



Administrative Report

Office of the Director, Infrastructure & Planning Services

To: Warden MacDonald and Members of Essex County Council

From: Allan Botham, P.Eng.
Director, Infrastructure & Planning Services

Date: Wednesday, November 15, 2023

Subject: Update Regarding Road Rationalization

Report #: 2023-1115-IPS-R42-AB

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an overview of the Road Rationalization Study (RR) since 2005, and recommend a strategy to complete the study.

Background

The Essex Windsor Regional Transportation Master Plan (EWRTMP) was the subject of a County Council Workshop on August 5, 2005, and, in addition to establishing a minimum regional road network, had the intended purposes to:

- reinforce an initiative that would establish policies and plans, at a strategic level, to address the network's future needs;
- develop a consistent regional road classification system; and
- develop a set of minimum design standards, across the region that would match the functional hierarchy of roads in the road classification system.

Administration finds that the formal policies and road classification system were never codified. The history of the Essex County road system, found in Appendix I, suggests that it was Council's direction to rationalize and establish a County Road network, and then proceed with recommendations of the EWRTMP.

Several attempts were made between 2005 and 2019 to complete a Road Rationalization Study, without success.

On September 24, 2021 the consulting firm of Strategy Corp presented an update to the regional CAO's on the RR, which included: findings, issues from the latest attempt, and draft principles for a project charter. Regional CAO's also agreed that the timing of the RR project is dependent on an updated Transportation Master Plan (TMP) for the County of Essex. At that time, the intent was to finalize the TMP, create a formal charter for a RR study, and move forward with the study.

Discussion

During the 18 years prior, there have been three different CAO's and two different Directors of Infrastructure. Multiple setbacks, including the onset of COVID-19, have impeded completion of the RR study.

The County of Essex hired a new Director of Infrastructure & Planning in November of 2021. The new Director provided a briefing memo during the February 2, 2023 Regional CAO meeting. The memo outlined Road Rationalization is one of three major projects that the County of Essex Infrastructure & Planning Services department will focus on, in order of: Official Plan (OP) Review/Update, Transportation Master Plan (TMP), and Road Rationalization (RR).

It was intended to complete the OP Review, and progress at least 6-8 months into the TMP before bringing the local municipal partners (LMP) back to complete a RR. The strategy, or approach, aligns with how the Regional CAO's left the process a few years ago with emphasis that the RR should not get ahead of the TMP.

Administration has committed to presenting a draft OP to Council in the first quarter of 2024.

The consulting firm of RJ Burnside was awarded the TMP. Within the terms of reference to the TMP, the consultant will touch on high level principles, guidance and policy on Connecting Links, Asset Management, Road Classifications and Road Rationalization. This work will inform further discussion during the Road Rationalization process. The TMP is projected to be completed early in 2025.

Project Charter and Terms of Reference

Given the broad impact of maintaining and developing a County Road network, asset management planning and the rapid population growth in the region, Administration is recommending that participation come from, not only engineers from the County of Essex and LMPs, but from representatives of Finance and Planning, from all LMPs.

As supported by the work of Strategy Corp, and as we move into the RR study, Administration, together with LMPs, will prepare a Project Charter and a Terms of Reference.

A Project Charter will identify commitments, of the County and all LMPs, goals, and the plan to accomplish the goals. The charter will be a collaborative effort with all seven municipalities and the County of Essex focusing on the finish line.

Basic principles for a Charter were provided to the CAOs group and are generally that the RR study:

- Respect an updated TMP;
- Respect the County's policies and the County OP;
- Establish responsibilities and financial roles;
- Have regard for financial fairness among local municipalities;
- Include consultation and meaningful dialogue with local municipalities; and
- Have consideration for regular updates and renewals to the network.

While the Charter is being developed, the Terms of Reference for a RR Study will also be developed to align with the Charter, but be more descriptive to give greater clarity on objectives and consequences of County Roads. The Terms of Reference will likely include categories such as:

- Roles and Responsibilities
- Accountability and Relationships
- RR Advisory Committee Members
- Objectives of a County Road
- Cost Sharing of County Roads
- Reporting Requirements and Records

In 2024, following completion of LMP budget processes and 8 months into the TMP, County Administration will reconvene a committee consisting of the appropriate representatives from all LMPs to begin the next RR.

Motivation for Road Rationalization

Attempts to move forward with RR in the past have been mired in misconceptions and suspicion. Administration and the County of Essex are committed to acting in good faith, continuing the RR study without the intention of:

- Arbitrarily improving the County's financial position
- Reducing County workload
- Creating a power position
- Unilaterally uploading or downloading road segments

Administration is simply responding to the direction of County Council to review the County of Essex Road Network. As the process unfolds, Administration will make recommendations and County Council will provide further direction and ultimately decide whether to approve the results of the comprehensive RR review.

Financial Implications

Administration is recommending that a third-party firm be engaged to help support and guide discussions, manage data, prepare summary documents and generally act as a project administrator. The cost of this work is expected to be \$ 50,000. However, it is expected that the third-party firm will propose a plan that will likely result in additional financial impacts. While the exact scale of these additional impacts remains undefined, it's important to be prepared for them.

With respect to the financial implications of owning and maintaining a road network, the attached Appendix I includes a section on historical costs. Appendix I represents the records of the County of Essex to operate and maintain and renew roads, bridges, culverts. The summary is provided for reference and discussion leading up to, and during, the RR study.

Administration acknowledges the challenges in distributing the County Levy, especially given the additional levy dedicated to the Expansion program. The Levy supports annual operations, maintenance, and renewals across all County of Essex departments, in addition to funding the Capacity/Expansion program. This report is specific to the consulting services; however, the plan presented by this consultant is expected to have a significant financial impact and will go to Council at a future date before moving forward with any of the recommendations of the plan.

Consultations

Preparation of the subject report included the CAO.

Recommendation

That Essex County Council receive report 2023-1115-IPS-R42-AB, and
That Essex County Council directs Administration to include \$50,000 in the 2024 Budget (funded from the Rate Stabilization Reserve) for consulting services in support of the Road Rationalization Study.

Approvals

Respectfully Submitted,

Allan Botham

Allan Botham, P.Eng., Director, Infrastructure and Planning Services

Concurred With,

Sandra Zwiers

Sandra Zwiers, MAcc, CPA, CA, Chief Administrative Officer

Appendix Number	Title
Appendix I	Briefing Report – County Road Rationalization History and Supporting Information