

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT IN SMITHS FALLS, ONTARIO; A COMPARISON BETWEEN TWO SITES**

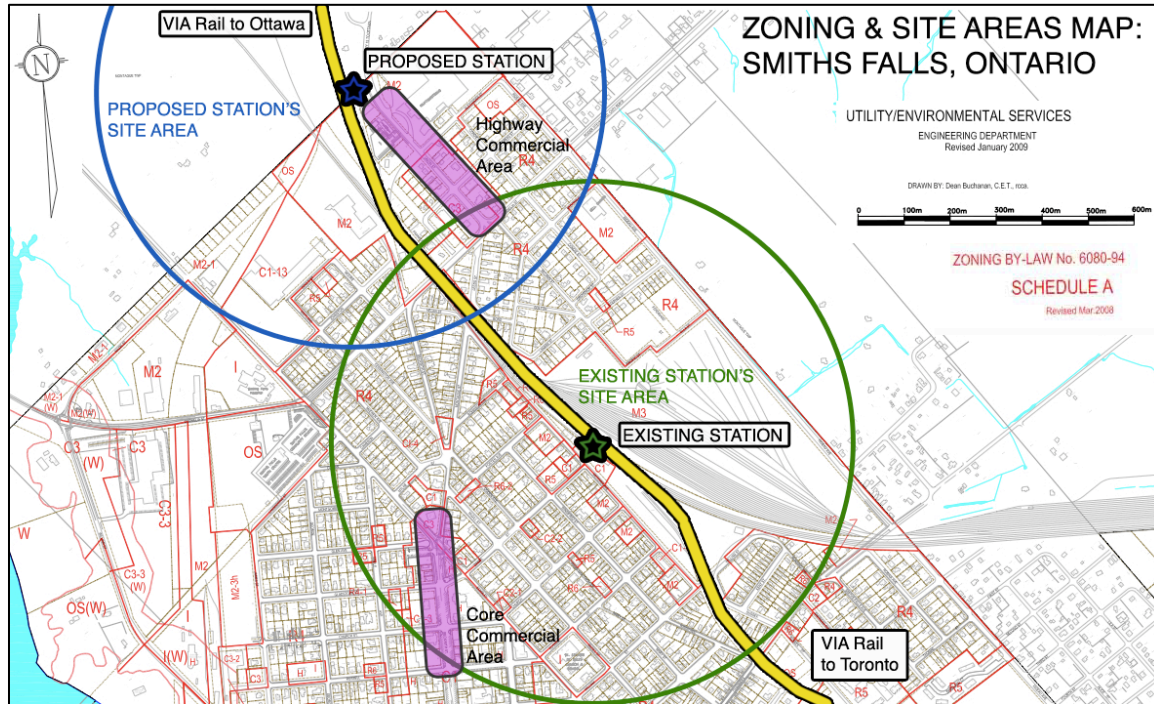
### **Topic and Purpose**

In 2007, the Mayor of Ottawa's Task Force on Transportation suggested adding a commuter rail line between Smiths Falls and Ottawa. While planning for commuter rail continues, VIA Rail is preparing to move its operations from a historic urban station to a new unstaffed suburban building to prevent passenger trains from obstructing freight trains entering Canadian Pacific Railway's regional rail yard. Does the existing or future train station have more potential to accommodate commuter transit-oriented development, as defined by the City of Ottawa's guidelines?

### **Study Area**

The study area consists of two site areas that can be seen in the map on the next page. The first includes all land within a 600-metre radius of the current VIA Rail station located at 63 Victoria Avenue in Smiths Falls. Other important sites include a significant town intersection, Beckwith Street North at Elmsley Street North, which is the location of the public library, police department, chamber of commerce, farmers' market, downtown business association, and recreation centre. The town's original commercial area southwest of the train station, residential neighbourhoods surrounding the core, and CPR rail yard and associated industrial land to the east occupy the rest of the site area.

The second site area includes all land within a 600-metre radius of the proposed VIA Rail station located along Union Street at the north edge of the Town of Smiths Falls. Industrial, residential, highway commercial development, and open space occupy one third of the site area. The other two thirds is situated in Montague Township and includes rural estate lots, occupied and vacant auto-oriented commercial, and agriculture. This site area's land use pattern and built form embody greater suburban characteristics than the current station's site area.



## Evaluation

A combination of transit-oriented development guidelines from the City of Ottawa and Robert Cervero's *Developing Around Transit* were used to evaluate the potential for existing land uses and policies to accommodate transit-oriented development around a commuter rail station in Smiths Falls. The twenty-five guidelines were divided into six categories: land use, layout, built form, pedestrians and cyclists, vehicles and parking, and streetscape and environment. All categories were compared to existing land use conditions and relevant policies for within a 600-metre radius of the existing and future VIA Rail stations. A summary of the evaluation can be found in the table on the following page, with greater conformity to the criteria represented by additional stars. An "X" represents a failure to conform to any aspects of the selected criteria.

Upon applying the evaluation criteria to the existing and potential attributes of the two site areas, and the policies of the municipalities of Smiths Falls and Montague, the conclusion drawn from the detailed analysis was that the existing VIA station and site area are in a better position to use existing land use patterns and municipal policies for commuter transit-oriented development to promote vibrant human activities in established areas of Smiths Falls.

<b>EVALUATION SUMMARY: Criteria</b>	<b>Existing Station &amp; Site Area</b>	<b>Proposed Station &amp; Site Area</b>
<b>Land Use Planning in Support of Commuter Rail</b>		
Provide and support mass transit-supportive land uses	★★	★
Discourage non-mass transit supportive land uses	★★	★
Design for multi-purpose, vibrant destination by incorporating needed local amenities	★★★★	★
Use established commercial uses to attract transit users	★	X
<b>Layout of Paths and Destinations</b>		
Establish direct, multi-path route networks for cyclists, pedestrians, and motor vehicle traffic	★★	★
Integrate buildings appropriately with mass transit	★★	X
<b>Built Form to Make Each Station "a Place"</b>		
Design landmarks to be visible and act as identifiable nodes	★	★
Design for a permeable pedestrian realm	★★★★	★
<b>Incorporating Pedestrians and Cyclists into Transit-Oriented Development</b>		
Enforce aesthetically attractive physical demarcation of pedestrian routes	★	X
Design for simple, visible and integrated pedestrian connections	★★	★
Provide waiting areas to protect transit users from uncomfortable weather	★★	★★
Establish cycling infrastructure in conjunction with local roads and mass transit networks	X	X
<b>Managing Vehicles and Parking to Support Mass Transit</b>		
Provide sufficient but not excessive parking for motorized vehicles	★★★★	★
Locate parking lots behind buildings and minimize conflicts with the pedestrian realm	★★	X
Provide a "kiss-and-ride" area	★	★
Expand park-and-ride lots vertically, not horizontally and integrate with pedestrian realm	★	X
Design parking lots for multiple types of users and vehicles	★★	★
Provide convenient and attractive bicycle parking	X	X
Design off-street loading zones so that they do not obstruct pedestrians	★★	★
Design existing park-and-ride lots or nearby parking so they may be converted to mixed-use, transit-oriented development in the future	★★	X
Design off-street private parking areas to not obstruct pedestrians	★★	★
Reserve space for local mass transit, even if it does not yet exist	★	X
<b>Planning a People-friendly Streetscape and Environment</b>		
Provide sufficient seating near sidewalks	★★	X
Enforce coherent function and inter-relation of pedestrian amenities	★★	X
Concentrate amenities at mass transit nodes	★★	X

**Legend:** ★★★ Mostly conforms to criteria, ★★ Partially conforms, ★ somewhat conforms, X fails to conform to criteria

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The existing VIA station and associated site area is more suitable to accommodate a commuter rail station, transit-oriented development, and take advantage of transit-friendly municipal policies. This site area is located within a district with a land-use pattern, path network, historical precedent, and pedestrian infrastructure that facilitates mass transit use and future transit-oriented development. Smiths Falls' Official Plan and Zoning By-Law specifically recognize established urban areas as potentially successful locations for transit-oriented land use patterns. A sample of the forty recommendations for the superior site area can be found below, according to their term of implementation.

### ***Short Term***

- Build a segregated pedestrian connection between Victoria Avenue and the VIA Rail station that does not cross a parking lot.
- Implement a carpooling program for residents commuting within and outside Smiths Falls.
- Open a coffee shop to sell tickets at the VIA Rail station.

### ***Medium Term***

- Convert rail-oriented industrial uses to mass transit-oriented development.
- Pave and maintain segregated bike paths parallel to arterial routes and designate certain local streets as bike routes.
- Install and maintain art and street furniture along routes connecting existing activity hubs to the existing VIA Rail station.
- Build and maintain safe connections between existing pedestrian routes and mass transit.
- Install and maintain safe bike racks, bike lockers, and showers at local commuting and activity destinations, including the VIA Rail station.
- Permit shared parking space between two or more properties.
- Purchase land for future establishment and expansion of local commuter rail-oriented mass transit network.

***Long Term***

- Increase land use intensity along all streets between Victoria Avenue and Beckwith Street.
- Design for transit-oriented commercial development at Victoria Avenue and Daniel Street, and Beckwith at Daniel Street.
- Implement and maintain a local mass transit network with access to the VIA Rail station.
- Design and prepare a detailed implementation plan for converting the established CPR yards to mass transit-oriented development.

Primary implementation actors over the short, medium, and long term should include the Town of Smiths Falls; its residents, business-owners, and employees; VIA Rail; community advocacy coalitions; and the development and real estate industries.