

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Reference: Smart Transit Options for the Region of Waterloo

The municipal election has come and gone, but the discussion of our Region's transit needs has continued to be top of mind for public and politicians alike. The Cambridge Chamber of Commerce is presently polling members on whether they prefer BRT, LRT, or think both are too expensive. It may come as no surprise that over 50% of respondents are saying they think both are too expensive. The four local newspapers have all had related commentary. And common concerns continue to surface: as a growing region, we need to plan for more transit, but the public doesn't like the cost of the options being promoted, and the Region's staff are struggling to find a solution that meets our needs for the right price.

Community Renewable Energy Waterloo (CREW) is one of many regional non-profits that had an opinion on the transit discussion during the election. Taxpayers for Sensible Transit repeatedly expressed grounded concerns about costs. TriTAG (the Tri-Cities Transport Action Group) continues to strongly favour LRT as the only technology that can service our future needs adequately. During the election, only one of the candidates for any of the City or Region posts clearly supported LRT (and did not get elected), many questioned both BRT and LRT, and all four councils are still giving mixed signals.

CREW consulted with experts on all sides, and is proud to release the attached summary report which re-assesses many of the key concerns about BRT (Bus Rapid Transit), LRT (Light Rail Transit), and a relatively new technology that seems to offer a blended solution: Aerorail, produced by a company called Aerobus. Studies released thus far by the Region's staff have focused heavily on BRT and LRT, but were fairly quick to dismiss other options: too quick in CREW's opinion. George Klemetsch of CREW says "we called some of the other technology suppliers, and the things they said did not seem to match with the Region's report, so we looked into it further." Derek Satnik adds, "Aerorail in particular seemed to be surprisingly competitive: versatile, cost effective, and well suited to our Region's needs for something that starts modestly, but includes Cambridge right from the start, and then grows with ridership over time."

The CREW report offers a different perspective on the Region's previous assessment of the various technology options, and calls upon the Region to explore a pilot Aerorail system: an overhead LRT that avoids all the infrastructure costs of dedicated lanes and tracks for either BRT or LRT, and which could offer three installed stations from Wilfrid Laurier University to the University of Waterloo to the Research and Technology Park for the same cost as the roadwork currently being done at the Weber rail crossing. This mini transit system, to prove it's worth, would offer all the benefits of LRT for less than a fraction of the cost of either BRT or LRT. And once successful, the system could be expanded across the region much more quickly than either BRT or LRT, and still at a fraction of the cost of either.

"The transit solutions we've been discussing require so much change in infrastructure, dedicated lanes and such, that we need to build them out substantially in order to build them at all," says Satnik, "but an Aerorail system is something we could start at a modest scale first, with as few as three stations: it's a very responsible and much less risky first step that deserves to be considered, and the growth potential thereafter is really attractive."

Denis Pellerin is a local Real Estate agent who campaigned in Kitchener's Ward 10 and says, "when I went door to door during the election, people were telling me they didn't care about more busses or trains: they wouldn't use them. Aerorail was exciting to them: especially to Seniors." Dan Glen-Graham, who beat Denis in the Ward 10 race, adds "whatever we do with transit, it needs to get people out of their cars. Busses and trains will be slower than what we already have with GRT: Aerorail will work, and be fast, and be fun."

Less than the cost of BRT, but all the value of LRT, and more. CREW's report emphasizes that Aerorail could be built mostly with local labour, from mostly local suppliers, and the manufacturer (Aerobus) is so

interested in our region that they'd consider relocating their headquarters here and exporting to all the other regions around the Province and the world that are watching and asking questions about this technology. And if CREW's proposed 3-station pilot Aerorail didn't end up being worth expanding, then it could easily be integrated into a BRT or LRT system, and for the modest investment, would still have been very worthwhile. Satnik quips, "indeed, as far as Aerorail is concerned, the opportunity is so good that it seems the sky is the limit."

Attachments:

- CREW summary report titled "An Evaluation of Rapid Transit Options for the Region of Waterloo", dated March 10, 2011.

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