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YORK REGION TRANSIT - VIVA A CHANNEL PARTNERSHIP

The Rapid Transit Public/Private Partnership Steering Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report January 11, 2006, from the Commissioner of Transportation and Works and the Vice President, York Region Rapid Transit Corporation:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council approve a three-year contract extension, from February 1, 2006 to January 31, 2009, for the partnership with the A Channel to provide live York Region Transit - Viva updates from the Transit Operations Centre.
2. The Regional Chair and Regional Clerk be authorized to sign the necessary contract, subject to review by Legal Services.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to update Regional Council on the partnership with the A Channel and to seek approval to extend the contract and partnership with the A Channel for a three-year term from February 1, 2006 to January 31, 2009.

3. BACKGROUND

In June 2005, Regional Council approved a six-month pilot project partnership (August 1, 2005 to January 31, 2006) between YRT - Viva and the A Channel (formally the New VR). The A Channel is positioned as York Region's dedicated TV station with news centres now located in Aurora, Markham and Vaughan. This partnership provides residents throughout York Region with live transit updates during the morning rush period and eventually during the evening rush period as well.

Currently, during CITY TV's Breakfast Television program broadcast on the A Channel, there are live inserts that include York Region news, traffic and transit updates. YRT - Viva is mentioned by the host when the transit segment is introduced and the logos appear on screen when the YRT - Viva transit reporter is speaking. Local events being held throughout the Region are also promoted on-air during the segment. Currently, the transit updates are broadcast live five times during the morning show, beginning at 6:35

a.m. According to CHUM, this is the largest morning show in Canada, with 1.3 million viewers each week.

The same promotional opportunities will be available in the evening beginning in 2006. The A Channel reaches more than 3.8 million viewers each week, including 245,000 viewers in York Region.

As well as live transit updates, the YRT-Viva transit segments are being promoted in A Channel traffic advertisements, and links have been established between the YRT and Viva Web sites to the A Channel site.

YRT - Viva is also exploring other cross-promotional opportunities with the A Channel including co-branded ads for community newspapers, YRT shelters and buses. Promotional partnering opportunities are not only cost effective but also provide additional means to communicate to a common audience.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

This partnership with the A Channel provides YRT - Viva with a regular presence on mainstream television, touching tens of thousands of viewers daily at minimal cost. This television exposure has not only raised awareness of the family of transit services available in York Region, it is providing people with up-to-date transit information during the morning rush period.

Although there has not been a formal survey conducted, the Manager of A Channel's News and Operations indicated there is plenty of anecdotal evidence to suggest people are tuning in. Viewers are sending emails and calling in to make comment about the live traffic and transit reports, and in fact people are upset if the reports are not broadcast for some reason, such as illness.

The YRT - Viva transit reporter communicates route changes, delays, accidents, construction areas and special community events for both YRT and Viva services. These transit updates provide customers with a convenient way of obtaining the latest transit information thereby alleviating some of the pressure on the YRT information line.

Through this partnership, the A Channel is establishing a solid foothold in the community. Their viewers now have access to real-time transit information that is only available from the YRT - Viva operations centre. The transit reporter is clearly playing a significant role in the success of the A Channel's morning news and information program.

4.1 YRT-Viva Transit Reporter Position

YRT received 2006 budget approval to hire two part-time transit reporters, one for the morning shift and one for the evening. The transit reporters are responsible for gathering and delivering real time and breaking transit information during live segments on the A Channel.

For the past six months, Team Viva member Rebekah Murdock has been writing and delivering the live transit reports. The A Channel has provided Rebekah with training and direction to help her develop her on-air skills. They have also provided training for our backup reporter Tamara Williams.

4.1.1 A.M. Shift

The reporter fills five 45 second segments during the Breakfast Television show which runs from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. Monday to Friday.

The reporter is responsible for allowing enough time before the show to gather the appropriate information from the operations centre, the YRT - Viva community event calendar, the YRT and Viva Web sites, the A Channel newsroom, etc., and then write a 30-45 second script.

The reporter is required to call the show producer, test the equipment and be in position to comfortably deliver the report. It is also the reporter's responsibility to ensure he or she is presentable for TV (meeting A Channel standards) as he or she acts as a YRT - Viva Ambassador.

The reporter delivers the information by standing in front of a stationary camera in the YRT - Viva operations centre. The reporter wears an ear piece in order to receive audio cues from the television control room, and, when the cue is given, delivers the report and signs-off.

Between segments, the reporter continues to collect updated transit information and lookout for breaking news, such as accidents, storms, etc. If something of note occurs, the reporter contacts the producer and possibly breaks in with a live update.

4.1.2 Proposed P.M. Shift

The reporter would fill at least two 45 second segments during the 5:30 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. news shows. The process would be the same as the A.M. shift and will begin in early 2006.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The financial requirements for the Region are minimal. A Channel has invested in the necessary equipment and is paying the rental fee on the Bell Line to their studio in Vaughan. The Region is responsible to provide the two part-time staff reporter positions

(value \$50,000 annually) which is included in the approved 2006 Business Plan and Budget. The value associated with on-air time provided to YRT - Viva is estimated to be approximately \$200,000 annually.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

People throughout York Region and the GTA now have access to real time transit information on a daily basis. Before leaving home, they can tune into the A Channel and find out about route changes, delays, accidents, or construction. They can also find out about YRT - Viva participation at community events.

7. CONCLUSION

This has proven to be a valuable partnership opportunity for YRT – Viva, offering multiple benefits to its residents. It has not only expanded communication opportunities, but has raised the profile of the family of transit services available in York Region by providing residents with current transit information, and another reason to leave their cars at home.

This is seen as a win-win situation for both partners as York Region seeks to promote its significant investment in an improved public transit system and the A Channel establishes its new brand in the Region.

It is recommended that the partnership agreement between York Region and the A Channel be extended for a three-year term until January 31, 2009.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.