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**A RESPONSE TO  
BURLINGTON'S DRAFT  
OFFICIAL PLAN:  
COMMITMENT  
REQUIRES  
ACTION**

**JUNE, 2017**

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# **COMMITMENT REQUIRES ACTION**

## **A response to Burlington's draft Official Plan June, 2017**

Burlington for Accessible Sustainable Transit (BFAST) is a non-profit citizens' advocacy group that promotes and works for a better transit system for Burlington. Burlington's current transit system, through no fault of its staff, who do their best to provide a workable network, is one of the worst in the Greater Toronto-Hamilton Area. Burlington provides the lowest level of municipal funding to its transit system of any city of its size in Ontario.

The purpose of our submission to the review of Burlington's Official Plan is not to argue with the stated goals of the Plan where transit is concerned. Rather, we will argue that the Plan needs a clear statement and commitment on funding for transit; otherwise, its stated goals with respect to transit are even less meaningful in reality than those of the current Plan.

If the purpose of the City's Official Plan is to chart an overall strategic course for future development, the City of Burlington's current Plan must be seen as a failure where transit is concerned.

## **SERVICE LEVELS**

The current Official Plan (updated in July 2015) states that the City's objective is to "promote the use of transit ... by providing increased levels of service ... and introducing appropriate 'transit priority' and Travel Demand Management (TDM) measures." (Part II, page 35)

In reality, the City has done the exact opposite. Far from "providing increased levels of service," the City has cut transit funding and service to the point where the network is barely functional. Whatever the "transit priority" and "Travel Demand Management (TDM) measures" were meant to be, there has been no sign of them.

Far from promoting transit, the City has done everything possible to discourage its use. It has significantly cut transit funding. It has reduced service frequencies. It has made making connections more difficult. And it has made it clear that any improvements in one area must be matched by service cuts in another.

## **POLICIES**

The City's Official Plan states that transit service "shall be provided" in accordance with a projected network map that, despite the omission of any service whatsoever to the Alton community, has not yet been realized.

The Plan also identifies "the long-term location of local and inter-regional transit services ... such as a Primary Bus Service Network" that will provide "peak period service frequencies of 15 minutes or better."

In reality, the City's actions have led to lower frequencies on many bus routes. Three of the four routes that serve northeast Burlington for instance, have been cut to hourly frequency, making it almost impossible for residents there to access any transit service whatsoever and leaving them with trip times exceeding two hours if they use transit for shopping, employment or school.

## **MODAL SHARE**

The current Official Plan calls for a transit modal share of "15% of all trips within Burlington." (Part II, p. 36)

### **MUNICIPAL PER CAPITA SPENDING ON TRANSIT OPERATING COSTS: BURLINGTON AND PEER COMMUNITIES**

*Table presented to Burlington City Council by Jarrett Walker at the Committee of the Whole meeting Nov. 14, 2016.*

<b>CITY</b>	<b>REVENUE HOURS</b>	<b>SERVICE AREA POPULATION</b>	<b>REVENUE HOURS PER CAPITA</b>	<b>MUNICIPAL OPERATING CONTRIBUTIONS PER CAPITA</b>
<b>BARRIE</b>	<b>172,042</b>	<b>135,543</b>	<b>1.25</b>	<b>\$70.90</b>
<b>BURLINGTON</b>	<b>160,072</b>	<b>170,310</b>	<b>0.94</b>	<b>\$48.41</b>
<b>GUELPH</b>	<b>308,800</b>	<b>141,097</b>	<b>2.18</b>	<b>\$92.12</b>
<b>KINGSTON</b>	<b>219,323</b>	<b>115,142</b>	<b>1.90</b>	<b>\$111.68</b>
<b>OAKVILLE</b>	<b>202,206</b>	<b>188,000</b>	<b>1.08</b>	<b>\$76.80</b>
<b>ST. CATHARINES</b>	<b>168,704</b>	<b>149,331</b>	<b>1.13</b>	<b>\$59.14</b>
<b>SUDBURY</b>	<b>160,715</b>	<b>138,000</b>	<b>1.21</b>	<b>\$77.97</b>

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In reality, transit's modal share, like its ridership, has shrunk to new lows as a result of City policies. Far from reaching a 15% modal share, transit ridership has shrunk nearly 15% since City Council decided to cut the share of federal gas-tax money that transit receives and put it into scrape-and-pave projects (of highly dubious value) on minor roadways. Transit's current modal share is estimated to be as low as two percent.

### **PROMOTION**

The current Official Plan states that "The City will promote increased transit usage through ongoing marketing, continuous operational improvements and fare incentives." (Part II, page 36)

Thus far, whatever marketing efforts the City has made have been ineffectual. "Continuous operational improvements" have been made only if other levels of government have funded them.

As for "fare incentives," Council has twice refused to consider pilot projects that would have increased ridership at costs of as little as 20 cents per household. That would have been the cost of a one-month experiment in giving seniors – a rapidly growing component of Burlington's population – free rides on Mondays. A similar proposal, advanced by the City's own Seniors Advisory Committee at a total cost of less than \$100,000 per year (less than two dollars per household) was rejected out of hand.

### **ACCOUNTABILITY**

If Council adopts strategies and measures in direct opposition to its stated goals in its own Official Plan, then we must ask what the point is of having an Official Plan in the first place. Whatever the worth of the Plan in defining permitted land uses, insofar as transit is concerned, the current document is meaningless.

If the current Plan was meant to be a statement of the City's intentions where transit is concerned, then the City has abrogated its responsibilities to the province and to its own citizens by adopting policies which are completely at variance with the objectives stated in the Plan.

The revised Official Plan makes only vague commitments to "[make] transit an attractive transportation option by encouraging transit-supportive land use" (p. 6-13) and to "implement a frequent transit network and other local transit service." (p. 6-14)

Yet the revised Plan states that the City's transportation system and land-use measures

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are “intended to achieve or exceed the minimum transit modal shares” as stated in Halton’s *Transportation Master Plan*.

Given the failure of the City to achieve a transit modal share of 15%, a goal set out in the current Plan, we can only wonder how it plans to achieve the 20% share set as a goal in the Halton plan. (*Halton Region Transportation Master Plan (2031) – The Road to Change*, p. 34)

Without increased funding from the municipality, it will be impossible to implement a frequent transit network without drastic cuts to other areas of the system. Indeed, this is the implied result of the frequency-vs.-coverage paradigm that the City’s transit consultant, Jarrett Walker, has promoted in his presentations to City Council and to the public.

Mr. Walker’s paradigm, if implemented without an increase in funding, would Rob Peter to pay Paul. It would deprive the mythical “Mrs. Jones,” who might not live along a main transit route, of any service whatsoever in order to beef up frequencies on main routes. Council would simply learn to ignore Mrs. Jones’s “yelling” and concentrate on satisfying riders in denser areas.

A simple statement of lofty goals for transit does not make for a workable transit plan. Experience shows that such statements are meaningless unless backed by adequate funding. And Burlington City Council has consistently made decisions that deprive its transit system of funding and act directly against the goals stated in its current Official Plan.

For all of the rhetoric about the need to operate the City in a more businesslike manner, Council is forging ahead with its master plan for transit without consideration of the costs and benefits of different transportation scenarios.

Studies by the Canadian Urban Transit Association have shown that transit is one of the best investments a municipality can make. Waterloo Region made a groundbreaking decision several years ago to redeploy parts of its projected spending on roads to transit based on a comprehensive, comparative cost-benefit analysis. (Regional Municipality of Waterloo, *Regional Transportation Master Plan: Moving Forward, 2031*; January, 2011)

Without such an evidence-based study, any debate on transit and transportation in Burlington will be mired in political interference and unfounded claims based solely on false premises (like big tax increases). We are confident that a proper cost-benefit

analysis would find that investment in transit would save taxpayer dollars by reining in the City's spending on roads.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The citizens of Burlington deserve to be given transportation choices, whether they live in an area of high or low density, whether they live on a main road or a side street, whether their home is a single-family dwelling or an apartment unit.

Transit is an integral part of a city that believes in accessibility for all of its residents: a city that encourages participation in civic life, promotes equal employment opportunity and builds a sense of community for all.

However, the provision of transit service that is merely adequate requires a financial commitment from the City in excess of its current contribution. In the context of today's anti-tax environment, that means finding ways to more efficiently distribute transportation costs among the various transport modes under the City's jurisdiction. This, in turn, should be done as part of an overall transportation study that examines the costs and benefits of various transportation scenarios, including one that prioritizes transit.

We therefore restrict our recommendations for the City's new Official Plan to two:

- 1) That the City commits to undertaking a comprehensive transportation study, such as the one completed by the Regional Municipality of Waterloo, that analyzes the costs and benefits of a system based primarily on roads vs. one that puts more priority on transit; and
- 2) That the City makes a commitment in its Official Plan to increase transit funding to a level that would enable it to meet and exceed its own stated goal of a 15% modal share for transit.

All of which is respectfully submitted.