

GRT Township Transit Strategy

Introduction

Rural transit solutions enhance access to essential goods and services such as groceries, healthcare, and community resources. They also expand the labor pool, making it easier for employers to find and retain workers. For those with unreliable transportation or other mobility barriers, rural transit can be a lifeline to overcome access challenges affecting rural communities and supports a higher quality of life.

Rural transit serving relatively low-density and often dispersed communities rarely achieves the same efficiencies as urban systems, and should be viewed as an investment in essential services for community well-being that support the Region's Strategic Plan.

Building on the success of township transit services in Wilmot and Woolwich, GRT initiated the Township Transit Strategy (TTS) to take a more comprehensive look at future transit services for all townships in Waterloo Region.

The initial goals of this project were to:

- Expand and/or enhance existing rural transit service to effectively and efficiently meet the needs of Waterloo Region's township residents; and,
- Consult with Waterloo Region's townships to design and cost improved transit services for future funding opportunities, considering various options to meet the unique needs of each township

The process of developing the TTS has provided GRT with a clear vision of what the future township transit network looks like for Waterloo Region:

All townships have core village-to-urban transit routes connecting key township population and employment centres into the core GRT network. These routes are complemented by on-demand service, bringing single-fare transit conveniently and cost-effectively to all municipalities in Waterloo Region.

Community engagement

GRT launched the TTS in spring 2023 with kickoff meetings to identify the local values, needs, issues and concerns known to senior township staff. This included identifying possible contributors, key employers, and high-value locations for potential transit service expansions or enhancements.

See **GRT's Business Plan Engagement Summary** for a detailed summary of GRT's plan, tactics and results**.**

The first round of public engagement was launched in the summer of 2024, including a public survey. In addition to the co-ordinated Conventional (Bus and Train) and MobilityPLUS Plan events, four township-specific virtual engagement sessions were held to share project information and to seek feedback on the options being considered.

Township residents are supportive of better access to rural destinations, which was shared by **city residents who voiced their support for the Township Transit Strategy**. Some township residents voiced concern that expanding transit service to new areas could negatively affect rural community character.

With design revisions, a second round of engagement was held in fall 2024 that included in-person open house sessions, online resources, and a follow-up survey. Details were proposed such as service models, route connection points, and basic service spans. Based on this feedback, the project team refined the various recommended routes and services for the future township transit network.

Future township transit network

Travel data and community needs were considered to design an effective service. These included existing travel patterns, local priorities, population and ridership forecasts, and trade-offs of service span, coverage, frequency, and related costs. For improvements to existing services, considerations included stop activity, existing and unmet ridership demand, new growth areas, effectiveness of existing services and routing, and optimization opportunities.

There are **two types of transit services** proposed for each of the four townships:

- **Fixed-route transit** is how most typical bus routes operate. Fixed-route service follows a consistent route and schedule every day the transit vehicle operates. Travel times are consistent but may require longer walks.
- **On-demand transit** is a shared-ride service that does not run on a fixed route or schedule. Instead, vehicles travel based on the trip requests made by passengers, which can make travel times variable. On-demand trips are used to connect to other zones or routes in the GRT network. Trips can be booked days in advance or spontaneously using an app or by calling.

The **Future Township transit network** (Figure 1) fulfills the TTS vision and has been shaped by in-depth technical analysis and the comprehensive public engagement process.

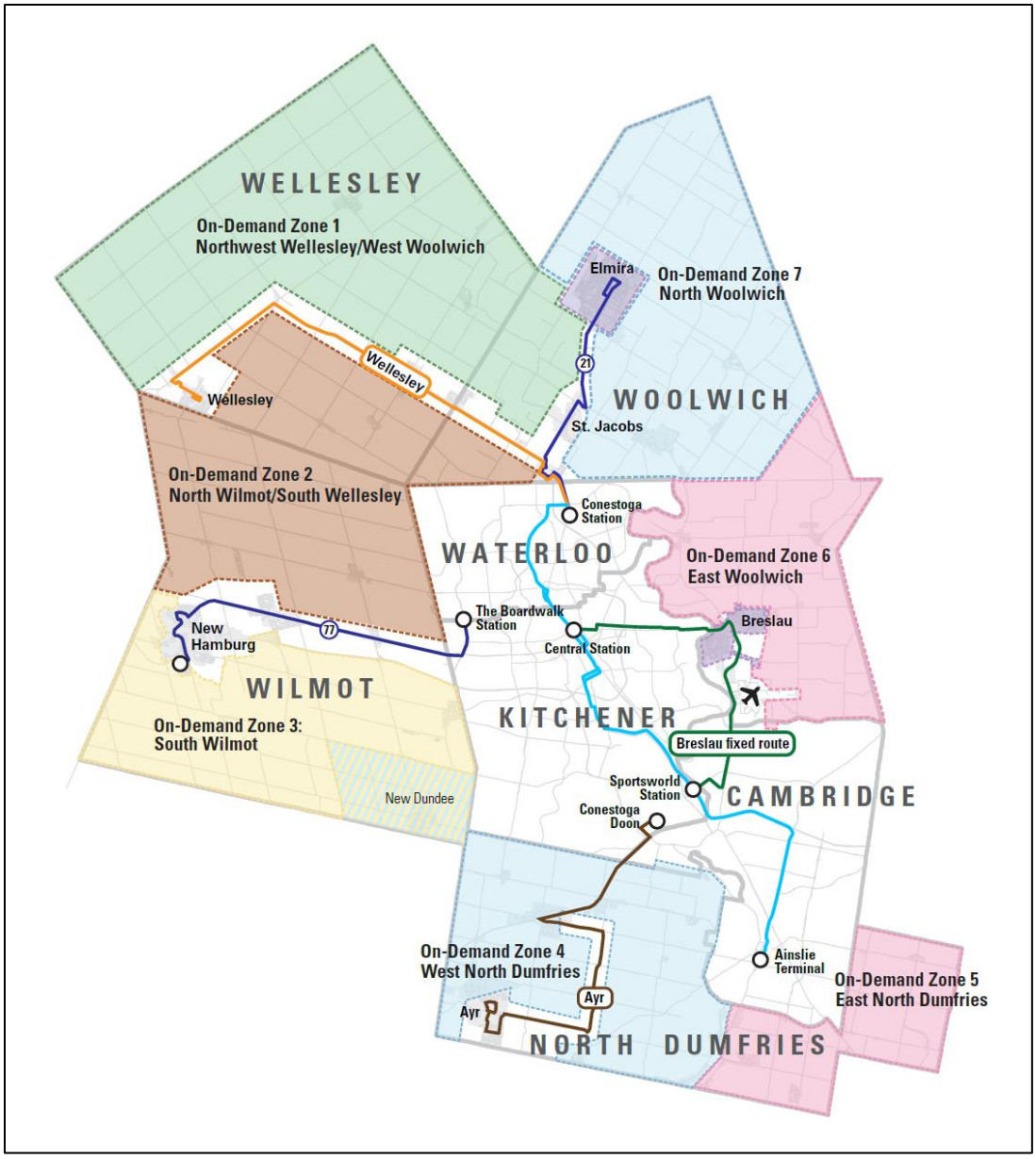


Figure 1: ***Future Township transit network****

**Final network, routing, and stops subject to change through annual reviews, further consultation and approval process for service, infrastructure, operations, and budget.*

Township transit service summary

The following summarizes the recommended services for each Township to fully achieve the Township Transit Strategy.

Wellesley

- Introduce a fixed route connecting Wellesley Village and other Wellesley communities to Conestoga Station
    - End to end travel estimate: 40 minutes
    - Frequency with 1 vehicle: 90 minutes
    - Connects over 50% of Wellesley's population
- Introduce On-Demand zones 1 and 2 serve the remaining areas of Wellesley with zone coverage overlapping parts of neighbouring townships

Wilmot

- Enhance Route 77
    - Convert the Forrest/Hincks Flex stop to permanent fixed-route stop
    - Modernize vehicle technology to offer real-time location information, consistent with most of GRT's fleet
    - Continue expanding service hours as warranted, including later weekday evenings and weekends, to align with the Conventional Bus and Train Plan
    - Continue monitoring the existing flex service and consider an alternate service model when appropriate to maintain and improve current service levels
- Introduce On-Demand zones 2 and 3 serve the remaining areas of Wilmot with zone coverage in parts of abutting townships as well as a shared coverage area for zone 3 and 4 serving New Dundee

Woolwich

- Introduce a new all-day-all-week fixed route from Central Station to Sportsworld Station via Breslau and the Waterloo International Airport to integrate the Breslau core and airport lands into GRT's core network:
    - Replace existing route 34 in Kitchener
    - Replace existing route 78 in Woolwich, Cambridge and Kitchener
    - Re-size the existing Route 79 Flex (On-Demand) service zone
- Transition Elmira Community Bus Pilot to a permanent GRT Elmira On-Demand service
- Continually monitor Route 21 for improvement opportunities as part of GRT's core network
- Introduce On-Demand zones 6 and7, alongside parts of Wellesley zone 1, to serve the remaining areas of Woolwich

North Dumfries

- Introduce a fixed route connecting the Village of Ayr and the 401 Business Park to Conestoga Doon Station
    - End to end travel time estimate: 40 minutes
    - Frequency with 1 vehicle: 90 minutes

    - Connects over 50% of North Dumfries' population and improves transit options for large employers.
    - Avoid all at-grade rail crossings to ensure schedule adherence.
- Introduce On-Demand zones 4 and 5 to serve the remaining areas of North Dumfries with a shared zone overlap in zone 4 with Wilmot township, and with connection points to the core GRT network

Financials

A mature township service is estimated to have an additional annual operating cost of approximately $4.5 million (2025 dollars), excluding improvements to Route 21 and Breslau/Airport services, which are captured in GRT's Conventional Bus and Train Plan. Township service implementation timing is anticipated to vary based on township-specific and regional priorities, and future external funding opportunities will be coordinated through the Region's annual budget process.

Next steps for GRT's Township Transit Strategy

- Continue collaborating with townships to identify opportunities to implement the new and improved services presented in the Township Transit Strategy
- Alternative service models may be considered as a first step towards achieving the future township transit network
- Pursue provincial and federal funding opportunities to support capital and operational expenses associated with the Township Transit Strategy
- In partnership with MobilityPlus and Kiwanis Transit specialized services, explore co-mingling services to optimize resources and serve on-demand township transit zones
- Share the Township Transit Strategy to inform the Region's upcoming Integrated Mobility Plan (IMP) and Area Municipalities' transportation and land use plans.

More information

Visit grt.ca/BusinessPlan for more information.