



2004 EMPLOYERS Opinion SURVEY



This report was completed by the York Region Community Services and Housing Department, and Planning and Development Services Department with the assistance of Bill Winegard & Associates.

Table of CONTENTS

Executive Summary	3
Chapter 1	UNDERSTANDING OUR ECONOMY
1.1	Economic Vitality and a Skilled Labour Force 5
1.2	York Region Employers Opinion Survey 2003: Methodology 6
1.3	Organization of this Report 7
Chapter 2	SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS
2.1	Economic Vitality and Related Challenges 9
2.2	Availability and Affordability of Housing 9
2.2.1	Rental Housing
2.2.2	Ownership Housing
2.3	Transit Service 10
2.4	Traffic Congestion and Transportation Infrastructure 10
Chapter 3	GENERAL FINDINGS OF THE 2004 EMPLOYER OPINION SURVEY
3.1	Economic Strategy 13
3.2	Rental Housing 15
3.3	Ownership Housing 17
3.4	Transit Service 19
3.5	Traffic Congestion and Transportation Infrastructure 21
3.6	Perspectives from Particular Employer Groups 22
3.6.1	The non-profit sector
3.6.2	Tourism and retail employers
3.6.3	Industrial/manufacturing employers
3.7	Perspectives on Particular Employee Groups 22
3.7.1	Single parents
3.7.2	Long-time residents of the Region
3.7.3	Residents north of the Region
3.7.4	Young sales and professional people
Chapter 4	CONCLUSIONS
4.1	York Region's vision for economic vitality 23
4.2	Maintaining the diversity and skills of its workforce 23
4.3	Co-ordinated public transit 23
4.4	Ensuring that the Human Services needs of business are addressed 23
4.5	Ensuring the physical needs of business are addressed 24
4.6	Ensuring that new housing is appropriate and adequate to the needs of employees 24

Appendix A - 2004 Employer Opinion Survey Questionnaire

Appendix B - Comparison between the findings of the 2000 Employer Survey and the 2004 Survey

Executive Summary

A diverse, qualified labour force is an essential ingredient for a vital economy and has traditionally been a strength of York Region. Monitoring our labour force and the issues it is experiencing is a key part in understanding and keeping our economy strong.

In 2000 the Regional Municipality of York conducted the first Employer Opinion Survey using a sample of 32 businesses. The anecdotal information collected provided opinions in a number of key business areas including that:

- Incentives are needed to draw employee applicants to businesses.
- Alternative Work arrangements are becoming more common.
- Commuting is an accepted reality, people would rather drive than uproot their families.
- Housing is more of an issue for family households.
- Businesses are losing potential employees because of housing costs.
- Housing is more affordable farther away.
- Traffic Congestion is having an impact on business operations.
- Local transit systems do not meet the needs of commuters.

In 2003 and 2004, the Region undertook a similar survey using questions from the initial survey and additional questions relating to transit and transportation. The 2004 Employer Opinion Survey provides anecdotal information from existing employers in the Region about their ability to attract and retain employees based on the employees' ability to find appropriate housing, transportation and transit within York Region. While attraction and retention in general terms is not an issue presently, employers recognize that some of their employees face difficulties in finding appropriate accommodation, transportation and transit which could, in future, impact Regional economic growth and competitiveness.

The 2004 survey interviewed 75 businesses representing a range of business sectors, business sizes and locations. A number of businesses surveyed have experienced difficulties in attracting and retained skilled labour and trades and many anticipate this trend

will continue, although the ability to attract employees in the general labour category is unchanged.

The majority of interviewees cite a need for affordable appropriate rental housing, and affordable ownership housing as being key to their employees needs. Most employers in the south part of the Region recognize that the majority of their employees' who reside in rental accommodation, commute from various areas in Toronto into York Region. In the northern municipalities rental accommodation is even more problematic as the supply of rental units is lower and in some locations, of lesser quality. Employees searching for first time home purchases are looking outside York Region and commuting from such locations as Toronto, Milton, Barrie, Bradford and Pickering into York Region. York Region is however a housing area of choice for move-up buyers.

Further, employers have identified that the transit system, while significantly improved in recent years, has limited usefulness for shift workers and for those industries and businesses located in business and industrial areas removed from the main thoroughfares. This limited usefulness is largely due to scheduling of buses in relation to shift starts times, unwieldy fare systems between the TTC and York Region transit and placement of the routes themselves which do not travel into many industrial parks.

A third element cited by employers and impacting both their employees and the business operations was congestion on major Regional rights-of-way. Most recognize that even with greater transit use this will not be impacted but they see a need for the Region to improve capacity and have greater control over the relationship between population and employment growth and transportation infrastructure development.

All of these elements have the potential to adversely impact the Region's ability to compete if left unattended. Recent statistical analyses as well as strategic initiatives within the business community have highlighted the same or similar issues.

The Region, in partnership with human services providers, other levels of government and employers and educational institutions must be prepared to address these issues with action in the near future.

Chapter ONE

Understanding Our Economy

1.1 Economic Vitality and a Skilled Labour Force

Economic vitality is one of the cornerstones of York Region's Official Plan. The Economic Vitality Goal of the Official Plan is "To create a competitive and adaptable economic environment that encourages investment and a diversity of employment opportunities." The Official Plan emphasizes that "in an increasingly competitive world, the Region must offer its employees and employers the highest level of livability, as well as high quality services and infrastructure systems."

York Region is a growing, vibrant, relatively affluent community and most residents enjoy a high quality of life. These strengths, along with a diverse, skilled labour force attract businesses and investment to the Region, supporting the Region's continued economic vitality. Despite these strengths, recent research indicates that the Region will face increasing competition to attract and retain a skilled labour force due to emerging demographic trends and other challenges.

A recent report entitled *Housing and Our Economy: Remaining Competitive* explores the relationship between the resident work force, employment and the availability and affordability of housing in York Region and adjacent municipalities. The research confirms that York Region currently has a diverse, growing and resilient labour force. The report also finds that York Region must position itself to respond to the challenge of attracting and retaining employees in the face of aging labour force and increased global competition for skilled workers. This challenge is compounded by the fact that although York Region's live-work ratio is improving, it is still one of the highest in the GTA. In 2001, 53.8% of the Region's employees lived in York Region. The high number of commuters can have a negative impact on York Region's competitiveness by contributing to traffic congestion and affecting employee retention as commuters find comparable jobs closer to home. The report identifies a lack of affordable housing, and rental housing in particular, as a key factor influencing the live-work ratio and, therefore, on the ability of employers in the Region to attract and retain employees.

In addition to the trend toward a shrinking labour force and the challenge of improving York Region's live-work ratio to remain competitive, a socio-economic profile of York Region's population living in low income households revealed that a lack of affordable housing and rental housing is a critical issue for low income workers in York Region. The profile reported that in

2000, there were over 24,000 people in York Region who could be classified as the "working poor". The statistics demonstrate that low income workers exist in all industries, supporting the conclusion that a diverse work force is needed to support economic vitality. Both *Housing and Our Economy* and the *Low Income Profile* include statistics that indicate that many low income residents are spending more than 50% of their income on housing and that the availability of affordable housing is a critical issue for lower wage workers.

The statistical data in *Housing and Our Economy: Remaining Competitive* and the *Low Income Profile* provide evidence that supports what the Region reported hearing from employers in the 2002 report *A Competitive Assessment of York Region* which highlighted three key drivers that are of major importance in retaining the Region's ability to attract and retain economic investment and ensure its future development, namely:

- Housing
- Skilled work force
- Transit/transportation

Human capital is the number one factor influencing economic development in York Region. *A Competitive Assessment of York Region* found that although economic development efforts within York Region have been successful for new business investment, it is critical that continued efforts ensure that human services are in place to keep pace.

To remain competitive, there is a need to concentrate on attracting and retaining employees particularly immigrants. In some specific industrial sectors the majority of the Region's labour pool is not resident in the Region; leaving the Region vulnerable to losing these employees to jobs closer to their homes. In other industrial sectors and in many occupational groups, the Region is performing well and the relationship between place of residence and place of employment is positive.

This 2004 Employer Opinion Survey supplements recent statistical research with current perspectives of employers on how the trends and challenges revealed in recent statistical research impacts them and their employees.

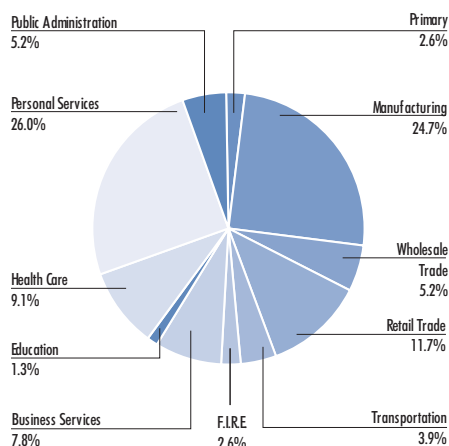
1.2 York Region Employers' Opinion Survey 2004: Methodology

In 2004, 75 companies participated in face to face interviews that elicited the employers' observations and opinions about issues affecting employee retention and attraction, particularly with regard to housing, transit and transportation issues, as well as about employee concerns more generally and other impacts on their operations.

In each firm, the survey sought to interview the person most familiar with the recruitment of employees and the characteristics of the workforce, including owner/operators, managers and directors of human resources. All interviews-which lasted from 20 minutes to over an hour-took place in person in the workplace. Interviews were conducted by Bill Winegard & Associates as well as Regional Staff. The interview questionnaire is attached as Appendix A.

Employers ranged from those who employ as many as 1,800 to as few as three people, and from a number of different business sectors, including manufacturing, trucking, community and municipal services, tourism and retail, and professional activities. The companies interviewed represent a cross-section of businesses in York Region. Businesses in all 9 Municipalities in York were surveyed. Figures 1 and 2, illustrate the distribution of businesses surveyed by combined North American Industry Classification System Codes and by Size of Business with Figure 2, showing the percentages of business by NAIC code on a Regional basis from the 2003 Business Survey.

Businesses Interviewed By NAIC Code Grouping
FIGURE 1



York Businesses By NAIC Category 2003 Business Survey
FIGURE 2

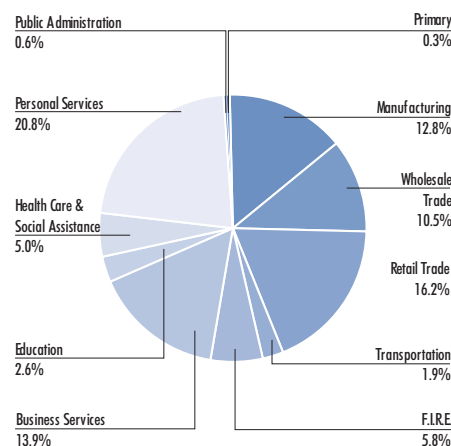
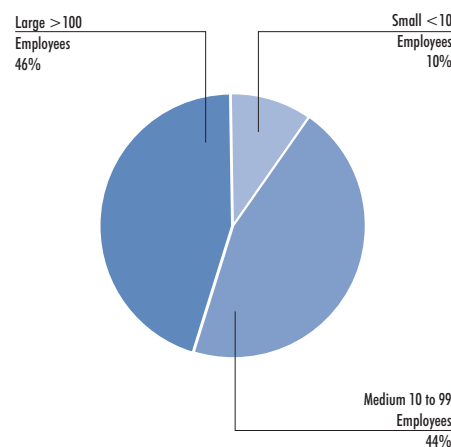


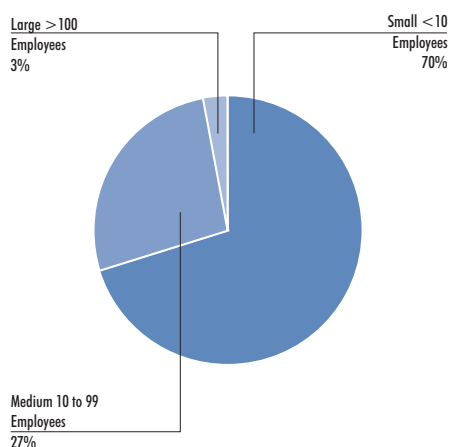
Figure 3, below shows the size of businesses surveyed as part of the 2004 Employer Opinion Survey compared to the Figure 4 which shows the total size of businesses in the survey sample.

York Businesses Interviewed by Size
FIGURE 3



The majority of businesses in York Region are small businesses with fewer than 9 employees. However, these businesses are less likely to experience issues relating to inability to attract or retain employees due to the higher number of sole proprietorships and partnerships and their reliance on employees from the immediate area. The 2004 Employer Survey sought out larger businesses where the attraction and retention issues are more critical and their employee base is drawn from a wider area. The interviews conducted during this survey elicited information about the nature and size of each employer's operation, and about the occupational categories, residential locations and transportation modes of its employees.

York Region Businesses by Size
FIGURE 4



Approximately 43% of businesses interviewed provided information relating to salary levels by occupational group. Management level salaries ranged between \$34,000 and \$150,000 per annum, professional salaries ranged between \$32,000 and \$135,000, clerical salaries ranged between \$25,000 and \$45,000, while technical and trades reported \$30,000 to \$65,000. The labour group salaries ranged between the Provincial minimum wage of \$6.85 per hour to approximately \$21.00 per hour (\$14,248 per year based on a 40 hour work week and approximately \$43,700 per year).

From the 75 businesses interviewed, most employee groups were full-time employees with several notable exceptions in large scale retail businesses where as much as 65% of their workforce was part-time. Of these businesses the range for employees living in York Region ranged between 2 and 100% of their workforce. The company that reported only 2% of their workforce living within York Region also reported that 85% of their workforce fell within the Labour category and of these, the majority (98%) currently reside south of Steeles Avenue.

When asked whether their employees had raised issues relating to housing, 50% of surveyed businesses responded in the affirmative for housing costs, 2% indicated employee issues relating to housing availability, 35% indicated issues with transit and transportation and 2% indicated issues related to health services.

Of the occupational groups that had indicated issues with housing, the majority were from the Labour group. There was no consensus regarding the household types with housing issues, rather the difficulties of finding suitable types and costs of housing seem widespread.

Of the transit and transportation related questions, many employees are willing to commute long distances to their place of employment. Reported commuting maximums ranged up to 90 minutes although the average was between 40 minutes and approximately 60 minutes depending on traffic and road

conditions. The vast majority of these employees rely on private automobiles or in some cases on informal car pooling arrangements. The highest percentage of transit usage by employees (up to 30% reported in two instances) was exhibited when employment locations were on or directly adjacent to the main transportation spines such as Yonge Street and in the Highway 7 and 400 area of Vaughan. Over 60% of employers felt that improvements to transit would be a benefit and a number of suggestions are reflected in the anecdotes and in the body of this report.

1.3 Organization of this Report

This report summarizes the wealth of input received. It contains trend or summary statements which capture opinions expressed by significant numbers of employers. In order to illustrate many of these summary statements, quotations, paraphrases or anecdotes provided by individual interviewees have been provided and are shown on the page facing the discussion of each issue area. (In many cases, these have been paraphrased in order to faithfully capture the opinions expressed while attempting to maintain the confidentiality that the interviewees had been promised.)

Chapter 2: The Summary of Key Findings includes the employers' view of the Region's economic vitality and its economic issues, then focuses on the primary comments of the employers interviewed with respect to the three specific subjects addressed by all interviews, namely housing availability and affordability, transit, and traffic congestion/transportation infrastructure. This chapter includes summaries of the more significant observations pertaining to some specific categories of employer: the non profit sector, tourism and retail sector employers and employers in the industrial and manufacturing categories. The chapter concludes with observations about specific groups of employees namely: single parent, long time residents of the region, northern residents and young sales and professional employees.

Chapter 3: Detailed Findings and Employer-Recommended Strategies contains findings related to economic vitality, housing availability and affordability, transit, and traffic congestion/transportation infrastructure. These findings are illustrated with quotes and anecdotes received from the interviews.

Chapter 4: Conclusions summarises the apparent or perceived success of relevant policies and the status of the relevant objectives pertaining to economic vitality and housing.

Not surprisingly, 75 interviews yielded a host of specific requests and concerns from individual interviewees, as well as various specific suggestions and offers to work on specific projects in partnership with the Region. While the interviews were conducted on a confidential basis, it is clear that the value of this survey to the Region can be greatly enhanced by this information, and that the interviewees wished it to be passed on confidentially to the relevant Regional Department. For example, many employers were pleased with specific Regional initiatives in transit and road system planning, although they also felt that

much more needed to be done. Some of these compliments and suggestions are noted in this report.

Many employers had complimentary remarks about the Regional Municipality of York, confirming that a high level of trust and awareness of the Regional government exists in many parts of the Region. The interview process provided an opportunity to further develop these relationships. For example, numerous employers asked for more information (particularly with regard to transit), offered to publicize schedules among employees, and offered to work with the Region and other partners on strategies to overcome current concerns - for example, in the areas of skills training and integration of new Canadians. Almost universally, those who were interviewed appreciated being contacted and having the opportunity to communicate with the Region.

Survey Appendix B includes observations on the conclusions contained in the 2000 York Region Employers Survey compared to the information and opinion provided through the 2004 sample. (Note that the 2000 sample included only 32 employers and did not include employers in all area municipalities) While most observations made in 2000 still appear valid, and while any differences could simply result from the different and broader sample in 2004, it appears that:

- House prices in the northern part of the Region are more of a concern to some employers now than they were in 2000.
- The shortage of trained and experienced employees seems to be a more acute issue now in all areas of the Region.
- Expectations with regard to transit service seem to be on the rise.
- Traffic congestion is now a universal concern except among businesses in the smaller municipalities which do not make deliveries or have mobile sales forces.

Chapter TWO

Summary of Key Findings

2.1 Economic Vitality and Related Challenges

There was consensus among interviewees that:

- York Region continues to offer significant advantages as a place to do business. It has attractive communities, lower house prices relative to Toronto, a bustling business environment, the talents and experience of the labour force living in York, the Region's ability to draw applicants from a considerable distance, and the availability of skilled immigrants in the GTA.
- A significant number of industrial employers have recently relocated their operations to the Region or have acquired other firms outside the Region and merged them at their York Region location. York Region is seen to have the advantages in terms of house prices, mobility and access, and commuting time for many employees.
- Marketing the Region to "commute-weary" business owners and employees would be an effective strategy.
- A general skills shortage exists in a wide variety of occupational areas in York, as is the case in other parts of the GTA. A coordinated approach to career planning and skills training involving employers, Seneca College and other educational institutions, and the Region would be beneficial and supported.
- New Canadians are fundamental to the Region's economy, but the coordinated institutional arrangements to help transition these employees into the work force needs improvement. There could be an appropriate role for the Region in developing a strategy to work with industry, government, and non-profit partners to assist and accommodate such employees.
- Employers observed that residential development has outpaced the planning and construction of an effective road system, to the detriment of business. Employers urged that the Region closely monitor the relationship between traffic congestion and the pace of residential development.

2.2 Availability and Affordability of Housing

Interviewees provided the following observations on the availability and affordability of rental and ownership housing:

2.2.1 Rental Housing

- Employers see the lack of decent affordable rental housing as a significant issue in most parts of the Region, particularly in the northern areas.
- The lack of "decent" affordable rental units is seen to hamper young employees and new Canadians who would otherwise choose to live close to their jobs in the Region. This, combined with under-service in transit has a significant impact on employee attraction and, equally important, employee retention.
- Several noted that the provision of affordable rental housing has not kept pace with the growth of the Region.

2.2.2 Ownership Housing

- The Region is seen to have a good mix of housing available for purchase, although not necessarily within each area municipality.
- With few exceptions, house prices are not seen to be hampering recruitment. Those exceptions relate generally to employee candidates from outside the GTA. On the other hand, several employers felt the fact that house prices are lower than Toronto prices is a recruitment advantage.
- Particularly in the northern parts of the Region, house prices are seen by many employers as a negative factor, although seldom a barrier to recruitment. Prices in these areas have risen substantially in recent years and have entered the GTA range.
- It is accepted that employees will commute in order to find houses they want and can afford. Employees who take jobs within the Region while owning homes elsewhere do not generally seek to relocate to the Region. The exception, as noted above, might be homeowners in Toronto, who might welcome the opportunity to move to a lower-cost environment with a shorter commute or immigrant employees who have "moved up" to housing in York Region as their second or third home address since arriving in this country.

- Except for employees in professional and management positions, employers observe employees buying in the Barrie, Bradford and Innisfil and along the Highway 407, 401 corridor areas, in order to be able to afford detached homes. Employers in the southern tier noted that employees are buying in Georgina and Milton for the same reason.

2.2 Transit Service

Employers responded that the transit system, while much improved, is not meeting the needs of many employers, including those in industrial areas and smaller settlements, and the situation is discouraging some lower-paid employees from applying for or keeping jobs in the Region. They provided the following observations:

- There is strong support for the expansion of transit service within the Region and significantly better integration between York Region Transit and the TTC.
- The Region was complimented for the expansion of transit service to Seneca College, Georgina and elsewhere. There were also compliments for GO Bus services.
- There is a common perception that the Region operates buses which are too large for many routes, and that the use of smaller buses/vans would enable the Region to offer more frequent service on existing routes and offer new service to small towns.
- The most common suggestions for transit service improvements include more frequent service in the Barrie-Bradford-Newmarket corridor; service to major industrial parks, particularly in Aurora and Newmarket; extended bus service to better accommodate shift schedules; bus route and fare integration with the TTC; extension of the subway to Highway 7; more east-west transit connections; and bus service to and within smaller towns, such as King City or Keswick.
- Expansion of transit is NOT seen as an alternative to road improvements for the purpose of resolving the traffic congestion issue.
- Insufficient transit service is seen to be out of step with the Region's vision and economic profile in 2003, including the need to attract new-Canadian employees to its major employment areas, to assist student employees to work in retail and similar operations, to provide economic opportunity to potentially disadvantaged employees, and generally to help the Region's industrial employers.

2.4 Traffic Congestion and Transportation Infrastructure

Employers interviewed had very definite views on the transportation network in the Region. They saw increasing congestion that affected themselves and their employees and their ability to access the business. Increasing congestion in the central and northern parts of the Region were particularly noted.

Traffic congestion is the pre-eminent concern among employers. Comments from employers dealt with:

- Traffic congestion within the Region is seen to be having a serious impact on the cost of doing business in many parts of the Region. This issue impacts material delivery times and the productivity of the mobile workforce within the Region, as well as on commuting times and the attractiveness of jobs in the southern tier of the Region. Some employers are considering relocation as a result. The only businesses that are not so concerned are typically non-industrial employers in the northern part of the Region that do not make deliveries or depend on a mobile workforce.
- Employers have numerous suggestions for the Region regarding road improvements that would help to address these issues. The most common requests are for the extension of the 404, expressway connections between 404 and 400, alternatives to the use of Yonge Street, and numerous road-widening/turn-lane/advanced-green measures.
- Concerns have been expressed in some heavily industrialized quadrants such as parts of Vaughan about road capacity which appears undersized and is creating increasing travel times during the rush hours.
- The 407 is widely hailed as essential to business in the Region, and many employers pay 407 costs either for their commercial vehicles or for senior employees. In addition many employees, who have invested in housing outside of York Region, accept the 407 fees as part of their commuting costs in order to acquire more affordable housing along either the 407 or 401 corridor to the west.

Comments made regarding Economic Vitality

"One company sends its mechanics for specialized training at a college near Edmonton, and is looking for an arrangement with a college in the GTA."

"If you know someone who wants a plant job with competitive wages, health benefits and a pension plan, let me know. We are always looking."

"Good experienced drivers are like gold. Everyone's looking for them and we all need more of them because they are sitting in traffic."

"Our agency would welcome the opportunity to work with the Region and others on some sort of an 'immigration task force'. I think the services are here but not well enough known."

"There are people from 40 countries working here. We are very proud of that."

"47% of the skilled trades in the plant now come through immigration. In 10 years, we project that will be 97%."

"The pharmaceutical industry relies on immigration for its experienced operators. The schools can't produce enough students."

"We need people who speak a variety of languages. It's going to be easier for us to help the people who already speak those languages to get the professional education they need to become fully contributing members of our country."

"Because of the regulations in our business, people must have a working knowledge of English before they come here. That's part of our testing. Beyond that, we have been thinking about offering some sort of advanced ESL for our employees. Maybe that's something we could work with the Region on."

"We rely on our employees spreading the word among other skilled people in the Russian community."

"The demographics in the Region have changed. We are losing our agricultural base and people don't want to do farm labour any more because of the hours and the type of work."

"Nursing just doesn't seem to be a popular career choice any more. There just aren't enough nurses."

"Students don't seem to see retail as a career possibility any more. We are not getting the applications we used to and the kids we get don't seem to have the interest and the maturity that we used to get."

"Our business has been based on craftsmen coming over from Italy. I would like to talk to the Region about working with them to build affordable rental units in this area for these employees."

"We are very conscious that, in some cases, we offer immigrants to Canada their first introduction to the Canadian workforce."

"We are lucky to have the Chinese-Canadian community in Markham. It's an excellent source of the skills we need and people will take the jobs and keep the jobs because they don't have far to come."

Chapter THREE

General Findings of the 2004 Employer Opinion Survey

3.1 Economic Vitality and Related Challenges

During interviews with employers throughout the Region, comments were naturally addressed to the Region concerning possible ways to strengthen and promote the Region's economy. York Region is still considered an advantageous place to have a business. Several employers commented favourably on the accomplishments of the Regional Municipality. Potential strategies to attract business and offers to work with the Region emerged from many of the conversations. These potential strategies are in addition to the findings of this survey related to transportation, transit and housing.

3.1.1 Providing training within the Region in fields now experiencing skills shortages

Most organizations throughout the Region report a shortage of trained and skilled employees. This theme was one of the most common to emerge from interviews.

This short supply/high demand applies to positions as diverse as

- police officers
- chefs
- pharmaceutical production operators and chemical technicians
- press operators
- funeral directors
- accountants
- millwrights and machinists
- mechanics
- electricians and master woodworkers
- professional salespeople
- part-time students
- veterinarians
- truck drivers
- farm labour
- nurses and nursing assistants
- home service workers
- multi-lingual counsellors

Transportation and housing factors, and, in some cases, work locations that are distant from large populations have been seen to exacerbate skills shortages. However, employers generally see shortages as an issue throughout the Greater Toronto Area and perhaps across Canada, as a result of both economic growth and

some degree of imbalance between what the economy needs and the career choices being made by young people.

One firm requires machinists who are very specialized and work with extreme accuracy. To meet its needs, the company:

- uses a headhunting agency;
- pays a bonus to existing employees who bring in suitable new recruits;
- hires suitable new recruits at any time;
- uses profit-sharing;
- has adopted a four-day work week;
- has standing arrangements with Humber and Georgian; and,
- employs people from as far away as North Bay, Port Perry and Penetanguishene.

Some employers suggested a strategy in which local institutions, particularly Seneca College, would expand its courses locally and encourage York Region students to enter these areas of high demand. In-career training, such as management seminars, health and safety training, and ESL were also mentioned as possible areas of cooperation.

A coordinated strategy among industry, Seneca College, and the Region to influence career planning and to train qualified workers would be beneficial and well supported by industry. However, there was no identifiable consensus from employers interviewed as to whether this initiative should be lead by the institution or by employers or the Region. The Region could in such cases, act as a liaison to bring the various parties together although it is recognized that a number of other players including the Provincial government would need to ultimately be involved.

3.1.2 Strategy to attract and accommodate the new Canadian workforce

New Canadians are fundamental to York Region's economy. Industrial employers in particular rely on this source of employees and take very seriously their responsibilities to accommodate these employees into the Canadian workplace. Some employers are using extraordinary measures to attract skilled technicians, trades and operators who have brought their skills to Canada.

New Canadians often face specific challenges with regard to commuting, language and Canadian experience. The organizational infrastructure needed to attract and retain this

Comments made on availability of Affordable Rental Housing

"The younger salespeople would like to move to Newmarket because of the long hours, but there's nothing to rent. It's not that they couldn't pay for it; they can't find it."

"Some of the places aren't where you would want your own children to live."

"We had a young guy turn down the job because he couldn't find a place to live."

"The kids say that all there is around here are "yucky" basement apartments for \$900 to \$1,000 a month."

"Our recruits are quite well-paid but they can't find enough good rental housing."

"Some of our operators would probably move to Stouffville but apartments are scarce."

"Some of our staff are single mothers and the cost of rental is a big issue for them. One is paying \$1,150 a month for a basement."

"A lot of our employees are immigrants. The only place they can find something to rent is Scarborough, and that means they have to make two bus connections to get to work."

"A basement apartment in Holland Landing goes for \$1,150 a month. We pay good wages for the kind of work but who can afford that?"

"We tell people flatly that there is nothing to rent in Georgina and we supply accommodation on-site for our new recruits."

"We do hire young professional staff and finding quality rentals is a real problem for them."

"There's nothing to rent up here for single mothers."

"They're putting in all those subdivisions; how about some rentals?"

"A one-bedroom in Richmond Hill is \$1,000 a month. That's nearly impossible for our employees on what we can afford to pay them."

"We need new Canadians to take these jobs but at first they can't afford to keep a car on the road and there's nothing they can rent close to work."

essential source of employees needs to be better developed in York. In addition to transit, many employers raised "soft service" issues, such as language training, skills assessment and licensing and the need for coordination. Several expressed an interest in working with the Region, educational institutions and other industries on strategies to attract and train this sector of the workforce in York.

3.1.3 Promotion of the Region to the commute-weary

Numerous employers mentioned that one of the Region's strengths is its wealth of talented residents who commute south to jobs but are eager for job opportunities closer to home. It was suggested that the Region should promote York as a place where businesses can reduce congestion and reduce employees' commuting time—as well as that of commute-weary business owners.

Several employers would use material that promotes the lifestyle advantages of the Region, offering growth and prosperity but without the congestion of Toronto. Employers themselves are enthusiastic promoters of the advantages of the Region.

3.1.4 Monitoring mobility and work-live opportunities in relation to the pace of development

Responding to the issue of traffic congestion and difficult commutes, several employers suggested that the Region should ensure that the rate of residential growth does not outpace the rate at which the road system is planned and built to accommodate it. Some extrapolated that new jobs should be created in the Region in proportion to the rate that new homes are created, in order to increase the likelihood that the Region's residents will be able to find suitable work closer to home.

The interviews themselves do not reveal the problem of residents having appropriate skill sets to match employment opportunities and housing price ranges matching the affordability requirements of the resident labour force. Rather, the interviewees are responding to observations and experiences with the road network at capacity in many areas of the Region at the end of each work day or shift. Ensuring a balance between residential growth and the provision of road capacity may be incapable of impacting this issue to any appreciable degree.

3.2 RENTAL HOUSING

A significant lack of decent and affordable rental housing was reported throughout the Region but particularly in the northern and rural municipalities. Of the 75 businesses interviewed fully, this lack of affordable rental housing has prevented newly hired employees from outside the Region from moving to the Region. This applies both to relatively well-paid young sales and professional people, as well as to less well-paid employees. In several reported instances, candidates have not accepted positions or employees have quit because they were unable to find what they considered to be adequate or affordable accommodation within a reasonable distance of the job.

In this survey, employers also reported that:

- Some employees who live in rental accommodation within certain areas of the Region are reported to be in accommodation of lesser quality than rent levels should justify.
- Several interviewees noted that the supply of rental housing had not kept pace with the growth of the Region.
- In the southern part of the Region many employees, particularly in manufacturing positions, commute into the Region while living in rental housing in the near-boundary municipalities.

The results of this survey support the findings of recent statistical analysis *Housing and Our Economy: Remaining Competitive* which finds that 32% of the workers that commute in to work in York Region and live in adjacent municipalities are renters. This suggests that for some of York Region's workforce, the lack of rental housing in York Region is a factor in the decision to live outside of the Region. The report found that the proportion of in-commuters renting is higher than average in occupations related to manufacturing, construction, various trades and in sales and service occupations. The report also confirmed that low income workers, whether living in York Region, or in adjacent municipalities are more likely to live in rental housing than middle or high income workers. The development of a strategy to increase the supply of rental housing is critical to York Region's ability to compete with neighboring municipalities to attract and retain a diverse labour force. The lack of affordable rental impact can also contribute to congestion as employees live farther and farther from their places of work - this is another issue that is important to employers.

Comments made on availability of Affordable Housing Ownership

"Some people think of Keswick as a place they can get into the market, but it's almost as high now as Newmarket. We're in the GTA."

"One employee sold a semi-detached house in Richmond Hill and bought a house on a four acre lot west of Barrie for the same price."

"Couples working two or three part-time jobs used to be able to buy in Stouffville, but not anymore."

"The last four sales people we've hired have all moved up from Toronto."

"People who bought here when their families were young are fed up with battling the traffic and they're looking closer to home."

"We have professionals applying for more junior positions than they had in the City. They can afford to take up to 20% less if they don't have to cross Highway 7."

"The difference between a new house in Newmarket and the same house in Barrie is \$50,000. People with young families are willing to commute for that"

"Our employees can't afford to live in Aurora. They have to commute"

"Employers report that positions such as nurses and dental assistants are getting easier to fill. Either local residents want to work closer to home or Toronto residents are looking for an easier lifestyle and more affordable housing."

"One of our professionals just bought in Aurora and moved up. He's delighted with it."

3.3 OWNERSHIP HOUSING

The Region is generally seen to have a good mix of housing available for purchase. Employers in the north tend to see prices as a negative, while those in the south, comparing prices to Toronto, tend to see the positive - although almost all will acknowledge that new home prices, even for row housing and semi detached housing forms have risen to the extent that many young families cannot or will not commit to homeownership in York Region as a first home. In order to buy a house they want and can afford, employees are willing to commute to York Region from areas like Barrie, Bradford and Milton. Several employers interviewed observed that York Region tends not to be the locations for first ownership for many of their employees, but when moving up in the market, York's prices and diversity of communities is seen as an advantage and as family finances improve, employees begin searching for accommodation in the Region.

Northern municipalities in York Region have historically provided more "affordable" housing than municipalities in the southern part of York Region. In 2003, average single detached house prices reported for the Towns of Georgina, East Gwillimbury and Newmarket were \$205,000, \$320,000 and \$310,000 respectively while Markham, Vaughan and Richmond Hill averaged \$390,000, \$405,000 and \$437,000 respectively¹. On a Regional basis, these 2003 prices represent an average increase of 7.3% over the 2002 figures.

Because of these housing cost increases, employers no longer see the northern part of the Region (Newmarket, Whitchurch-Stouffville, East Gwillimbury, Georgina) to be an area of lower-cost housing. Lower-paid administrative/clerical, labour or trades employees do not feel able to buy homes in the area, and, if they are looking, generally buy in or around Bradford or Barrie. The entire Region is seen to have become part of the GTA housing market in recent years. Employers appear to accept this as a given.

Conversely, York Region is still considered affordable by some employers by contrast with Toronto, particularly for higher-income earners. This comparison to Toronto housing prices is seen as a significant advantage by numerous employers. Many of the Region's residents moved to the Region in the past in order to afford a home, usually with a relatively large lot, and have been commuting to jobs farther south. After years of commuting, these residents are becoming a significant source of dependable employees for jobs closer to home.

¹ Toronto Real Estate Board Market Watch 2003 as reported in York Region Economic and Development Review 2003

Comments made on Transit

"The service to Seneca College is exceptional. It not only helps students, but also helps us recruit "clerical staff."

"The guys in the plant were so happy we were doing this survey. They asked if I could get them a bus on Industrial Parkway]?"

"Our industry is generally clustered around Scarborough and most of the workers use transit. If we want to get people for the industry up here, they have to be able to get here by transit."

"The GO Bus on Yonge is good to have but it doesn't run often enough for our people to use it. They have to have a car."

"The bus service down from Holland Landing has been a big help, but it still doesn't help with our shifts. We run 24/7."

"New Canadians don't necessarily have the money for a car, but the GO service isn't consistent with our shifts."

"There are so many people going back and forth now, they should bring the subway up to Highway 7 or 16th."

"The Region has improved the bus service a great deal in Georgina, but it still doesn't run at times that would accommodate our industry, and that will probably never be economical."

"A bus service along Harry Walker would be good for our day shift, but I imagine the other two shifts would still need a car."

"We are well served by transit here, both for our employees and our customers. The Region should be doing more to publicize it. If they give us the schedule, we will help them to publicize it and encourage people."

"The GO Bus goes by the plant but its schedule doesn't work with our shifts. If there were more frequent service, we would be happy to give the schedule to our employees and encourage them to use it."

"I think more people would use the GO service from Barrie and Bradford to Newmarket, but the timing doesn't work."

"Let's face it, the industries we have here now are the same as they have in Toronto and we need people from Toronto to work for us. We need transit just like Toronto needs transit."

"Some of our employees are single moms. They can't afford cars. The Region could help me by helping them get to work."

"They shouldn't need to get two tickets to get here on the TTC and then on York Region Transit. There could be some kind of a pass that works for both."

"More bus service is needed, but that's not going to solve the traffic problem."

"Realistically they are not going to run all night long. At least at first, we are probably talking about the day shift."

3.4 TRANSIT SERVICE

Employers complimented the Region for its expansion of transit. Nonetheless, expectations for the expansion of transit service throughout the Region run high. For example, extended service to the industrial areas of Aurora and Newmarket and Vaughan, closer integration with the TTC, closer integration with GO-service to the north of the Region, service tied to shift schedules, and more east-west transit connections were all cited as necessary support for the York Region's booming industrial economy. In addition, specific interviews provided the following:

- York Region Transit is generally a hit with those employers on YRT routes, particularly if the routes are new. Several companies requested that YRT provide them with schedules and schedule changes for their employees.
- Industrial areas are reported to be underserved by YRT. Where transit might be a feasible means of commuting, bus schedules do not accommodate shift schedules. Several businesses interviewed in southern Vaughan reported that their employees, if transit dependant, ended up arriving at work at least an hour early for a 7:00 a.m. shift start because of the connecting schedules. Taking a later bus meant that they would be late for the job.
- Many employers reported that expanded transit service could be an important advantage to their employees in lower-paid positions and to the reliability of their workforce. These employees might be hard pressed to keep a car on the road for reliable commuting. New Canadians, students and single parents were all mentioned in this context.
- Better/more frequent bus service along the Barrie-Bradford-Yonge Street corridor would be helpful, as would better connections with Barrie-Bradford-Yonge service, with the TTC and with the subway in the southern tier of the Region.
- More east-west service has been requested, whether in the Holland Landing-Mount Albert area, in the Stouffville area, or in the southern tier of the Region.
- Several interviewees noted that YRT buses can often be seen nearly empty, and assumed that, by using smaller vehicles on some routes, the Region could afford to offer more frequent service and to expand service to smaller centres.
- Whether because of their location, shift schedules, or the origins and preferences of their employees, many employers do not expect transit to be a commuting solution for their employees and none of the businesses surveyed felt that transit will be the major part of the solution for traffic congestion.

Comments made on Traffic Congestion and Transportation Infrastructure

"Without the 407 pass, I couldn't have taken this job. Getting here in the morning would be impossible."

"Our deliveries are mostly in the Newmarket, Keswick, Bradford and Cookstown areas. The round-trip delivery time to Bradford has doubled in the last 10 years, so we have had to change our delivery guarantee."

"The insurance company has told us not to make left turns onto Yonge Street. The company is looking at the possibility of moving to a more wide-open road."

"We have had potential employees decline jobs when they see the congestion, the growth and the amount of construction in this area."

"This plant competes successfully for business from Collingwood and Huntsville to Cambridge and Tillsonburg, because we design and build custom products. Traffic congestion has had a huge impact on our deliveries. Even though we pay to use the 407, it now takes a half-hour longer to deliver to Vaughan than it did eight years ago. Yonge Street is impossible. Getting truck drivers is our biggest problem, because our guys need a special license. We are thinking of looking for a location with better transportation."

"Aurora isn't a place where industrial employees can afford to live, and even Newmarket isn't any more, so we are bringing in people from a long way away to work here."

"The Region should put the road system in place before allowing a lot of building. This congestion is reducing the quality of life that we moved here to find."

"The roads can't handle the volume of traffic. There are too many cars trying to compete with too many trucks."

"The traffic is making our office inaccessible. Our elderly clients can't get in or out any more."

"We are contracted to deliver so many loads a day to the Toronto lakeshore. It works out to five trips a driver. When we started the contract, the trip took an hour and a driver worked about nine hours a day. Now it's more like an hour and 40 minutes. The guys work a 12-hour day and that's what we pay them for. Our insurance has gone through the roof and we're burning fuel sitting on the expressway. We have to pass the difference along to the customer and it shows up in the final price of the product. The guys start at 4:30 a.m. so they can get in a couple of loads before the rush. Not everyone would want those hours."

"The 404 needs to get to Keswick. We've got the people, now we need the road."

"CHATS is a well-regarded Region-wide provider of services to support people in their own homes. In the current bidding environment, the agency has had to limit the mileage paid to home care workers, notwithstanding the fact that a car is mandatory for the job. Traffic congestion has two impacts. First, because workers can visit fewer clients per day, either service is reduced or more workers are needed to maintain service levels. Second, the mileage paid to workers does not match the costs they incur. Faced with repairs and insurance bills, at least one home care worker has quit to make more money as a waitress."

"Traffic congestion may not be having an impact on our recruitment but it has a huge impact on our response times and the number of incidents we respond to. It's one of the reasons we have to hire more people every year."

"Any guy who owns a business in Toronto and lives in the Region is sick and tired of fighting traffic on the 400. Find him, offer him a smile and some property within 20 minutes of his house, and he's yours."

"Traffic on Davis Drive has doubled in two years from 11,000 cars a day to 22,000. This used to be a country road...now it's a major thoroughway."

3.5 TRAFFIC CONGESTION AND TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Traffic congestion was the most frequent concern expressed by employers, usually accompanied by specific examples of the impact that congestion was having on their operations, their costs, and/or their employees.

Several firms indicated they planned to relocate because of traffic congestion, and a couple of firms had recently done so. While these relocations were within York, the Region should monitor this activity to ensure that the businesses are retained. Similarly, a strategy should be considered to ensure that space is available for business relocation adjacent to future expressways.

Some industries have moved or consolidated their operations to York Region, in part because of its greater ease of mobility compared to Toronto or Mississauga. The relative lack of congestion in the northern part of the Region is still seen by several employers as an important economic development tool for the Region. Nonetheless, there is a strong sense among employers that large-scale upgrading of the transportation infrastructure is overdue, in order to retain an attractive business environment and to catch up with the traffic demands of existing development. The interviewees made many specific suggestions for improvements to the road and traffic control infrastructure.

- Several businesses were complimentary about the Region's efforts, such as the extension of 404 to Green Lane and the Bathurst-Green Lane extension, but they also clearly have high expectations about much-discussed projects like the further 404 extension, the Bradford bypass and the extension of 427. Areas of particular concern are Yonge Street through Richmond Hill and Newmarket, most north-south roads through Richmond Hill and Vaughan, Stouffville Road east of Highway 48, and the commuter flow on King's rural roads.
- Employers in the southern tier of municipalities reported traffic congestion as a major problem for employees, and in some cases as a barrier to recruitment.
- Employers throughout the Region stressed the impact of traffic congestion on operations which involve either deliveries or their employees traveling to clients or job sites. Congestion faced by delivery vehicles and by employees who travel to work sites or clients increases the demand for occupations already in short supply, increases costs of doing business, increases the consumer price of products and services (where congestion-induced costs can be passed on), or reduces service quality (where congestion-induced costs cannot be passed on).

3.6 PERSPECTIVES FROM PARTICULAR EMPLOYER GROUPS

3.6.1 The non-profit sector

Several employers in the non-profit sector are very sensitive to the difficulty of attracting employees. Wages are traditionally relatively low. Student help is becoming more difficult to obtain because the combination of low wages and high tuitions makes it less feasible to take the job "for the experience." Since many such agencies are involved in outreach work, traffic congestion has had the same impact as it has had on emergency services-lower productivity in terms of response time and number of client visits per employee per day. The lack of transit reduces the options for relatively low-wage and for part-time employees, as well as for clients. Agencies commonly report candidates not being able to take their jobs because of transportation problems.

The non-profit sector is not only essential to the quality of life in York Region, but is also an important source of employment in its own right. The sector appears to be struggling to attract employees to meet the needs of a growing Region and would benefit from the Region's leadership and assistance.

3.6.2 Tourism and retail employers

Tourism and retail employers rely significantly on part-time and seasonal employees, particularly students. Typically, the commute distance for these employees is short (less than half-an-hour) and their availability locally is crucial. Many such employers stated that transit service could be an important benefit to their employees, although most tourism operators felt that their location was prohibitive.

Several tourism operators provide on-site housing for some of their specialized seasonal employees, citing both their relatively isolated location and the lack of transit.

3.6.3 Industrial/manufacturing employers

Most manufacturing employers take steps during their recruitment process to emphasize their location, particularly if they are outside the southern tier, and attempt to ensure that those hired will be able to attend reliably. In a few cases where their recruitment experience and their compensation allow them to do so they discourage applicants from more than 30 minutes away. The private car remains the main means of commuting, but several firms feel that more of their employees would rely on transit if it were available, particularly in the Yonge Street area and in the industrial areas.

Manufacturers in the northern tier report problems in retaining and attracting employees. Although many offer attractive compensation and regular hours, the wages do not typically allow many employees to buy houses in York Region. Long commutes either encourage employees to look for work closer to home or bring into focus the lack of transit to industrial areas and for the less convenient shifts. Manufacturing operations, generally large employers, rely heavily on new Canadians in their workforce.

In the southern tier, depending on the employer, many have no difficulty in attracting and retaining their employees

3.7 PERSPECTIVES FROM PARTICULAR EMPLOYEE GROUPS

3.7.1 Single parents

Employers of single-parent employees report serious concern about inadequate transit routes and transit schedules, and about a lack of affordable and decent rental housing.

3.7.2 Long Time Residents of the Region

Numerous employers reported that long-time residents of the Region were the backbone of their workforce because they lived nearby and had purchased their homes at a time when homes were considerably less expensive. Similarly, employers feel strongly that York employers have a very important advantage in recruiting for positions, particularly professional, management, technical and sales, because residents of the Region with excellent skills and experience are becoming increasingly jaded about the commute to Toronto or even to the southern tier of the Region, and are keen to work closer to home.

Cases were reported where long-time residents, particularly if nearing retirement, are taking advantage of the recent rise in the value of their houses and are selling and moving north.

3.7.3 Residents north of the Region

Employees who took jobs when they lived in an area of less expensive homes outside the Region are unlikely to move into the Region. Not only are York's house prices a barrier, but these employees have social connections and are able to afford larger lots elsewhere. At the same time, jobs in the Region draw applications from far afield in many cases, including Haliburton, Kawartha Lakes, Collingwood, Orillia, and Barrie-Innisfil. Employers did not expect that this pattern could be changed, although some employers prefer to hire more locally, if possible, for lower-paying jobs.

3.7.4 Young sales and professional people

Young single employees or couples without children who get jobs in the Region making relatively good money are most likely to want to move to the Region if they work long hours or unusual shifts, but the lack of rental accommodation in the northern and rural parts of the Region, as well as factors such as leaving their social setting, can make this very difficult.

Chapter **FOUR**

Conclusions

York Region is a growing, vibrant, relatively affluent community and most residents enjoy a high quality of life. These strengths, along with a diverse, skilled labour force attract businesses and investment to the Region, supporting the Region's continued economic vitality. Despite these strengths, recent research indicates that the Region will face increasing competition to attract and retain a skilled labour force due to emerging demographic trends and other challenges.

The Regional Official Plan establishes a Policy framework to meet these challenges. However a number of additional initiatives may be required including, further financial support for transit and rapid transit implementation, increased support and a new financial partnership to support the construction of affordable rental housing within the Region, and Economic Strategy that reflects the growing diversity of businesses and supports their expansion, human services planning and partnerships to provide co-ordination and reflect the needs of the community.

4.1 Economic Vitality

The vast majority of the employers interviewed are growing, adding employees, competing successfully for business, and in several cases merging operations from outside the Region. They represent considerable diversity, from custom concrete products, pharmaceuticals and high-tech machinery manufacturing to trucking and sod farming, and from high-end tourism to home-care, personal services and immigration services. In keeping with the vision of the Official Plan, a predominant conclusion from the survey is that York Region is a growing, diversified, highly competitive economic powerhouse.

Indeed, its success has bred its problems. With economic growth have come skills shortages and the need to attract and accommodate new Canadians into the workforce, the need for transit, the heavy impact of traffic congestion, and the challenge of balance between live/work opportunities.

4.2 Maintaining the diversity and skills of its workforce

Earlier sections of this report have noted the existing diversity of the workforce and the wide range of specialized skills that lend strength to the Region's economy. At the same time, skills shortage is a common theme. The economic opportunities in York Region are attracting employees from a wide area, with diversity of skills and professions, and from a broad spectrum of nationalities.

The 2004 Employer Opinion Survey shows that there are several key elements to maintaining the diversity and skills of its workforce. Key among these and part of the Region's role is improving the range and affordability of housing within the Region to more closely match the needs of York's labour force and providing transit and transportation to move people to jobs. Similarly, York Region has taken a leadership role in providing the soft services needed by immigrant and new Canadian employees. with its Human Services Strategy. Employers in this survey have also encouraged the Region to explore ways to support human services, training, and knowledge-based opportunities in order to maintain the the diversity and skills of its workforce. The Region's role in training and education is limited and both the Federal and Provincial governments must be engaged to provide leadership and financial support for such programs.

4.3 Fully-coordinated public transit system

A continuing message from employers is that York needs high-quality transit, coordinated with the TTC and with GO Transit. The Region's commitment to YRT and the rapid transit initiative as well as functional expansion of our existing system will support the essential need.

4.4 Ensuring that the Human Services needs of business are addressed

This survey included a number of employers in the human services sector and received comments from employers about employee groups who might need particular consideration, such as single mothers and new Canadians. As discussed earlier, the human services sector is taxed by the Region's growth, and the Region's efforts to monitor and facilitate the work of this sector would be consistent with the Plan.

The development of both transit and rental housing are essential to ensure that groups such as single parents and new Canadians share in the Region's high livability and its strong economy.

4.5 Ensuring that the physical needs of business are addressed

Employers in this survey strongly believe that a transportation infrastructure deficit exists in the Region, and that this deficit is imposing a heavy cost on their businesses and their employees. Employers expect that the Region, in concert with the Province, will place a priority on the expansion of the 400-series highways to meet already existing needs, and have suggested through their comments a number of other ways in which the effects of congestion could potentially be alleviated.

4.6 Ensuring that new housing is appropriate and adequate to the needs of employees

The availability of public transit and community services, housing that matches the needs of employees, and a road network which keeps up with the needs of growth is essential. Many employers perceive that roads, transit, and rental housing have not been expanded apace, and that the growth of employment opportunities might not have been linked with the pace of residential growth on an area-municipality basis. These observations would support initiatives by the Region to monitor the future pace and location of residential growth, in the light of these policies and the observations of the employers in this survey.

Acknowledgments and Appendices

York Region gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the following employers in the preparation of this study.

Town of Aurora

GenPack LP	3
Featherlite Industries Ltd.	2
Reebok Canada Inc	3
Hallmark Cards	2
D-Mac Furniture Ltd.	2
Canada Law book Inc	3
Morley Sanderson & Millard	2
Aurora Resthaven Nursing Home	3
CHATS	3

Town of East Gwillimbury

J.F. Kitching & Son Ltd.	2
Brooklin Concrete Products Limited	2
Inscape	3
Skelton Truck Lines Ltd.	2
North York Appraisal Services Service Ltd.	1
Dr. Elaine McKenna	1
York Professional Care and Education:	
The Children's Academy	1
Pheasant Run Golf Club	2
York Equestrian Centre Inc.	2
Queensville Service Centre	2

Town of Georgina

National Building Supplies	2
Simcoe Coach Lines Ltd.	3
Town of Georgina	3
The Briars Resort and Conference Centre	3
Riveredge Restaurant	1
Hair Fitness Inc.	2
Job Skills	2
Sibbald Point Provincial Park	2

Township of King

Zander Sod Company Ltd.	2
Showa Canada Inc.	3
B.C. Instruments	3
LGL Ltd.	2
Kingsdale Animal Hospital	1
Seneca College	3
The Montessori Country School	2
Cardinal Golf Club	3
King Township Public Library	2

Business Size

Town of Markham

Nutco Inc.	2
Phillips Electronics Ltd	3
Markham Stouffville Hospital	3
Hilton Suites	3
Comfy Cotton Diaper Company	2

Town of Newmarket

CeDe Candy Company	3
Snap-on Tools	3
H. J. Pfaff Motors	3
The Bay	3
Stiver, Vale, Leck & Associates	2
Roadhouse and Rose Funeral Home	1
Cintas	3
Regional Municipality of York Police	3

Town of Richmond Hill

Apotex Inc.	3
Bon L. Canada Inc.	3
Davies Harley-Davidson	2
Canadian Tire	3
TD Canada Trust Financial Group	2
Country Style Donuts - Head Office	2
Silvercity Richmond Hill	3
Town of Richmond Hill Fire Department	3
Catholic Community Services	2
Merry Maids	2

City of Vaughan

Canadian Hickory Farms Inc.	1
Jones Apparel Group of Canada Inc.	3
Cortina Kitchens Inc.	2
Airline Limousine	2
Paramount Canada's Wonderland	3
DSH Inc.	3
Ikea Vaughan	3
Excentrotech Precision Inc.	2
Teknion Corporation	3

Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville

Novopharm Ltd.	3
Farmer Jacks Gardens	2
A & P	3
Stouffville Medical Centre	1
Shadow Lake Outdoor Recreation Centre	1
The Other Office	1
Ontario SPCA Provincial Office and Shelter	2

Business Size is denoted as follows 1 - 1 to 9 employees; 2 - 10 to 99 employees; 3 - +100 employees



2004 Employer Opinion Survey

Date of interview:

Business Name:

Contact Name and Telephone Number for feedback purposes only:

Business Profile

Number of Employees from most recent employment survey:

Core business by description:

1. What are the major occupational groups within your company and what would be the approximate wage or salary range of those groups?

Occupational Group	% of total workforce	Salary or hourly wage Range (Low end High end)	FT	PT - Casual	PPT
Professional					
Administrative or Office/clerical					
Technical					
Skilled trades					
Labourer					
Sales					
Other					

2. Is there a difference in the salary range depending on whether employees are FT, PT- Casual, PPT

3. From your knowledge of your employees, where do most live:

% in York Region	Municipalities:
% outside York Region	What municipalities:

4. Have existing employees raised issues about the availability housing, transportation or transit and the availability of social and community services (such areas as health care availability, doctors, schools)?
5. Of the employees that raise Housing as an issue, what is their major occupational group:

Occupational Group	√ Appropriate Occupational Groups
Professional	
Administrative or Office/clerical	
Technical	
Skilled trades	
Labourer	
Sales	
Other (<i>Specify</i>)	

6. What is the most common household type of the employees that identify housing as an issue:

Household Type	√ Appropriate household type
Young Singles (between 18 and 24)	
Singles	
Couples	
Couples with children	
Pre-retirement (from age 55 through 65)	

7. Have you experienced situations where existing employees left your employment due to difficulty in finding or maintaining suitable housing stock or because of the length of their commute.

Attraction of New Employees

8. In the past 5 years, has your company increased its work force here in York Region?

Yes No

(go to question 9) (go to question

9. If your workforce has increased, in what occupational group(s) has the increase occurred?

Occupational Group	% Increase
Professional	
Administrative or Office/clerical	
Technical	
Skilled trades	
Labourer	
Sales	
Other	

10. What occupational groups are the most difficult to attract to your business and why?

Occupational Group	√ Appropriate occupational group
Professional	
Administrative or Office/clerical	
Technical	
Skilled trades	
Labourer	
Sales	
Other	

11. Of the new employees, have any expressed difficulty in finding adequate and affordable housing?

Have you experienced situations where prospective employees either refused positions or delayed the acceptance decision because of difficulty in finding suitable housing.

12. Can you recall what the specific difficulty encountered:

Difficulty encountered	
Housing was too expensive	
Type of housing sought not found within a reasonable commuting distance	
Rental housing could not be found	
Other	

13. Do you think affordability of housing in the area of your business is a positive or negative feature for employees considering working for your company?

- Positive?
- Negative?
- Neither

Transit and Transportation

14. What is the primary mode of transportation used by your company's employees in their commute to work?

Mode of Transportation	% of Employees using if known
Personal vehicle	
Carpool with others	
Public transit	
Private transit service	
Other	

15. From your experience, is there a maximum distance in minutes or miles that employees are willing to commute?

16. Do you feel that traffic congestion is affecting your operations (this applies not only to employee commute times but also delivery of goods and services and customers willing to come to the business)?

Yes – In what way?

No -

17. In your opinion would improvement to transit service in York Region benefit your business? And what specific improvements would be most appropriate in the short-term and longer term?

In the Summer of 2000, a similar series of interviews was undertaken with 31 employers throughout the Region (although weighted toward Newmarket/ Aurora and Markham). While a smaller sample than the 2004 series, the 2000 interviews also included employers from a variety of lines of business and number of employees. This section reiterates the conclusions drawn from the 2000 interviews and then comments based on the 2004 interviews.

General Trends Reported in the 2000 Survey

1. "Larger businesses noticed the issues among their employees more than smaller employers"

Comment:

The 2004 sample did not support this conclusion. Both larger firms (which generally had HR people) and smaller firms (generally owner-operated or family-operated) were well-informed about their employees and forthcoming in their responses. Firms which had experienced little turnover or recent recruitment, whether large or small, tended to some extent to report that housing was a less significant issue for their employees, recognizing that the employees are well-established in their housing choices, whether inside the Region or outside. Although concern about the quality and quality of rental housing was expressed more keenly by several employers, most employers took the prices of ownership housing as a "given".

2. "Southern area of York Region notice the impact of housing costs to a larger degree than northern location"

Comment:

The relative price of ownership housing and employers' awareness of the price issue, within the Region appears to have changed during the past 3 or 4 years. This has been a boom period in the Region and the GTA, both for residential growth and for house prices. While there is still a differential in house prices between the southern communities and the northern communities employers report that house prices in the northern area are no longer the "bargain" that originally caused these areas to grow and that communities like Keswick and Stouffville are now within the GTA range of house prices. New employees beginning their careers, or in lower-paying jobs, are thought to be unable to afford a new home in the northern areas, and to be attracted to Barrie, Bradford, Milton and other areas beyond the Region if they are in the house market.

3. "The degree to which businesses are feeling the impact of housing supply and commuting issues can be seen in corporate policies and initiatives (that they have adopted)"

Comment:

With the exception of a few tourism operators who supply some accommodation on-site, employers did not report any initiatives to counteract issues with the price or availability of housing. The key issues for most employers are traffic congestion and commuting.

A few firms whose delivery vehicles or outreach workers can use the 407 to avoid congestion on the job pay for 407 transponders. Some others have tailored shift schedules or even a four-day work week to avoid the worst of rush hour. Some smaller employers accommodate the transit schedule their employees use.

Where the labour market permits, some employers are very reluctant to hire employees who would face a long commute. Others, while not expecting employees to relocate, emphasize during recruitment that the candidate should ensure that s/he will be able to handle the commute reliably. Many employers are strongly supportive of better transit connections and eager to ensure that information is provided to their employees.

4. "Larger organizations showed a greater awareness of housing and transportation issues"

Comment:

Although the 2004 sample included several HR managers who were very well-informed and concerned about employee issues, the 2004 survey would not support this conclusion from 2000.

5. "The farther south the business is located, the stronger the reaction to transportation issues"

Comment:

This pattern remains true to some extent. One HR manager in Markham reported that a 6 kilometer commute, which once took 10 minutes, now routinely takes 40 minutes. Social agencies within the southern tier reported being able to visit considerably fewer clients in a day than they would have been able to visit 10 years ago. The impact on emergency services, both to build stations and to hire more recruits, is direct and costly. Collision damage appraisal is a booming business.

However, businesses anywhere within the Region which must make deliveries to the southern tier, or to Toronto, reported strong concern about the impact of congestion on their operations. Furthermore, the Yonge Street corridor through Newmarket and up to Bradford is widely recognized as a barrier both to delivery times and to commuting. Numerous requests for more frequent transit service in that corridor as well as between Newmarket and Keswick were expressed. Rapid population growth in Newmarket and Georgina during the recent boom has created a strong awareness of the need for more work-trip transit within those communities.

6. "It is commonly accepted that jobs in Markham, Vaughan, and Aurora will require a commute"

Comment:

This remains true but is also true for the remainder of the Region. Jobs in the Region's smaller communities require a commute, often from outside the Region. New Canadians are now a significant part of the York economy, commuting from areas, often outside the Region, which accommodate ethnic communities. The Region's employers accept commuting as a fact of life.

Retail employers and employers in the tourism business are perhaps the exception. Because of unusual work hours and because students typically don't have cars, many of these employers only hire from areas close to work.

7. "Retail employers are most likely to state that housing is an issue neither for their current employees nor for the organization in attracting new employees"

Comment:

This conclusion from 2000 remains true. Students live at home and other part-time employees are available locally from the days when the Region was a low-cost area that attracted retail employees, tradesmen, industrial operators, and young families. As concluded in the 2000 report, most employees know where they will be working and have thought through their travel arrangements.

Few employers of any kind have had employees refuse to take a job because they were unable to find suitable housing

Summary of Opinions Reported from the 2000 Survey

1. "Incentives are needed to draw applicants".

Comment:

The 2004 Survey found few incentives, despite the fact that numerous occupations are in short supply and high demand within the Region. High demand occupations as diverse as truck drivers, police officers, chefs, experienced sales reps, accountants, or chemical technicians do not appear to be receiving special packages, unless the opportunity to work long hours and overtime is included. Accommodation provided for employees in a few tourism destinations would be the most obvious exception.

Some employers reported that they rely on the fact that they offer a shorter commute, to attract experienced employees who are already commuting. Lower house prices than in Toronto or Mississauga are seen by some as an incentive for young professional or technical employees.

2. "Alternative Work arrangements are becoming more common."

Comment:

Several smaller employers indicated that they try to be understanding about traffic tie-ups and transit schedules. At least one trucking company begins early to avoid some of the road congestion. One manufacturer has a work week of four longer days, instead of five. One manufacturer allows flex-hours for laboratory staff.

On balance, however, the 2003 survey would not suggest that alternative work arrangements have become more common since 2000.

3. "Commuting is an accepted reality"

Comment:

This continues to be the case. In general, employers felt that a 60 minute commute was the common maximum and that an hour was an extreme, although many had examples of employees commuting longer distances (one manufacturer has two employees who continue to live in North Bay; a trucking firm has an employee commuting daily from Madoc).

As discussed, some retail and tourism employers will not hire people who do not live locally. Several employers recounted situations where employees looked near the worksite to buy but decided that they could not afford to move to the area. Similarly, several mentioned that employees had moved to a greater commuting distance, in order to buy a home in areas such as Barrie, Bradford or Beeton. The general acceptance of commuting leads to the fact that employers, while often mentioning and lamenting rising house prices, did not generally direct the Region's attention to ownership housing as a significant issue.

4. "Geographic mobility is part of the job"

Comment:

While many occupations require mobility, employers in the 2004 survey did not indicate that these employees were necessarily inclined to live farther from "head office". One trucking firm does have two employees from communities well to the east, who are allowed to take their trucks home and to drive directly to the each day's first pick-up. Convenient shift schedules, such as those worked by firefighters, may have the most influence on allowing employees to live farther away.

5. "People would rather drive than uproot their families."

Comment:

This continues to be true. People who take a job within the Region when their families are established at a distance from that job are unlikely to move closer to the job. Similarly, it is part and parcel of the general acceptance of commuting. Couples without children may look to buy in the Region, if they see potential for jobs for both partners, and it is these who may be discouraged by house prices. This desire not to uproot families was cited by some employers as the reason why better transit connections were needed by new Canadians and single mothers.

Several employers noted a concern that employees commuting long distances would tend to take jobs closer to their homes and families, if jobs become available.

6. "Housing is more of an issue for family households."

Comment:

In the 2004 survey, employers made most mention of housing issues facing those in the market for rental housing rather than ownership - lower-paid employees, single young professionals, single parents. While few employers recounted situations in which ownership housing had been a barrier to candidates with families accepting jobs, there were such examples, or examples where employees had left the job after a short period, because they were unable to find a house which they considered affordable.

7. "The cost of housing in the area of a business can be seen as either a positive or a negative factor"

Comment:

A couple of employers felt that house prices in the Region were a positive factor for recruitment compared to Toronto prices, and were attractive to employees with higher income jobs. More employers agreed that the cost of housing (presumably meaning ownership housing) is a negative for the area in the minds of prospective employees, thinking of lower-wage jobs and younger employees. Most frequently, the cost of housing was felt to be neither, either because they felt a good mix of housing is available within the Region or they felt that people take jobs regardless of whether or not they can afford to live in the vicinity.

8. "Businesses are losing potential employees because of housing costs"

Comment:

In the 2004 survey, examples were cited either of candidates refusing or delaying acceptance of a job, or leaving a job after a short while because they had not found affordable housing. These examples were varied but not numerous, however. They included a construction manager, a chef and a hotel manager, an automotive manager, a hairdresser, a municipal manager and a planner. Suitable rental housing is part of this issue, as well as ownership housing. More commonly, it was reported that employees left for jobs closer to home, tired of the commute.

At a more macro level, numerous employers noted that families who bought in the Region when it was less expensive, and have since commuted, are a good source of potential experienced employees. The higher prices of recent years will presumably eventually diminish this pool of potential experienced employees looking to work closer to their York Region home.

9. "Businesses continue to lose experienced employees"

Comment:

Commuting continues to take its toll on people's lifestyles. In fact the impact of commuting is being exacerbated by traffic congestion and the scarcity of feasible transit alternatives. Recognizing that long commutes are among the most common causes of turnover, some employers are reluctant to hire from farther than 30-45 minutes away from the work site. Said one employer: "We want people who are going to be with us for 20 years."

10. "Housing is more affordable farther away."

Comment

This 2000 comment remains at least as true in 2004, as even northern parts of the Region now have prices within the GTA range. One employee is reported to have sold a semi-detached home in Richmond Hill and bought a 4-acre property west of Barrie.

11. "Some people move closer to work over time."

Comment:

The 2004 survey heard varied examples of this phenomenon pertaining to salespeople, hotel managers, engineers, accountants, Provincial staff and municipal employees. However, more frequently, it was noted that the lack of rental housing is preventing young employees and new recruits from moving closer to work. For employees with families or ties to ethnic communities, factors other than house prices may be what prevents more people from moving closer to work.

12. "There is a maximum tolerance distance for commuting"

Comment:

As in the 2000 Survey, a few extreme examples of long commutes were offered, but also like the 2000 survey, employers felt that there is a practical maximum. 45 minutes was the most common response in the northern part of the Region; an hour in the southern tier or for employees who had to rely on transit. However there were instances where significantly longer transit commute times were experienced. Tolerance for commuting depends also to some extent on time of day, congestion of the routes, and shifts. Numerous employers are concerned that those employees commuting the maximum distance were susceptible to leaving for jobs closer to home. Several employers expressed concern about commute times for employees who have to rely on transit routes with poor connections.

13. "Entry level positions have very few housing options."

Comment:

The lack of suitable rental accommodation was an issue raised by virtually every employer who has been active in hiring entry-level or lower-paid labour positions, whether it is auto salespeople, nurses, police officers, hotel management, concrete manufacturers, social workers, or any others. It remains one of the significant issues facing the Region, particularly since these same employers reported significant difficulty, in common with others in the GTA, in attracting new recruits.

14. "Traffic Congestion is having an Impact on business operations."

Comment:

As indicated elsewhere in this Report, this conclusion from the 2000 interviews is even more true from the employers interviewed in 2004. Numerous examples of the impact on business operations have been given. In 2004, for employers making deliveries or putting employees on the road, or for most employers in the southern tier, this is the number one issue that they want the Region to address.

15. "Local transit systems do not meet the needs of commuters."

Comment:

Employers in more "remote" locations do not expect any transit system to be feasible that would permit their employees to commute by transit. However, many employers did make a number of suggestions for transit improvements on behalf of their lower-paid employees, students, single parents, and part-time employees. These included better east-west connections in the southern tier, more frequent service in the Barrie/Bradford/ Newmarket/Yonge St corridor, more routes and more stops in Georgina, service to the primary industrial areas, better connections to the TTC and GO bus, and more routes/ more frequency between Newmarket and Georgina/East Gwillimbury. Several employers urged more routes/ more frequent service using smaller, less-expensive-to-operate buses. Three employers urged YRT to consider the Georgina Transit subsidized "dial-a-ride" as a possible model for expanded service.

Several employers had praise both for the GO service and for the recent transit improvements initiated by YRT. Clearly, however, the expectations for future transit service are very high. More transit is seen as a partial solution for road congestion, as a means of reducing the hassle and unreliability of commuting for their employees, and as an important advantage for employers in retaining and attracting employees in lower-paying positions.

