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YORK REGION TRANSIT MOBILITY PLUS CROSS-BOUNDARY TRIAL SERVICE - UPDATE

The Transit Committee recommends the following:

- 1. Receipt of the presentation by Irene McNeil, Manager, Service Planning and Steve Baldo, Supervisor, Contract Administration, York Region Transit; and**
- 2. Adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report dated January 29, 2009, from the Commissioner of Transportation Services, with the following additional recommendation:**
 - 3. Staff be required to personally contact all riders affected by the proposed discontinued cross-boundary locations and provide individual assistance to them in finding alternative services.**

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. The revised list of York Region Transit Mobility Plus cross-boundary service locations within the City of Toronto, as noted in this report, be approved.
2. An additional location, Community Head Injury Resource Services, at 62 Finch Avenue West, which is a Central Local Health Integrated Health Network-funded facility, be added on an interim basis only. Further, that a request be made for the cost of the cross-boundary portion of the trip to be subsidized by the Network.

2. PURPOSE

This report updates Regional Council on the York Region Transit (YRT) Mobility Plus cross-boundary service to selected locations within the City of Toronto.

3. BACKGROUND

York Region has recognized the long history of cross-boundary service issues along the YRT/TTC boundary

At its September 2004 meeting, Regional Council approved a YRT staff report summarizing the recommendations of a study prepared by Entra Consultants regarding a

number of Mobility Plus service initiatives planned for 2005. One of the recommendations dealt with the provision of cross-boundary services to the City of Toronto.

At that time, Mobility Plus cross-boundary service was provided only from the City of Vaughan into the City of Toronto, a policy pre-dating transit amalgamation in 2001. The Toronto service area boundary was Highway 401 to the south, Yonge Street to the east, and the Regional Municipality of Peel to the west. These trips were provided on a single-fare basis. Following amalgamation, this policy continued for Vaughan-based trips; however, Mobility Plus registrants from other parts of the Region could not avail themselves of this service.

Based on the need to remove this service inequity, staff recommended and received approval from Regional Council to conduct a one-year pilot whereby all eligible Mobility Plus registrants would be offered cross-boundary service, on a single fare, to selected City of Toronto destinations. YRT staff would conduct an annual review of the destinations and adjust the number of locations based on usage and the availability of similar services within York Region.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 CROSS-BOUNDARY DESTINATIONS AND RIDERSHIP

Cross-boundary locations are reviewed annually and recommendations made based on usage or availability of the same services within the Region

The cross-boundary destinations, for the pilot, were selected based on the most commonly requested locations north of Highway 401. Included in the list were hospitals, major medical facilities, social service agencies, major educational institutions, three accessible subway stations (Finch, Downsview and Don Mills), and one multi-unit residential location (4000 Don Mills Road at Steeles Avenue, which was added during the trial with Council approval).

As part of this review, staff has identified 14 of 40 destinations with low usage and suggest removing them from the list. These are locations that generate under 100 return trips per year (less than two return trips per week) or where like services are offered within York Region or no longer exist. This is the case for Earl Bales Park and Kipling Acres Nursing Home. Programs that were once offered in these facilities have ended. *Attachment 1* includes an updated list of destinations which YRT Mobility Plus will continue to service and *Attachment 2* is a corresponding map showing the locations.

A total of approximately 12,000 trips were made to/from the cross-boundary locations during 2008. Trips to/from the four transfer locations along Steeles Avenue are not included in this total. This represents a 4% share of the total Mobility Plus trips

(294,000). At a cost of approximately \$31 per trip, the total cost for cross-boundary trips is approximately \$372,000 annually. This is more or less equal to the average cost of trips provided within York Region.

Staff recommends the temporary addition of 62 Finch Avenue West as an additional cross-boundary location

A request was received from Community Head Injury Resource Services (CHIRS) to service their program located at 62 Finch Avenue West (Yonge and Finch) directly. Three additional requests were also received from clients who live within York Region and attend this program.

Staff's initial response was that these passengers can transfer with TTC Wheel-Trans at a transfer point along Steeles Avenue to reach this destination. The program and the caregivers of the clients disagree, and state that any transfer can leave an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) passenger disoriented, fatigued and confused.

Mobility Plus staff has since been informed by the Executive Director of the program that a location within York Region boundaries is being sought to expand their service and will accommodate these clients. It is with this knowledge that staff recommends the Finch Avenue West location be added on a temporary basis until a suitable location is found within the Region.

Mobility Plus will service locations south of Steeles Avenue that have driveways directly off Steeles Avenue

Passengers often request transportation to shopping facilities south of Steeles Avenue whose driveways are directly off Steeles Avenue. In being consistent with the current practice of the conventional transit services (where buses pick-up and drop-off on the south side of Steeles Avenue), Mobility Plus will continue to provide this service for users, provided that the location has a direct access off Steeles Avenue or a Steeles Avenue address.

4.2 OPERATIONAL IMPACTS OF CROSS-BOUNDARY SERVICE

Cross-boundary trips impact the availability of vehicles needed throughout the Region

Although cross-boundary trips account for a relatively minor portion of total trips, one of the issues raised at an operational level is the limited opportunity for linked or shared trips with other passengers. As a result, the majority of cross-boundary trips deadhead (i.e. travel without a passenger) in one direction or the other.

The provision of this trial cross-boundary service has had an impact on service and vehicle availability when trying to accommodate client trip requests within the Region.

For example, some of the cross-boundary trips are provided by YRT's small buses rather than minivans or sedans. This is primarily the case when transporting customers who use very large scooters or wheelchairs. As a result, there have been instances where other Regional trips have had to be re-scheduled to accommodate this situation.

Also, due to the relatively infrequent cross-boundary trip activity, bus capacity and linked/shared ride opportunities are not available, as is the case with Region-based trips. Contracted service providers have also raised this concern, since there is limited opportunity to obtain a return ride, resulting in substantial trip deadheading (without remuneration).

It is also noteworthy that a vehicle scheduled to go south of Steeles will generally require twice the time to provide the trip compared to a trip of the same distance within the Region because of traffic congestion.

4.3 RIDES TO CENTRAL LHIN-FUNDED FACILITIES

The cross-boundary portion of trips going to Local Health Integration Network-funded facilities may be subsidized by the Central Network

Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) are not-for-profit corporations established by the Ministry of Health that work with local health providers and community members to determine the health service priorities of the various regions of the province. York Region is in the Central Network.

Local Health Integration Networks are responsible for planning, funding and managing health services in their communities. They do not provide services directly, but are responsible for integrating services in each of their specific geographic areas.

The Network funds many of the programs Mobility Plus provides trips to south of Steeles Avenue (e.g. the CHIRS facility at 62 Finch Avenue West). A formal request should be made to the Central LHIN to fund the portion of the trip that is beyond York Region's borders.

4.4 LACK OF RECIPROCITY WITH TTC WHEEL-TRANS SERVICES

One of the major obstacles for York Region residents registered with Mobility Plus is the inability to access TTC Wheel-Trans services

Within the province of Ontario, most specialized transit operations accommodate cross-boundary travel requests by designating transfer locations on the border between adjacent municipalities. It is not common practice for specialized services to provide direct trips into the adjacent municipality.

Other than the locations included in this pilot, YRT Mobility Plus has transfer arrangements with both the Region of Peel (at William Osler Health Centre) and Durham Region (at Markham-Stouffville Hospital).

At this time, reciprocal client acceptance is the normal industry practice. Customers registered with one specialized service are automatically accepted by other service providers. However, this is not the case with the TTC Wheel-Trans service.

TTC Wheel-Trans eligibility is strictly based only on a physical inability to use conventional transit. YRT's Mobility Plus eligibility criteria are broader and include anyone who cannot use conventional transit services due to a functional disability. Therefore, not all registrants of YRT's Mobility Plus qualify for Wheel-Trans service.

The implications of this eligibility gap means that, without the direct cross-boundary service, many customers destined to the Toronto locations would be without accessible public transit.

ENTRA Consulting is currently assisting Mobility Plus in the preparation of an Operational Plan including the integration with surrounding GTA Transit Systems

A portion of their assignment will be to identify a cross-boundary strategy for Mobility Plus, particularly as it relates to the City of Toronto, that meets passenger needs and allows an equitable distribution of service throughout the Region.

In this activity, ENTRA and YRT staff will meet with Metrolinx, who are responsible for co-ordination of transit planning through the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA). They will explore the agency's intentions for the integration of specialized transit services throughout the GTHA.

The recently-released draft Accessible Transportation Standard, prepared pursuant to the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), does not provide clear direction on eligibility reciprocity, or the provision of service between adjacent municipalities, other than to require connections to be facilitated. It is clear that Metrolinx will have a significant role to play in resolving these issues.

4.5 RELATIONSHIP TO VISION 2026

Vision 2026 calls for the provision of an integrated and accessible transit network. The trial cross-boundary service addressed an initial inequity that existed for some Mobility Plus customers. It also allowed staff to assess the impact cross-boundary service would have on the availability within the Region. Based on the results of the trial, it is obvious that the transportation needs of Regional residents are not necessarily met by services provided just within the Region itself. By providing limited cross-boundary service into

Toronto, Mobility Plus provides a responsive and unique transit solution for individuals who need the service to maintain and enhance their quality of life.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

With an average cost per passenger in 2008 of \$31, the total cost to provide cross-boundary trips to and from the City of Toronto was approximately \$372,000. This represents 4% of overall contracted trip expenditures. There is no distinguishable cost difference for intra-Regional vs. cross-boundary trips.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The implementation of the cross-boundary service to selected locations within the City of Toronto addressed the need to provide a more equitable service to all registrants of Mobility Plus regardless of their place of residence within the Region.

7. CONCLUSION

The Mobility Plus Service Implementation Initiative report, as approved by Regional Council in September 2004, was directed at moving YRT Mobility Plus closer to its vision wherein seniors and persons with disabilities would have convenient access to a variety of transportation options. The provision of cross-boundary trips to selected locations within the City of Toronto on a trial basis was undertaken to remove an existing inequity to the registrants of Mobility Plus and to allow staff the opportunity to measure the operating and financial impacts of providing this service.

The continuation of cross-boundary service to selected destinations within the City of Toronto is recommended for the following reasons:

1. Cross-boundary trips generate a relatively small portion (about 4%) of total Mobility Plus trips.
2. Cross-boundary trips provide York Region residents with access to important medical services and day programs that may not be available within the Region.
3. There is no basis to assume that a similar trip within the York Region boundary would be shorter in distance or cost less.
4. Without reciprocity with TTC Wheel-Trans service, many current cross-boundary customers would find themselves without accessible transit services.

It is recommended that the revised list of cross-boundary service locations in the City of Toronto be approved as outlined in this report.

For more information on this report, please contact Sharon Doyle, Manager, Mobility Plus, at Ext. 5634.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The two attachments referred to in this clause are attached to this report.)