

**TO: MEMBERS OF GENERAL COMMITTEE**

**FROM: MAYOR LEHMAN**

**RE: MAYOR'S PLAN FOR TRANSIT**

**DATE: FEB 9<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

Members of General Committee,

We have reached a point in our city's evolution where a comprehensive reform of Barrie's Transit system is necessary. During the recent municipal election, transit was a major issue due in part to growing public concern about service levels. Further, the advent of a second GO rail station, and resulting changes in intercity bus travel patterns, is changing the nature of intercity transportation to and from Barrie and creating new focal points for transit service. It's therefore a good time to be considering big changes to transit and intercity transportation. Of course, any major changes need to happen only through extensive consultation with the carriers, operators, and most of all the riders – the general public. This memo outlines initial steps taken to start this process.

Shortly after inauguration, I spoke with the General Manager of Community Services to set up a meeting of relevant staff to answer basic questions about the feasibility of three possible major changes:

1. Introduction of a new route and scheduling model for transit using multiple hubs around the city instead of a single primary hub downtown;
2. Relocation of intercity buses out of the downtown terminal, to a more appropriate location closer to Highway 400;
3. Following the above two changes, the conversion of the ground floor of the Barrie Transit Terminal into a market building, with the potential to host an expanded Barrie Farmer's Market in the former platform area.

Two internal working meetings with staff have been held to test the feasibility of the above ideas, to determine if they have enough merit to consider further. I'm pleased to report the answer appears to be yes for all three components, as outlined below.

**1. New Models for Transit**

Barrie Transit currently operates 22 routes, from a primary hub (the downtown terminal) and two secondary hubs (Allandale Recreation Centre and Georgian College). The system essentially operates using the principle of "connecting downtown" – if you need to get somewhere in the city that isn't on the route you're boarding, you travel downtown and catch a bus from the terminal that's going where you need to go. Routes are scheduled to arrive downtown at the same time to allow for transfers.

However as Barrie has grown, this model has been stretched to a point where it is difficult to serve the full geography of the City – south end routes have to travel extensive distances to get back to the downtown terminal. Most south end routes - #41 Allandale, #31 Essa, #30 Yonge, #34 Ardagh, and #39 Hurst – are currently 60 minute round trips. With development in the annexation area, this problem will worsen, and it will likely be impossible to serve the extreme southwest and southeast portions of the city on the current model.

Transit service is also fundamentally shaped by land use patterns. Higher density areas, and major facilities or institutions, generate significantly higher ridership and can support more frequent service. In Barrie today these include the City Centre, Bayfield Street, and RVH/Georgian College. As the City's

intensification strategy comes to pass, the land use vision for Barrie includes more medium and higher density development along major arterial roads, and in key nodes around the City. This can support more frequent transit service along these corridors, connecting these nodes.

One new model would see Barrie's system moving from a single hub model to a multi-hub model, with more frequent service connecting the hubs along arterial roads. "Feeder" or local service would continue much as it is today, but serving the nearest hub instead of the downtown terminal. South end hubs will allow for feeder service into the annexation lands and will capitalize on continued growth and expansion along the Mapleview Corridor, from Holly to the Barrie South GO Station. Service would continue to downtown as one of several hubs, but the amount of transit activity at the Terminal building would be greatly reduced.

A multi-hub model has the potential to significantly improve transit service in Barrie. However, considerable testing is required to work out the details of such a significant shift in transit service. While additional fleet requirements are forecast to be relatively minimal (3 to 5 additional buses), a detailed route concept cannot be prepared until updated ridership data (passenger on/off counts and origin/destination data) is available. Transportation modeling will need to be conducted to examine the impacts on service and prepare a routing model which can be presented to the public. Costing implications, both capital and operating, will need to be prepared. This planning work can be conducted by transportation engineering firms and is anticipated to cost in the order of \$50,000. The outcome of the work will be a viable new model for transit service, for public consultation.

A brief introductory conversation concerning transit and intercity transportation was held with senior staff at Metrolinx (GO Transit). It was noted that there may exist funding opportunities for transit projects that can enhance service to GO Rail stations. Metrolinx has offered to send a staff member to participate in planning meetings should this initiative move forward.

## **2. Intercity Transportation**

With the reintroduction of GO rail service to Barrie, there has been some degree of shift in ridership on Barrie-Toronto service from bus service to rail. It's anticipated that when the Allandale Station opens in late 2011, there will be a further shift in ridership. Trends in trip generation also suggest that, despite the coming growth in Barrie's population and economy, demand for intercity bus transportation is forecast to remain roughly stable.

Currently, there is an average of 37 intercity bus departures a day, operating off of 4 platforms at the Barrie Terminal. Discussions could be initiated with the intercity carriers about relocating these platforms to another transit hub or appropriate location, closer to Highway 400. It should be noted that the built space requirements to support intercity bus service are not substantial in scale and could potentially be accommodated through any number of methods – through integration into a planned or proposed commercial development, through conversion of an existing building, or potentially a new building.

The benefits of relocating intercity service would include: more convenient access for buses to Highway 400, shortening travel times and reducing difficult bus movements in congested areas of the core; elimination of delays due to road closures for special events; and the potential to create better intermodal linkages between buses and GO rail service, or with commuter parking facilities on Highway 400.

It should be noted that the City of Barrie's current role in intercity bus service is really as a landlord to carriers who deliver the service from the Barrie Terminal. Facilitating continued service for our residents is very important, however, the nature of the City's future involvement should form part of the discussion if bus service moves offsite.

### **3. Terminal Building**

The existing Maple Avenue transit terminal building was constructed nearly twenty years ago through joint funding by the City of Barrie and the Province of Ontario. The ground floor includes a waiting area for transit and intercity passengers, washrooms, ticket sales, parcel area, driver room, and several tenants including the Barrie Police, a restaurant, and a convenience store. There are currently 13 operational platforms, 9 used by Barrie Transit, 4 by intercity carriers.

If Barrie's transit system became a multi-hub model, transit service would no longer require this number of platforms or as much waiting area. The relocation of intercity buses would also result in fewer platform requirements and eliminate the need for intercity passenger waiting and support spaces inside the terminal building. This creates the potential to re-purpose the ground floor of the Terminal; while still maintaining it as a transit hub, including ticket sales and a small waiting area, much of the remainder of the ground floor could be used for a different use.

An initial staff review of the building indicates that a renovation project could open up some of the existing ground floor waiting area into a large floor plate. The former platform area could also be re-purposed as a public space for a wide variety of potential uses, providing a connection between the waterfront and Dunlop Street. Further, this area would become an extension of the public spaces along the waterfront, allowing waterfront events and their visitors to be "drawn up" into the downtown (whereas the current use is something of a barrier).

One potential use would be as a full-time food market building, a use which could be a major tourist attraction and has the potential to significantly stimulate revitalization in the west end of Downtown Barrie. This could consist of permanent vendors operating every day of the week, during regular business hours, or a variety of other operating models. Currently, two Barrie citizens (Allan Bell and William Leslie) have volunteered their time to investigate market buildings in other cities.

It would also be my intention, if Council supports this initiative, to meet with the Barrie Farmer's Market Committee to discuss whether they would be interested in relocating to the Terminal Building if all of the above came to pass. A permanent food market building near the waterfront could present significant benefits to the Barrie Farmer's Market in terms of additional space for growth, dedicated space, easier access, and tie-ins to waterfront special events and festivals. However, the Farmer's Market would not necessarily need to move to the building for the project to succeed, and no discussions with the Farmer's Market Committee have been undertaken yet, pending Council's consideration of the project.

#### **Timing and Next Steps**

The proposed next step in this process is to consult with the experts regarding major issues and feasibility, and with all the potentially affected parties. To do so, a series of three charettes (intensive workshops) are proposed, one for each aspect of the project. The charettes will be held with stakeholder organizations for each aspect – with the intercity carriers regarding their facility and needs; with transit drivers and planners regarding the potential system changes; and with Terminal tenants, the BIA, Tourism Barrie, and related groups regarding the building itself and future uses.

To begin the transportation planning and modeling work, ridership data needs to be collected during the post-secondary school year (by May) in order to be accurate. As such, there is a need to get moving right away to collect data, hence the request for immediate funding for the transit planning process.

An extensive public consultation plan will need to be developed and executed regarding the proposed changes. It's anticipated that this consultation will occur in late spring and summer of 2011 and could include steps ranging from openhouses, displays at the terminal, on-line forums, and printed material on the buses themselves.

Public comments, proposed changes, and further refinements would then lead to a final proposed plan for General Committee consideration and approval in fall 2011. If approved, the timing of project implementation would then be driven by transition planning for the transit system, and the timing of budget approval for capital expenditures (new buses and building renovations). However, it is feasible that the project could be achieved by 2013-2014.

### **Relationship to Draft Strategic Priorities**

At the time of writing, Council's draft strategic priorities have been established as five goals for this term of Council. This project addresses all five of them as follows.

1. *Economic Development* - improved transit service provides improved mobility for the labour market and can reduce traffic congestion. A new routing model can help introduce transit service to new employment areas in the south end of Barrie.
2. *Managing Growth* – the project will support the City's intensification strategy and help support a more sustainable growth model for the city, while reducing traffic and associated emissions.
3. *Community Involvement/Customer Service* – the project can respond to the needs of transit riders for more frequent service and through an extensive consultation plan, can involve the system's users directly in shaping transit service.
4. *Fiscal Responsibility* – increased transit ridership lowers the subsidy required from the general tax base; a new model may also allow outside revenue opportunities through partnerships with adjacent communities. A market building would also be very likely to raise assessed values and stimulate new development in the area, resulting in new tax revenues.
5. *Revitalizing the City Centre*– the conversion of the Terminal to a market building would create a significant new attraction, drawing people up from the lakeshore into downtown Barrie, and creating a significant amenity for those living and working in the core itself. It would likely improve assessed values in the area.

### **Conclusion**

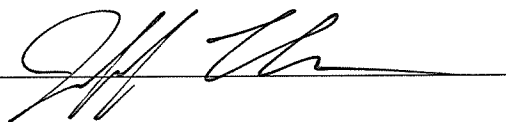
The growth of our city and the needs of its residents require an overhaul of Barrie's intercity and urban transit models. The system that has served us well for many decades now needs a model that reflects the realities of our geography and the changing pattern of land use in Barrie, as well as the clear message from the public that changes are desired and needed. Serving all parts of the city well in the future requires a fundamentally new model for service.

In some ways, the potential to convert the transit terminal to another use is merely a by-product of this larger change. However, by creating a new attraction in a strategically important location, and creating a new link between the waterfront and downtown Barrie, the repurposing of the terminal building could be a substantial leap forward for downtown revitalization, stimulating property values and supporting tourism.

This project has three other key advantages: it can be achieved in a relatively short timeline (3-4 years), it is relatively low cost, and it does not depend on external forces such as market conditions or development decisions to be accomplished – it is within the City's control.

At this point, I'm requesting **support in principal** by General Committee for the ideas outlined above, and for the necessary resources to properly test and plan the new model for our transit system. These would be funded from the Council Strategic Priorities account, as this project fulfils virtually all of our draft strategic priorities, as outlined above.

In conclusion I would like to recognize the work conducted by City staff in the Leisure, Transit, and Facilities department, to evaluate the feasibility of the components of this potential project, and to work up a plan to move forward.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "J. H. ...", is written over a horizontal line.

**Appendix A: Next Steps**

Item	Timing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 Charettes               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Intercity carriers</li> <li>b) Transit Planners &amp; Operators</li> <li>c) Tenants, BIA, Tourism Barrie, others</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	March/April
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ridership Data Collection</li> </ul>	April/May
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft New Route Distribution Model Developed</li> </ul>	May/June
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integration of Route Model and Feasibility Study</li> </ul>	June/July
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public/Stakeholder Consultation &amp; Feedback on Route Model and Re-adaptive Use of Terminal</li> </ul>	June-Sept
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revisions to Integration Draft Plan</li> </ul>	Fall 2011
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final Proposed Plan for Council Consideration</li> </ul>	Fall 2011