



A Division of METROLINX

COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

2012 Niagara Seasonal Train Service

Situation

For the fourth consecutive year, GO Transit is offering passengers seasonal travel options to/from the Niagara region by train. The train service runs along the Lakeshore West corridor with stops at Union, Exhibition, Port Credit, Oakville, and Burlington GO Stations, and the St. Catharines and Niagara Falls VIA stations. For the summer session, an express GO Bus shuttle will further enhance the GO experience to the region by accommodating passengers between St. Catharines and Niagara-on-the-Lake (NOTL).

For the 2012 season, this GO service will operate during:

- Victoria Day weekend (May 18-21)
- Summer session (June 23*-Sept 3)

**The service will not run on the first Friday of the summer session (June 22) due to operational limitations.*

GO will operate one trip each way on Friday evenings and three trips each way on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays between Niagara Falls and Toronto.

New in 2012, GO is offering an express GO Bus shuttle between the St. Catharines train station and downtown NOTL during the summer session. Shuttle times have been coordinated to meet trains in St. Catharines. Substantially broadening the market potential for the rail service, the shuttle is expected to draw a season total of 1,800 passengers with an estimated net cost of \$25,000. The increased GO Train ridership generated by offering this new service should cover the additional operating cost. This shuttle will not compete with an existing local service as Niagara-on-the-Lake does not have a transit system, and St. Catharines Transit does not serve the NOTL market.

The GO fare will be the same whether passengers transfer by GO Bus to Niagara-on-the-Lake or continue on to Niagara Falls by train.

The Burlington – Niagara Falls route is covered year-round by GO Bus service daily. Regular GO service will not be affected by the operation of the seasonal rail or shuttle services.

Niagara rail service will not operate over Thanksgiving weekend as it did in previous years due to track work west of Burlington GO Station. Regular GO Train service will also be disrupted that weekend; separate messaging will follow as details are confirmed.

Previous Niagara Rail Activity

The Niagara GO Train seasonal service has operated every summer since 2009.

In 2009, the service only ran Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays; this schedule included an early morning trip from Niagara to Toronto. For the subsequent years, that trip was discontinued in favour of a Friday evening trip.

Since 2010 the schedule has remained relatively unchanged, although the weekends of operation have varied from year to year.

Year	Ridership	# of weekends	Weekend dates	Net cost	Average ridership/weekend
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2009	49,400	17	June 27 – October 12	\$810,000	2906
2010	30,600	19	May 21 – September 26	\$1,150,000	1610
2011	29,458	13	May 20 – May 23, June 24 – September 5, October 7-10	\$900,000	2266

In 2011, it was announced that the Niagara seasonal rail service would be a permanent part of the GO annual service planning.

Potential Stakeholder Issue

For the NOTL shuttle, this is the first time a bus stop has been placed in downtown Niagara-on-the-Lake. The GO stop will displace existing street parking and landscaping due to minor curb construction, which is required to ensure accessibility. The town has requested the opportunity to table the service and construction at council prior to an announcement by the Ministry. It is our understanding that construction cannot begin until the approval of council has been confirmed.

Objectives

- To effectively communicate and promote the Niagara train service and the NOTL shuttle
- To meet ridership objectives
- To leverage GO marketing efforts and add value for riders through strategic promotional partnerships
- Increase awareness of year-round Niagara GO Bus service

Strategy

To inform the public about the seasonal train service to/from Niagara in advance of May 18, we will execute five phases of communication to coincide with service commencement, a potential announcement and long weekends.

In regard to the Niagara-on-the-Lake shuttle, it is recommended that the Ministry make an official announcement prior to/on May 7. Immediately following the announcement, general information will be available on gotransit.com. Messaging on May 3 will not include any reference to the shuttle because the shuttle will not operate for the Victoria Day weekend service.

Note: The launch of the Barrie weekend service is the same day, and the extra Milton train service will begin two days later on June 25. There is opportunity for one combined announcement on or around May 7.

- Phase 1 – May 3, 2012 (in advance of Victoria Day weekend service)
- Phase 2 – May 7, 2012 (recommended Ministry announcement re: NOTL shuttle)
- Phase 3 – June 5, 2012 (in advance of summer service)
- Phase 4 – June 23, 2012 (potential MTO event re: NOTL shuttle)
- Phase 5 – July 30, 2012 (in advance of the August long weekend)
- Phase 6 – August 27, 2012 (in advance of the Labour Day weekend)

Key Messages (Victoria Day weekend)

- GO Transit is running its seasonal train service between Niagara and Toronto during Victoria Day weekend again this year. There will be one trip in either direction on Friday evening, and three trips on Saturday, Sunday, and Monday.

- The train will make stops at Union Station, Exhibition, Port Credit, Oakville, and Burlington GO Stations and the St. Catharines and Niagara Falls train stations.
- Niagara-bound trains will depart Union Station at 6:20 p.m. on Friday evening, and 9:00 a.m., 4:15 p.m. and 8:10 on Saturday, Sunday and Monday.
- Toronto-bound trains will depart the Niagara Falls VIA Station at 8:40 p.m. on Friday evening; and 11:30 a.m., 7:20 p.m., and 10:30 on Saturday, Sunday and Monday.
- After Victoria Day weekend, GO will run the Niagara weekend train service again from June 23 through to September 3.
- There will be two bike coaches on the Saturday, Sunday, and Monday trips
- Visit gotransit.com/niagara for more information

Key Messages (summer session)

- GO Transit is running its seasonal train service between Niagara and Toronto again this summer, and the new GO Bus shuttle will run express between St. Catharines to Niagara-on-the-Lake. There will be one trip in either direction on Friday evenings, and three trips on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays.
- The train will make stops at Union Station, the Exhibition, Port Credit, Oakville, and Burlington GO Stations and the St. Catharines and Niagara train stations.
- Our new shuttle GO Bus will meet the train in St. Catharines and take you to Niagara-on-the-Lake.
- Niagara-bound trains will depart Union Station at 6:20 p.m. on Friday evenings, and 9:00 a.m., 4:15 p.m. and 8:10 on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays.
- Toronto-bound trains will depart the Niagara Falls VIA Station at 8:40 p.m. on Friday evenings, and 11:30 a.m., 7:20 p.m. and 10:30 on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays.
- The southbound GO Bus shuttle will depart St. Catharines at 8:05 p.m. on Friday evenings; and 10:45 a.m., 6:00 p.m., and 9:55 on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays.
- The northbound GO Bus shuttle will depart Niagara-on-the-Lake at 7:55 p.m. on Friday evenings; and 10:45 a.m., 6:30 p.m., and 9:45 on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays.
- The location of the GO Bus stop in Niagara-on-the-Lake is at (TBD)
- There will be two bike coaches on Saturday, Sunday, and holiday trips
- The seasonal Niagara service is now part of our annual service schedule.
- Visit gotransit.com/niagara for more information.

Audiences

- General Public
 - Particularly, 18-34 year olds without cars
- GO Transit passengers
- GO Transit staff
- Media partners
- Ministry of Transportation

Tactics

Stakeholders:

Communication Tool	Responsible	Due
MTO Comm roll-out	Trina Melatti	Complete
See Stakeholder Plan		

GO Passengers and General Public:

Communication Tool	Responsible	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Phase 6
MTO announcement/event	Ministry of Transportation	n/a	May 7	n/a	June 23	n/a	n/a
www.gotransit.com (Home > Niagara) (Schedule Changes > Niagara)	Caroline Busbridge	May 3	May 7	June 5	June 25	n/a	Aug 27
On the GO alerts	Karen Warner Savio d’Gama Rose Brendon McGibbon	May 8	n/a	June 5	n/a	July 30	Aug 27
CSA/Driver/Station Announcements	Karen Warner Savio d’Gama Rose Brendon McGibbon	May 8	n/a	June 5	n/a	July 30	Aug 27
PINS Board messaging	Karen Warner Savio d’Gama Rose Brendon McGibbon	May 3	n/a	June 5	n/a	July 30	Aug 27
Facebook	Transit reporters	May 3	n/a	June 5	n/a	July 30	Aug 27
Twitter	Transit reporters	May 3	n/a	June 5	n/a	July 30	Aug 27
Advertising (see Media Plan)	Stephanie Trendocher	May 13	→	→	→	→	→
Promotional partnerships	Stephanie Trendocher	TBD	→	→	→	→	→
Customer Contact Centre phone messaging	Brendon McGibbon	May 3	n/a	June 5	n/a	July 30	Aug 27

GO Transit staff:

Communication Tool	Responsible	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Phase 6
Job aid (for front-line staff)	Jason Allen	April 24	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Q&As (for media inquiries)	Malon Edwards	April 24	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Department-specific notices	Respective department	April 24	n/a	May 31	n/a	n/a	Aug 22

Media partners:

- Leverage media relationships to produce coverage of seasonal rail service

Communication Tool	Responsible	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Phase 6
Ontario news release	MTO	n/a	May 7	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
GO news release	Caroline Busbridge	May 3	n/a	June 5	n/a	Aug 27	n/a
Media pitches	Malon Edwards	May 3	n/a	→	→	→	→

Evaluation

Quantitative and qualitative measures to determine whether communication objectives were achieved:

- Increased amount of positive coverage and media impressions
- Decreased number of questions and complaints to Contact Centre regarding service communications related to the Niagara seasonal train service in 2012 compared to 2011
- Ridership targets obtained
- Promotional partnership objectives met

Written by: Caroline Busbridge

Approved by:

Date: April 19, 2012