



OAKVILLE

REPORT

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL MEETING

MEETING DATE: NOVEMBER 23, 2020

FROM: Planning Services Department and Engineering and Construction Department

DATE: November 18, 2020

SUBJECT: **Urban Mobility and Transportation Strategy: Assessment of COVID-19 Impacts**

LOCATION: Townwide

WARD:

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RECOMMENDATION:

That the report entitled Urban Mobility and Transportation Strategy: Assessment of COVID-19 Impacts dated November 18, 2020, from the Planning Services and Engineering and Construction departments be received.

KEY FACTS:

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

- On September 26, 2017, Council adopted the town's urban structure (OPA 15) which identified a series of growth nodes and corridors to be developed as complete communities.
- Success of the town's urban structure is dependent on the integration of multi-modal transportation options into the design of our growth nodes and corridors, which will facilitate a mode shift away from the predominant use of private automobiles for mobility in Oakville.
- Oakville has limited opportunities to increase road capacity in response to growth and, therefore, needs to look at ways to move people and goods differently.
- Choices the town makes with respect to getting around and moving goods will have significant implications for how effective the town will be at addressing climate change.

- The existing travel characteristics in Oakville demonstrate the potential to reduce reliance on automobiles.
- In September 2019, Steer was engaged as a consultant to prepare a strategy for urban mobility and transportation in Oakville (“urban mobility strategy”) which will explore and provide a comprehensive understanding of ways in which to marry transportation choices with the functionality of the town’s urban structure.
- The intent of the urban mobility strategy is to be a primary background document and input into the town’s ongoing official plan review, the upcoming transportation master plan review, and other master planning initiatives for Oakville.
- The urban mobility strategy will also inform the corporate direction for how the municipality prioritizes, operates and maintains our transportation facilities.
- During development of the urban mobility strategy, the COVID-19 pandemic took hold. Given the significant uncertainty and societal disruption brought about by COVID-19, the original scope of work was adjusted so that Steer could examine and assess the short-term and long-term effects of COVID-19 on Oakville’s transportation system.
- This report presents a brief summary of assessment of COVID-19 impacts prepared by Steer. The full memorandum is attached to this report as Appendix A.
- Steer has identified some significant risks that are part of managing the unique situation for society as we emerge from the pandemic, including:
 - changing long-term plans based on short-term trends and then producing outcomes that are contrary to the Town’s strategic aims for its transportation system;
 - embedding Oakville’s car-orientated travel patterns, contrary to Oakville’s policies and strategic aims (and Halton and Province); and
 - allowing increased lower-density/sprawling development in and beyond the Greater Golden Horseshoe.
- Steer provides a number of conclusions from their assessment of the COVID-19 impacts, including:
 - This is a time of large-scale and rapid change in society.
 - Preventing and mitigating the negative effects of those changes requires rapid actions.

- The Town has opportunity to benefit from increased localism at the municipal level.
 - Continuous investments into good quality public transit infrastructure and services, in addition to cycling and walking infrastructure, are needed.
 - Local environmental benefits are at risk.
 - Promoting de-densification could be damaging socially, financially, and from a climate perspective.
 - Inaction would affect resilience.
- It will be important to ensure that decisions the Town makes in the short term as a result of COVID-19 continue to reinforce the long term direction and framework set out by the town's urban structure, Livable Oakville official plan, transportation master plan and other relevant master plans.
 - Next year, staff will consult with the public on the benefits of relying on alternate modes of transportation in addition to privately-owned automobiles as part of the ongoing official plan review and the upcoming transportation master plan review.

BACKGROUND:

On September 26, 2017, Council adopted the town's urban structure (Official Plan Amendment #15). The town's urban structure is intended to protect natural heritage, open space and cultural heritage, maintain the character of residential areas and direct growth to an identified system of nodes and corridors. This series of nodes and corridors are the focus of higher density mixed-use development which will include places to not only live, but also to work, shop, play and relax.

These areas will only succeed, however, if multi-modal options are integrated into their design and used to facilitate a mode shift away from the predominant use of private automobiles for a variety of trip types and lengths. Together, the synergy of uses and mobility within the town's nodes and corridors will help build complete communities, help the Town reduce its emissions and ecological footprint, and help foster healthier lifestyles.

As indicated in the Transportation Master Plan Review 2018, Oakville has limited opportunities to increase road capacity in response to growth. In other words, Oakville cannot continue to maintain the status quo of relying predominantly on private automobiles and the notion of perpetually widening roads to move people around. Continuing to do so will lead to traffic congestion, a community of wide,

busy streets and a potential undermining of the town's urban structure. Congestion will also impact the ability for goods to move efficiently in and through Oakville – an important factor for a healthy economy.

Oakville needs to look at ways to move people and goods differently. Oakville needs to use, or allocate, its public right-of-way space differently so that multiple modes of transport are both viable and attractive choices for Oakville residents and workers. Forms of transport such as walking, cycling and public transit require less space to move people than private automobiles (which are typically single-occupant). Prioritizing and shifting our choice of transport to these alternatives will increase the number of people moving within Oakville right-of-ways without increasing the size of our streets. Moving people using modes that require less space per person, for example, will then also benefit the movement of goods throughout the town by potentially avoiding congestion which can create delay for goods movement.

Shifting our priorities will also require rethinking our strategies and policies for maintaining our streets, sidewalks and pathways to ensure that pedestrian, cycling and public transit facilities operate safely and efficiently at all times. Providing a well-balanced, multi-modal transportation system is also important to ensuring that our transportation system is equitable for all Oakville residents and workers, so that people who cannot, or choose not to, drive are given the same consideration by Oakville's policies and infrastructure as people who do choose to drive.

Choices the town makes with respect to mobility will have significant implications for how effective the town will be at addressing climate change. Council's climate emergency declaration provides clear direction for Oakville to significantly lower community greenhouse gas emissions and improve our overall energy efficiency while strengthening the local economy. As indicated in the town's Community Energy Strategy, "Transportation accounts for almost half of community-wide [greenhouse gas] emissions and total dollars spent on energy in Oakville." This means that it is imperative that the way Oakville develops in the future, particularly in its growth nodes and corridors identified within the town's urban structure, results in complete communities that include common destinations in proximity to each other and that are integrated with viable multi-modal choices for getting around and moving goods. Shortening everyday trips and providing for attractive, viable travel options that emit less greenhouse gas and are more efficient in energy use need to be big part of the way that the town addresses climate change.

The existing travel characteristics in Oakville demonstrate the potential to reduce reliance on automobiles. According to the Transportation Master Plan 2018 update, over 60% and 80% of the morning and afternoon peak trips in Oakville are less than 10 km in length. These are trips that are often ideal for travel by walking, cycling or public transit. In Oakville, however, private automobile is the predominant mode choice for these trips.

It will take a coordinated master-planning effort to realize the mode shift required to succeed with implementation of the town's urban structure and effectively address the issue of climate change. To this end, the Town released a request for proposals seeking a consultant to prepare a strategy for urban mobility and transportation for Oakville (herein referred to as 'the urban mobility strategy'). The intent of the strategy is to be a primary background document and input into the town's ongoing official plan review, the upcoming transportation master plan review, and other master planning initiatives of for Oakville. The urban mobility strategy will also need to inform the corporate direction for how the municipality prioritizes, operates and maintains our transportation facilities. In September 2019, Steer was awarded the contract and began work on the strategy.

WHAT IS THE URBAN MOBILITY & TRANSPORTATION STRATEGY?

The urban mobility strategy is about rethinking the forms of transportation that Oakville should focus on. If Oakville shifts its primary focus to walking, biking, rolling, transit and the best way to move goods through town, it can provide lots of different viable options for travel. It will suggest the things Oakville needs to do to create good ways of moving around so that people will not want or need to use their car every time they go somewhere.

The urban mobility strategy will explore and provide a comprehensive understanding of ways in which to marry transportation choices with the functionality of the town's urban structure – the designated growth areas in particular – and the manner in which to connect these. The objective of the urban mobility strategy is to identify the many facets involved in transportation planning, how these are integrated, and establish principles and implementation tools that will allow the municipality to adapt to societal changes yet continue to move people to destination areas within the municipality and to the broader transportation network which explores the current advances in urban mobility and transportation planning to create a multi-pronged approach for moving people and goods in and through Oakville. The Strategy will closely complement and integrate with the town's Urban Structure and will be the foundation for future transportation master plans.

This work will also allow the town's administration to make future decisions relating to the municipality's transportation choices, the ways in which to fund those choices to ensure the town's future success, and continued livability.

To achieve this, the strategy will examine ways in which to advance the prioritization of walking and cycling, transit users and good movements ahead of the private automobile. Establishing a hierarchy of users is fundamental to the success of future mobility in Oakville. If the Town attempts to proceed without a clear hierarchy, and instead continues in the traditional approach of attempting to balance the needs of

all users, then simply all users will suffer the on-going gridlock and lack of mobility, regardless of how much infrastructure investment is made.

ASSESSMENT OF COVID-19 IMPACTS:

During the development of the urban mobility strategy, the COVID-19 pandemic took hold. This pandemic has already had a major effect on how people travel, as well on the economy and society more widely. Some impacts will only be short term while others have the potential to change the way we live, work, play and move in the long term.

Town staff and Steer agreed that it was important to acknowledge and consider the impacts of COVID-19 and the implications this pandemic will have for the transportation in Oakville. To simply forge ahead with an urban mobility strategy without considering the impacts from COVID-19 would simply lead to a strategy that would likely be out-of-touch with the new realities that will result from the pandemic.

As a result, the original scope of work for Steer was adjusted so that Steer could examine and assess the short-term and long-term effects of COVID-19 on Oakville's transportation system in order to inform the ultimate preparation of the urban mobility strategy. Steer has prepared a memorandum which presents the results of that analysis, covering what the future might look like, the potential effects, and resulting considerations for the development of the strategy.

A brief summary of the memorandum from Steer entitled Assessment of COVID-19 Impacts is included below. The full memorandum is attached to this report as Appendix A.

Summary

The memorandum begins by defining a "business as usual" baseline. This is what was expected to happen to Oakville's transportation system before COVID-19. The memorandum then presents a set of scenarios for the management of COVID-19 and medical advances. The memo concludes by outlining the risks, challenges and opportunities that need to be considered for the development of an urban mobility strategy for Oakville depending on which COVID-19 scenario is ultimately realized.

The "business as usual" baseline is predicated on planned changes to the transportation network in Oakville which involve a steady evolution that builds on the existing network and services. The planned changes are line with the wider aims to accommodate growth in travel and also encourage mode shift away from car use.

Four COVID-19 scenarios are presented which vary based on the progress made in treatments and vaccines that may be developed to fight the virus (illustrated in Figure 1). These scenarios can also be viewed as sequential phases through which

society may progress as medical advances emerge. It is important to acknowledge, however, that we may never reach Scenario 4 and may find ourselves in some variation of the first three scenarios in the long term.

Scenario 1 is labeled 'Cycles of Lockdown' and represents our current situation and where we have been since March. It is the scenario where we have no vaccine and are experiencing a cycle of lockdowns and peaks of infections. This scenario represents the greatest amount of societal change as a result of COVID-19.

Scenarios 2 and 3, labeled 'Adaptation' and 'Therapeutics' represent incremental steps toward development of a fully effective vaccine. Scenario 2 is where we still have no vaccine but subsequent waves are contained because mitigation measures (such as mandatory mask wearing, social distancing, and others) become permanently adapted by society – leading to an adapted society. Scenario 3 is where we continue to have no vaccine but alternative effective treatments for COVID-19 are available. While these treatments would not prevent people from getting sick, they may prevent death and/or reduce the severity of disease. Subsequent waves would be contained and allow for life to mostly return to pre-COVID-normal.

Scenario 4 is where a successful vaccine becomes available and a good portion of the population has been vaccinated. The vaccine would prevent or moderate subsequent waves allowing everyday life to return to 'almost' normal. This scenario represents a best-case scenario but still acknowledges that there will always be impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic that endure.

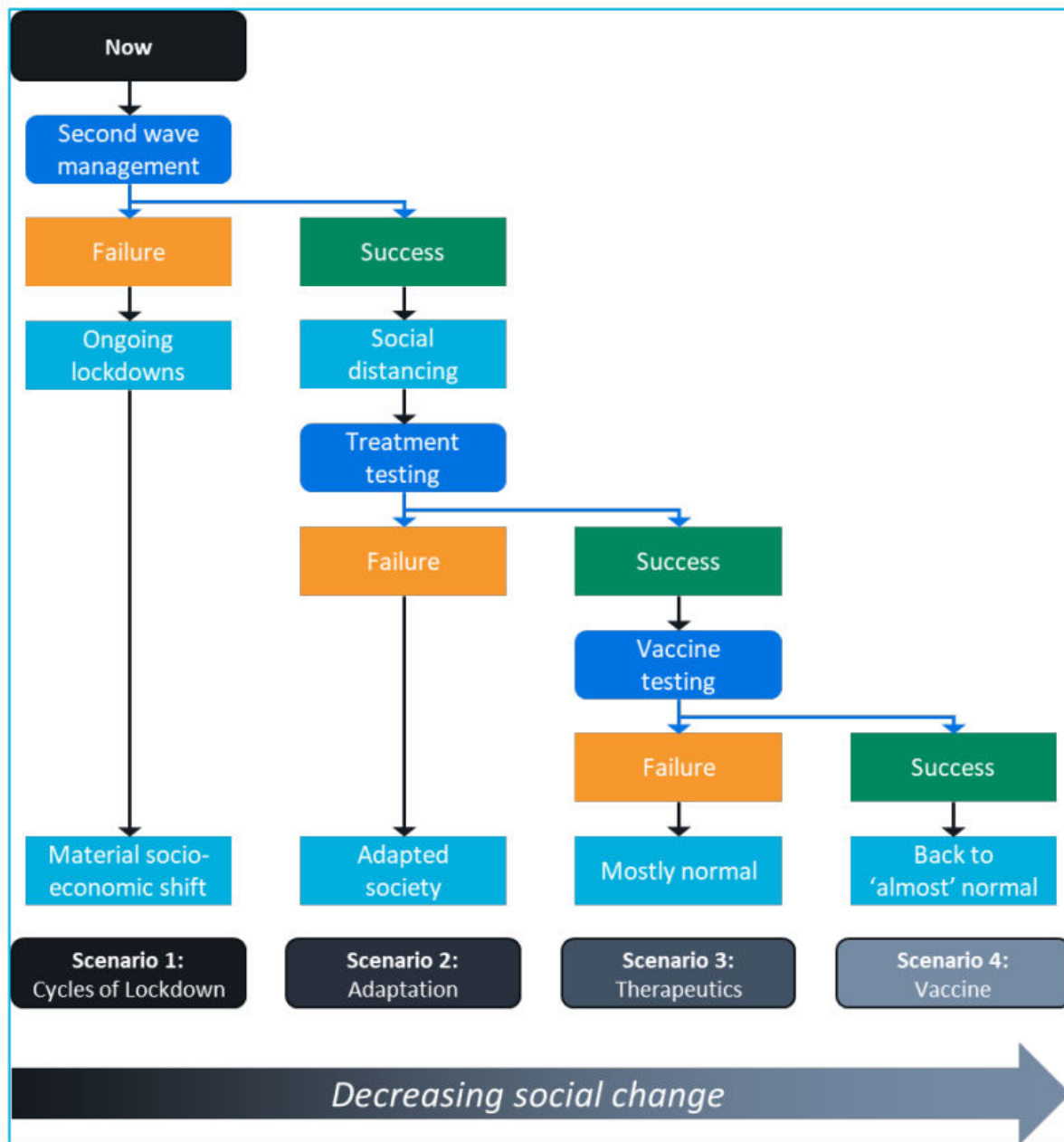


Figure 1 – Potential COVID-19 Impacts (source: Steer analysis, adapted from UK Government Office for Science “Futures Toolkit”)

The memorandum then moves on to evaluate the impacts on society and the resulting impacts on transportation that can be anticipated for these scenarios, with emphasis on Scenarios 1 and 4 as they represent the outer extremes of the spectrum of potential COVID-19 impacts (see Figure 2).

Area	Scenario 1: Cycles of Lockdown	Scenario 4: Vaccine
Lifestyle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social distancing becomes embedded • Localisation • Dispersal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drift back to pre-COVID norms
Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long deep recession • Slow recovery • Structural change • Increased societal division 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short recession • Economy returns to trend • “Lost years”
Demand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth in car use (tempered by economic performance) • Large drop in public transit • Large growth in active transport • Large growth in online and associated local goods movement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modest growth in car • Drop in public transit use followed by slow recovery at best • Modest growth in active transport • Modest growth in online and associated local goods movement
Supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Road capacity increases more urgent • Significant reduction in bus/rail services • Pressure for better pedestrian and cycling connectivity and unfractured 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manageable pressures on road network • Modest reduction in bus/rail services • Pressure for better pedestrian and cycling connectivity and unfractured
Land Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Big drop in city centre retail, offices, leisure • Increased interest in edge of town 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less city centre retail, offices, leisure • Increased interest in edge of town

Figure 2 - Key Impacts between Scenarios 1 and 4 (source: Steer analysis, adapted from UK Government Office for Science "Futures Toolkit")

Steer’s assessment ends with identification of significant risks and conclusions which are important for Oakville to consider in regards to transportation and will inform preparation of the urban mobility strategy.

Risks

Managing the unique situation for society as we emerge from the pandemic brings with it some significant risks, as follows:

- Embedding Oakville’s car-orientated travel patterns, contrary to Oakville’s policies and strategic aims (and Halton and Province); allowing lower-density/sprawling development in and beyond the Greater Golden Horseshoe.
- Assuming that “working at home” is a viable option for the majority of residents; more generally, failing to take the needs of vulnerable groups into consideration when crafting public policies.
- Failing to correctly determine which temporary changes to the transportation system and urban environment should be made permanent. Transit is

especially vulnerable, as short-term network changes could have long-term ridership effects.

- Changing long-term plans based on short-term trends and then producing outcomes that are contrary to the Town's strategic aims for its transportation system.

Conclusions from the Memo

1. *This is a time of large-scale and rapid change in society.* Within a few weeks, the COVID-19 pandemic produced changes in public life and travel patterns of a scale that normally takes decades. Under all scenarios, those changes will continue in whole or in part for an extended period. No-one responsible for creating public policy (in transportation or other fields) has had to deal with anything like this before.
2. *Preventing and mitigating the negative effects of those changes requires rapid actions.* The changes from COVID-19 are already in place and will continue to evolve if no actions are taken. The negative effects could include embedding car-dependent travel habits and land use patterns, contrary to Oakville's wider strategic aims. This memo has also described some of the other potential negative effects. Quick and decisive action is needed to deliver the changes Oakville wants.
3. *The Town has an opportunity to benefit from increased localism at the municipal level.* Within municipalities, this memo has described how people will rely more on local amenities for everyday life. Oakville has multiple places in the town that can serve as focal points (such as downtown Oakville and Bronte Village). Further, the nodes and corridors in the Town's [urban structure] will help support this trend.
4. *Continuous investments into good quality public transit infrastructure and services,* in addition to cycling and walking infrastructure, are needed if Oakville wants to make sustainable modes of transportation attractive and safer especially in the wake of this crisis.
5. *Local environmental benefits are at risk.* Without decisive action, the recent drop in pollution will be a short digression from past historical trend, soon replaced by a return to growth in automobile traffic. This risk is a concern, given the mounting evidence that pollution probably makes us more vulnerable to crises.
6. *Social and urban patterns are important.* It is increasingly clear that the geography of inequality – the social divide – is a key determinant of COVID-

19 incidence and prevalence. Promoting de-densification could be damaging socially, financially, and from a climate perspective.

7. *Inaction would affect resilience* – strong resilience of the offering in the context of possible rapid fluctuations in demand in the future is required, since future crises are foreseeable.

The COVID-19 pandemic is the epitome of a disruptive change characterized by high impact and relatively short timescale. It has impacted the trajectory of economic activity and transportation demand in Oakville and has changed behaviours related to how we get around and where we go, particularly in the short term. Nevertheless, our town will continue to grow and the demand for moving people and goods will continue to rise. It will be important to ensure that decisions the Town makes in the short term as a result of COVID-19 continue to reinforce the long term direction and framework set out by the town's urban structure, Livable Oakville official plan, transportation master plan and other relevant master plans.

At present, Steer is continuing to work on the urban mobility strategy. The strategy will include a summary of best practices for urban mobility, an assessment of the current policy framework to create unified future direction for transportation in Oakville, and make recommendations on a variety of topics related to Urban Mobility. The recommendations will cover initiatives to support mode shift including infrastructure improvements, land use policy and guidance, parking strategy, and new technologies. The strategy will provide direction for other studies as well as recommendations for implementation and transitional steps.

Staff expect that the urban mobility strategy will be completed early next year and presented to Council at a later date, in conjunction with a transportation discussion paper that staff will be preparing as part of the ongoing official plan review and upcoming transportation master plan review.

ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY:

Engaging the community with respect to the future of transportation in Oakville is an important part of the Town's ongoing official plan review and upcoming transportation master planning processes.

Prior to the first wave of COVID-19 restrictions, town staff and Steer had preliminarily begun to reach out to key stakeholders within the community by holding a preliminary stakeholder engagement session for internal and external stakeholders in October 2019 to introduce the urban mobility strategy project. Staff subsequently met with the Oakville Chamber of Commerce on two occasions to introduce the urban mobility strategy initiative and Steer, as the consultant, to this group as means to begin engaging the business community in our discussions.

When the COVID-19 pandemic reached Oakville, town staff realized that going out to the broader community to engage the public on the topic of urban mobility and transportation during a time of COVID-19 restrictions was not well-timed. As a result, Steer's scope of work was adjusted to permit them to focus on the assessment of COVID-19 impacts and staff would take on the public engagement component of the urban mobility strategy at a later time, likely in 2021.

This public engagement will then take place as part of the public engagement for the official plan review (transportation discussion paper) and initiation of the review of the Transportation Master Plan. The engagement is intended to generate discussion within the community regarding the choices we make when we move and the implications of those choices on our natural and built environments within the town and region. Staff will consult with the public on the benefits of relying on alternate modes of transportation in addition to privately-owned automobiles.

Staff are looking at a number of potential engagement strategies that would be appropriate depending on the level of lockdown due to the pandemic that we may find ourselves in, including:

- a series of short educational videos posted on the Town's website, and distributed through social media, potentially covering a number of topics, including:
 - explaining what an urban mobility and transportation strategy is;
 - why choices related to how we move around are important;
 - how urban mobility relates to climate change and our carbon footprint;
 - how will future technologies may impact the way we move; and
 - how urban mobility relates to built form and land use.
- Information and other material posted on the Town's website;
- Pop-up information kiosks at various community centres, shopping malls, etc. to engage people in the locations they frequently travel to (depending on the COVID-19 restrictions in place at the time of engagement); and
- Virtual webinars or panels with subject matter experts on targeted topics related to urban mobility (similar to the educational videos) which would also potentially allow facilitated discussion among attendees.

CONCLUSION:

The COVID-19 pandemic has already had a major effect on how people travel, as well on the economy and society more widely. Some impacts will only be short term while others have the potential to change the way we live, work, play and move in the long term. Steer's memo emphasizes the need for Oakville to act quickly to prevent and mitigate the potential negative environmental, social and economic effects of the pandemic such as embedding car-dependent travel habits and land use patterns in the long term.

Continuous investments into good quality public transit and active transportation (e.g. walking and cycling) infrastructure and services are key. When these investments are in tandem with implementing the town-wide urban structure to facilitate the creation of complete communities, oriented around high-density, mixed-use nodes, it allow residents to rely more on local amenities for everyday life and makes sustainable modes of transportation attractive and safer. This is particularly important in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis.

CONSIDERATIONS:

(A) PUBLIC

There are no public impacts from this report and no notice requirements. Public consultation related to the urban mobility strategy will occur at a later time through both the ongoing Official Plan Review and the upcoming Transportation Master Plan Review.

(B) FINANCIAL

There are no financial implications from this report. Steer's consultant work on the urban mobility strategy is being paid for with funds already approved for this purpose. However, implementation of the recommendations from the urban mobility strategy may impact the financing and delivery of municipal programs, services and infrastructure.

(C) IMPACT ON OTHER DEPARTMENTS & USERS

This report has no impact on other departments and users. However, implementation of the recommendations from the urban mobility strategy will impact most town departments.

(D) CORPORATE AND/OR DEPARTMENT STRATEGIC GOALS

This report addresses the corporate strategic goal to:

- enhance our natural environment
- have environmentally sustainable programs/services
- be accountable in everything we do

- treat everyone with respect
- be fiscally sustainable
- be the most livable town in Canada

(E) COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY

The urban mobility strategy is part of long-term planning focused on the environmental sustainability, as well as the long-term economic sustainability, goals and objectives of the Livable Oakville Plan.

APPENDICES:

Appendix A – Strategy for Urban Mobility and Transportation Planning:
Assessment of COVID-19 Impacts, Memorandum from Steer

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