



Subject:	uLinc Transit Pilot Quarterly Update Report
To:	Community Services & Infrastructure Committee
From:	Public Works Department

Report Number:	PW 07-19
Wards Affected:	All
Date to Committee:	Wednesday, April 3, 2019
Date to Council:	Monday, April 15, 2019

Recommendation:

Receive and file the Public Works report PW 07-19 regarding an update of the uLinc Transit Pilot Service for 2018 and Q1 2019.

Purpose:

This report is intended to provide an update on the uLinc Transit Service to Council. The report provides updates on ridership metrics, engagement/communications plans, and recommendations for improving the routes and stops, as well as a brief update on inter-municipal transit progress in Niagara.

Background:

In November of 2017, the Town launched the uLinc intra-municipal Transit Pilot with the intention to introduce and expose residents of Lincoln to local transit in an effort to better gauge citizen and community need, desire, and readiness for a new municipal service offering. ULinc is the first step to prepare the community for potential future inter-municipal connections provided by Niagara Region Transit (to Grimsby and St. Catharines) as well as GO Rail service.

In September of 2018, Council approved the following:

- Extending the service contract with the BTS Network Inc. for 2019;
- In principle, transitioning from a pilot to a permanent transit service;
- A 3-year contract for a Transit Coordinator to support the uLinc service; and
- A rider fare to come into effect in 2019 to allow the Town to qualify for Provincial Gas Tax funding.

Report:

Status and Ridership Metrics

The uLinc Transit Pilot was in service for over 13 months. The pilot was implemented to move our residents and visitors within Lincoln, while providing a foundation for future inter-municipal transit, allowing residents to move beyond Lincoln's borders.

Over the past year, staff have worked with The BTS Network (bus vendor and operator) to track ridership and resident feedback. These quarterly updates provide Council with ridership, customer feedback, route operations and quality improvements throughout the duration of the pilot.

The following is a breakdown of the ridership demographics for 2018 service:

- Over 2,400 rides in 2018
- The highest demographic of users were adults (49%), followed by seniors (36%), and youth (15%) with women making up 71% and men 29%
- Average daily ridership varies by season but over the past year, averages out to 9.5 riders per day
 - Average daily ridership is lower in Fall and Winter as weather plays an integral part of those going out to average to 8.5 rides/day or lower
 - While it jumps to 10.4 in the Spring and 11 in the Summer
 - As noted above, seniors are a large portion of ridership who do not go out as much in the winter months. Therefore, over October, November and December, the senior ridership was less. It is anticipated as warmer weather arrives, the proportion of seniors will again increase.
- Route 2 (Ontario St./Bartlett) is the most popular with 41% of the rides, followed by Route 3 (King St.) with 36%, and Route 1 (Hixon St.) with 23%
- The highest frequency of trips occurs in the early and late morning, with lower usage on the later routes
- The hub of the system, the Fleming Centre, results in 36% of the pick ups
- Not including the Fleming Centre, the most used stops have been:
 - Foodland in Vineland (13%)
 - Two stops at the Heritage Community in Vineland (13%)
 - GO Bus Stop in Beamsville (12%)
 - Edelheim Apartments in Beamsville (11%)
 - No Frills in Beamsville (10%)
 - Sobeys in Beamsville (8%)
 - Two stops at Golden Horseshoe Estates in Beamsville (8%)
 - Union Road in Beamsville (8%)

The figures below provide a more detailed analysis of the rider demographics and stop locations for each route.

Figure 1.0 – Rider Ages

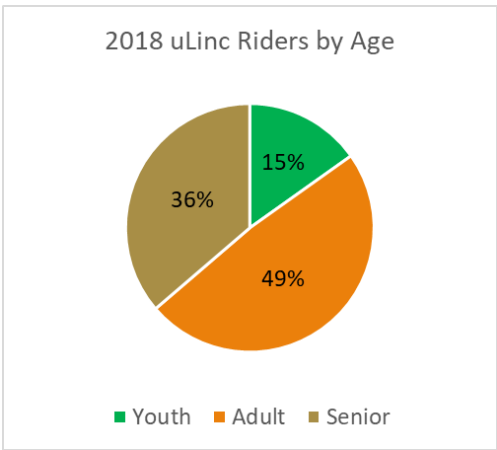


Figure 2.0 – Route Performance

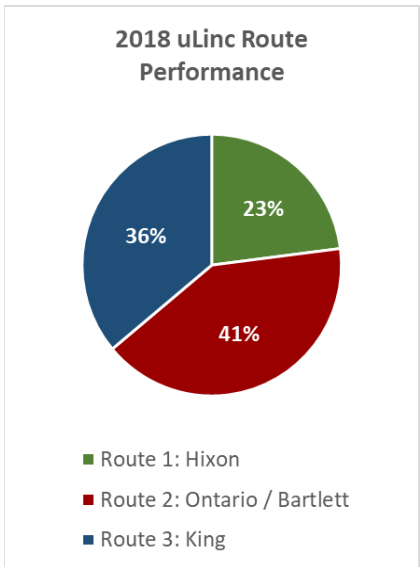


Figure 3.0 – Usage by Time of Day

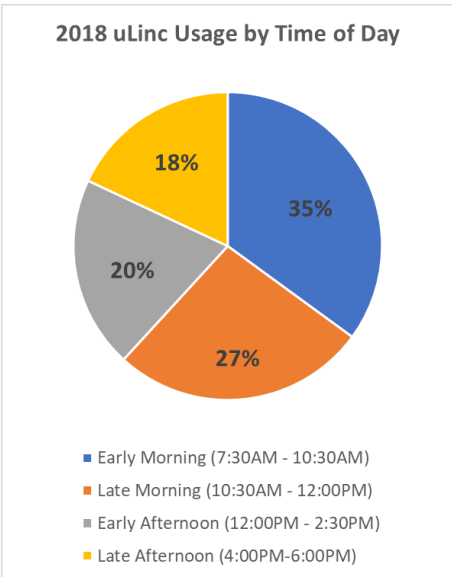


Figure 4.0 – 2018 Average Usage per Stop by Community

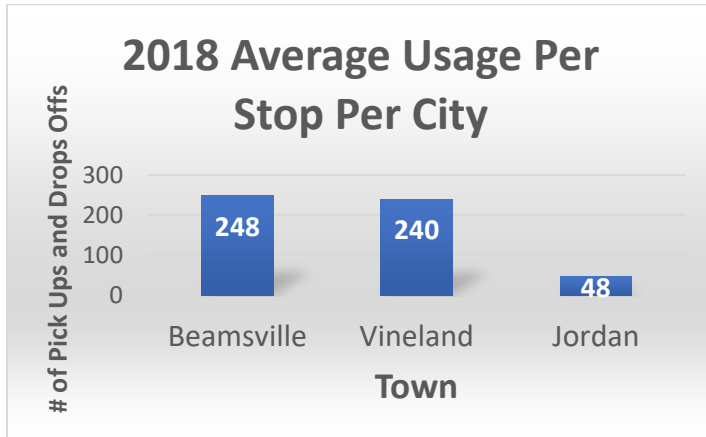


Figure 5.0 – 2018 uLinc Usage by Stop

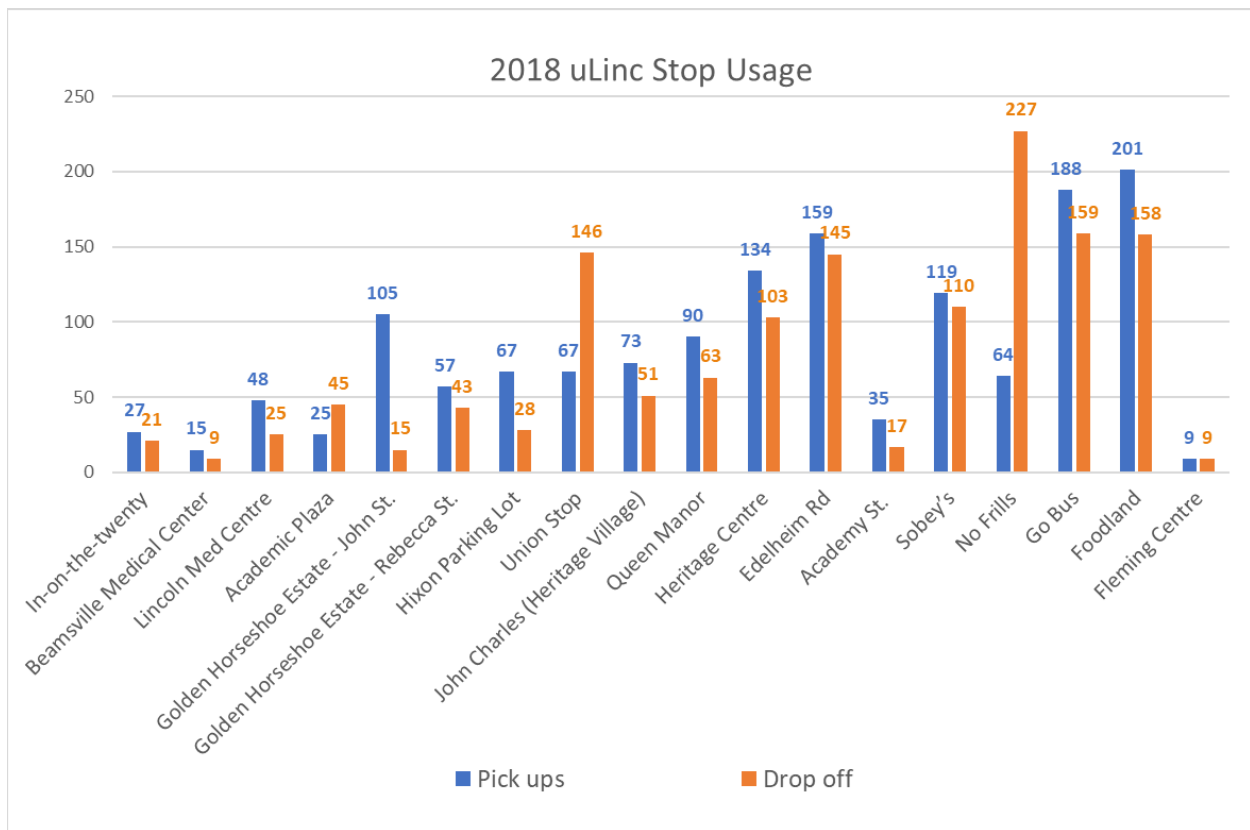


Figure 6.0 – Average Daily Rides by Month

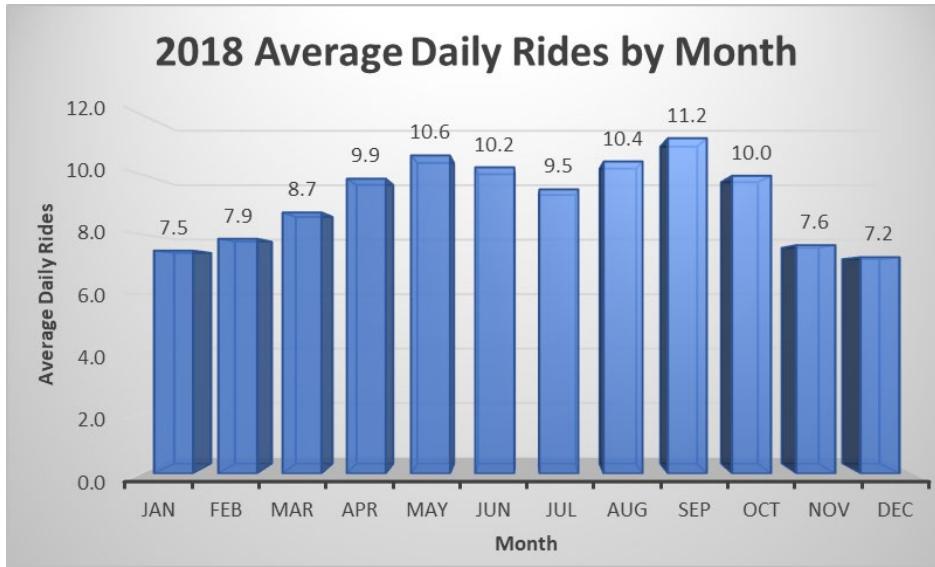


Figure 7.0 – 2018 Monthly Ridership

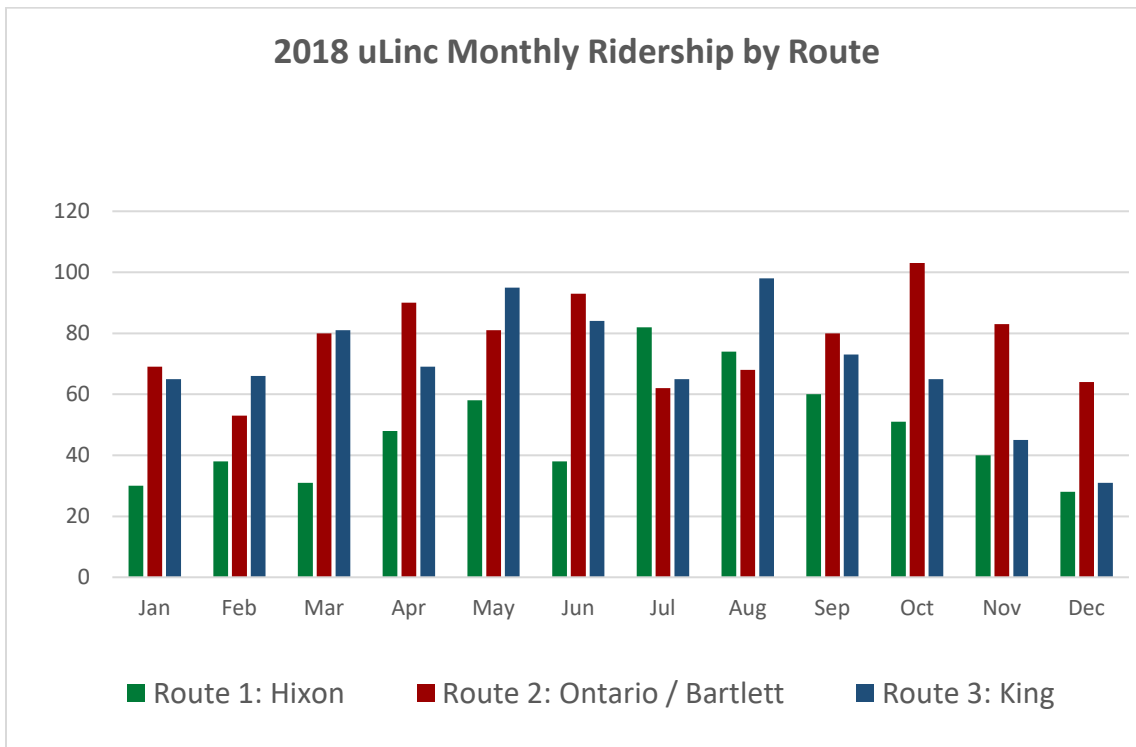
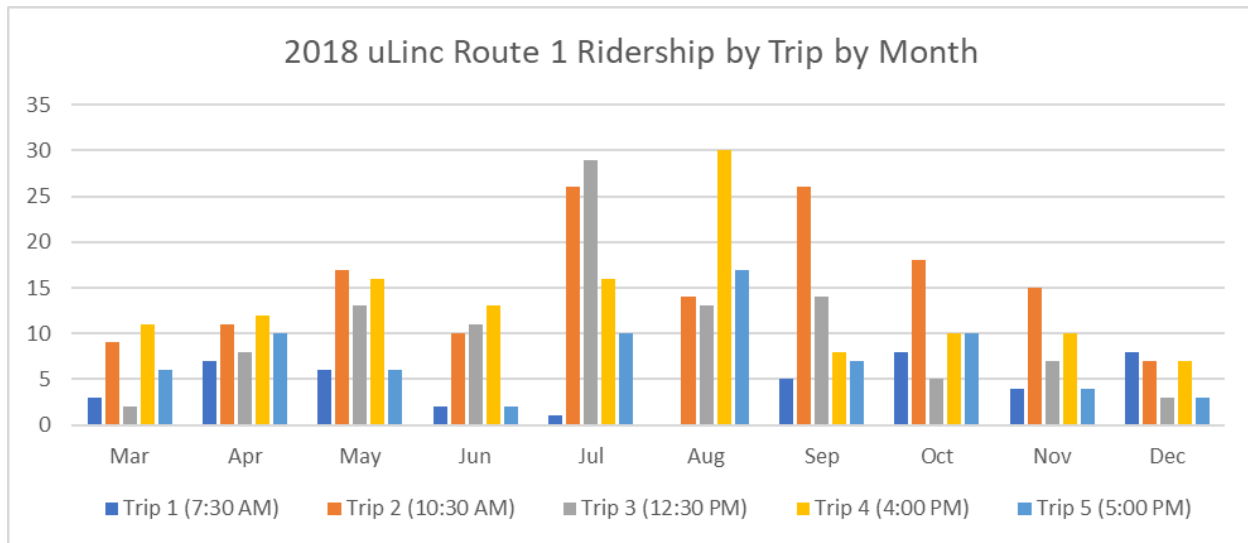


Figure 8.0 – 2018 Route 1 Ridership by Month



*Please note that detailed trip information (for Figures 8.0, 9.0, and 10.0) was not available in January and February 2018. As such, only the number of rides taken per route over day were captured, and not which trip the rides were taken. Accordingly, the data appears to have all taken place on the first trip for each route but the actual trip dispersion is unknown for these months.

Figure 9.0 – 2018 Route 2 Ridership by Month

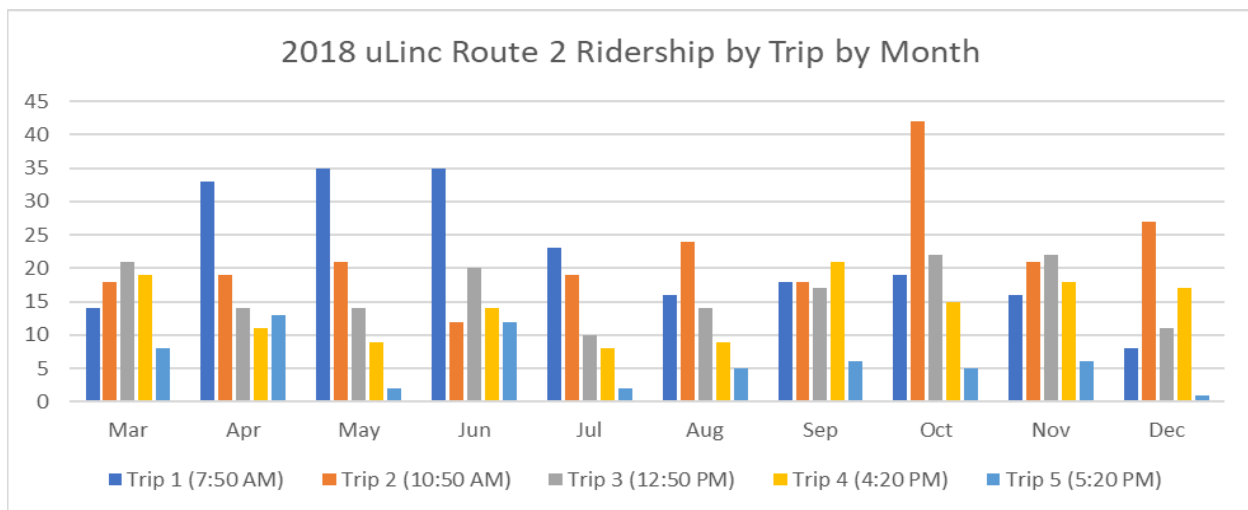


Figure 10.0 – 2018 Route 3 Ridership by Month

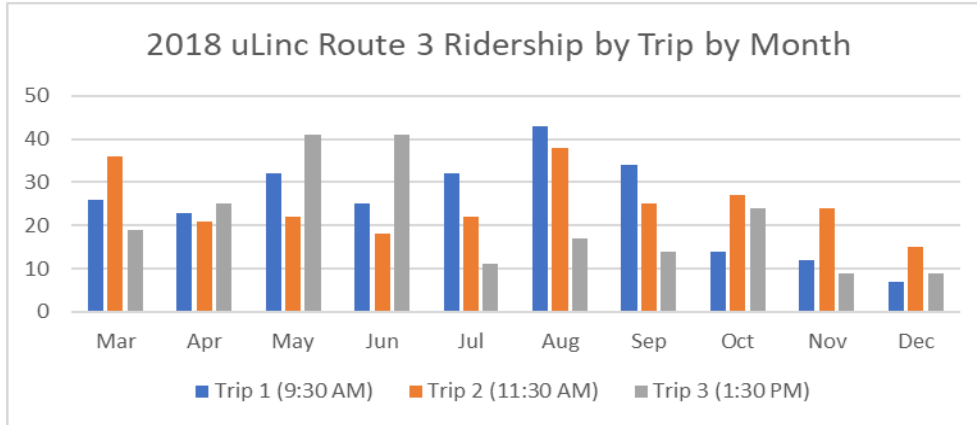
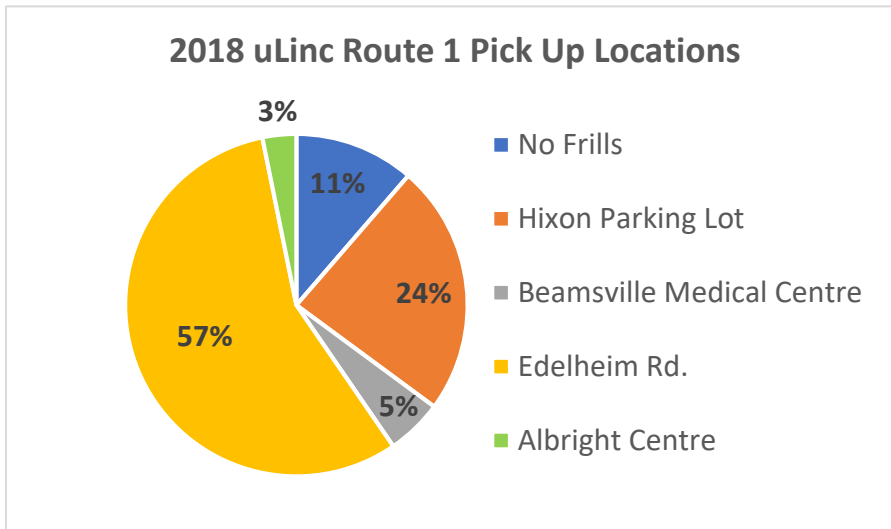
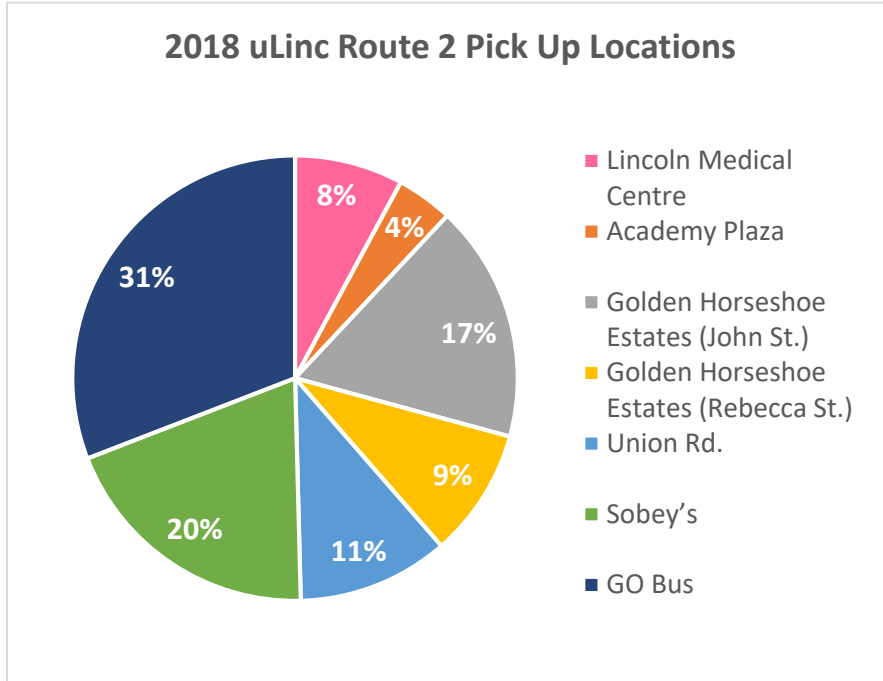


Figure 11.0 – Route 1 (Hixon - Beamsville South) Usage Locations



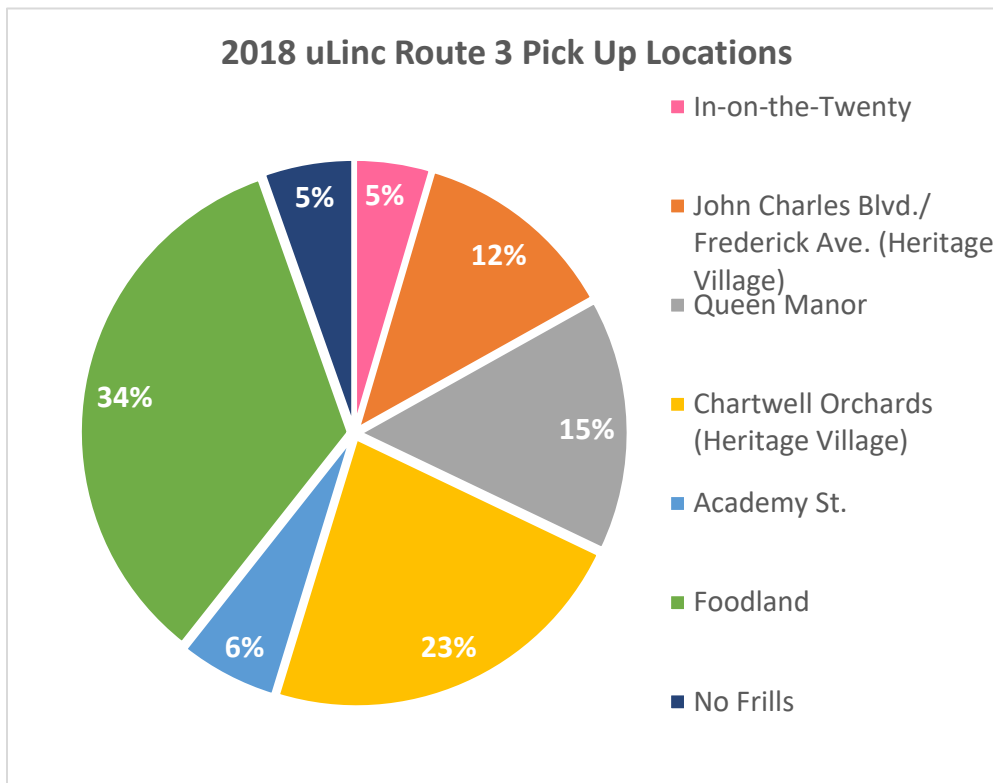
****Please note that the Albright Centre stop was only added in July 2018. Therefore, the statistics for this stop is based on only 6 months of data compared to 12 months of data for the other stops.**

Figure 12.0 – Route 2 (Ontario/Bartlett - Beamsville North) Pick up Locations



****Please note that the Golden Horseshoe Estates (Rebecca Street) stop was only added in July 2018. Therefore, the statistics for this stop is based on only 6 months of data compared to 12 months of data for the other stops.**

Figure 13.0 – Route 3 (King - Vineland & Jordan) Pick up Locations

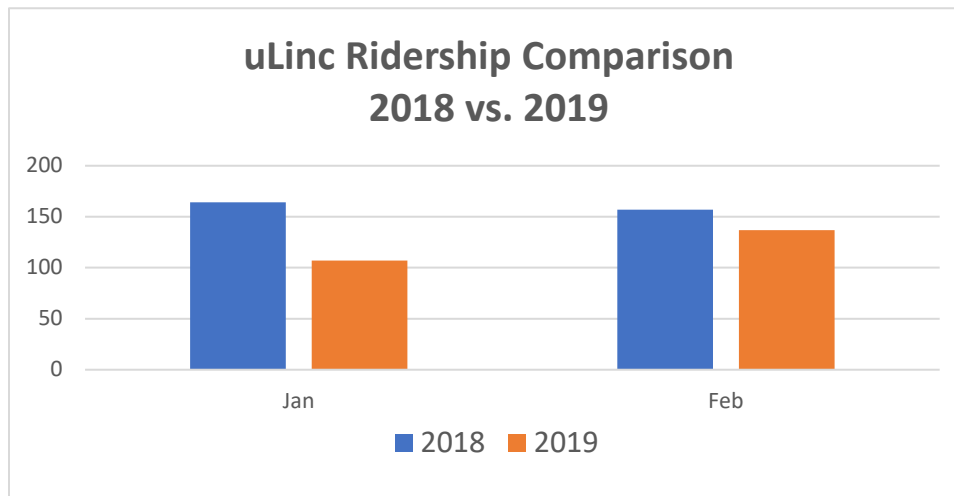


****Please note that the Academy Street stop was only added in July 2018. Therefore, the statistics for this stop is based on only 6 months of data compared to 12 months of data for the other stops.**

Q1 2019 Ridership Update

As expected and observed last year, due to inclement weather and cold temperatures, ridership tends to be lower in winter months. January and February 2019 have been particularly cold which has impacted the ridership to date. Below is a graph comparing January and February ridership from 2018 to 2019.

Figure 14.0 - uLinc Ridership Comparison: Jan. and Feb. 2018 vs. 2019



While January 2019 ridership was significantly lower than January 2018, the gap was much smaller in February. It is important to note that in January 2019, Public Health issued two extreme weather alerts, resulting in a total of seven days. During cold weather alerts, Public Health and the Town remind residents to limit their time outdoors, especially for seniors and those that are vulnerable. Therefore, the cold weather may account for the difference in 2018 and 2019 ridership for January.

Staff is confident that ridership will continue to increase as Spring approaches and that the proposed changes outlined below will further enhance the system which will be realised with additional ridership.

Quality Improvements

The addition of a transit coordinator has provided a dedicated focus to this important initiative, providing mobility to residents across Lincoln. Many of the quality improvements listed below, to encourage further ridership, wouldn't have been possible without the focus and expertise of the transit coordinator. This role's continual focus on contract management, operations, ridership, routes and schedules, and customer service has realized the following outcomes below. In the short time of being hired, this role has been integral in the intermunicipal transit planning and Lincoln's opportunities to be connected to the remainder of Niagara. Efficiencies through detailed analysis are allowing for significant enhancements to the system to improve access and overall ridership.

Staff have collected feedback from riders of the service along with input from the bus driver, along with ridership statistics, in order to make informed decisions about bus stop locations and routes. Significant effort is being made to improve the user friendliness of uLinc, in the following forms:

- **Brochure:** Being improved with clear and detailed route maps.
- **Webpage:** Being redesigned to allow ease of use and easy access to information. The website will contain links to a number of newly created documents including Rider Policies, Frequently Asked Questions, and Trip Planners.
- **Apps and Trip Planners:** uLinc data has been included on digital trip planners such as Google Maps (Transit) and the Transit App.
- **Improved Connections to the GO Bus:** The existing schedule has been shifted by 5 minutes to ensure an additional 4 daily transfer connections.
- **Additional Summer Saturday Stop Locations:** This year's Summer Saturday service will connect to community assets such as pools and splash pads, and will allow residents to access more community events.
- **Additional Bus Stop Locations:** An additional 9 stops are proposed to be added to the existing routes to improve accessibility and usability of the system. In addition, Flag Stops are being added along King Street on Route 3.

Staff is working closely with the contractor responsible for snow clearing to ensure that all bus stop locations remain accessible during and after snow and ice events.

Proposed Service Changes for 2019

The following service changes are proposed for 2019 based on public feedback and ongoing evaluation:

More Connections to the GO Bus Stop

To better align with the GO bus schedule, we would like to start our schedule 5 minutes earlier, which will allow uLinc to make 4 additional connections to the GO bus. We will share this with Metrolinx as they were eager for additional linkages, where possible. Staff will continue to review schedules and routes to find opportunities for connection for our students and residents.

New Bus Stops

Throughout the past year of service, staff have collected feedback regarding stop requests and route deviations. Staff have closely considered all of the suggestions and deemed the following stops and route deviations as feasible with only minor extensions to the existing timeline and useful additions to the routes. Staff proposes to add 2 stops in Vineland and 2 stops in Jordan to better serve these communities and to better reflect

the proportions of populations in each community. An additional 4 stops are proposed in Beamsville to make assets and workplaces more accessible. The stops are listed below:

Route 1: Hixon (2 new stops)

- Calvary Gospel Church (inbound only)
- Lincoln Community Centre (inbound only)

Route 2: Ontario/Bartlett (2 new stops)

- Wendy's (outbound) / McDonald's (inbound)
- Tim Horton's

Route 3: King (4 new stops)

- Southridge Community Church
- Twenty Valley Community Church
- Village of Hope
- Jordan Arena/Lion's Park

New Flag Stops for Rural Areas

There is currently an area of approximately 7.5 km along King Street between Beamsville and Vineland with no access to the bus. While a permanent stop did not align with planning principles given the sparse population, there is an opportunity to serve the residents and migrant workers in this area, which can be met with a Flag Stop.

A Flag Stop is where passengers can access the bus on a request basis by 'flagging' down the driver at a safe location along the route. Staff proposes to make the area along King Street between Petty's Lane in Beamsville and Rittenhouse Rd. in Vineland a Flag Stop Route.

Proposed Service Enhancements – Summer Saturday Service

The 2018 Summer Saturday service ran for July and August on the regular schedule, with 3 trips of each route. This service was well received and saw an average of 1 rider per trip, compared to 0.7 riders per trip on the regular service. Based on these statistics, staff recommends Saturday service remain for July and August 2019, with adjustments for improved service. Staff recommend the following Summer Saturday service enhancements based on feedback to help promote summer community assets and programs:

- In addition to the new stops listed above, the Saturday service will also service:
 - Hillary Bald Park in Beamsville

- Allan F. Gretsinger Community Pool in Beamsville
- Charles Daley Park in Jordan
- Jordan Lions Pool in Jordan
- Routes 1 and 2 will be combined to provide faster running times
- Removing unused stops/ stops that are closed Saturdays
- Each route will run 4 times to provide additional service hours

Financial, Legal, Staff Considerations:

Financial:

To be eligible for Gas Tax Funding, a municipality must charge a rider fare but there is no set minimum. A fare policy and communications strategy was necessary, so it was decided the planning for this would be done by the Transit Coordinator following their hire in January 2019, resulting in a Q2 implementation of a fare. The fare comes into place on April 1, 2019, (as this report is written prior to the report date) and will be \$1 per ride. Alternatively, riders can purchase ride cards, valid for 11 rides, for the cost of \$10. The fare is expected to generate approximately \$2,000 to \$2,500 in a year. As a reminder, transit is a subsidized service and is not revenue generating for a community. The revenue is applied to some cost recovery and meets the requirements of gas tax funding eligibility.

The 2019 estimated operating costs are included below in Table 1.0.

Table 1.0 – 2019 Estimated uLinc Operating Budget

Item	Estimated Cost
EXPENSES	
2019 Operating Costs (Contracted service to BTS)	\$139,500
Salaries and Benefits	\$108,609
Winter Maintenance	\$8,500
Software & Other Miscellaneous Materials (additional stop signage, stop improvements, etc.)	\$13,000
Administration (Printing, Marketing, Advertising, Creative Services)	\$19,150
Gross Operating Expenses	\$288,759
REVENUES	
Grants	\$113,000
Net Estimated 2019 Operating Budget	\$175,759

Staff has submitted a request for Provincial Gas Tax funding and estimated a grant of approximately \$113,000.

Staffing: The new Transit Coordinator position was filled in Q1 2019. Public Works continues to be the lead department for the operations of uLinc with support from Communications for ongoing promotion and engagement work.

Legal: The service contract with The BTS Network Inc. has been extended for an additional year, expiring December 31, 2019.

Inter-Municipal Transit Update

The Niagara Region has included and approved \$13.9M in capital funding for Niagara Region Transit in 2019 for their 2019-2020 Inter-municipal Transit Service and Capital Plan. This plan includes:

- the purchase of 13 additional buses;
- increasing service hours of the existing NRT service to match the hours of the local transit services;
- increasing frequency from 1 hour to every 30 minutes; and
- new route expansions/extensions.

A number of these improvements are planned for September 2019/January 2020 and include two new transit pilot services for West Niagara, set to begin as early as Q1 2020. The new inter-municipal transit (IMT) service to West Niagara is identified as a priority to connect west Niagara communities to Niagara's existing transit network, and to have an established transit service in advance of the planned GO Rail Service Expansion to Grimsby by 2021.

In addition, there is a need to connect Lincoln's newly created local transit system with the IMT system to fully leverage transit connectivity. It is envisioned that a route could be initiated to connect Grimsby, Beamsville, Vineland and Jordan. An additional service could be added to connect this route with St. Catharines. Another route is proposed to connect Smithville with Grimsby. Lincoln staff will continue to work closely with the Inter-municipal Transit Working Group to provide any necessary support and to ensure seamless connectivity with uLinc.

The IMT Working Group is spearheading a number of initiatives that Lincoln will continue to participate in to find economies of scale and to ensure consistency across all Niagara transit agencies:

- Common Fare Strategy by September 2020
- Single Transit Phone Number by September 2019
- Investigate/Evaluate on-demand transit options to provide enhanced service
- Test Remix software to streamline and simplify route planning

One of the main goals of the IMT Working Group (IMTWG) is to ensure a seamless and customer friendly experience. One way the IMTWG plans to achieve this goal is to ensure there is no duplicity in the route numbering to minimize passenger confusion. To achieve this, each municipality/transit agency has been assigned a range of numbers to use for their respective routes. Town of Lincoln has been assigned route numbers 930 to 949. Accordingly, Town of Lincoln will need to rename the existing routes as follows:

- Route 1 (Hixon) will become **Route 931 (Beamsville South)**
- Route 2 (Ontario/Bartlett) will become **Route 932 (Beamsville North)**
- Route 3(King) will become **Route 933 (Vineland/Jordan)**

Public Engagement Matters:

Staff continue to communicate with several municipalities and organizations with comparable transit systems for ongoing planning and implementation. It should be noted that support from these organizations has also been well received as Lincoln is stepping forward in providing mobility to residents and is adding to community livability and sustainability.

Internally, staff consulted with Community Services who support the proposed route enhancements. Our customer service representatives at the Fleming Centre play a key role in customer feedback, with Fleming being the hub of the service. The transit coordinator will provide training on the new schedule and stops to the Town's customer service representatives. Public Works will continue to work closely with other departments to help support community events and arrange for uLinc Shuttle services where required.

Ongoing efforts to promote the system, increase ridership and solicit feedback to continually evolve the system to deliver accessible and quality services remain the focus of public engagement. The focus of a transit coordinator has allowed for significant planned improvements to our communications strategy and activities. These improvements are focused on usability of the schedules and route planning.

A dedicated communications strategy has been developed and implemented (at the time of this report) to manage the fare implementation. The target audience is the existing riders and our stakeholder groups. Those that have yet enjoyed this service, will be made aware of the fare as they are informed on routes and schedules.

As well, promotion of the service will be enhanced greatly by the dedication of the transit coordinator and having the ability to be in-person at a number of key community events, stakeholder information days, as well as other planned uLinc information days.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Hague
Transit Coordinator
905-563-2799 Ext.284

Appendices:

Appendix A – The Journey of ULinc Staff Presentation Report

Approval:

Report has been reviewed and/or approved by Director of Public Works, and Chief Strategic Communications & Public Affairs Officer. Final approval is by Chief Administrative Officer.