



SUMMARY Waterloo Region is constructing ION, an \$818 million rapid transit system which will run through a 36 km Central Transit Corridor linking the cities of Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo. The Region and the three cities have spent the past three years developing the Community Building Strategy (CBS) to guide investment, planning, and infrastructure decisions within the Corridor. The CBS demonstrates how the introduction of rapid transit can shape a community, provides a framework for co-ordinating land use planning and related initiatives, and facilitates the investment needed to realize the full range of community building potential.

RÉSUMÉ La région de Waterloo investit présentement dans la construction d'ION, un système de transport rapide de 818 millions de dollars qui a pour objectif de relier les villes de Cambridge, Kitchener et Waterloo par un couloir central de transport en commun de 36 km. De concert avec les trois villes, la région a passé trois ans à développer le Community Building Strategy (CBS), une stratégie de renforcement des collectivités visant à orienter les décisions en matière d'investissement, de planification et d'infrastructure au sein du couloir. La CBS montre comment l'application d'un système de transport rapide peut façonner une communauté, lui offrir un cadre de coordination de la planification de l'utilisation des terres et d'initiatives connexes, en plus de faciliter l'investissement nécessaire à la réalisation du plein potentiel de renforcement des collectivités.



Leveraging Transit Investment to Shape the Community WATERLOO REGION'S CENTRAL TRANSIT CORRIDOR COMMUNITY BUILDING STRATEGY

BY KEVIN CURTIS, MCIP, RPP AND MELANIE HARE, MCIP, RPP

Waterloo Region is a vibrant global community that has recently been experiencing unprecedented population and investment growth. Over the next 20 years, Waterloo Region is expected to grow by 185,000 people and 80,000 new jobs. One of the key ways that the Region intends to accommodate this growth and support the continued concentration of people and jobs in existing urban areas is through the construction of ION, an \$818-million rapid transit system funded jointly by the Province of Ontario, the Government of Canada and the Region of Waterloo. ION will run through a 36-kilometre Central Transit Corridor linking the cities of Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo.

The Region, together with the three cities, has spent the past three years developing The Central Transit Corridor Community Building Strategy (CBS) to guide investment, planning, and infrastructure decisions within the Central Transit Corridor. The CBS is not a traditional land use plan, but rather is a framework to define and facilitate investment opportunities and community-building potential along the Corridor. The process and outcome has been deemed highly successful by the municipal partners, community and Regional Council, which unanimously endorsed the CBS in December 2013. This article shares the key attributes of the CBS and outlines how similar initiatives may be valuable for other Canadian municipalities.

WHY PREPARE A COMMUNITY BUILDING STRATEGY?

The concept of a rapid transit system within a central transit corridor has been part of planning in Waterloo Region since 1976

when the Regional Official Policies Plan—the first Regional Plan in Ontario—was approved. The transit spine concept became the centrepiece of the Regional Growth Management Strategy (RGMS) in 2003, which advocated directing a greater proportion of growth and development to existing urban areas.

This strategic direction for accommodating growth coincided with the onset of a demographic and economic transition that is playing out in many communities across Canada. The population has become older and more ethnically diverse, while the manufacturing-oriented economy now boasts strong office-oriented hi-tech, health and education sectors. This transition has contributed to a shift from predominantly suburban-oriented growth to more urban focused growth. For example, since 2006, an average of 46 percent of all new residential development and 63 percent of all new non-residential floorspace in Waterloo Region has occurred in existing built-up areas.

The new Regional Official Plan and the new official plans for the Cities of Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo all seek to support these trends. The plans include specific policies related to the development of a network of transit corridors and nodes, core area density targets, residential intensification targets for existing built-up areas, and rapid transit station area planning.

However, stakeholders indicated that they wanted to be more informed about possible community-building opportunities associated with rapid transit, and the Region and the three Cities realized that close, ongoing collaboration between the municipalities would be required to fully realize these opportunities.

The Region subsequently retained a consulting team led by Urban Strategies Inc., with sub-consultants Nelson Nygaard and Colliers, to work with a project team of Region and City planning staff to create a CBS at the corridor scale, including 23 stations and



Illustrating the potential future of Hespeler Road as a complete street.



Workshop with municipal stakeholders in the Project Storefront.

the surrounding community context. The goals of the CBS were to:

- > respect high priority community features, such as established neighbourhoods;
- > assist in the coordination of future Regional and Area Municipal public investment;
- > inform development prospects and be an investment tool for business attraction;
- > reflect the broader vision of Waterloo Region as an inclusive, thriving and sustainable community; and
- > help preserve agricultural lands and environmentally sensitive areas within the rural areas by fostering compact mixed-use development.

ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

The development of the CBS centred on a highly collaborative planning process in all three cities from February 2012 to the fall of 2013 and involved hundreds of stakeholders and community members. The consultation included a project launch, stakeholder interviews, three Exploring the Opportunity Forums, 15 open houses, a dedicated project website and a project storefront in downtown Kitchener where people could drop in and discuss ideas with staff.

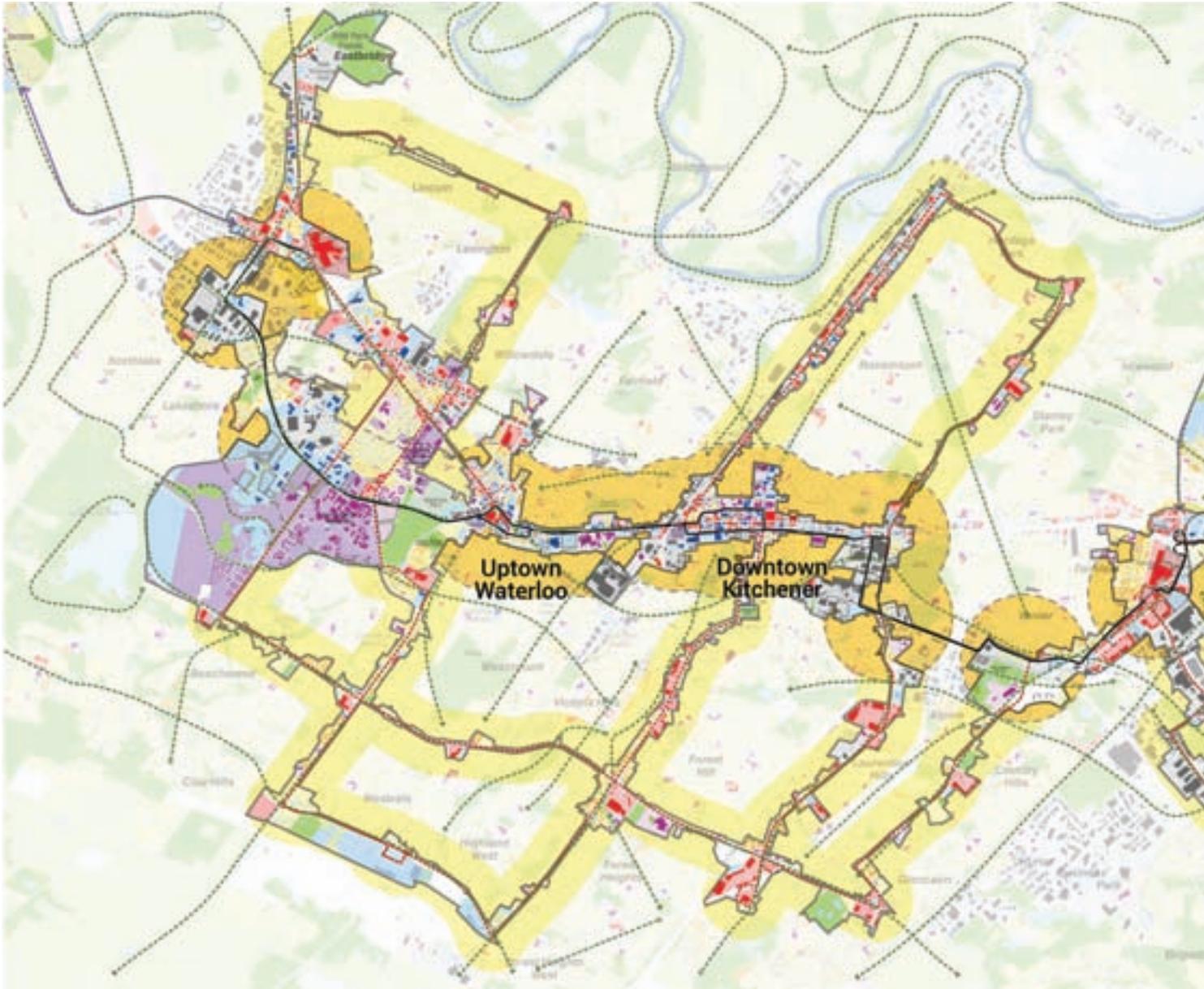
The CBS Project Team also hosted a speakers' series, during which experts with experience planning rapid transit in communities around the world presented their perspectives and responded to questions from the public.

INFORMING STATION AREA PLANNING

The CBS considers rapid transit station area planning from two perspectives. The first perspective is to understand the current and future station area characteristics that could help inform decisions about the types of development that should be encouraged at each location. A Station Area Snapshot was created for each future station that includes a description of what the station area is like today and what the station area's role within the central transit corridor could be in the future.

There is also specific information about market demand in the area, appropriate built form and land uses, mobility and public realm considerations, and potential community-building initiatives. This is critical intelligence that is now available to the investment community and is especially important for investors who are not familiar with Waterloo Region.

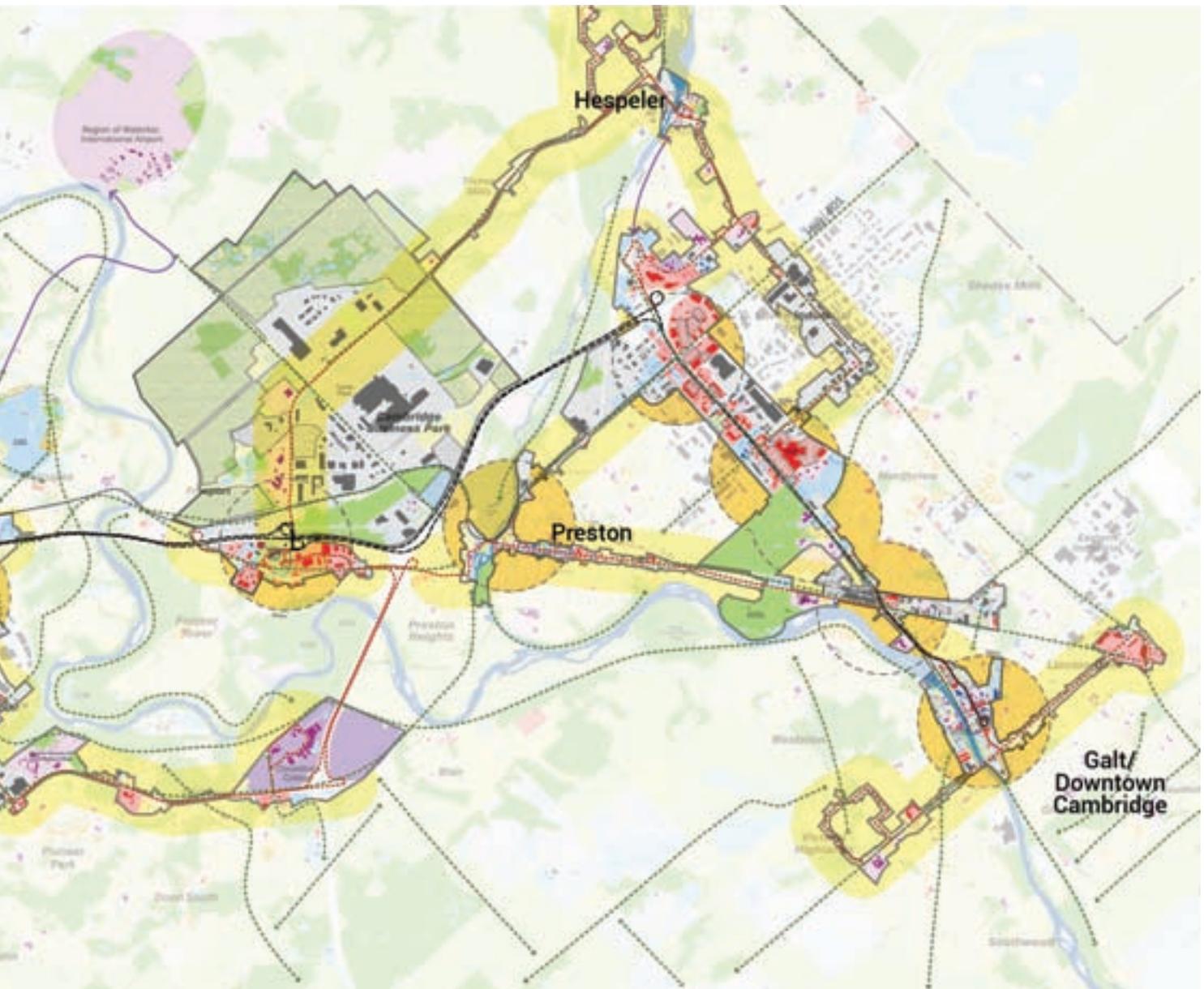
The second perspective on station area planning in the CBS focuses on how plans can be structured and what key process and resource considerations need to be addressed before undertaking station area planning. This is a particularly important perspective in Waterloo Region because considerable attention must be given to aligning Region and City financial, infrastructure and planning initiatives. For example, while the Region is responsible for ION, all other transit services and Regional Roads, the three Cities are responsible for more detailed considerations like zoning, parking and site planning.



MOBILITY FRAMEWORK

A new Mobility and Land Use Framework was established through the CBS

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|-----------------------------------|--|------------------------------|
| — RT Alignment | Focus Area | Low Density Residential |
| - - iXpress Bus Routes (Redesign) | Neighbouring Areas RT Corridor (800m) | Medium Density Residential |
| - - Regional Trail Network | Neighbouring Areas iXpress (400m) | High Density Residential |
| Agricultural | Commercial/Office | Retail |
| Park | Industrial | Institutional—General |
| Natural Areas | Utility | Institutional—Post Secondary |
| Opportunities for investment | Estimated 10 Min. Walk from Station (800m) | |



ILLUSTRATING TRANSFORMATION OVER TIME

Experience has shown that images help more people to fully appreciate how a community could change as a result of new development. The CBS includes detailed renderings that show how planning for transit-oriented development over time could achieve the Region’s long-term vision for the Central Transit Corridor. These renderings depict transformation over the short, medium and long term for five different types of areas; a new urban village/centre; a traditional centre; a commercial corridor; an avenue; and an employment area. The images were instrumental in engaging the community, Council and investors to demonstrate the broad range of community-building potential that could be achieved through transit-oriented development.

IMPLEMENTING THE CBS

Effectively transforming a plan into action is a challenge that foils many planning initiatives. The CBS Project Team determined that successful implementation of the CBS lay in developing a limited number of initiatives that were a top priority for the Region and the three Cities. These priority initiatives had the greatest potential short-term impact, could be used to help align planned Region and City capital programs for new or rehabilitated infrastructure, and could be supported with staff and adequate financial resources.

Six short-term priority initiatives that needed to begin in the next one to two years were identified, including the lead and partner(s) for each initiative. In addition, the CBS includes implementation actions organized under eight broad



Above: Mixed use development in uptown Waterloo. Below: Adaptive reuse at the Victoria Transit Hub, Kitchener



TODAY



LONG-TERM



Top, (No LRT): Place-making and investment opportunity on Charles Street, Kitchener.
Bottom, (with LRT): Market/Festival Street linking with LRT, Charles Street, Kitchener.

community-building themes that could be initiated some time after the next two years.

An Inter-municipal Working Group comprising representatives from the Region, Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo has been formed to coordinate the implementation of identified priorities and actions ahead of expected new development. Examples include station area planning programs that will result in almost all of the required station area plans in Kitchener and Waterloo being completed before rapid transit service begins in 2017, expanding student transit pass programs, and completing floodplain studies in some key station areas.

CONCLUSION

The Region of Waterloo's Community Building Strategy is one of only a handful of transit corridor-based plans in North America and one of the very few that applies to a mid-size community. The CBS shows that a robust community dialogue can successfully create a common understanding of how the introduction of a rapid transit system can go well beyond increasing transportation choice to help shape a community. The CBS also provides a framework for coordinating the many land use planning,

infrastructure planning, urban design and economic development initiatives that need to be undertaken before and after a rapid transit system is introduced, if the community-building potential of the transit investment is to be realized. Finally, the CBS is a critical tool to guide and facilitate the public and private investment needed to shape the communities of Waterloo Region.

For additional information on the CBS, please visit: www.regionofwaterloo.ca/bigshift ■

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