



Media Release

Monday, May 30, 2005

For Immediate Release

Viva Rapid Transit is on a roll

From A to Being ... innovative

NEWMARKET – The next era of public transit has arrived in York Region. Today, the first Viva rapid transit vehicle was unveiled during a ceremony held in front of the York Region Administrative Building. On hand for the event were the Honourable John McCallum, National Revenue Minister and Markham – Unionville MP, the Honourable Harinder Takhar, Ontario Transportation Minister, Bill Fisch, York Regional Chair and members of Regional Council.

“This is truly a historic day, what was once a bold vision of Regional Council is quickly becoming a reality,” said Chair Fisch. “This new modern vehicle is the first of its kind in the GTA, and I can assure everyone when Viva begins operating this September it will provide a fantastic ride and a unique transit experience.”

The fleet of 25, 60-foot vehicles and 60, 40-foot vehicles is being built in Belgium by the award-winning bus manufacturer Van Hool. The remaining vehicles are expected to arrive in Canada over the next several months.

These new rapid transit buses are quiet, roomy and comfortable, featuring high-backed, contoured seats. Viva vehicles are fully accessible, with wide doors, low floors and ramps to accommodate wheelchairs and strollers. They operate on clean burning diesel and meet the latest emission standards.

“Viva is truly the evolution of public transit in York Region, and I’m confident that these vehicles will attract a whole new generation of riders,” said Minister McCallum, on behalf of Transport Minister Jean-C. Lapierre. “Viva is important because it will not only reduce traffic gridlock, but will help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and contribute to Canada’s Kyoto targets.”

Van Hool was chosen following a stringent, competitive, worldwide procurement process to select a state-of-the-art rapid transit vehicle. A vehicle evaluation team carefully considered exterior and interior design, vehicle engineering and purchase price. To ensure fairness and impartiality, an independent auditor from PricewaterhouseCoopers was appointed to oversee the process from start to finish.

"We want to create a transit culture in Ontario, especially right here in York Region, where most people commute by car," said Minister Takhar. "Viva will boost transit ridership by giving people a real, viable option to the car."

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The Viva rapid transit system is designed with passengers in mind, offering a service that's frequent, flexible and comfortable. Rapid transit vehicles will arrive every five to 10 minutes during peak periods. Viva stations will be bright and safe with a uniquely modern look.

There will be fare vending machines allowing passengers to purchase tickets quickly and easily before boarding. When passengers get their tickets, they will have up to two hours to get on and off Viva to go to the drug store or the grocery store ... without having to pay an additional fare. There will also be real time information in the stations telling passengers when the next Viva vehicle will arrive.

Viva will link the Region's urban centres of Markham, Richmond Hill, Vaughan, Aurora and Newmarket along four major corridors, including Highway 7 and Yonge Street. In addition, Viva will link York Region with the City of Toronto and its subway system, to GO Transit, and to the transit systems in the Region of Peel and eventually into Durham Region.

"Viva is one of the most ambitious initiatives to bring fast, frequent and reliable transit service to a rapidly-growing auto-oriented urban region in Canada," said CUTA President and CEO Michael Roschlau. "It will be instrumental in showing the potential of bus rapid transit in this environment, and will serve as an important model for other communities."

York Region contributed \$50 million for the first phase of Viva. The Governments of Canada and Ontario also contributed \$50 million each under the Canada Strategic Infrastructure Fund for Viva's first phase. When the first phase is fully implemented, York Region estimates these initial improvements will lead to a 30 per cent increase in transit ridership or an additional 4.5 million riders – moving 7,000 cars a day off the major arterial roads.

Viva rapid transit service will officially begin in 99 days and will be opened in four stages between September and December.

For more information on Viva, or to visit the Local Leaders' Gallery please visit the Viva Web site at: www.vivayork.com

For more information on the Regional Municipality of York, the services offered and links to the nine area municipalities, please visit the York Region web site at: www.york.ca

Transport Canada is online at: www.tc.gc.ca. Subscribe to news releases and speeches at www.tc.gc.ca/listserv/ and keep up-to-date on the latest from Transport Canada.

The Ontario Ministry of Transportation is online at www.mto.gov.on.ca.

This news release may be made available in alternative formats for persons with visual disabilities.

Electronic photos of the Viva vehicle or Viva stations will be available upon request.

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VIVA BACKGROUNDER

Viva

Viva is an innovative rapid transit system that is being developed in three-phases over a 20-year period. It will link Markham, Newmarket, Richmond Hill, Aurora and Vaughan along four key transportation corridors (Yonge Street, Highway 7, Markham North-South Link and Vaughan North-South Link). When the first phase is fully implemented, travel times will be reduced by 15% to 25% during peak periods.

Viva Vehicles

Van Hool was chosen by York Region following a stringent, competitive, worldwide procurement process to select a state-of-the-art rapid transit vehicle. A municipal vehicle evaluation team carefully considered exterior and interior design, vehicle engineering and purchase price. To ensure fairness and impartiality, an independent auditor from PricewaterhouseCoopers was appointed to oversee the process from start to finish.

Van Hool is a family-owned company located in Lier-Koningshooikt (near Antwerp) Belgium. It has a worldwide reputation for quality and service. The company has been building transit buses and highway coaches for over 50 years, exporting 85 per cent to cities around the world, including Montreal and Oakland, California. They follow rigorous engineering, design and testing procedures to ensure durability and long life.

Van Hool employs 4,200 people and designs and manufactures advanced buses for bus rapid transit, conventional transit and suburban service. Unlike other manufacturers, Van Hool is a fully integrated manufacturer, designing and manufacturing many of the vehicle components itself, such as the suspension system, articulation joint, seats, and body components. The company also produces a full line of specialty truck trailer products used throughout Europe.

Key Features of the Van Hool Vehicles:

Length: A330 - 12.2 metres (40 feet)
AG300 - 18 metres (60 feet)

Width: 260 cm (102 inches)

Height: 338 cm (133 inches)

No. of Doors: 12.2 metre bus – 2 (1 x 950 mm (37.4”), 1 x 1200 mm (47.2”))
18 metre bus - 3 (1 x 950 mm (37.4”), 2 x 47.2”))

Accessibility:

- full-length low floor
- “kneeling” feature (bus air suspension lowers body height for improved access)
- wheelchair ramp at second door
- two mobility device locations per vehicle

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Body Design and Structure:

- advanced aesthetic design
- winner of 2003 European “Bus of the Year” Award
- semi-integral, stainless steel body
- extensive anti-corrosion treatment

The 12 metre vehicles cost \$494,000 each, the 18 metre articulated vehicles cost \$742,000 each.

Phase One

Viva’s first phase is designed to provide early benefits to York Region, where over 25% of major regional arteries are plagued by traffic congestion during much of the day. Most people commuting to or within York Region rely on the private automobile as the primary mode of transportation, while less than 8% of peak period trips are made on public transit.

Viva will provide rapid transit vehicles (RTVs) that are frequent, flexible and comfortable, and conveniently located transit stations every 1-2 km. By using the latest technology, passengers will be able to pre-purchase tickets from automated fare machines and get real time arrival information from displays at every stop. The latest technology is being adopted to help RTVs move through mixed traffic as quickly as possible.

Viva will provide for connections to the Toronto Transit Commission’s Yonge, Spadina and Sheppard subway lines, to the GO Transit network, Peel Region, and eventually to Durham Region.

When the first phase is fully implemented, York Region estimates these initial improvements will lead to a 30 per cent increase in transit ridership or an additional 4.5 million riders – moving 7,000 cars a day off the major arterial roads.

The Government of Canada is contributing \$50 million to Phase One under the Canada Strategic Infrastructure Fund (CSIF), and the Government of Ontario is providing \$50 million from its transit expansion funding program.

Phase Two

Viva’s second phase will truly put the “rapid” in rapid transit, building on the investment made in the initial phase. Dedicated transit lanes are planned to be built between 2006 and 2012, separating RTVs from mixed traffic. This would allow them to move quickly and reliably, any time of the day or night, in any type of weather. This phase also calls for larger, more elaborate terminals, with a variety of services and new park-and-ride facilities.

All major *Viva* facilities and systems being contemplated for Phase Two will be planned and designed from the beginning to allow for conversion to light rail transit or subway when there is a justification to do so.

Phase Three

In *Viva's* third phase, Light Rail Transit (LRT) and subway extensions could be built and/or Bus Rapid Transit could be expanded. A decision to proceed will be based on a major review of the *Viva* rapid transit system and system performance in 2009.

The Urban Renaissance of York Region

Viva will allow for more strategic planning and the development of highly desirable “transit villages”, allowing people to leave their cars behind. Emerging policies dealing with York Region’s Centres and Corridors will attract new commercial and residential development, and at the same time protect environmentally sensitive areas, such as the Oak Ridges Moraine. Sustainable development and further investment in public transit go hand-in-hand. *Viva* will serve as a cornerstone of the Region’s growth strategy.

Public-Private Partnership

York Region decided to enter into a unique public-private partnership to speed implementation of its proposed rapid transit network. In 2002, following a worldwide competition, an agreement was signed by York Regional Council and York Consortium 2002. This is the first public-private partnership in Canada for a rapid transit project of this magnitude and there are a variety of benefits. York Region will retain control of all the assets, including the vehicles and the terminals, as well as control of public policy, including the determination of fares.

Sources of Federal Funding

Through the \$4-billion Canada Strategic Infrastructure Fund (CSIF), the Government of Canada works with provincial, territorial and municipal governments, as well as with the private sector, to meet strategic infrastructure needs throughout the country. The CSIF supports large-scale strategic infrastructure projects that improve quality of life and further sustainable economic growth. The fund also supports the Government of Canada’s proposed “New Deal for Communities”, through which it wants to become a world leader in developing vibrant, creative and prosperous cities and communities. Since 1994, the Government of Canada has committed \$12 billion to over 20,000 infrastructure projects in Canada’s communities. This will leverage over \$30 billion in additional investment from other partners.

Sources of Provincial Funding

The McGuinty Government is following through on its commitment to improve transit in the Greater Toronto Area by providing funding to *Viva's* first phase. The strength of York Region depends on an efficient, effective public transit system. The McGuinty Government is making strategic investments in transportation infrastructure to increase public transit ridership, reduce commute times and emissions, and make a real difference in building strong and safe communities.

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