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YORK REGION TRANSIT TRAVEL TRAINING PROGRAM

The Transit Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, December 19, 2006, from the Commissioner of Transportation and Works:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the York Region Transit Travel Training Program update be received for information.

2. PURPOSE

This report provides an update on the development of the York Region Transit (YRT) Travel Training Program including the rationale behind the program, a summary of the program elements and a description of the implementation plan. This program provides a training package to improve the knowledge, skills and/or confidence to take full advantage of YRT/Viva services.

3. BACKGROUND

There are two criteria that must be met if YRT is to expand its market to accommodate the growing number of people with physical and cognitive disabilities:

1. An accessible infrastructure so everyone can safely access transit stations, bus stops and vehicles.
2. A targeted education program for customers who need assistance, support and encouragement to use the system.

YRT has made many accessibility improvements in recent years. In addition to having a policy to purchase only low-floor accessible vehicles, YRT has an aggressive bus stop retrofit program which improves accessibility at over 200 bus stops each year. With half of our 4,000 stops already accessible, full system accessibility is planned by 2015. However, some potential riders require additional knowledge, skills or confidence to plan and make a trip on the system, including finding information about how to get to a bus stop, purchase and use of fare media, expected assistance from bus operators, etc.

YRT recognized the need for a systematic approach to help people use transit as part of the original Mobility Plus Five-Year Service Plan (2002). This need was then further

scoped in the Region's 2006 Accessibility Plan, where it was proposed that a formal Travel Training Program be developed. It was recognized that, not only does York Region need to provide transit services for persons with disabilities who cannot access conventional transit services, there is also a need to ensure that the option exists for those who have the potential for using conventional services for at least some of their trips. The increased use of the conventional transit system could also reduce the demand for the specialized door-to-door service, Mobility Plus, thus increasing capacity for those who have no other transportation alternative.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Program Overview

YRT's Travel Training Program will consist of a comprehensive training manual, participant learning materials/handouts and a communications piece which provides a summary of what's available to both trainers and participants.

4.1.1 What is Travel Training

The initial steps in the development of the program included an accessibility inventory of both services and infrastructure offered by YRT. YRT staff, along with iTrans Consultants, spent a considerable amount of time reviewing the current state of transit accessibility with the objective of setting clear direction of the best approach to develop a comprehensive and effective program. The first step was the completion of a best practices review and a discussion relating to who should deliver the program, the target audience for the program, how to introduce a pilot program and, finally, how best to implement a sustainable program.

4.1.2 Best Practices Review

With the assistance of iTrans Consulting, a review was conducted of existing travel training programs across Canada and North America. Programs from various jurisdictions were reviewed and, where appropriate, different aspects of the programs were incorporated into YRT's draft training materials. For example, sample programs from London, Edmonton, Calgary, Vancouver, New York City and Easter Seals were reviewed in detail with the best and/or most relevant elements of the various programs captured in the development of YRT's program.

4.1.3 Training Manual Elements

The draft Travel Training Manual is a detailed and comprehensive document which provides a step-by-step guide on how to use conventional transit services. The draft manual is customized to reflect service conditions across York Region. Clear direction is provided for everything from contacting customer service information to disembarking from a vehicle at the end of one's trip. Some of the specific elements in the draft Manual are directions relating to:

- Reading route maps and bus schedules
- Recognizing YRT/Viva buses, bus stops and landmarks
- How to get on and off the bus (ambulatory and wheelchair/scooter users)
- How to pay the transit fare
- How to transfer between buses
- Recognizing differences between YRT/Viva, TTC, Brampton and GO Transit services
- Personal safety issues
- Securing mobility devices on buses
- Preparing for an emergency
- Determining which bus to take
- Knowing your start and end point
- How to get to the bus stop
- Knowing the route number(s) and name(s)
- What to take on the trip
- Request stop program
- Courtesy seating
- Guaranteed ride home
- Lost articles policy
- Asking the bus driver for assistance

Now that a draft of the Travel Training Manual has been prepared, it is proposed that the training materials be presented to a stakeholder focus group. The purpose of the focus group is to solicit feedback regarding:

- Relevance of training materials
- Detail of instruction materials and effectiveness of presentation
- Delivery options for a variety of target groups
- Pilot program options
- General comments and suggestions

The focus group is scheduled to meet in mid-January, with YRT staff taking into consideration their feedback for the final version of the Training Manual.

4.2 Need to Determine Scope of Training and Method of Delivery

4.2.1 Train-the-Trainer

It is proposed that once the Travel Training Manual is complete, the program be presented to would-be trainers across York Region. For example, training staff from the CNIB, Association for Community Living, and other community social service agencies would be trained by York Region staff to deliver the program to their clientele. York Region staff would be available to provide the materials and support the program as

needed (e.g. YRT would be responsible to keep the materials updated, offer the materials free of charge to service agencies, provide information and support).

4.2.2 Free Fares During Pilot Program

In order to encourage the use of conventional transit services, it has been proposed that during the initial pilot period of the program, all registered Mobility Plus customers access conventional transit services free of charge. It is also proposed that, anyone who is a client of a service agency affiliated with the Train-the-Trainer program, receive free service during their training period.

4.3 Relationship to Vision 2026

Vision 2026 calls for the provision of an integrated and accessible transit network. To support this goal, YRT has identified and will implement numerous measures, guidelines, policies and programs which improve access to the transit system for anyone who wishes to travel in York Region. The Travel Training Program outlined in this report is an initiative that will provide the education and support for those who require extra assistance to access the Region's public transit services.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

It is estimated that this pilot program will be self-sustaining due to the cost-savings realized by some Mobility Plus customers switching to conventional YRT/VIVA services for at least a portion of their transportation needs. The 2006 average cost/trip on conventional transit is \$4.50 versus the Mobility Plus trip cost of \$22.50, a savings of about \$18 per trip. YRT staff will closely monitor the use of this program to estimate the annual cost savings.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

There are no local municipal impacts associated with this initiative.

7. CONCLUSION

Travel training empowers people to use regular (conventional) transit, where they can travel spontaneously, be more independent and improve their quality of life. YRT's Travel Training Program is designed to help potential customers gain the knowledge, skills and confidence to get to and from employment, medical, leisure, shopping or social destinations.

In light of the new Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) legislation, it is clear that York Region has a mandate to provide accessible public transit options for all. Having a comprehensive and effective Travel Training Program will provide the

means to train and educate all York Region residents to use conventional public transit services, notably persons with physical and cognitive disabilities.

For more information on this report contact Irene McNeil, Manager, Service Planning (Ext. 5628), of the Transit Branch in the Transportation and Works Department.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.