

Building on the Success of Public Transit in York Region:

York Region Transit – Marketing and Communications Plan 2005/2006

DRAFT 3

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the last three years, York Region Transit has integrated the brand, routes and operations of five separate municipal systems. Our marketing activities during this period of amalgamation have focused on the “basics” – integrating the system’s identity as YRT, consolidating routes and providing customers with the information that they need to use the system. Our efforts have been successful. Research with 400 users and non-users in the Region show that YRT is clearly identified as the local transit service with 97% of respondents aware of it.

At the same time, only 44% of respondents in the Region express familiarity with YRT’s services. This means that there are significant opportunities to build awareness of YRT services that will in turn drive increased use with potential riders.

The goal of the 2005/2006 marketing plan is to build on the success of the last three years, create increased familiarity with the system to build ridership and continue to build the strong link between YRT and the health, sustainability and quality of life in the Region.

2005/2006 Marketing and Communications Strategy

Our strategy is to use marketing and communications activities for three important purposes:

1. *Inform* current passengers of YRT of service changes and improvements to retain them as riders and where possible increase their use by providing service that meets their needs
2. *Build awareness and, then use* of YRT services (including Rapid transit) with non-users who might use the system (or recommend it to others such as children and employees) were they to know about services and see them in a positive light.
3. *Generate support* for public transit among York Region residents, businesses and community leaders. One key learning from recent research is the value placed by users and non users alike on public transit as a key factor in quality of life and pride in the region.

Target Markets

Given the realities of car ownership and use in the Region and our resources, marketing efforts will be focused on targeting those audiences that have the most potential to remain and grow as YRT users. Our research shows that among people who chose transit we must target young adults between the ages of 18 – 25. These are people who often start as transit users and then drop off or graduate to using a car. Another target group are new residents who, if they are familiar with transit options, may delay the purchase of a second or third car. In addition, we will target occasional users of all ages who may be persuaded to use transit more often for more trips.

With respect to building support for transit, our efforts will focus on building the link between transit a healthy and vibrant economy and quality of life in the Region among key business and community audiences.

Target Messages

Much of our marketing and communications must focus on informing current riders about current and new services and changes. For example, one of our challenges in association with YRTP will be to educate current riders of the new fare media that will go into effect in September 2005.

In respect to growing transit use, our research as well as research by other transit operators in North America clearly shows that while community benefits (i.e. economic growth and sustainability, environmental factors) are important it is personal benefits (convenience, cost/benefit, comfort and stress-free travel) that are the prime motivators for people to use transit or not use it. Based on this important foundation, our messages will be targeted to our key audiences depending on what we want them to do – use transit, be aware of transit or support transit.

Key Media

Using our resources effectively means finding the best way to get our message to our target audiences. Our marketing activities will use three channels to reach our target audiences:

1. Community Outreach, Events and Promotion – Becoming and being seen as an integral part of the community will be a key focus of our activities. This will be done through continuing and adding to our community presence at events in the Region. Our plan is to focus this community outreach around community oriented themes not just transit. Because building ridership among the younger residents of the Region is important to sustaining transit use we plan to increase communications and activities in the schools and to parents of school-age kids. A key component of our community outreach program this year will be to develop partnerships with local businesses in the form of sponsorship opportunities.
2. Traditional media – Given the cost of traditional media (advertising, posters etc.) we will use this very cautiously. However, there will be some occasions where this will be feasible
3. Brand Refresh – One of the key learning from our research is that while the YRT brand is recognized, transit is seen as “not for people like me.” One of our activities this year will be to “refresh” the YRT brand image through imagery and messages to bring it more in line with our riders and target riders as a reasonable alternative to driving.

YRT/YRTP

Our plan has been developed with careful consideration of the impact and opportunities that Rapid transit presents to the Region and to YRT. This is important for several reasons. First, it is the best way to make the benefits of YRT and Rapid evident to our customers, residents and businesses. It clear that Rapid can and will have a “halo” effect on all transit provided by the Region. Second, it is the best way to use our resources effectively. When we are out in the community we will represent one system and as much as possible find ways to maximize the effectiveness and synergy of YRT and YRTP marketing efforts over the next 12 – 18 months.