

4

CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY UPDATE

The Finance and Administration Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, October 6, 2004, from the Commissioner of Corporate Services:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that this report be received for information.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update on the implementation of the Region's Customer Service Strategy.

3. BACKGROUND

On June 28, 2001, Council adopted the Region's Customer Service Strategy. Over the past three years there have been a number of major initiatives that are part of the Region's ongoing commitment to serving its customers. We have been reporting on these each year. This report covers initiatives from June 2003 to June 2004.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Major Initiatives

During the past year the Region has undertaken or continued a number of major initiatives designed to improve service to its 873,000 residents, its businesses and other customers. Included among these are:

- Continued its major investment in water and wastewater (\$456 million), transit (\$160 million) and roads ((\$142.9 million) infrastructure to serve present and future customers
- Approved \$50 million and obtained an additional \$100 million in funding from the Provincial and Federal Governments to begin the Quick Start rapid transit initiative in the Yonge Street and Highway 7 corridors
- Awarded the contract for the new waste management facility on Bales (Garfield Wright) Drive
- Acquired three new mobility buses, 35 new conventional buses, 44 used conventional buses and assumed various route extensions and operation of two GO transit routes (total transit revenue vehicle hours of service went up by about 75% between 2000 and 2003)

- Partnered with area municipalities' fire services to establish three new permanent emergency medical services paramedic response stations
- Opened 58 new units for seniors and adults with disabilities at the Newmarket Health Centre

4.2 Customer Service Strategy Initiatives

There have also been a number of initiatives undertaken in the past year that support the Customer Service Strategy adopted by Council in June 2001. Steps continue to be taken towards implementation of the recommendations in the Strategy. These will be noted under the Strategy's ten major components.

4.2.1 Leadership

The success of the Region's Customer Service Strategy depends on the continuing and visible support of Council and Senior Management. The commitment of Council and Senior Management has been evident in:

- Council's approval and staff implementation of various infrastructure, program and service initiatives
- Council's approval of *Understanding Barriers*, York Region's first annual Accessibility Plan, geared to removing barriers to people with disabilities
- Council's approval of an e-Government subcommittee designed to improve the Region's offering of electronic information and services
- Continued customer service messaging in communications and speeches by the Regional Chair and CAO
- The continuation of a cross-departmental Customer Service Strategy Team and departmental implementation teams. The Customer Service Strategy Team currently has 17 members representing the Regional Chair's Office, the CAO's Office, the six Regional Departments and York Regional Police.

4.2.2 Continuous Planning for Improvement

Another tenet of the Customer Service Strategy is that the Region's ongoing corporate and business processes should incorporate customer service measurements and plans.

- Vision 2026, approved by Council in 2002, contains major customer service components, including a key action area entitled "Proactively Meeting the Needs of Our Customers". Vision 2026 now incorporates various performance measures relating to customer service.
- Various other corporate strategies, including the annual Business Plan and Budget, the Region's Strategic Plans and Multi-Year Program Plans have significant customer service components. The Business Plan and Budget now contains a number of customer service Key Performance Indicators (KPI's)
- The Region's Corporate Management Framework provides for customer service and efficiency as the two main indicators of staff delivery of Council's decisions
- The Chief Administrative Officer's 2004/05 Strategic Initiatives provide for improved customer service focus through enhanced stakeholder communication and measurement and through use of the Provincial Common Measurement Tool (CMT)

4.2.3 Customer Voice: Seeking the Customer's Views

Another foundation of the Region's Customer Service Strategy is seeking customer views in order to determine customer needs. In this way, the Region's services will be based on customers' direct input rather than on staff perceptions of what the customers need.

There has been a great deal of activity in this area over the past three years. Initiatives in this area over the past year include the following:

- The Region continued its annual Environics survey of its residents and businesses
- Council's Accessibility Advisory Committee and Community Services and Housing coordinated a month-long consultation to gather public input into the development of the *Understanding Barriers Accessibility Plan*
- The Region conducted an extensive internal Employee Satisfaction Survey. 1,518 employees responded for an excellent response rate of 64%. The survey confirmed that customer service is a key part of the Region's corporate culture.
- Community Services and Housing conducted customer satisfaction surveys with tenants, Ontario Works applicants and recipients, family support and child care service recipients, Enhanced Funding Program recipients, Early Intervention Services client families and *YorkLink* readers
- Health Services conducted a survey of York Region businesses that have used workplace wellness programs
- Long Term Care continued its ongoing survey of clients and families and received an overall client satisfaction rating of 96.5%
- Planning's Geomatics division continued to survey its customers on its information and services
- The 2003 external Employment Survey of the Region's businesses resulted in a revised *Business Directory and Employment Report*
- York Region Transit formed a staff improvement team to focus on suggestions stemming from its 2002 and 2003 Customer Satisfaction Surveys and from its contact centre for both conventional and specialized transit
- Transit also has its customer service representatives "step into the customer's shoes" twice a year by traveling on a bus and determining what they like or dislike about the journey
- Forestry's Nature's Classroom forest education program was adjusted to reflect feedback and comment sheets from its customers
- Transportation and Works reviewed and analysed feedback obtained through its *TW Cares* program
- The Region's web site continued to be modified in response to input received from an online survey
- The Region's surveying efforts were featured at a Provincial Government conference on measuring and managing citizen satisfaction
- Various departments, including Planning, Community Services and Housing, Health Services and Transportation and Works facilitated public forums and consultation sessions prior to recommending new corporate initiatives and policies to Council

4.2.4 Staff Development

Another element of the Region's Customer Service Strategy is that customer service should be built into all aspects of the Region's human resource practices so that staff can deliver the best possible customer service. There have been a number of initiatives in this area over the past year.

- Human Resource Services completed customer service training for 261 staff. 1,850 York Region staff have received customer service training since this program started in late 2002
- Likewise, Human Resources continued to provide an overview of the importance of customer service at all new staff orientation sessions
- Human Resources continued to ensure that customer focus is required in all job descriptions, interviews, employee core competencies and performance reviews
- The Chief Administrative Officer and Human Resources organized a leadership forum for all Commissioners, Directors and Managers
- Staff and specialist teams were formed to consider various suggestions in the Employee Satisfaction Survey in areas such as recognition/reward, communication, workload, career development, senior leadership, pay satisfaction and dealing with poor performers
- All Departments and divisions held specific sessions to respond to the Employee Satisfaction Survey results
- Human Resources initiated a staff mentoring program to provide advice from experienced staff members to newer staff members
- Health Services launched the Heart Alive program with extensive training on heart health and defibrillators to help save lives at 25 Regional facilities and at public venues
- Health Services implemented an EMS Driver Training Program
- Transit staff developed a "Winner's Guide to Customer Service" to assist transit employees in the essentials of excellent customer service
- Transit managers were provided with EAT (Employees' Appreciation Team) "kits" for employee recognition
- Finance implemented a departmental orientation package for new employees and a mentoring program that focuses on cross-training of staff
- Community Services and Housing developed and implemented a four-week Contact Centre representative training plan including a specific role playing scenario
- Information Technology Services continued to offer computer training to all staff with the option of receiving it either in person or over the Internet

4.2.5 External Communications

The Region's Customer Service Strategy is also based on giving the Region's customers information on the services it provides. Part of the Strategy is to use a variety of means to build public awareness of the Region and its services. Initiatives undertaken in the past year include:

- Corporate Communications is piloting a Social Marketing Plan to market the Region to residents. The aim is to help eliminate confusion about the two tiered structure and allow residents to better access services

- “It’s All Here!”, developed by the Human Services Planning Coalition, used a multi-partner approach to brand and market the Region as a great place to live, work, and play
- The Regional Clerk’s Office began to offer all staff reports, attachments, Committee Reports and Council Minutes on the “Regional Government” portion of the web site with hyperlinks to increase access to Council and Committee material. This led to a 45% increase in “hits” to this portion of the web site between June 2003 and June 2004
- Corporate Communications continued to post media releases from Committee and Council reports on the Region’s web site
- York Region Transit generated a ticket agent newsletter, the MY Transit newsletter (for riders) and a Mobility Plus newsletter
- Younger customers were served by Community Services and Housing in its PLAY program offering recreational opportunities for children aged 6-12 of single parents on social assistance and advertising its Kids Line phone line in all nine municipal Parks and Recreation Guides
- The Region’s youth were also served by Corporate Communications facilitating sessions for grade 5 students as part of the school board curriculum, by Health Services’ Youth Summit on Cannabis (the first of its kind in Ontario) and by Transportation and Works organizing the annual Children’s Water Festival
- The Region’s Greening Strategy and its Forestry Services Branch were promoted at over 20 different forums and venues
- Two issues of *York Works*, the Transportation and Works newsletter, were mailed directly to each household in the Region
- The Region launched communications campaigns to apprise residents and businesses of various new initiatives, including Phase 3 of the No-Smoking By-law, the West Nile Virus and Asian Long Horned Beetle management and eradication
- Regional staff from various departments attended a total of over 200 public information centres, community events, school presentations and Customer Appreciation Days

4.2.6 Telephone/Telecommunications

The telephone continues to be the most convenient way for the Region’s customers to access Regional information and services. The *Citizens First 3* survey conducted in 2002 showed that most citizens still prefer to contact Government by phone. It also showed that problems with telephone service delivery (e.g. voice mail, busy lines, the “bounce effect”) continue to affect public sector service delivery in much the same manner as they affect the private sector.

The Regional Administrative Centre switchboard, the Health Connection line, the Community Services and Housing Kids Line Contact Centre and Housing Access Centre, the Information Kiosk and York Region Transit collectively answer over 320,000 “first contact” telephone calls a year. The need to strengthen the Region’s phone system and its use was identified as a priority in the Customer Service Strategy. Initiatives taken in this area have included:

- On May 20, 2004, Council approved Phase 2 of a Five-Year Telecommunications Strategy and Implementation Plan geared to improve telephone infrastructure and service delivery
- Health, Transit and Community Services and Housing have formed a Contact Centre Best Practices Working Group
- Information Technology Services, Human Resources, Clerk's and the Region's Customer Service Manager have joined together to develop a comprehensive telephone training course that will be offered to Regional staff beginning in late 2004
- Teletype writer (TTY) was installed for riders with hearing disabilities in both conventional and specialized transit call centres
- Community Services and Housing contact centre representatives were trained on TTY machines
- Community Services and Housing reduced and standardized its Bell Blue Pages listing, resulting in increased accessibility and reduced cost
- Transit further expanded its Contact Centre hours

4.2.7 Information Technology/Web Services

The Customer Service Strategy also provides for improvement in employee access to computers and information and to public access to the Region via its web site and through e-government initiatives. The number of regional employees outfitted with personal computers has grown from 1,150 in 2001 to 1,827 in 2003. Improvements over the past year in this area include:

- Information Technology Services staff successfully completed migration to both Microsoft Windows and Office XP for all Regional Departments and staff. Windows XP contains faster search and information organizing capabilities for improving customer service
- The Region's web site, various departmental areas of the web site and the Character Community web site were modified to respond to customer suggestions and improve navigability
- The Council/Committee ("Regional Government") portion of the web site was viewed by over 42,000 customers in the past year
- Similarly, almost 19,000 customers viewed geographic information online through York Explorer (a 625% increase) and 37,762 maps were downloaded (a 157% increase)
- Corporate Communications and the Regional Clerk's Office continued to respond to large numbers of customer e-mails (10,000 to 15,000 a year) over the web.
- The Region's electronic document management system makes information retrieval for customers much faster and was successfully implemented at 250 workstations with a total of over 600,000 activities
- The Finance Department introduced credit card/direct debit technology to facilitate the selling of bid documents
- The Region's Disaster Recovery Plan (DRP) was successfully tested to ensure that departments could access their systems in the event of a serious business disruption

- Community Services and Housing implemented a web-enabled “record of attendance” for child care operators, allowing operators to submit billing information electronically
- Health Services’ dental clinics implemented electronic appointment booking
- The IT helpdesk was upgraded to send e-mails to clients automatically when tickets are logged. It also sends a proposed solution to Regional staff customers and offers them the opportunity to accept or reject the solution provided
- Transportation and Works second release of “TW Cares” assisted staff in capturing customer concerns, routing them to the appropriate resource, monitoring resolution and progress and also assists in monitoring the performance based contracts with service providers

4.2.8 Property/Facilities

The Customer Service Strategy also provides for improvement of accessibility to Regional facilities and services. It provides for improvements to the Region’s physical facilities, including the investigation of opportunities to improve parking and the accessibility and comfort of the Region’s facilities. Initiatives in the past year include:

- Over 50 Regional facilities received new design, construction or renovation in 2003
- Property Services, as part of its program to maintain and improve Regional facilities, completed 19,000 facilities maintenance activities in 2003. This represents a 90% increase since 2001
- Property Services completed an accessibility review of the Regional Administrative Centre
- Long Term Care commenced renovations/construction a new 32-bed Psychiatric/Cognitive Care unit
- Property Services has now provided for electronic requests to its help desk

4.2.9 Accessibility

One of the Region’s main challenges, as outlined in the Customer Service Strategy, is to increase accessibility to its services. This can be done through a variety of means, including extending core business hours, giving the option to reach a “live voice” outlined above and pursuing strategies to support accessibility in languages other than English. Initiatives in these areas are outlined below:

- Community Services And Housing translated Child Care letters and forms into Chinese, Tamil, Farsi, Russian and Italian, based on demographic research
- Health’s Lay Health Educator Program trained 11 women from the Chinese community to deliver health education sessions in Cantonese and Mandarin
- Community Services And Housing rolled out a new strategy to provide Social Assistance applicants the option of using their own personal interpreters
- Community Services And Housing improved the quality and efficiency of service to customers by streamlining service delivery for Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), by providing a single point of contact for ODSP clients and community agencies
- York’s Children Water Festival was extended by one day to give more children access and was attended by a record 5,000 students

- The Career Line phone number was added by Human Resources to enable people with disabilities to check employment postings
- Appointment times in preventive dental clinics were extended to 4:00 p.m.
- York Region Transit began the installation of 1,000 new YRT bus signs to increase the public's awareness of accessibility to transit services
- Both the Newmarket and Maple Health Centres expanded accessibility to mental health services for the Region's seniors

4.2.10 Service Standards

The Customer Service Strategy contains a number of standards that provide for access to a "live voice" during normal business hours and for the timeliness of responses to telephone calls, correspondence, e-mail and complaints. Timeliness was highlighted as a major customer need in the most recent Citizens First survey.

During the first two years of the Strategy, the focus was on communicating the standards to Regional staff and on training staff on how to meet and exceed these standards. More emphasis is now being placed on trying to improve response times in order to better serve the customers.

- High-level customer service targets are being established, tracked and monitored as part of the Region's Key Performance Indicators
- Planning, Court Services, Regional Clerk's, EMS and Transit, to name five, are measuring various forms of timeliness/response times as part of their KPI's
- The Region is a key participant in the Ontario Municipal Benchmarking Initiative's (OMBI's) customer service panel that is seeking to establish key performance indicators and benchmarks for day-to-day customer service transactions
- The Region is one of the leaders in a Customer Service working group involving staff from 13 municipalities in southern Ontario and the Greater Toronto Area that is reviewing best practices in customer service in the municipal environment

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The costs of implementing the Customer Service Strategy are contained in the 2004 Business Plan and Budget. They are part of the Region's ongoing way of providing service to its residents and businesses.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The Region shares the same customers as local municipalities. Local municipalities are the Region's customers. Improvements to customer service benefit local municipalities and all of our mutual customers

7. CONCLUSION

Council's adoption of the Customer Service Strategy in 2001 was part of the Region's ongoing commitment to serving its customers. Customer service is established as an integral component of the Region's corporate culture.

There have been a significant number of customer service "successes" over the past year. These signal the continuing long-term commitment of Council, Senior Management and Regional staff to our primary goal of serving our customers.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.