

City of St. Thomas Transportation Master Plan Update Virtual Public Consultation Meeting Transcript May 11, 2021

Slide 1

Welcome to the second virtual Public Consultation Meeting for the City of St. Thomas Transportation Master Plan Update. We appreciate you taking the time to attend this meeting and look forward to your feedback. My name is Brian Putre and I am the Project Manager at Stantec for this project. I am also joined by Lindsay Haskins, a Transportation Planner, Luxmi Shanmuganantha, also a Transportation Planner, and Nathan Bokma, Manager of Development and Compliance Services for the City of St. Thomas. Together, we are available to answer your questions following the presentation.

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We will start with a brief presentation by the study team, followed by a question and answer period. If you'd like to ask a question or speak with the project team during the question period, click the "Raise your Hand" button at the bottom of the screen. If you have called in through your phone, please dial "9". A member of the study team will tell you to unmute your microphone to ask your question or provide your comments.

This presentation, transcript, and question and answer summary will be available online following the meeting at www.stthomas.ca/tmp.

Following the meeting if you have any additional input to provide on this phase of the study, please reach out to a member of the project team by June 1, 2021.

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We are hosting this virtual Public Consultation Meeting in place of an in person Open House, to provide you with an update on the study progress. We will begin by providing an overview of where we are in the study process, we will summarize forecasted population and employment growth, and share what future network operations would look like in 2031 if no changes were made to the transportation network. We will then present our preliminary multi-modal recommendations and proposed policies and strategies. We will conclude by telling you about the next steps of the project and opening the meeting for a question and answer period.

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Study Progress (Title Slide)

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The TMP will serve as a long-range strategic plan to support and accommodate growth through to the year 2031. The goals of the study are to provide connectivity between transportation modes to move people and goods sustainably, efficiently, and safely; to support an integrated multi-modal transportation system that reduces the reliance upon any single mode and promotes walking, cycling, transit, and other forms of transportation; and finally to define policies and long term strategies to protect transportation corridors for all modes of transportation to address current and projected population and employment growth.

We completed Phases 1 and 2 of the project, which included a thorough look at the existing multi-modal network and community context, and involved traffic modeling to understand future conditions, needs, and opportunities. We are currently completing Phase 3, which evaluates alternative solutions to address needs within the transportation network and gathers public feedback on our initial solutions and recommendations. Phase 4 involves the identification of implementation considerations such as timing and project triggers, as well as cost estimates.

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Transportation plays an important role in the life of residents and visitors to St. Thomas – not only as a means to move around, but as a tool that contributes to the City’s quality of life. The Transportation network should empower residents, visitors, and businesses by balancing the needs of all users and abilities.

Ultimately, the vision for the transportation network in St. Thomas is a “Multi-Modal Transportation Network that facilitates connectivity for residents to jobs, services, and recreation, providing options for traveling within and beyond the City safely and efficiently.”

Through the Transportation Master Plan Update, we are working towards this vision by doing the following:

1. Providing infrastructure for growth;
2. Planning flexible infrastructure for seasonal changes;
3. Prioritizing and encouraging Active Transportation;
4. Prioritizing and encouraging Transit;
5. Improving safety for all road users; and
6. Enhancing multi-modal connections.

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During Phase 1 of this project, we conducted a public survey to obtain feedback on how the transportation network is currently used, and to understand the community’s transportation vision for the future. A total of 183 survey responses were collected, with many respondents indicating they use a personal vehicle as their primary mode of travel. 88% of respondents indicated as such, with 5% indicating they take public transit as their primary mode, and all other modes such as walking, cycling, or getting a ride from a family member or friend constituted about 1-2% of responses each.

When asked what modes people are most interested in using, there was interest expressed in using a combination of modes, but 84% of respondents expressed being very interested in using a personal vehicle.

Following a personal vehicle, walking and personal bicycle are the next most popular modes that respondents are interested in using. E-scooters, e-bikes, autonomous vehicles, and aerial drone deliveries are the modes that have the highest number of people who are not interested in using these modes at all. Notably, interest in particular modes of travel tend to be proportional to the availability and quality of the particular mode, so this chart on the right is not to suggest limitations, but rather to paint an accurate picture of current attitudes and perceptions.

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Forecasted Growth and Network Operations (Title Slide)

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It is important to understand how a community will grow to determine potential constraints in the transportation system and identify where improvements are required. St. Thomas is forecasted to undergo an increase in population of nearly 8,000 new residents between 2016 and 2031, which would yield an annual population growth of 1.3%. Over 3,000 new dwelling units are anticipated to be built by 2031, of which over 60% will be single-detached and semi-detached housing, and the rest will be apartments and multiple dwelling units. Nearly 21,000 total jobs are projected for 2031 which would reflect an increase of nearly 3,150 new jobs in the community.

St. Thomas' projected growth requires expansion of its Urban Area boundary to support residential development. The PFG Study 2020 identified four areas with potential for residential development within the city boundary but outside the urban build area, and the 2020 Development Charges Background Study established additional growth areas.

All growth areas are shown on this slide and were considered in our traffic forecasts.

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A future network operations analysis was completed to understand the capacity impacts if St. Thomas continues to grow with no changes to the transportation network – this is what we refer to as the “Status Quo” scenario. The primary metric with which we assess network capacity constraints is through evaluating the volume-to-capacity (v/c) ratio which represents the amount of vehicles that travel along a roadway within the peak hour divided by the capacity of the roadway. The analysis reveals that overall, the network will continue to operate within capacity during the 2031 AM Peak hour with none of the major roadways anticipated to exceed 85% of their capacity, apart from Burwell Road.

During the midday and PM peak periods, Fairview Avenue, Burwell Road, Talbot Street, Sunset Drive and First Avenue were all observed to be constrained. Talbot Street is anticipated to continue to be the most congested corridor in the City during these time periods.

These four most constrained corridors were reviewed in greater detail to identify potential opportunities and solutions to address the capacity limitations.

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Multi-Modal Network Recommendations (Title Slide)

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Of course, the volume-to-capacity analysis based on the “status quo” scenario does not take into consideration implementation of strategies that will encourage mode shift to alternative forms of transportation such as cycling, walking, and transit. As the future is difficult to predict, it is important to compare a few scenarios so that the transportation network can be planned in a flexible manner that can pivot with changing demands over time. For this reason, we have identified three mode split scenarios that range from the status quo to an aggressive change that would shift a considerable amount of people away from their vehicles and onto alternative modes of transportation. These scenarios were developed based on existing travel demand information that considers existing mode share, trip purposes, trip distance, and the planned future land uses & vision that are identified in the City’s Official Plan.

A multi-scenario analysis was conducted along the four (4) focus corridors identified in the Phase 2 analysis – the Burwell Road / Fairview Avenue corridor, as well as Sunset Drive, First Avenue, and Talbot Street. Some local auto trips of short distances were assumed to be shifted onto alternative modes, resulting in the ‘partial change’ and ‘aggressive change’ mode shares shown on this slide. The assumption is that investments and enhancements in active transportation, transit, and emerging technology will be the catalysts for mode shifts.

In developing recommendations, we have considered the ‘partial change’ scenario, which reflects a modest reduction in traffic along all four corridors as compared to the status quo. By doing so, we ensure that road network improvements are considered alongside investments elsewhere in the transportation network, and that we are addressing all capacity issues without overcommitting resources in areas where they aren’t needed.

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The recommended pedestrian network focuses on providing a connected network of walking routes that address residents’ most important needs and underline this TMP’s guiding themes. All of these objectives can be distilled into broad criteria that include: Improving safety; Improving accessibility; Creating connections to places people want to go to; and Integrating the pedestrian network with other modes of transportation such as transit and cycling. Pedestrian infrastructure, including sidewalks and crosswalks, support local retail and neighbourhood trips, considering also that automobile and transit trips require pedestrian connections to final destinations. Nowhere is this more prevalent than along Talbot Street where the sidewalks support and provide connections to retail.

New development areas and industrial lands have also been identified for pedestrian improvements to encourage the use of active modes for all or a portion of people’s trips.

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Cycling facilities were evaluated during Phase 3 of the TMP process based on input from stakeholders and assessment of needs and future travel trends. The network evaluation included the following five criteria: population density, incline, crossing barriers, access to major destinations, and network connectivity, to determine the feasibility and prioritization of each cycling corridor.

The proposed corridors will offer connections to many destinations, are all on relatively flat ground with between a 1 and 3% incline, and will service areas with moderate densities. Overall, the active transportation corridor on First Avenue scored the highest largely due to the connection it provides over both identified barriers, the St. Thomas Expressway and the railway.

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The City of St. Thomas recently completed a Transit Strategic Plan which presented a new optimized transit network that will better serve the residents of St. Thomas. Notably, the Strategic Plan details expanding transit access via on-demand transit, which has been recently implemented. On-demand service is now offered in the Industrial Area in the northeast, the residential community located off of Burwell Road in the north end of the City, and the Miller's Pond residential development just south of the current urban area boundary.

This TMP recommends investigating the expansion of transit service into new development areas once the City has more information about the ridership and performance of its new transit system. The use of on-demand transit in areas of growth can be strategic as this will encourage and facilitate transit use early on, with the potential to eventually convert the service to fixed route in the future if demand warrants it.

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The recommended vehicular network consists of the improvements summarized on this slide. Notably, these major road widening projects would require Environmental Assessment studies, including additional public consultations, to develop preferred designs that balance the needs of all road users, and have favourable benefits in comparison to costs and environmental impacts. For each recommended road widening, it is envisioned that a detailed intersection treatment analysis would be conducted as corridor design concepts are developed for at-grade intersections. Roundabouts are the preferred intersection treatment, and one is envisioned to be feasible at South Edgeware Road and Highbury Avenue, but they may not be feasible where right-of-way limitations exist.

In addition, we are recommending several transit priority measures be implemented. Transit priority measures can take a variety of forms but most applicable to St. Thomas would be transit signal priority, whereby traffic sensors detect approaching buses and traffic signal phasing is adjusted to allow buses to move more efficiently through the intersection, for example through extending additional green time to ensure the bus can clear the intersection.

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Policies and Strategies (Title Slide)

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A successful multi-modal transportation network relies on not only physical infrastructure, but also policies and strategies that regulate and guide the City toward the vision for the future. Several policies and strategies are shown here on the slide and have been explored in Phase 3 of this TMP. We will elaborate on a few of these strategies in the following slides.

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The image on the screen here shows a heatmap of historical vehicle collision data across the City. Previously, collision rates were actually the highest along Centre Street, but the City of St. Thomas has already recognized this as a gap and reconstructed this road in 2018, which led to a considerable drop in collisions. While zero collisions is always the goal, and while some challenges will inevitably remain along major corridors, there are no intersections that are recommended for specific safety improvements at this time, based solely on collision data. Furthermore, St. Thomas' existing traffic calming policy is effective in proactively addressing road safety concerns. At the same time, there are always opportunities to improve, and a noted recommendation included in this TMP in the interest of pedestrian safety, is to consider installing flashing amber lights at the courtesy crosswalks along Talbot Street, to improve their visibility to passing drivers.

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Complete Streets are streets that are safe for everyone including people who walk, bike, take transit, or drive, and for people of all ages and abilities. There is no singular design for a Complete Street, as each one is unique to its local context, but the most effective complete streets are those that equitably share the roadway for all users based on contextual needs. Complete streets may include design elements such as sidewalks, wide paved shoulders, frequent and safe crossing opportunities, curb extensions, median islands, bus lanes, roundabouts, and more. St. Thomas currently takes a Complete Streets approach with all new roads constructed with new subdivisions and during the reconstruction of existing roads.

Complete streets are best woven in with road classification, where the design elements are aligned with the function of each street type, including arterial roadways, collector roadways, and local streets. St. Thomas already has a robust road classification system, although recommended road classification upgrades are recommended along Wellington Street (west of Elgin Street), as well as along Peachtree Boulevard, McGregor Court, and Avon Road, to accommodate future growth and to be consistent with transit service levels.

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The next steps of our study include refining and finalizing network and policy recommendations based on this round of public engagement; and then preparing an implementation plan that includes timing, cost considerations, and an action plan, and finally developing the Transportation Master Plan Update report.

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Thank you again for listening to our presentation. We now welcome your thoughts on the proposed transportation network and strategies. Once you raise your hand, we will unmute your microphone so that you can speak with the project team.

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