



Report to Committee of the Whole

From: Peter Dutchak, Director of Engineering Services

Date: April 22, 2025

Subject: Transportation Master Plan Initiatives – Road Rationalization

Recommendation(s):

THAT the County's Road and Bridge Rationalization Study be received and filed; and

THAT staff be directed to develop an implementation action plan and asset transfer protocol to facilitate the transfer of approximately twenty-four kilometres of County road sections to local jurisdictional ownership as identified in the study for approval by County Council at a future meeting in 2025; and

THAT staff be directed to begin the planning process for the permanent closure and subsequent removal of the Fulton Line Bridge and the Jamestown Line Bridge; and

THAT the following five (5) bridges be removed from the County's jurisdiction:

1. Edison Drive Bridge – Municipality of Bayham
2. Lings Bridge – Township of Southwold
3. McGinnis Bridge – Municipality of Central Elgin
4. Harkness Bridge – Municipality of Central Elgin
5. Fleming Creek Bridge – Municipality of West Elgin

Introduction:

The County of Elgin is developing its first comprehensive master planning exercise for the County's transportation network. The Phase 1 update - Needs and Opportunities Report was completed and presented to County Council in February 2025. The TMP is nearing the conclusion of Phase 2: Develop and Assess Network Alternatives and includes a road network jurisdictional evaluation. This report seeks Council's endorsement of the study's road rationalization recommendations and to direct staff to develop an implementation action plan to advance road transfers.

Background and Discussion:

The County of Elgin's Transportation Master Plan (TMP) is a long-term strategy that will outline policy directions and identify transportation infrastructure plans to meet the transportation needs of the County's residents, businesses and visitors through 2054, considering all modes of travel.

Currently in “Phase 2: Develop and Assess Network Alternatives” of the TMP, draft recommendations have been developed after multiple stakeholder group meetings and public input. The following fourteen (14) strategies are being developed to support the TMP’s goals and vision.

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| 1. Cycling Master Plan | 8. Road Rationalization |
| 2. Transit Feasibility Analysis | 9. Road Classification |
| 3. Commercial Vehicles | 10. Local Bridges Review |
| 4. Safety Strategy | 11. Freight Rail |
| 5. Road Design Guidelines | 12. Carpool Lots |
| 6. Roundabout Screening | 13. Transportation Demand Management |
| 7. Communication / Utilities | 14. New Technologies |

Road Rationalization

A key component of the TMP is the aspiration to create an upper-tier road network in Elgin County and envisioned as follows:

The road network should support business, economic development, and growth in the county as well as meet the transportation needs of existing communities. To provide an increased level of service where it is required, county roads are to function as arterial or major collector roads and to provide for the efficient movement of traffic.

Road rationalization is the process of reviewing and determining the appropriate jurisdiction (County vs. local municipality), aiming to align asset ownership with the provision of services the County provides. The process removes assets that should not be within the County’s portfolio and places them under local jurisdiction when they serve a local function so they can be managed locally to best serve their community’s needs.

Road use and function can change over time and road transfers have occurred throughout the history of Elgin County to accommodate growth and demand changes. The TMP has used this philosophy and past practice to help formulate the ideal County road network through a road rationalization review.

As examples, in the late 1950s, County Road 10 (part of Aberdeen Line) and County Road 12 (part of Mapleton Line) were transferred to their respective local municipalities. In the mid 1980s, a large number of local roads were assumed by the County and including all or parts of County roads 5, 18, 27, 46, 48 and 52. In the late 1990s, transfers from the Province to the County for Highways 3, 4, 19, 73, 74 and 76 occurred. In the early 2000s, Graham Road through West Lorne, Belmont Road through Belmont, John Street through Aylmer Robinson Street through Port Burwell, and Putnam Road (between Lyons Line and Ron McNeil Line) were transferred from local jurisdictional ownership to the County. Colbourne Street and Bridge Street in the Village of Port Stanley (including the King

George VI Lift Bridge) were also transferred from the Municipality of Central Elgin to the County's jurisdiction.

Most recently in 2016, road rationalization transfers occurred between the County of Elgin and the Township of Southwold whereby 3.5km of local roads were transferred to the County and 10km of road segments were transferred to the Township of Southwold.

Although the Municipal Act, 2001, permits upper-tier municipalities the ability to transfer roads at their discretion, no guidance is provided to assist in the selection of candidate upper-tier roads. Many municipalities have and continue to utilize the Ontario Good Roads Association's (OGRA's) road rationalization model to determine road allocations between upper and lower tier jurisdictions. Elgin's TMP has also utilized the OGRA's methodology (with slight refinements) to develop the road transfer recommendations.

The OGRA road rationalization tool was utilized to score road segments based upon twelve (12) unique criterion. The entire County road network was evaluated as well as 48.5 kilometres of local roads proposed by the Municipal Advisory Committee (MAC) during 2021 and 2022 for transfer to the County's jurisdiction. The complete study presentation is attached to this report. The Road Rationalization presentation provides an overview of the twelve (12) criteria categories implemented in order to determine a warrant scoring for each road segment. Each criteria application and resulting score is illustrated to provide an overall network scoring to determine recommended road transfers.

The resulting analysis determined that a total of 180 kilometres of County roads meet the warrant criteria to be transferred to their local jurisdictions. The study's final recommendation has significantly reduced the warranted transfers through a phased approach and has identified a total of 23.8 kilometres of "near-term" transfers of County roads to municipalities.

These "near-term" transfers are proposed to occur within the near term and coincide with an action plan and asset transfer protocol yet to be developed or approved. One asset transfer protocol option may consist of transferring funds identified with the approved capital plan to the municipality at the same time as the asset transfer occurs to allow municipalities to make their own asset investment decisions. This option is similar to how transfers occurred from the Province to the County in 1997 and 1998. Another transfer protocol may allocate funding to the receiving municipality over a period of time, for example 10 years. If endorsed by Council, staff will develop an action plan and asset transfer protocol for Council's approval to facilitate the transfers in an equitable fashion.

County Bridges on Local Roads

The County of Elgin has jurisdiction of nine (9) bridges that reside upon local roads. Each of these structures has been reviewed and their strategic value has been assessed considering: its use, being redundant with nearby crossings available, if load restrictions are present, considering undue hardship for users if removed, considering emergency response times and if significant local area growth is expected.

Two (2) of these bridges have been identified for requiring replacement within the next 5 years and \$2.86M has been included within the approved capital plan to replace these single lane bridges with similar single lane structures in 2027. An opportunity exists to permanently close and remove the Fulton Line Bridge and Jamestown Bridge as they have been identified as providing low strategic value. Staff supports divesting these assets in order to re-allocate capital investment towards other, higher value strategic initiatives such as anticipated growth- related needs currently not included within the capital plan.

Five (5) of these bridges have been identified as low strategic value to County travel and recommended to be removed from the County's portfolio to ensure alignment with the services the County is responsible for providing.

Two (2) of the bridges (Dingle Street and Gillets) are recommended to remain within the County's portfolio since they provide moderate strategic value.

Financial Implications:

If endorsed by County Council, the transfer of assets as recommended by the County's consultant will have financial implications that vary depending on the developed and approved action plan and asset transfer protocol.

Advancement of the Strategic Plan:

The TMP supports Council's strategic strategy of sustainable community growth by understanding anticipated future needs to inform planning of asset investments that allow the County to provide exceptional services to meet those needs.

Local Municipal Partner Impact:

Staff proposes to develop an asset transfer protocol with funds identified within the approved capital plan so that additional local funding will not be required in the medium term. This infrastructure will be able to be managed locally, serving a local rather than regional purpose. This report recommends staff be directed to develop an asset transfer protocol for County Council's consideration at a future meeting. Once that action plan and asset transfer protocol is approved by Council, staff will meet with the LMPs, solicit their comments and report back to County Council prior to implementation of the plan.

Communication Requirements:

Once direction is provided by Council with respect to the Cycle Master Plan and Road Rationalization, the findings will be presented in a second public information centre (PIC) for public review and comment during a virtual PIC and through the project's webpage and social media.

Conclusion:

The County of Elgin's TMP has developed recommendations for jurisdictional responsibility of the County's current asset portfolio in order to align with the services the County is responsible for providing.

A key component of the TMP includes recommendations of road and bridge rationalization as has been completed throughout Elgin's history. This report seeks Council's approval to implement these recommended transfers and direct staff to develop an action plan and asset transfer protocol for Council's approval. The report also seeks Council's approval to permanently close and remove the Fulton Line and the Jamestown Line bridges.

All of which is Respectfully Submitted

Approved for Submission

Peter Dutchak
Director, Engineering Services

Blaine Parkin
Chief Administrative Officer/Clerk