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YORK REGION TRANSIT
2006 RIDERSHIP GROWTH STRATEGY AND ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Transit Committee recommends:

1. **The presentation by Irene McNeil, Manager, Service Planning be received; and**

2. **The recommendations contained in the following report, January 26, 2006, from the Commissioner of Transportation and Works be adopted:**

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. The York Region Transit 2006 Ridership Growth Strategy and Asset Management Plan, as outlined in this report, be endorsed.

2. The Regional Clerk forward the 2006 Ridership Growth Strategy and Asset Management Plan to the Ministry of Transportation Ontario for consideration.

2. PURPOSE

The development of a municipal transit ridership growth strategy and asset management plan is a requirement for receiving provincial gas tax funding. The plan needs to be developed, approved in principle by Council, and submitted to the Ministry of Transportation by March 31, 2006.

3. BACKGROUND

In October 2004, the Province of Ontario announced its commitment to invest a portion of gas taxes collected in Ontario public transit systems. Over a three-year period, approximately $680 million of the provincial gas tax will flow to transit systems, starting with one cent a litre of the tax, and growing to one-and-a-half cents by October 2006 and two cents in October 2007. The goal of this Provincial investment is to increase overall ridership through the expansion of service levels and public transportation capital infrastructure.

It is recognized that increasing overall transit market share is not only linked to the availability and quality of public transit operations, but is also directly impacted by transit supportive land-use policies, parking policies and the availability of transportation demand management programs.

On January 1, 2001, The Regional Municipality of York assumed responsibility for the funding and operation of public transit (conventional and specialized transit services) throughout York Region. With the assumption of public transit, York Region began an aggressive program of transit investment, all of which contribute to the future growth of transit ridership and transit market share.

The Ministry of Transportation has prepared guidelines for the development of both Ridership Growth Strategies and Transit Asset Management Plans. A Ridership Growth Strategy should include information relating to operating and capital initiatives (both from a broader strategic perspective, as well as more detailed service initiatives), general transit supportive planning policies, system performance measures and any other initiatives that support and encourage transit ridership growth. The Transit Asset Management Plan should address all physical assets including vehicles, facilities, passenger amenities and other supporting infrastructure. It should also outline the financial requirements and funding sources related to the assets described in the Plan.

The Region's plan (*Attachment 1*) provides a summary of the key policies, programs, initiatives and studies that contribute to the overall success of public transit in the Region. The following is a list of the referenced materials in Plan:

- York Region Transit (YRT - Conventional) 5-Year Service Plan (2002 – Update 2006-2010) and YRT Mobility Plus 5-Year Plan (2002)
- York Rapid Transit Business Plan (2004) and Network Plan (2004)
- YRT/Viva Marketing and Communication Plan 2006 (December 2005)
- York Region Transportation Master Plan (2002 – Update 2007-2036)
- Vision 2026, York Region Official Plan (2004) and Regional Centres and Corridors Strategy
- York Region Great Regional Streets Study (Draft December 2005)
- York Region Employee Trip Reduction Program (September 2005)
- Smart Commute Initiative, Transportation Demand Management and TMAs in York Region
- York Region Accessibility Plan 2006
- York Region 2006 Transit Budget and Business Plan

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The above referenced materials all represent critical planning milestones in terms of developing a framework for the future success of a balanced transportation network and public transit ridership growth in York Region. York Region is one of the fastest growing areas in North America, with a population of 1.3 million expected by 2026. The employment level is forecast to grow by 70% to reach almost 700,000 over that same time period. Most of this growth is planned in the southern half of the Region, with the two main transportation corridors, Yonge Street and Highway 7, being the primary conduits for development.

The materials referenced in the Ridership Growth Strategy and Transit Asset Management Plan have a direct impact in contributing to successful growth management in the Region. Comprehensive stakeholder consultation has been a key element in developing the materials and all of the above noted plans, programs and studies have been endorsed by Regional Council and the affected local municipal governments. Copies of the referenced materials are readily available either on the Region's website or by contacting the Region's representatives.

4.1 Specialized Services (Mobility Plus)

As indicated earlier in the background section of this report, The Regional Municipality of York assumed both conventional and specialized transit services on January 1, 2001. Specialized Transit (YRT Mobility Plus) is an accessible public transit service for those persons who are disabled and unable to use accessible conventional transit and who meet specific eligibility requirements. Mobility Plus is a share-ride, escorted door-to-door transportation service provided by contracted accessible buses, accessible minivans and sedan vehicles to address the various registrant mobility requirements. Eligibility and applicant processing, route/trip scheduling, trip booking, customer service, marketing/information, contract auditing and compliance functions are carried out by in-house staff.

Ridership growth initiatives and service demand management within the context of specialized transit will focus on four main objectives:

1. Enhancing and expanding capacity of the system to accommodate trip demand.
2. Enhancing the quality of service for customers.
3. Undertaking initiatives to improve the efficiency and cost structure of the service.
4. Improving conventional system accessibility for easier access by persons with disabilities

The delivery of specialized public transit creates strategic planning challenges and financial pressures. In 2006, it is planned to address these challenges and financial realities through various initiatives with the goal to improve the quality of the service, while maintaining system efficiencies.

4.2 Asset Management

As noted earlier, an Asset Management Plan is required to be submitted to the Province in order to continue to receive Provincial gas tax funds. Public transit assets are managed through the capital and operating budgets. They complement the various transit initiatives listed earlier with respect to addressing the needs, strategies, plans, targets and goals. Components of the Region's Transit Asset Management Plan are listed in detail in the Asset Management Plan attachment which forms part of the submission to the Province.

4.3 Relationship to Vision 2026

The primary reason for developing a Ridership Growth Strategy is to ensure a comprehensive approach to planning for a balanced transportation network. Part of that balance is a significant transit market share of total trips, which can only be achieved if the various policies, programs and plans are followed and successfully implemented.

Vision 2026 includes a goal statement relating to the development of Infrastructure for a Growing Region, which states that:

"In 2026, York Region will have effective, efficient and environmentally sensitive transportation, waste management and water systems."

To support this goal, the Region has identified specific action areas. The following action areas have been considered for this report:

- Continuing to improve service and infrastructure for successfully integrated transit service
- Developing an optimal mix of transit service types
- Promoting transit usage as a practical and wise alternative to private vehicle use

By endorsing this document as the Ridership Growth Strategy and Asset Management Plan for York Region, the Region will continue to develop a transit supportive environment and thus contribute to the development of a more balanced transportation network.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The conditions applicable to this Provincial gas tax revenue stream are to support public transportation programs (operating and/or capital). Specifically, expenditures must relate directly to programs that promote or contribute to ridership growth.

The Federal gas tax revenue is less restrictive, in that the expenditures can be in support of a variety of environmentally sustainable municipal infrastructure programs including, of course, public transit.

Table 1
Gas Tax Revenues (Millions)

Source	2004/05	2006	2007	2008	2009
Provincial					TBD
Operating	-	$9.3			
Capital	$7.7	-	$11.3	$11.3	
Federal					TBD
Operating		$2.2	$0.04	$0.04	
Capital	$7.1	$4.9	$9.46	$11.76	
Total	**$14.8**	**$16.2**	**$20.8**	**$23.1**	

The gross operating costs for YRT range from $90M in 2006 to a forecasted $113M in 2008. Gross capital costs of $44M are budgeted in 2006; this amount is forecasted to increase to approximately $50M/year in 2008. Total annual expenditures for transit in the range of $134M to $163M are forecasted over the next three years.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Local municipalities and their representatives have been closely involved with the development of all the materials referenced in this report as either direct participants or valued stakeholders.

7. CONCLUSION

This report to Council summarizes the comprehensive approach York Region has taken and continues to take in the development of its public transit services and programs. Between 2001 (amalgamation year) and 2004, YRT revenue service hours have increased significantly, at an average of 20% per year. With the full year of operation of the new Viva bus rapid transit routes, the system service hours will increase 36% within just one year (2005-2006).

Since the amalgamation of transit services in 2001 and the end of this year, total annual ridership on the YRT system will have grown by over seven million trips. Even when taking into account the transfer of riders from GO Transit’s Yonge and Bayview routes (2003), the average rate of increase has been 9.5% per year. This rate of increase can be directly attributed to the Region’s overall population growth (average 4.5% per year), as well as to the significant increase in transit investment. It is estimated that with the introduction of Viva routes, the ridership increase between 2005 and 2006 is expected to be in the 25-30% range. This unprecedented level of investment and record ridership gains are a direct reflection of the Region’s commitment to providing high quality public transit services.

Submission of an Asset Management Plan to the Province will maintain eligibility for gas tax funding and demonstrate the Region's responsible and defined approach in its Transit assets management process.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachment referred to in this clause was included in the agenda for the February 9, 2006 Committee meeting.)