement and strives to grow ridership and make transit a first choice.

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed a challenge to the project timelines. The City of Hamilton paused all in-person public engagement efforts and as such, the majority of HSR engagement events in 2020 were cancelled. The date to present the draft guiding principles was postponed from June 2020 to January 2021.

At the same time, the pandemic has highlighted the vital role transit plays during times of uncertainty. During phase one of the pandemic response, while residents avoided non-essential travel and followed orders to shelter in place, transit provided stable service that helped society function. Many essential workers, such as healthcare providers, shipping and food industry workers, and grocery clerks rely on transit and the rest of the community benefits from the essential services provided.

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OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

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Indeed, transit will continue to play a vital role as Hamilton responds and the economy continues to recover.

Background

Throughout 2019 and the first quarter of 2020, the Transit Division conducted extensive public and stakeholder engagement on the future of conventional transit service delivery in Hamilton. (Re)envision the HSR included a wide-ranging survey of almost 6,000 customers and residents, the results of which were shared in Information Report (PW20005) in January 2020. (Re)envision also attended over 50 community events and neighbourhood meetings, met with dozens of community stakeholders, and conducted digital consultation with hundreds of participants on the My HSR public engagement website. In addition, HSR Operators and staff shared their feedback, insights and ideas through a staff survey and HSR planning staff are participating in a comprehensive network review led by researchers from McMaster University's Department of Civil Engineering.

While the network reconfiguration is the most significant tangible outcome expected from the (Re)envision project, the purpose is much broader. Every aspect of transit's service delivery has been examined, to look for ways to improve the customer experience and grow ridership by increasing the satisfaction of existing customers and attracting new ones to the service. This will ultimately be achieved by understanding what existing and potential customers expect from the service, and how our current levels of service are meeting those target quality expectations, described in Figure 1 as the Quality Loop Model.

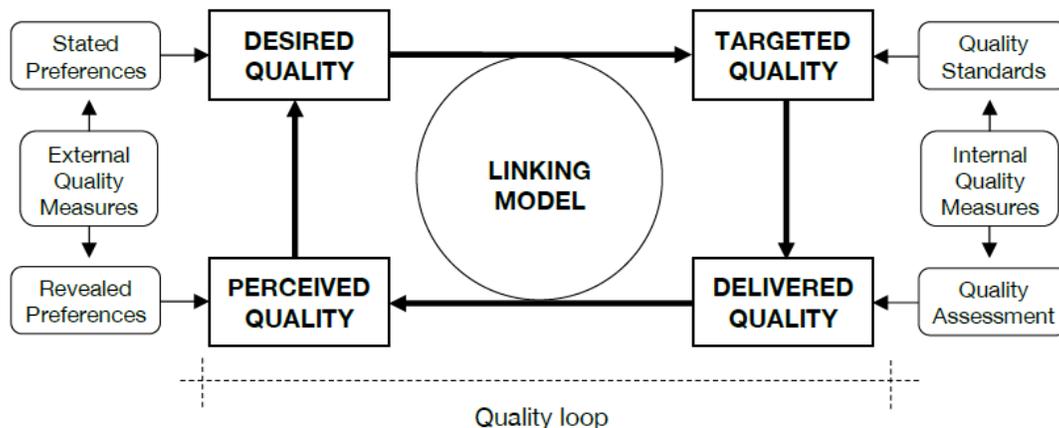


Figure 1: The Quality Loop Model

In addition to the eventual network reconfiguration to be proposed later in the project, several action plans will also be introduced to support customer acquisition endeavours,

ranging from small projects, to pilot initiatives, to larger service transformation activities that will help to shape the remaining years of the 10-Year Local Transit Strategy.

Strategic Context

Transit service is critical to the City's economic, social, cultural and environmental activities and outcomes. Transit supports essential service, economic growth, employment and education sectors, culture and tourism, climate change, and promotes healthy and safe communities. By providing accessible and affordable mobility to all residents throughout the City of Hamilton, transit increases equity and the freedom to move.

The 10-Year Local Transit Strategy, approved by Council in 2015, supports the City of Hamilton's Transportation Master Plan that seeks an appropriate balance within different transportation modes. Hamilton is mid-way through the strategy, including two paused years, with year five planned for implementation in 2021. It is important to note that the (Re)envision project provides the opportunity to guide the allocation of service hours and investment in transit.

As critical as transit service is to the City's overall sustainability, and despite the direction provided by the 10-Year Local Transit Strategy, there are noteworthy external factors that present opportunities and challenges that will influence the network reconfiguration and the future of transit in Hamilton:

(i) Opportunities

- Youth, seniors, newcomers, low-income families, and people with disabilities rely on public transit to improve their quality of life and represent important customer audience segments.
- COVID-19 demonstrated the essential service that transit provides to keep society functioning by transporting essential workers, such as healthcare providers, shipping and food industry workers, and grocery clerks.
- Rising cost of real estate, housing, education, and groceries strain household income and erode purchasing power; as such, walking, cycling, and public transit become important and affordable mobility options.
- Influx of new residents to Hamilton from the GTHA and beyond, who prefer or are accustomed to using transit over other modes of transportation.
- The looming climate crisis is amplifying the need to reduce CO₂ emissions and divert the use of single occupant vehicles toward public transit.

(ii) Challenges

- Area-rated taxation policy for transit limits transit growth in Flamborough, Glanbrook, Ancaster, Stoney Creek and Dundas, which have been the focus areas of economic development.
- Suburban areas of the city continue to expand outside the Urban Transit Boundary, creating “transit deserts” (e.g. Binbrook).
- Economic growth continues in areas where frequent transit service is not yet available for workers who rely on affordable transportation options, particularly in areas such as the Airport Employment Growth District (AEGD), Flamborough and Ancaster Business Parks.
- Awaiting decisions on the direction for rapid transit (e.g. BRT, LRT) along the B-line corridor of the BLAST network, which will become the backbone of the network reconfiguration.
- COVID-19 has reduced ridership and customer confidence is strained (temporarily).
- Potential ongoing operational impacts related to the second wave of COVID-19.
- Funding for transit is relatively fixed, with approximately 53% of operating costs funded by the tax levy.

Importantly, (Re)envision provides a platform for internal and external stakeholders by giving a voice to customers and identifying or amplifying strategic and collaborative opportunities that will grow ridership and strengthen the city’s overall sustainability.

Draft Guiding Principles

The engagement effort has culminated in a collection of proposed guiding principles. These draft guiding principles consolidate the most commonly expressed values, expectations and ideas from current and potential HSR customers, stakeholders and staff.

The draft guiding principles appear below, along with aspirational outcomes that each principle strives to achieve. The order of the principles does not imply a hierarchy of importance.

1. Customer experience is at the heart of what we do

- Be transparent with customers: Customers know their rights and responsibilities.
- Be easy to use at every step of the journey: The whole customer journey from start to finish is easy for customers.
- Make it right when things go wrong: Customers feel their feedback and complaints are resolved satisfactorily.
- Exceed customer expectations: Customers are passionate fans of the HSR.

2. We honour equity, diversity and inclusion
 - Leave nobody behind: Everyone can afford to take transit when they need it.
 - Neighbourhoods matter: Everyone across the Transit Urban Boundary can consider transit a viable option for their transportation needs.
 - Become barrier-free: Everyone can expect a transit service that goes beyond the minimum requirements to be truly accessible for all.
 - Welcome aboard: Everyone has a right to feel welcome and safe while using transit.

3. We deliver on our promise
 - Be reliable and on-time: Customers know they can rely on the service to meet their needs.
 - Commitment to our standards: Customers can access transit when and where they need it.
 - Riding a bus is comfortable: Customers ride buses that are clean and comfortable.
 - Over-crowding is managed and minimized: Customers do not have to wait too long due to over-crowded buses.
 - Stops, shelters and terminals are welcoming: Customers can wait at stops that are clean, free of graffiti, and have comfortable and accessible amenities.

4. We connect, innovate and evolve
 - Mobility is integrated: Customers can connect with other forms of transportation to complete their journey successfully.
 - Reconfigure our routes to serve the Hamilton of today: Customers can optimize their travel by taking direct trips to major destinations.
 - Be ready for tomorrow: Customers continually benefit from new and innovative features to make transit their first choice.
 - Marketing to new riders: New customers start using transit to increase modal share for conventional transit.

5. We engage with employees to improve customer experience
 - Employees are our strength: Employees feel engaged in helping to shape the future of transit in Hamilton.
 - Join our team: Customers celebrate the quality of the experience they receive from our staff.
 - Ready for change: Employees actively support and participate in continuous improvement opportunities.

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6. We make a positive impact on communities, environment and economy
- Design communities with a transit-first philosophy: Residents live in well-designed urban and suburban communities that prioritize transit service.
 - Improve quality of transit in suburban areas within the Urban Transit Boundary: Customers living, working and learning in suburban areas of the city benefit from frequent and reliable service, and reduced travel time.
 - Strong partnerships with businesses: Business communities embrace transit service to benefit their employees and customers.
 - Support advocacy within communities: Community partners have trust and confidence in the HSR
 - Understand the role of transit in an emergency: Customers can rely on us for their essential travel, even during a pandemic emergency.
 - Acting on climate change: HSR is one of the greenest transit fleets in Canada.

A summary of the guiding principles, target outcomes and operating principles is provided in Appendix “A” attached to Report PW20005(a).

Revised Timeline

It is important to note that like all aspects of the City of Hamilton’s operations over the last several months, the (Re)envision project has been impacted by COVID-19. A significant amount of public engagement around the draft guiding principles was planned for the spring and summer months but was subsequently postponed or cancelled.

Most significantly, the network review led by McMaster is founded upon ridership and operational metrics from 2019 and early 2020, prior to COVID-19. These metrics may not fully reflect the future travel needs and behaviours of HSR customers, due to the currently unpredictable medium- and longer-term impacts of the pandemic on ridership.

Further analysis is required by staff before recommendations can be developed for review and consultation. As COVID-19 response activities at the HSR stabilize, the project team will resume the analysis.

Figure 2 represents the revised project timeline, assuming a best-case scenario based on current situation:

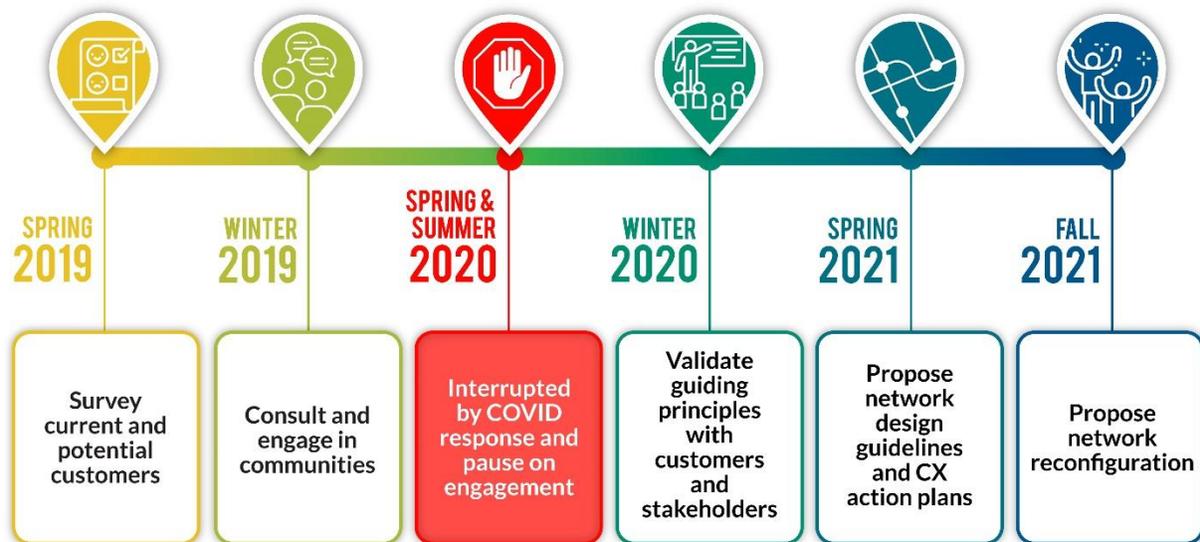


Figure 2: Revised Project Timeline

If there are further COVID-19 impacts into 2021, staff may be diverted to priority operational responses, which may place the project timeline at risk of further delays. The external challenges mentioned earlier may also continue to impact the project timeline. Staff will continue to seek resolutions or mitigating opportunities to external challenges in order to ensure timelines can be met as closely as possible.

Next Steps

The draft guiding principles are an output from the broad and deep engagement activities to date and require validation. The next step, therefore, is to validate the draft guiding principles with internal and external stakeholders, customers and the broader community. Once validated, the guiding principles will inform the final phases of the (Re)envision project and shape the remaining years of the 10-Year Local Transit Strategy.

The engagement effort will include digital engagement and will explore customer expectations and behaviours considering COVID-19 that will be crucial to support ridership recovery, stability, and ultimately growth.

Conclusion

(Re)envision the HSR is a transformative initiative based on extensive stakeholder engagement. Once the draft guiding principles are validated, there will be a solid framework to guide the next phase of the (Re)envision project including network reconfiguration, service design and the customer experience.

At the same time, (Re)envision the HSR is aligned to the City of Hamilton's strategic priorities and positioned to both grow ridership and enhance the quality of life in Hamilton. Now more than ever, the outcomes of (Re)envision are crucial to the City of Hamilton's recovery and its longer-term sustainability.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix "A" to Report PW20005(a) – Summary of Guiding Principles, Target Outcomes and Operating Principles