

## REPORT

### Council

**Meeting Date: February 28, 2022**

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**FROM:** Transportation and Engineering Department

**DATE:** February 15, 2022

**SUBJECT:** Memorandum of Understanding – Smart Commute Program

**LOCATION:**

**WARD:** Town-wide

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#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

1. That the report entitled “Memorandum of Understanding – Smart Commute Program” from the Transportation and Engineering Department, dated February 15, 2022 be received.
2. That the authority to allow the Town of Oakville to represent the other Halton municipalities, and enter into and sign the Halton Municipalities Smart Commute Memorandum of Understanding, be delegated to the Director of Transportation and Engineering.
3. That the authority to allow the Town of Oakville, on behalf of the Halton municipalities, to enter into and sign the Smart Commute Regional Partner Memorandum of Understanding be delegated to the Director of Transportation and Engineering.

#### **KEY FACTS:**

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- The Smart Commute Program is a crucial strategy to achieve our overall Transportation Demand Management (TDM) goals within the town, the region, the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA), and the Province.
- In 2007, Oakville joined the Smart Commute Program under Halton’s Smart Commute Transportation Management Association (TMA).
- In 2008, Metrolinx assumed the operation of the Smart Commute Program.
- In 2019, as a result of alternative funding priorities at the provincial level, Metrolinx ended their involvement in the Smart Commute Program. Halton

Region subsequently informed the local municipalities that they were no longer going to be involved in the Smart Commute Program.

- In 2020, the neighbouring regional TMA's acquired all the resources of the Smart Commute Program from Metrolinx. They also initiated a GTHA-wide Smart Commute Regional Partner Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).
- In 2021, the four local Halton municipalities partnered to create a new Transportation Management Association in Halton Region – Smart Commute Halton Region (Locals).
- The local municipalities wish to enter into a Smart Commute Halton Municipalities Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to allow the Town of Oakville to represent the new TMA at the GTHA Regional Partner level. The Town of Oakville and the Town of Halton Hills are prepared to sign the Halton Municipalities MOU.
- On behalf of the local municipalities, the Town of Oakville also wishes to enter into a Smart Commute Regional Partner Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to allow our new Smart Commute Halton (Locals) TMA to join the Steering Committee with the GTHA partners.

**BACKGROUND:**

The Town of Oakville clearly recognizes the benefits of Transportation Demand Management (TDM) and has already displayed significant dedication and resolve for promoting and shaping the built environment and social infrastructure. Oakville Council has encouraged the development of a number of strategies, initiatives and policies such as the Official Plan (OP), the Transportation Master Plan (TMP), the Active Transportation Master Plan (ATMP), the Urban Mobility Strategy, the Environmental Strategic Plan (ESP), the Parks Recreation Culture and Library Plan, the North Oakville Secondary Plans, etc., all of which recommend the need for increased use of sustainable modes of transportation. Further, Oakville is at the forefront of developing new communities that promote active transportation by application of transit first principles and pedestrian scaled environments.

An improved road system alone will not be sufficient to accommodate future growth patterns. Oakville recognizes the need to entice a change in travel behaviour while concurrently delivering the infrastructure and systems necessary to successfully support its users. The town's Transportation Master Plan (TMP) anticipates that a combination of improvements to active transportation, transportation demand management, transit services, provincial highways, regional roads and local roads will collectively best support growth and the vision for Oakville's future from a transportation perspective. The future network includes a target goal of 6% mode share for Transportation Demand Management initiatives which involves a focus on employment and school based trips during the peak periods of travel.

The town's Official Plan, Transportation Master Plan, Active Transportation Master Plan, Transit Strategy, and the new Urban Mobility Strategy identify Transportation Demand Management (TDM) and Complete Streets as key policies and goals for success of the overall transportation system. The Smart Commute Program was designed to achieve the goals of these town plans and strategies, as well as the Province's Big Move, and the 2019 "A Place to Grow" Growth Plan.

The Smart Commute Program helps to expand the reach and effectiveness of current projects and initiatives that aim to achieve the same TDM mode shift targets identified above and throughout our plans and policies. This includes:

1. Continuing to apply our TDM initiatives as part of development applications through our approved OP policies and zoning by-law amendments for end-of-trip facilities such as bike parking and bike storage requirements;
2. Integrating future public bike share, car share, carpooling, and vanpooling initiatives and infrastructure;
3. Coordinating individual school travel plans for every elementary school in Halton Region in partnership with our Halton Active Sustainable School Transportation Hub (ASST) agencies;
4. Combining and expanding individualized marketing strategies and community-based social marketing (CBSM) techniques through a future branding approach for similar programs such as our Every Metre Counts activities (ASST initiative), our annual Bike Month outreach initiative, our pedestrian/cyclist safety awareness campaign; our transit marketing initiatives; and,
5. Leveraging the outreach and infrastructure components of the ATMP to integrate education, encouragement, and awareness opportunities.

The Smart Commute Program helps local public and private employers and commuters explore different commuting options such as carpooling, telecommuting, cycling, walking and transit. This program is another powerful tool and strategy to achieve our overall Transportation Demand Management (TDM) goals within the town, the region, the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA), and the Province.

The Smart Commute Program began in 2004 as part of Transport Canada's Urban Transportation Showcase program as a joint municipal project between the Regions of Halton, Peel, York and Durham and the Cities of Toronto, Mississauga and Hamilton. In 2006, the Smart Commute Halton program was launched by Halton Region and was subsequently expanded to include the four local municipalities.

In December 2006, the Town of Oakville announced its participation in the Smart Commute Program under Halton's Smart Commute Transportation Management Association to help reduce single occupant vehicle trips travelling during peak traffic conditions and help improve local air quality. It was determined that Oakville's

program would begin by implementing Smart Commute initiatives at Town Hall only (1225 Trafalgar Road) before expanding the program to the other offsite facilities and the private sector within the community. The Smart Commute program was officially launched in Oakville in June 2007.

In 2008, Metrolinx assumed the operation of the Smart Commute Program ensuring continued financial support for the program and for the Transportation Management Associations such as Smart Commute Halton.

During the period of 2008 to 2018, the Smart Commute Halton initiatives included the expansion of the program to private businesses throughout the region. Services included a base-line employee survey, an on-site parking and building assessment, development of employer carpool sub-groups and employee ride matching, individual trip planning opportunities, special events and contests, workplace champion training, outreach lunch and learn events, emergency ride-home subsidies, promotional incentives, and an annual awards ceremony. In the later years, focus began to shift to individual municipal projects that could be used elsewhere within the GTHA, such as Oakville's workplace relocation support services, and Burlington's transit project within an industrial workplace area. Ongoing contact, engagement, encouragement and support with the local employers continues to help Oakville reach our transportation demand management mode share goals.

In early 2019, as a result of alternative funding priorities at the provincial level, Metrolinx concluded their involvement in Smart Commute. This subsequently resulted in the neighbouring regions and large municipalities initiating a partnership together to acquire the services, resources and branding materials for the Smart Commute Program from Metrolinx. The GTHA Regional Partners consisted of Durham Region, York Region, City of Toronto, Peel Region, Halton Region, and City of Hamilton.

However, in response to the cancellation of the provincial funding, Halton Region made the decision to refrain from partnering with the other regions, and to not participate in the creation and signing of a new Smart Commute Regional Partner Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that establishes a regional-level commitment to share resources and costs to maintain service delivery for the Smart Commute Program across the GTHA. Halton Region subsequently then gave notice to the local municipalities of their intent to conclude and cancel their involvement in the Smart Commute Program.

Over its 17 year history, the Smart Commute Program has been established as one of the most successful initiatives of its kind in North America, and the Town of Oakville is a leader in its implementation along with the regions and other municipalities of the GTHA.

The report herein outlines the future strategy and commitment of the local municipalities within Halton Region with respect to the Smart Commute Program. It seeks Council's authority to enter into an MOU with our local municipal partners, and our regional partners, which is necessary to continue to deliver and enhance the Smart Commute Program for workplaces using a coordinated approach that will reduce operational costs and create a consistent platform in the Region and also, potentially, the Province.

**COMMENT/OPTIONS:**

The goal of the Smart Commute Program is to ease gridlock, improve air quality and reduce greenhouse gas emissions while making the commute to work more enjoyable by partnering with local employers. Commuters who utilize alternative transportation options across the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area remove approximately 2.4 million single occupant car trips from roads and highways each year.

After the neighbouring regions and larger municipalities, each commonly known as a Transportation Management Association (TMA), acquired the services, resources, and branding materials for the Smart Commute Program from Metrolinx in 2020, they partnered together to begin the creation of a GTHA-wide Smart Commute Regional Partner Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to maintain and move the program forward into the future.

The City of Hamilton has taken the lead agency role in the GTHA-wide Smart Commute Regional Partnership. Recognizing the importance of Smart Commute to achieving our collective TDM goals, in 2019, senior transportation staff from the four local municipalities in Halton advised the City of Hamilton of their interest in participating in the GTHA-wide Smart Commute Regional Partnership, subject to Council approval to enter into the MOU and budget availability. A copy of the letter is included in Appendix A.

There are 37 employers (15 in Oakville) currently registered as Smart Commute members within Halton Region, although Smart Commute activities are currently paused due to the changes in the Smart Commute Program described in this report. The intent is to re-engage with these employers once the MOUs are in place. The decision by Halton Region to conclude their involvement in the Smart Commute Program and not participate in a new GTHA-wide partnership left (and continues to leave) these employers at risk of TDM service disruption after the pandemic, and hinders the Program's collective ability to expand the program throughout Halton Region. The local municipalities of the City of Burlington, the Town of Milton, the Town of Halton Hills, and the Town of Oakville continue to endorse and advocate that the Smart Commute Program is an integral key to supporting a shift to active and sustainable modes of travel, thus strengthening our Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategies and sustainable transportation policies and plans.

With this in mind, the four local municipalities began working together to create a new Transportation Management Association in Halton Region – Smart Commute Halton Region (Locals).

At the onset of the pandemic in 2020, there was an immediate shift to telecommuting and digital services throughout the GTHA, resulting in an immediate shift away from other TDM measures such as carpooling and transit due to the lock down situations. Smart Commute Programs and activities were temporarily on hold as the Transportation Management Associations were simultaneously acquiring the Metrolinx services, as well as developing the Regional Partners MOU and transitioning to an alternative carpool platform provider/vendor.

As the pandemic persists to evolve, TMA's continue to evaluate the current health climate and what the anticipated transportation landscape may look like in a post pandemic era. Even in the current state, major highways and arterials continue to experience increased traffic volume, congestion and delay. TMA's are aware that when employers are ready to return to work in person, in some capacity or hybrid situation, commuters will be reluctant to return to options such as carpooling and public transit. Anticipating this will be coming, the regional TMA's are aware a shift is necessary in outreach tactics and offered services to adjust to the needs of an employer's return to work program. The TMA's are currently preparing return to work modules, hybrid meeting services and processes, hoteling and shared workspace procedures, virtual meeting etiquette guidelines, improved cycling and walking matching services, an enhanced outreach and communication campaign plan, and a reengagement strategy that will include reevaluating individual employer needs to support their employee workplace commuter options.

The new TMA has been meeting monthly since November 2019 to develop the goals and future of the Smart Commute Program in Halton Region. The local municipalities have also developed a Smart Commute Halton Municipalities Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), included in Appendix B. At this time, the Town of Oakville and the Town of Halton Hills are prepared to sign the Smart Commute Halton Municipalities MOU. It is anticipated the City of Burlington will join later this year, and the Town of Milton will sign in early 2023. All municipal representatives will continue to meet monthly and provide in-kind resources to help progress the Smart Commute Program at a regional level.

The Halton Municipalities MOU includes the following highlights:

1. Appointing Oakville to represent Halton Hills with respect to the Smart Commute Program, including signing the Regional Partner MOU;
2. Meeting and communicating on a regular basis to provide and determine direction for Oakville to represent Halton Hills and the future other signing municipalities;

3. Using all reasonable efforts to complete all activities, including sharing the advantages of each other's in-kind resources (e.g. staff-time, incentives, communication resources, event and storage spaces, etc.) to promote, attend and maintain ongoing events, outreach, data collection, business expansion, and any other activities related to the operations of the Program;
4. Sharing equally in the financial responsibilities to ensure the operational requirements of the Program, including, but is not limited to: the procurement of an online mobility tool platform to provide ride-matching services within the GTHA; the procurement of promotional incentives for outreach events and onboarding new business members; expenses related to marketing and advertising; and, the procurement of a consulting services company to operate, maintain, expand, evaluate and monitor the day-to-day business of the Program within Halton Region;
5. Pursuing joint funding opportunities in order to help financially assist the Program;
6. Allowing the City of Burlington and the Town of Milton to join in the future; and,
7. Outlining a term of three years, with the opportunity to extend in the future.

The Halton Municipalities MOU needs to be approved by Council to permit our TMA to sign the Smart Commute Regional Partner MOU (attached as Appendix C) as a collective, and receive access to the resources required to continue the delivery of the program.

The Regional Partner MOU highlights include:

1. Establishing a Smart Commute Association which includes all participating TMA's, Regions, and Municipalities, and recognizes the City of Hamilton as the steward of this governance, including obtaining, maintaining, and managing all assets related to the Program delivery;
2. Developing a Steering Committee to oversee and deliver the business plan, operations and goals of the Program, and accept and evaluate the application of new additional members as required;
3. Establishing an Advisory Committee composed of TMA representatives, Service Delivery Agents, major employers, and transit agencies, to provide feedback, project ideas, program development, transit service initiatives, and support for annual reports and outreach campaigns;
4. Acknowledging ongoing communication, and that joint public relations are equal in value by recognizing all participating members;
5. Using efforts for each Participating member to be financially responsible to acquire the services of an online mobility tool platform to provide ride-matching services within the GTHA;
6. Pursuing joint funding opportunities in order to help financially assist the Program with services and assets shared among the Participating members;

7. Sharing costs for operational services and assets required to operate the Program; and,
8. Outlining a term of three years, with the opportunity to extend in the future.

The Smart Commute Program is a vital component for employees to help local employers and employees explore different commuting options such as carpooling, telecommuting, walking, cycling and transit. Upon Council approval of this report and the Smart Commute Halton Municipalities MOU, the Town of Oakville will engage the GTHA partners and sign the Smart Commute Regional Partner MOU on behalf of the new Smart Commute Halton Region (Locals) TMA.

## **CONSIDERATIONS:**

### **(A) PUBLIC**

There is no public engagement required at this stage.

### **(B) FINANCIAL**

The capital budget requirements to reinitiate, enhance, operate and maintain the Smart Commute Program is approximately \$35,000 for the Town of Oakville. This funding is approved within the 2022 Capital Budget in the ATMP – Active Transportation Initiatives account (53342107). An effective and long-term Smart Commute Program requires dedicated budget funding, and therefore, will continue to be included in future capital budget requests as part of our mobility strategic priority to have programs and services that are environmentally sustainable.

### **(C) IMPACT ON OTHER DEPARTMENTS & USERS**

Overall the Smart Commute Program provides benefits for multiple departments. Examples include improved environmental stewardship (Strategy, Policy and Communications) increasing transit ridership (Transit), and reducing parking lot requirements (Planning Services).

### **(D) CORPORATE STRATEGIC GOALS**

This report addresses the corporate strategic goal(s) to:

- Improve the town's multi-modal transportation network to support the effective movement of people and goods, by promoting safe alternative travel options.
- Support opportunities for multi-modal transportation including walking, cycling and transit services.
- Protect greenspace and promote environmentally sustainable practices.

### **(E) CLIMATE CHANGE/ACTION**

The Smart Commute Program provides important environmental benefits to the entire community. By providing and supporting alternative transportation



options to our local employers and employees, positive changes to air quality, climate change, and our natural environment can be achieved. This program has the ability to engage and impact the community as the town becomes a leader for other organizations to participate in the Smart Commute Program's services and initiatives.

**APPENDICES:**

Appendix A – Local Municipalities – Letter of Intent to City of Hamilton

Appendix B – Smart Commute Halton Municipalities Memorandum of Understanding

Appendix C – Smart Commute Regional Partner Memorandum of Understanding

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