

City of St. Thomas Transportation Master Plan Update Virtual Public Consultation Meeting Transcript September 9, 2020

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Thank you for joining us for the first round of Virtual Public Consultation Meetings for the City of St. Thomas Multi-Modal Transportation Master Plan Update. My name is Stephanie and I am a Planner from Stantec Consulting, and I will be walking you through the presentation today. We also have Brandon Orr, the Project Manager and Transportation Planner from Stantec Consulting, and Nathan Bokma, Manager of Development and Compliance Services for the City of St. Thomas who are here to answer your questions following the presentation.

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We will start with a brief presentation by the by study team, followed by a question and answer period. If you would 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 call you in order to unmute your microphone to ask your question or provide your comments. You can also type comments through the “question and answer” tab at the bottom of your screen.

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 October 2, 2020. Contact information is provided at the end of the presentation, and is also available on the website at www.stthomas.ca/tmp.

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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 introduction to the study and an overview of the study process, provide a review of current conditions and future directions for the study, and most importantly, we’re here to provide an opportunity for you to connect with the project team and share your input on the transportation network in St. Thomas. Thanks to all of those who have already taken our survey! Your input is important as we progress through the study, and we’d like to hear from you following the presentation with any input on elements of the existing transportation network, where you see areas of opportunity or concerns, or other considerations for the Transportation Master Plan Update.

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The Transportation Master Plan (TMP) will serve as a long-range strategic plan to support and accommodate growth through to the year 2041. 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 promote walking, cycling, transit, and other forms of transportation, and to fine policies and long term strategies to protect transportation corridors for all modes of transportation to address current and projected population and employment growth.

We are currently completing Phase 1 of the study, which includes a thorough look at the existing multi-modal network, community context, and the various City policies and strategies that feed into the transportation network. During Phase 2, we undertake traffic modeling to better understand future conditions, needs, and opportunities. We then identify and evaluate alternative solutions to address needs within the transportation network during Phase 3. Phase 4 involves the identification of implementation considerations such as timing and project triggers, as well as cost estimates.

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Community demographics play an important role in understanding needs within our transportation network, since different age groups may rely more on different modes of transportation.

Like many communities across Canada, St. Thomas has a large proportion of individuals over the age of 55, which represent approximately 33% of the population. While the large proportion of the senior population may put greater emphasis on certain community transportation needs such as paratransit, the City also has a significant proportion of population under the age of 14, which can have very different needs.

Similarly, looking at land use and development trends, St. Thomas is expected to see a shift to a greater share of multi-family and apartment units. These higher density forms of development can help support sustainable modes of transportation like active transportation and transit systems.

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The City of St. Thomas Road Network is organized into different road classifications, which all serve different functions and have different characteristics.

Highway 3 a Provincial highway under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Transportation and is identified as a Controlled Access Highway with limited road accesses, intended to move larger volumes of traffic quickly and safely.

The City of St. Thomas Official Plan identifies both Major and Minor Arterial roadways, which carry moderate volumes of city-wide traffic, and provide important connections to highways, collector, and local roads.

The Official Plan also identifies Major/Minor Collector roadways, which are intended to move moderate amounts of traffic between arterial roadways and destinations.

Local roads are intended to carry light volumes of traffic between destinations and the collector road network.

We are reviewing these road classifications to identify opportunities for better integration with complete streets principles and transportation vision.

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The City of St. Thomas recently completed the Transit Strategic Plan. The study looked at existing route structures, service delivery approaches, technology, and other needs and constraints along with considering the results of the transit survey and best practices in other similar sized cities.

The recommendations of the Plan included:

- higher frequency service along Talbot Street,
- conversion of low-ridership areas into on-demand service areas,
- later evening service via on-demand, and
- reduced frequency on lower-tier routes to allow for a Sunday service pilot project.

At this time, St. Thomas transit will operate using the existing routes, fares, and schedules, and will evaluate potential changes based on the availability of funding. This Transportation Master Plan update provides the opportunity to integrate these proposed transit improvements with the broader transportation network to help contribute to a more resilient, connected, and multi-modal transportation network.

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The Pedestrian Network in the City consists of nearly 234 kms of sidewalks and multi-use pathways, 40 signalized intersections, and 27 pedestrian crossovers (or crosswalks). Most built-up areas of the City can access the Downtown within a 30-minute walk.

While there are well connected pedestrian links within the residential and commercial areas of the City, there are gaps within the employment and industrial areas primarily within the north-east areas of the City. This presents opportunities to better support alternative modes of transportation and multi-modal connections within these important employment centres.

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The City's cycling network includes nearly 52 km of infrastructure including bike lanes, multi-use pathways, and trails, but there are still a number of gaps that exist in the network, including the residential and institutional areas around Fairview Street, and areas around Balaclava Street north of Talbot. The City of St. Thomas' compact form and relatively flat topography are great for cycling – nearly all of the built areas of the City are within about a 15-minute bike ride to the downtown core.

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As part of the TMP Update, we are assessing travel demand data to understand how traffic is moving around the City, but also how it travels in and out of the City. We have focused on fall weekday trips, as well as summer weekend trips, since St. Thomas is in a unique position between the City of London as a major urban centre, and Port Stanley as a popular summer recreation destination.

The analysis shows that both during the Fall Weekday and Summer Weekend periods, over 60% of trips started and ended within the City. This is a significant proportion of trips when compared to other similar jurisdictions and provides excellent opportunities for localized improvements within the multi-modal network.

The rest of the traffic was distributed fairly evenly between the City of London, Elgin County East, and areas external to Elgin County, with a smaller proportion of trips heading to areas in the west of Elgin County.

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Currently in St. Thomas, over 95% of trips are currently made by car. Of those trips, over 80% are less than 6kms. These trends identify potential opportunities to increase the mode share split of personal vehicle trips to alternative modes of transportation such as active transportation or transit over the next 20 years. Due to its compact size, the City is in an excellent position to encourage these alternative modes of transportation through the provision of cycling and pedestrian infrastructure, improvements to transit services, and mixed-use community developments. All of these initiatives can help reduce the reliance on personal vehicles, which contributes to a more sustainable transportation network, a reduction in community greenhouse gas emissions, and overall community health!

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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 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 Multi-Modal Transportation Master Plan Update, we are working towards this vision by:

1. Providing infrastructure for Growth
2. Planning flexible infrastructure for seasonal changes
3. Prioritizing and encouraging Active Transportation and Transit
4. Improving safety for all road users, and
5. Enhancing Multi-Modal Connections

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The Next steps in our study include:

- Reviewing and considering feedback we have received so far from the Online Survey and Public Meetings
- Preparing traffic forecasting and modeling to understand future needs and opportunities, and
- Identifying and assessing alternative solutions to address these future needs

A second Public Consultation Meeting will be held during Phase 3 to share information on future needs, alternative solutions, and preliminary Master Plan recommendations.

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Thank you for attending this virtual Public Consultation Meeting, and we will now open up the floor to questions. Please click the “raise your hand” button and a member of the study team will unmute your microphone so that you can speak with the project team. Note that you can also provide comments or input to the project team at any time via telephone or email.

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

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We would love to hear your thoughts on the current transportation network, including areas you think could be improved. We are also interested in hearing about what types of factors influence your transportation choices the most, and what you see as our greatest challenges over the next 20 years. Once you raise your hand, we will unmute your microphone so that you can speak with the project team.



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