

1

YORK REGION TRANSIT 2008 MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS REVIEW

The Transit Committee recommends:

- 1. Receipt of the presentation by Irene McNeil, Manager, Service Planning and Caroline Berryman, Supervisor, Marketing, York Region Transit; and**
- 2. Adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report dated February 26, 2009, from the Commissioner of Transportation Services.**

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. This report be received for information.

2. PURPOSE

This report provides an overview of the 2008 York Region Transit (YRT)/Viva marketing and communications program activities, summarizes market research results and highlights successful marketing campaigns.

3. BACKGROUND

A marketing work plan is developed each year to guide the marketing and communication activities that will educate, inform, and engage residents

York Region is one of the fastest growing communities in the country with an annual population growth rate of about 4%. Over the past eight years since the amalgamation of transit services in the Region, the rate of transit ridership growth, at an annual average of 10.5%, has far exceeded the rate of population growth. The Region continues to add approximately 20,000 jobs and 40,000 new residents each year. This growth requires a well-planned and successful public transportation network. In 2008, some 19 million revenue passengers were carried on the YRT/Viva system.

Effective and ongoing education to key target groups is vital for both current and new residents. Planned marketing overcomes resistance to public transit through education, promotions, engagement and communication.

In 2008, the goal was to build on the momentum and success of the previous year's marketing and communications program. The 2008 plan included measurement of campaigns to gain insight into our target audiences and to effectively gauge the impact of the communication on them. Results indicated that riders were more likely to be aware of specific services such as the online automated trip planner and that there are circumstances that might trigger ridership among non-riders. These include weather, new job, perception of greater convenience in terms of service frequency, and saving money on gas and parking. This allows staff to refine products and messages for greater impact based on that research and feedback. As an example, a campaign was executed in July 2008 at the height of rising gas prices to convince non-riders to try transit. The online trip planner also received a makeover in the fall, and was promoted at several events to create awareness. Our market research indicates that a well-planned and executed marketing and education program makes public transit a relevant and viable alternative to driving for residents.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The 2008 Marketing and Communications Plan was developed to build on the success of previous years' programs

The objective of the 2008 Marketing and Communications Plan was to change modal share for transit by changing consumer behaviour. The 2008 plan identified our key target groups, essential programs, specific campaign ideas and communication messages. *Attachment 1* provides a summary of 2008 Marketing and Communications activities.

The 2008 Marketing and Communications Plan included three key principles: inform, engage, and educate

The key to informing is to ensure riders have all the information necessary to facilitate their transit experience on a daily basis. Up-to-date route maps, fare guides, schedule information and newsletters are essential for the rider.

Keeping riders engaged in transit is more than just informing them of how it works. It is about capturing their attention, drawing them in and imparting a sense of community. The goal is to make transit part of their everyday lives. In 2008, YRT participated in over 85 community events. Staff engaged the community at local malls, participated at local high school, college and university events, and partnered with business groups and businesses to make a personal connection with our various target groups. Research indicates that recall of marketing and communications is most effective when a personal connection is made through engagement at an event or as part of a program or campaign.

Education is an important principle to ensure riders and non-riders are aware of the benefits of YRT and Viva. This is done through deliberate and targeted communications, campaigns and programs that speak specifically to the individual benefits that may encourage ridership for that target segment. New route promotions and new products such as Next Bus (schedule information by email) and the Clean Air Day campaign (a national campaign to encourage drivers to try alternative ways to get to work) are examples of how the public is educated about YRT/Viva.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The YRT/Viva 2008 marketing budget was developed based on the need to provide communication resource materials to riders, build awareness of new services and products, and to continue to effectively market the individual benefits of transit to non-riders. This includes customer communication (e.g. media buys, printed route schedules and maps), ongoing educational and partnership programs targeting non-users, current customers, businesses and students.

The YRT/Viva 2008 communications and marketing budget, at \$1.7 million, represents 3.9% of total revenues and 1.4% of total operating costs. As a general rule, the transit industry average expenditure for marketing-related activities averages 1-2% of operating costs.

It takes a steady marketing investment to change consumer attitudes and perception, and to build awareness and knowledge of a service. In order to protect the investment made thus far, staff must continue to promote the benefits of transit through planned and targeted marketing and communications in upcoming years. This informative marketing provides compelling reasons to overcome resistance to public transit through education about YRT and Viva services, as well as encouraging new riders to embrace the Region's transit system.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

YRT/Viva staff work closely with local municipalities to provide information through transit displays in municipal offices, explore opportunities for partnerships, and attend local municipal events.

7. CONCLUSION

It is necessary to continue to build upon our previous success and reach out to target audiences. There is a great opportunity to continue to attract and maintain riders, with new services, new technologies and new features. To be successful, marketing and communications must let residents know about these exciting transit benefits. To ensure ongoing value and impact, ongoing tracking and research will help evaluate and refine each program and is typically conducted after major campaigns.

The 2009 marketing plan will build on the successes of 2008. It will also introduce new, exciting marketing and communications programs to meet overall transit goals and objectives.

For more information on this report, please contact Irene McNeil at Ext. 5628.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachment referred to in this clause is attached to this report.)