



Woodstock Transit. Bruce Chessell, Woodstock Sentinel Review

Urban Transit

The role of urban transit in addressing local mobility needs and making communities less dependent on the car is obvious. Its quantity and quality are increasing as factors in the decisions people make about where they want to live and work, and where businesses choose to invest.

As a piece of the regional public transportation puzzle, urban transit has an equally important role to play. It supplies the “first and last mile” component of car-free intercity and inter-regional journeys. A traveller’s decision to drive or use public transportation for their full journey may hinge on urban transit’s frequency, ease of access, geographic coverage and connectivity with the other public modes.

Without adequate urban transit as part of a seamless travel package, each mode’s effectiveness in providing an alternative to the car is compromised.

However, delivering enhanced urban transit is a challenge. While many municipalities recognize the need to increase their transit service coverage and frequency, the increased capital and operating costs have been barriers. Recent federal and provincial funding contributions to transit have, to date, eased this problem marginally.

Compounding this is the general infrequency of intercity service in Southwestern Ontario. Reductions to VIA Rail Canada and privately-operated inter-community bus services have only made the situation worse. As a result, investing in improvements to urban transit to act as a feeder to the intercity modes has been difficult to justify.

Despite these challenges, some Southwestern Ontario cities are engaged in projects that will boost urban transit’s role as a component of the public transportation system on a regional basis.



City of London: Shift.

The 2012 revamping of Guelph Transit placed a heavy emphasis on the “hubbing” of its routes at the municipally-owned Guelph Central Station, which provides direct connections with GO, VIA and private bus services.

When completed in 2017, Waterloo Region’s high-frequency light rail transit line will provide a direct connection with the intercity modes in downtown Kitchener.

In other communities, current studies of urban transit improvements provide more opportunities to consider how it can better perform as part of a seamless, region-wide system. Notable among these is the Shift initiative, which will define a new transit vision and implementation strategy for London.

As has been demonstrated in several U.S. regions, urban transit is an indispensable component of a successful multi-modal public transportation system. To make this a reality in Southwestern Ontario, municipal transit providers will require significant financial support from the upper levels of government.