



**2025
Provincial
Pre-Budget
Submission**

CHAIR'S MESSAGE

On behalf of Niagara Transit and our Board of Directors, I am pleased to present our 2025 pre-budget submission. As you make decisions regarding Ontario's 2025 budget, I ask that you keep in mind our priorities and recommendations. The challenges at Niagara Transit are shared by many of the transit systems across Ontario, but by working together collaboratively, we can ensure we have a province that keeps moving.

Transit is a vital service. It is critical for businesses to be able to attract talent and for commuters to be able to reach their workplace reliably, without sitting in gridlock. It is equally critical to seniors as it is often the only mode of transportation available to them to reach appointments and stay connected to friends and loved ones. In rural or smaller towns and cities, like the majority of municipalities in Niagara, residents must leave their community to access hospitals, employment or education. Transit supports those who do not have the means to utilize other transportation options, opening up both professional and personal opportunities that would not otherwise be available.

Niagara Transit is appreciative of the provincial investments that have been made, including provincial gas tax funds, that have helped create a more connected and accessible community. We still face significant financial pressure, however, with municipal budgets unable to keep up with the demands for transit from our ridership and the increasing costs to deliver transit services. In concert with our own asks for consideration, we would like to reiterate the lobbying efforts of the Ontario Public Transit Association (OPTA) from their recent visit to Queens Park in December 2024. OPTA requested the provincial government increase the dedicated gas tax for transit to address the significant operating deficits for operators. Further, they requested consideration of matching funds to augment the Canadian Public Transit Fund to ensure transit's state of good repair for all systems in Ontario.

The Niagara Transit Board has approved the recommendations contained within our pre-budget submission and they reflect our top local priorities as they relate to the provincial government. We are excited to collaborate to take on these challenges and work with your government to deliver exceptional transit to Niagara Region.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Mat Siscoe
Chair, Niagara Transit
Mayor, City of St. Catharines



Our Requests

- 1** Increase transit's portion of the provincial gas tax.
- 2** \$10M in capital funding for microtransit.
- 3** Implement policies to encourage partnerships between utility providers and transit.



INCREASED TRANSIT FUNDING

Funding for transit, and specifically transit operations, has seen significant challenges. The demand for services is rapidly increasing, but municipal budgets are under pressure and the costs of delivering transit have risen steadily. Provincial gas tax funding has been greatly appreciated, but is not tied to inflation, and has therefore decreased substantially in value. What was worth two cents (\$0.02) in real dollars when the transit allocation was instituted in 2004, is now worth only 1.4 cents, (\$0.014), a drop of over 25%. Many transit vehicles are now using low or zero emissions technologies, but even with traditional diesel propulsion, transit represents a significant, positive environmental impact over driving a car. Restoring the value of the provincial gas tax to transit services would align with the goals of the tax while providing stable and nimble funding to transit agencies that is desperately needed.

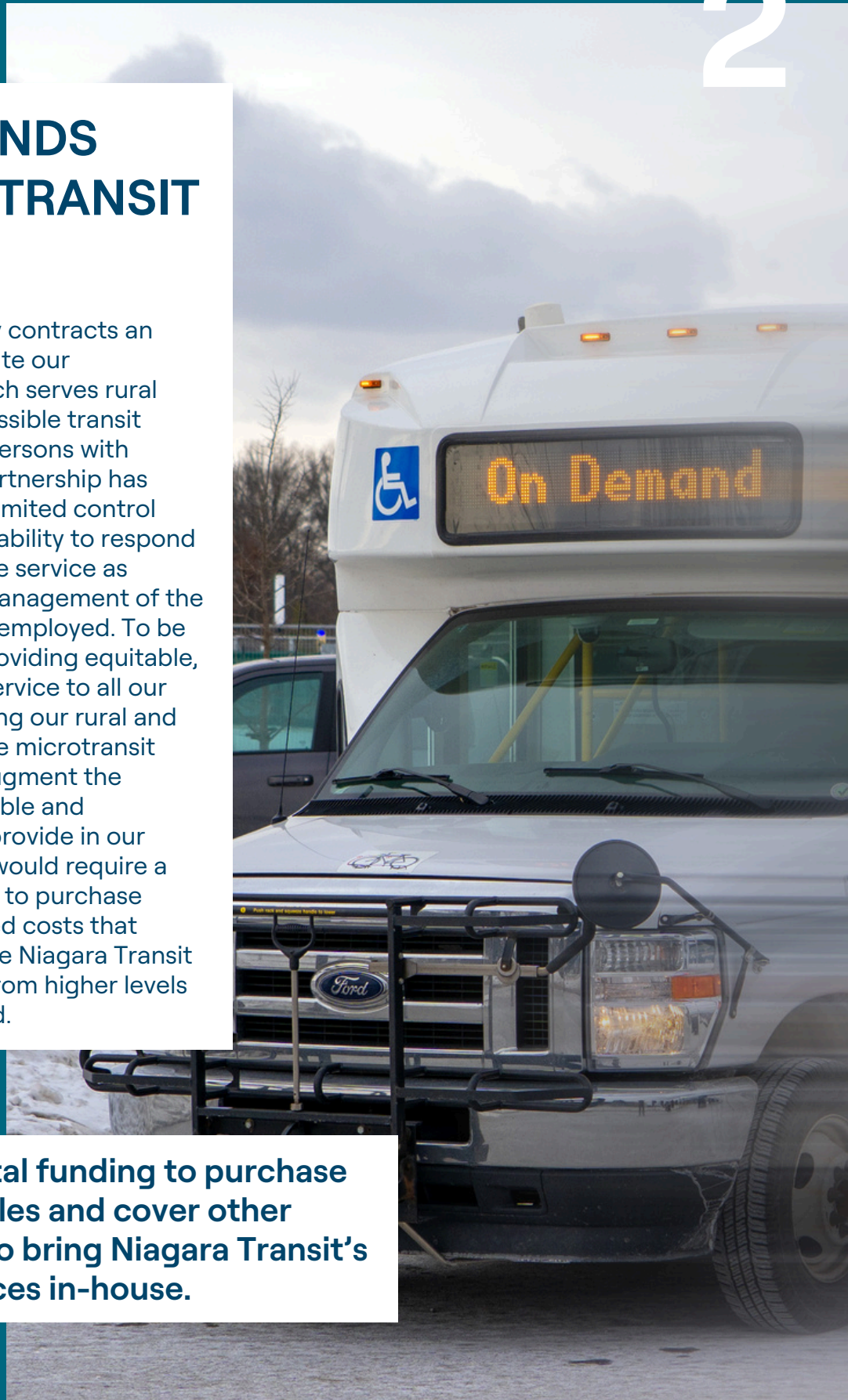
ASK: Increase transit's portion of the provincial gas tax to match the value when it was established and tie it to inflation to ensure funding is stable moving forward.



CAPITAL FUNDS FOR MICROTRANSIT IN HOUSE

Niagara Transit currently contracts an external vendor to operate our microtransit service which serves rural areas and provides accessible transit service for seniors and persons with disabilities. While this partnership has been valuable, we have limited control over the service, limited ability to respond and make changes to the service as needed, and no direct management of the staff and vehicles being employed. To be able to ensure we are providing equitable, reliable and optimized service to all our residents we need to bring our rural and intermunicipal accessible microtransit services “in-house” to augment the already in-house accessible and ondemand services we provide in our urban city centres. This would require a significant capital outlay to purchase vehicles and other related costs that cannot be covered by the Niagara Transit budget alone. Support from higher levels of government is needed.

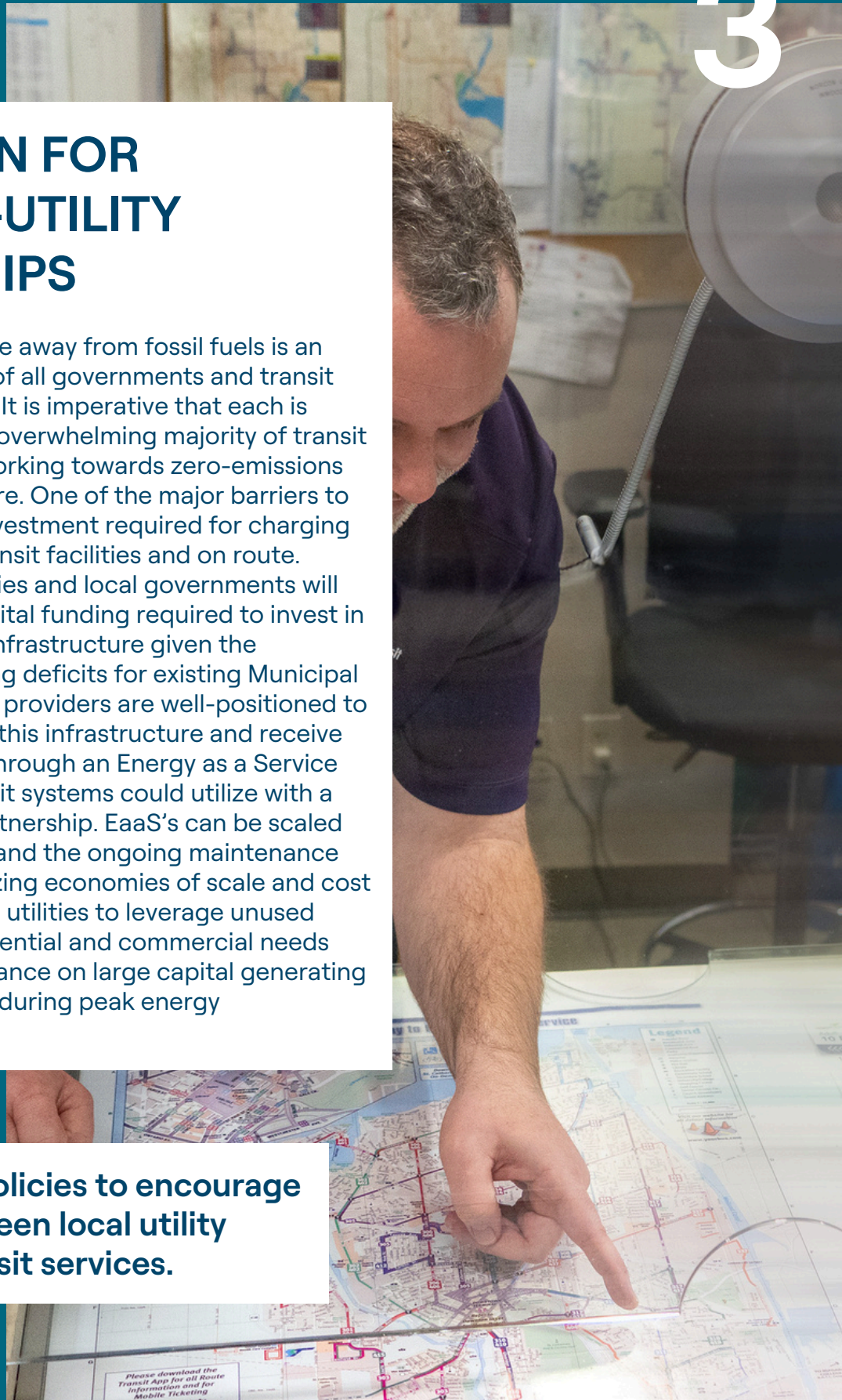
ASK: \$10M in capital funding to purchase the required vehicles and cover other capital expenses to bring Niagara Transit’s microtransit services in-house.



LEGISLATION FOR MUNICIPAL-UTILITY PARTNERSHIPS

Transitioning our province away from fossil fuels is an important responsibility of all governments and transit agencies across Ontario. It is imperative that each is doing their part, and the overwhelming majority of transit agencies are currently working towards zero-emissions vehicles and infrastructure. One of the major barriers to progress is the capital investment required for charging infrastructure both at transit facilities and on route. Simply put, transit agencies and local governments will never have sufficient capital funding required to invest in the necessary charging infrastructure given the substantial capital funding deficits for existing Municipal assets. Conversely, utility providers are well-positioned to make the investments in this infrastructure and receive an immediate cashflow through an Energy as a Service (EaaS) model which transit systems could utilize with a medium to long term partnership. EaaS's can be scaled across multiple facilities and the ongoing maintenance handled by experts, realizing economies of scale and cost efficiencies. It also allows utilities to leverage unused capacity to support residential and commercial needs thereby reducing the reliance on large capital generating facilities to feed the grid during peak energy consumption.

ASK: Implement policies to encourage partnerships between local utility providers and transit services.



Conclusion

Transit is a critical service that residents from all walks of life depend on. Seniors, youth, post-secondary students and low-income individuals need consistent, reliable transportation to stay connected to critical services and opportunities.

Niagara Transit delivers value for money and an exceptional transit network to the Niagara Region, but we cannot do it alone. The provincial and federal government are important partners in ensuring we realize the potential of transit and meet the rapidly growing demand for service in all corners of Niagara. As we move into our third year as an amalgamated service and complete our first master plan, we need increased partnership from higher levels of government to ensure we do not fall behind.

Despite the challenges we face, we are certain we can overcome them if we work together.



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