

Go for GO: Extending Go Transit into Dundas

A White Paper by Nicole Graziano and Brian Baetz



(GO Transit, n.d.)

Introduction:

Public transit is a key feature of any community and plays a significant role in the built infrastructure of a city. Despite the well-known benefits of public transit and the need for its ongoing presence and enhancement in a growing city like Hamilton, various communities remain disconnected. In particular, Dundas is becoming an increasingly popular community with a diverse demographic, many of which rely on public transportation. Dundas is located in close proximity to Downtown Hamilton and other major business and social centers, including McMaster University. However, despite its proximity to these populated areas, it remains relatively disconnected and isolated from surrounding communities. This is in part due to the lack of regular and accessible public transportation. Although Hamilton Street Railway (HSR) service to Dundas has greatly improved over the past several years, Dundas lacks adequate connection to regional public transportation, such as GO bus and train services. Dundas was once home to Dundas' Grand Trunk Station. Unfortunately, the station became largely ignored until it set fire in 1984 (Nowak, 2004). Following this, the remaining passenger shelter was also set on fire in 1987, this time in a controlled demolition (Nowak, 2004). Although the rail lines are still in use by commercial rail companies, no passenger trains have stopped in Dundas since the loss of the Grand Trunk Station (Nowak, 2004). A future project aiming to bring passenger trains and a train station back into Dundas does warrant consideration. However, the expensive and time-consuming nature of this endeavour illustrate that for the time being, rerouting existing buses is a more favourable project. In light of the need to bring enhanced transit to Dundas so that it is better connected to the Aldershot GO station, the 15 GO Bus should be rerouted so that it runs from McMaster University Bus Terminal and stops at the Watsons Lane Loop in Dundas, before arriving at the Aldershot GO Station. This rerouting has the potential to renew Hamilton's commitment to the Dundas community, while enhancing the accessibility of public transit and multiplying its benefits.

Proposal:

The infrastructure to connect Hamilton and the Dundas community to the Aldershot GO station already exists. The proposed solution relies on enhancing the current routing of the 15 GO Bus. This is a cost-effective means of promoting enhanced public transportation, especially in a post COVID-19 world. This re-routing will also allow for more people to access the GO Bus to the Aldershot train station, thus encouraging more eco-friendly modes of transportation with lower carbon footprints and ensure that Dundas' aging population has reliable access to public transit

services. Currently, the 15 GO Bus from McMaster University Bus Terminal runs southward from the terminal, along Cootes Drive, then goes Eastward on Main Street West, where it links to Highway 403 and eventually leads to Waterdown Road which intersects with the Aldershot GO station. Typically, this is a 15 to 20-minute bus ride depending on traffic, which spans 11.2 kilometres. This current routing may deter commuters from choosing public transportation over the use of private vehicles. In turn, this will only worsen the already congested Aldershot Go station parking lots and increase traffic on Highway 403 and York Road. Comparatively, if the 15 Bus were to be re-routed so that it goes northwards on Cootes Drive, up Olympic Drive to York Road, where it eventually merges onto the 403 and for the remainder of the journey follows the same path as the existing bus route, it will be 11.8 kilometers in length and be able to pick up passengers from both McMaster and Dundas. This is a relatively small addition to the overall distance of the 15 GO Bus route; however, it will make a significant positive impact on the surrounding community.

Rationale:

Improved connection of Dundas and the surrounding community will simultaneously help reduce transportation related greenhouse gases while improving already existing public infrastructure. With more accessible GO Bus routes which lead directly to the Aldershot GO train station, people will be more inclined to use public transportation over private vehicles. Enhanced public transportation provides a “low emissions alternative to driving” and has been linked to reduced greenhouse gas emissions (U.S. Department of Transportation, 2010). Unfortunately, even in light of the worsening climate crisis and continually rising global temperatures, “the number of vehicles driven worldwide is expected to double by 2050” (Apostolicas, 2019, p.26). This heightens the threat of carbon emissions, which are one of the leading causes of climate change (Apostolicas, 2019). In addition to crafting comprehensive climate change policies at the international and national levels, individual communities can reduce the effects of carbon emissions by opting for public and active transportation. Notably, in Bogota Colombia, a successfully designed rapid transit system which features buses that can hold over 150 people, transports nearly two million people daily and has been linked to approximately a 40% decrease in greenhouse gas emissions (Apostolicas, 2019). The success of this transportation system is thanks in part to the equalitarian design which serves “not only the most central and affluent areas, but also the oftentimes neglected corners of the city” (Apostolicas, 2019, p.27). Effective

government investments in transportations which service all communities within the city and better connect various regions can “foster economic growth [and] reduce emissions” (Apostolicas, 2019, p.27).

Urban sprawl coupled with poor public transportation systems have forced people to switch from traditional forms of transportation to motorized vehicles. In turn, this has increased environmental pollution and also created “social and health issues such as overflow of road infrastructure capacity causing traffic jams, and physical inactivity among car users” (Kwan & Hashim, 2016). Improving public transportation is a multifaceted issue that impacts public health, the environment, accessibility and the economy. When compared to the use of private vehicles, “public transportation produces 95% less CO, 45% less CO₂ and 48% less NO₂ than private vehicles” (Kwan & Hashim, 2016). The arguments in favor of public transportation are well known and researched. However, these benefits can only be experienced equally when public transportation reaches out to all communities in the surrounding area.

Even in light of the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic, Public Transit is a necessary and frequently used service. In the post-COVID-19 world, people across Hamilton will continue to rely on transit, possibly even more so than they do today. Due to continual economic shutdowns that are a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many individuals and families will face economic hardships and may struggle to afford or maintain private cars. In turn, this will result in significantly more commuters relying on public transportation. As a proactive approach to this looming situation, municipalities should be looking to expand public transportation services and ensure that all residents have equal access to public transportation, whether they live in the core of Hamilton or the outskirts of Dundas.

Re-routing the 15 GO Bus from McMaster University Bus Terminal so that it runs along Cootes Drive to Aldershot is a cost-effective means of making public transit more accessible. This project relies on existing infrastructure and presents a financially feasible option to better connect Hamilton and Dundas to the Aldershot GO station and surrounding communities. Rather than design completely novel train or bus routes, this White Paper proposes better connecting existing public transportation to the Aldershot GO station. The Aldershot GO station is the major train station in the region, serving Dundas, Waterdown, West Hamilton and Aldershot. Due to its popularity, the Aldershot GO Station experiences a large amount of commuter-related traffic and congestion, especially within its parking lots. In order to alleviate parking lot congestion and

encourage the use of public transportation over single occupancy vehicles, the 15 GO Bus should be re-routed. The proposed changes to the 15 GO Bus route would only result in one additional stop to the traditional route. After arriving at the McMaster GO Bus Terminal, the 15 GO bus would proceed northward on Cootes Drive, up to Olympic Drive and stop at Watsons Lane Loop, across from the Holland Park Garden Gallery. Currently, this is where the HSR 52 local bus service stops and the loop area has been recently improved so that it includes a concrete waiting pad (see Figure 1). Travellers from Dundas could easily bike, walk, take the bus or get a ride to the Watsons Lane Loop stop and take the 15 GO Bus from there. Watsons Lane Loop is approximately 2.8km from the Downtown Dundas Business Improvement Area and can be accessed by a ten-minute bike ride, thirty-two minute walk, twelve minute bus ride or five minute drive. Moreover, this northbound route is already often used by GO dispatch when the 15 GO Bus faces traffic congestion on Main Street West or Highway 403. Therefore, this white paper proposes that this familiar and often used route become the standard, default route for the 15 GO bus. Re-routing the 15 GO Bus so that it stops at both McMaster and Dundas, makes public transportation accessible for all of Dundas' residents, especially those who commute frequently or have mobility issues.



Figure 1: Paved passenger platform (left) and bus entrance at Watsons Lane Loop.

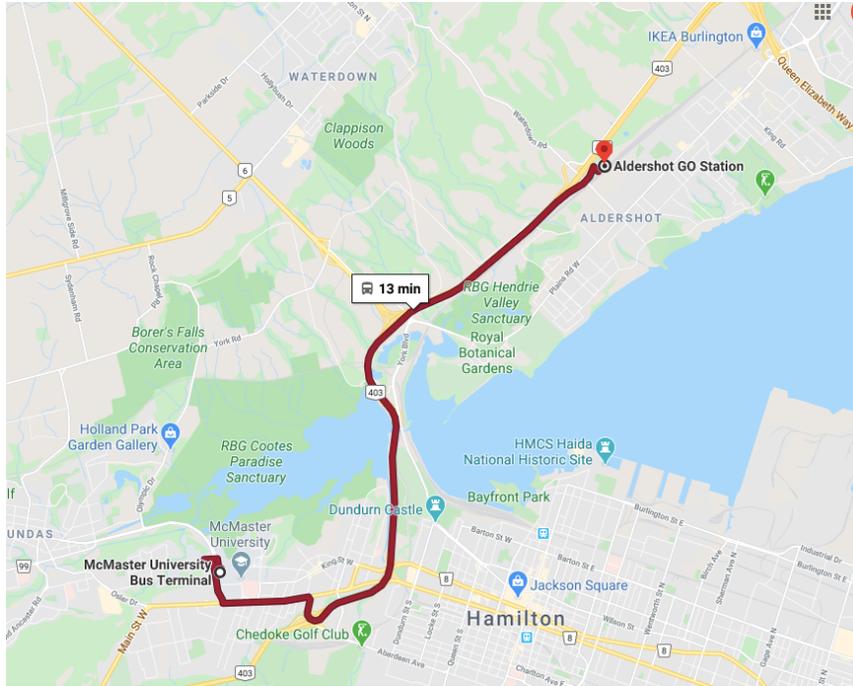


Figure 2: The current route of the 15 GO Bus which spans approximately 11.2 kilometres

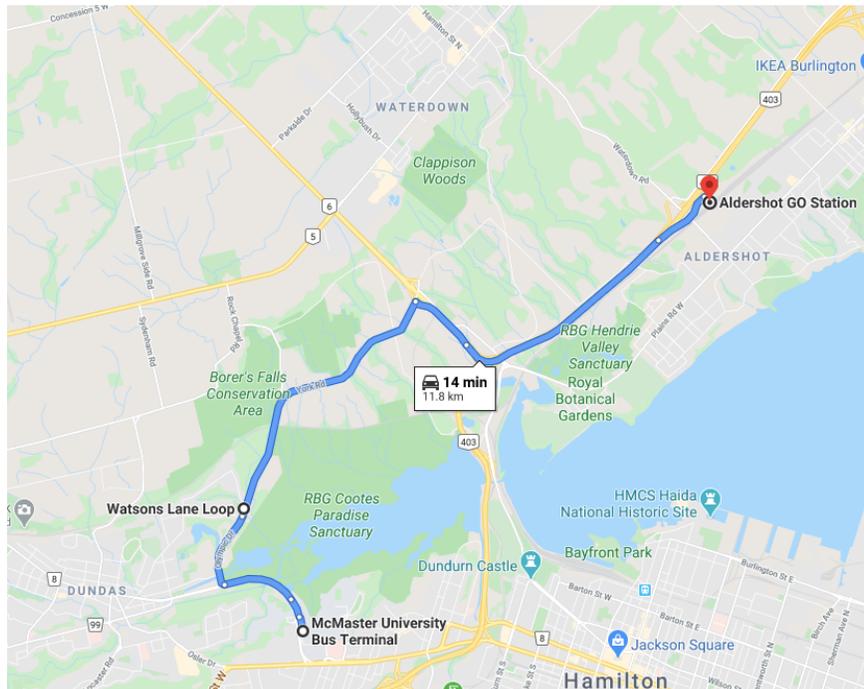


Figure 3: The proposed re-route of the 15 GO Bus which will have one stop at the Watsons Lane Loop. The currently displayed time values accounts for driving in a private vehicle. The actual time of the entire journey may be slightly longer when taking the bus.

Logistics:

The eastbound 15 GO Bus coming from the McMaster Bus Terminal will proceed northwards on York Road, turn left and enter the Watsons Lane Loop from the northern entrance (labelled entrance A in Figure 3). By entering from the upper entrance, the bus will be able to easily pick up passengers waiting on the platform, which is located to the right of the bus. To exit, the bus will move around the loop, straighten out, then turn left and enter the northbound lane, to continue on to the Aldershot GO Station. Although both bus routes are relatively simple, the westbound bus coming from Aldershot GO Station to the McMaster University Bus Terminal will have a less complicated entrance into the Watsons Lane Loop. The westbound bus will take a right turn to enter Watsons Lane Loop and pickup or drop off any passengers at the platform to the right of the bus. Then, the bus will take another right turn to continue south on York Road, back to McMaster.

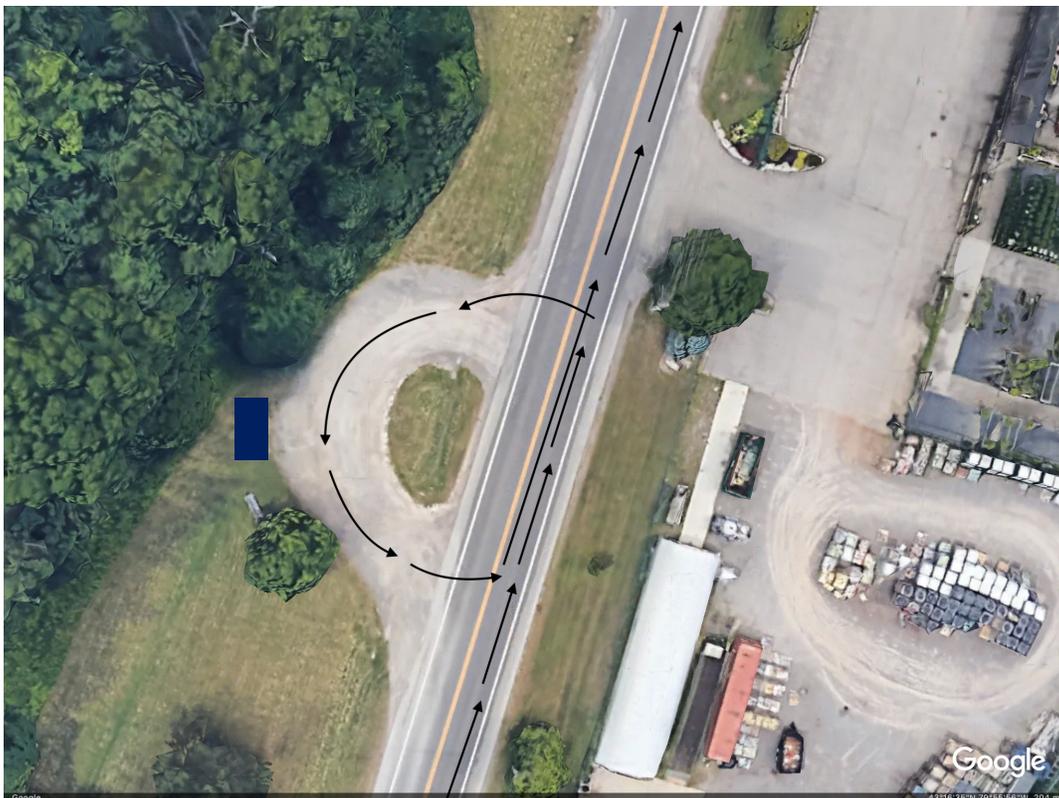


Figure 3: Depiction of eastbound 15 GO Bus route along Watsons Lane Loop. The blue rectangle represents the passenger platform.

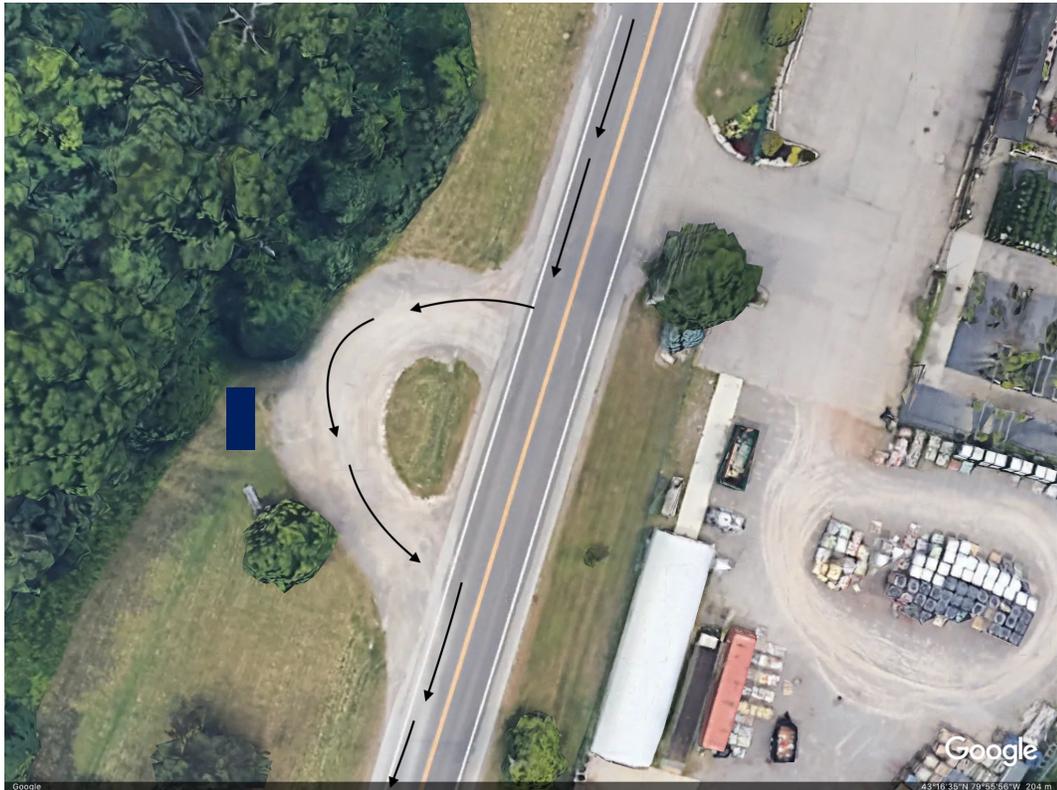


Figure 4: Depiction of westbound 15 GO Bus route along Watsons Lane Loop. The blue rectangle represents the passenger platform.

In addition to instructing 15 GO Bus drivers to follow this reroute, there must be communication with the HSR so that the organization is aware that GO buses will also be using the Watsons Lane Loop, which is currently used only by local transit. The necessary infrastructure, including the concrete waiting platform, a bench and a sign pole already exists, therefore, the only addition to this stop will be additional signage, indicating that this is a GO Bus stop. Outside of the physical location, updated schedules and routes will need to be relayed to drivers and posted on the GO Transit website.

Summary:

Extending GO Bus services into Dundas will better connect Dundas and its surrounding communities and ensure that there is sufficient public transportation across Hamilton. In order to truly experience the bountiful benefits of public transportation it must be made widely available and accessible to all. By re-rerouting the 15 GO Bus so that it stops at the Watsons Lane Loop,

Dundas will be afforded enhanced accessibility to the Aldershot GO Station and surrounding destinations. Many residents of Dundas rely on public transportation and will make use of this proposed GO Bus service. The infrastructure to make these changes already exists, in turn cementing this project as a much needed and reasonable change to public transportation. Dundas, like the rest of Hamilton, deserves a complete and accessible transportation system.

Appendix A

Photos of the Watsons Lane Loop and surrounding area.



Acknowledgements:

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