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YORK REGION TRANSIT INTERACTIVE VOICE RESPONSE SYSTEM FOR MOBILITY PLUS

The Transit Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report March 27, 2007, from the Commissioner of Transportation and Works:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. The Region enter into a contract with TranSched Systems Limited for the supply, installation, integration and testing of an Interactive Voice Response system for Mobility Plus in the amount of \$190,400, plus applicable taxes, pursuant to the sole source provisions of the purchasing by-law.
2. The Regional Chair and Regional Clerk be authorized to sign the above contract, subject to review by Legal Services.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to seek Regional Council authorization to enter into a contract with TranSched Systems Limited for the supply, installation, integration and testing of an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system. TranSched Systems Limited is the vendor of the TransView scheduling software currently being used by Mobility Plus schedulers and dispatchers.

3. BACKGROUND

Currently, paratransit customer trip booking, confirmation and/or cancellation requests are handled by the call centre staff in the Mobility Plus area of York Region Transit. The Mobility Plus call centre handles an average of 450-500 calls per day.

The IVR system is a telephone technology in which the customer uses a touch-tone telephone to interact with a software/database to acquire information from or enter data into the software/database. The IVR system does not require human interaction over the telephone as the customer's interaction with the software/database is predetermined by what the Interactive Voice Response system will allow the customer to do.

An IVR system integrated with the TransView scheduling software will allow paratransit customers to achieve the following without having any interaction with the call centre staff:

- Trip booking.
- Trip confirmation or cancellation.
- Reminder calls.
- Automated service updates.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Interactive Voice Response system

With changing demographics and greater public information about demand-responsive transit, call volumes at paratransit operations have increased dramatically. TranSched Systems Limited as prime contractor and Syntellect as subcontractor have developed an Interactive Voice Response system for TransView, the scheduling software currently being used by Mobility Plus schedulers and dispatchers. TranSched, in association with Syntellect, has submitted a proposal to York Region Transit (YRT) to supply, install, integrate and test an IVR system for Mobility Plus.

The proposed costs for the IVR system hardware, software, and services have been compared with other similar installations elsewhere and found to be reasonable.

4.2 System Benefits

The proposed IVR system will offer the following benefits to paratransit customers and York Region Transit.

4.2.1 Paratransit Customers

- 24/7 service providing customers with great flexibility. 24/7 service is very expensive to offer with live agents, and the proposed system will allow a solution which will be very beneficial for increased demand in the future. Currently, the call centre hours are 6 a.m. – 12 a.m. (Monday-Saturday) and 8:30 a.m. – 10 p.m. (Sunday and statutory holidays).
- An easy-to-use system based on simple touch-tone commands to achieve bookings and cancellations and receive timely service updates.
- A system based on speech recognition allowing extra convenience to customers with disabilities.
- The ability to receive automated reminder calls thus greatly improving customer service levels.
- Special calls to advise customers when their bus, sedan or van is running behind schedule.

- Avoid frustration by not having to wait in a queue to find out the status of a scheduled ride in the event of a major delay which can be included in the opening message/greeting.
- Ability, at any point in the queue, to “zero” out to a live operator.

4.2.2 Mobility Plus Operations

- Cost savings as a result of fewer calls for bookings, cancellations and general operations status.
- Fewer ‘no-shows’ since the customers will be reminded of their trips.
- Fewer calls from customers about delayed vehicles because they will be notified in advance or will listen to a service delay greeting.
- Back-up system or disaster recovery environment in the event of a failure in the live agent call centre system or an evacuation of the call centre.
- Capability to offer callers an optional or must-listen-to message at the beginning of each call which can be enabled on short notice for system delays, reminders of holiday scheduling and many other possibilities. These important greetings will lower the average call times for live agent calls and transfers.

4.2.3 Technology

- Ability to provide a platform to enable other IVR applications for transit or general information.
- Integration with the Cisco call manager which will enable implementation of a call recording system very easily.

4.3 Sole Source Justifications

It is recommended that YRT enter into a contract with TranSched Systems Limited for the supply, installation, integration and testing of an IVR system for the following reasons:

4.3.1 Interface

The IVR system is required to have an interface with the existing TransView scheduling software so that the customer-made changes/updates are reflected in the scheduling system. It is advantageous to procure the IVR system from TranSched and Syntellect as the interface will not be an issue since TransView scheduling software was supplied by TranSched.

4.3.2 Software Support

The IVR system has been specifically written for the TransView application. This has the potential to save considerable time and cost in resolving a problem should it arise. The initial cost of the application and its maintenance over time will be less than having a custom one-off application built.

4.4 Syntellect IVR Experience

Syntellect has installed IVR systems across North America including the following properties:

- Delta Dental, Rancho Cordova, California, Customer Service – (800) 422-4234
- Nationwide Insurance, Columbus, Ohio, Policy Line – (877) 669-6877
- United States Postal Service, General information Line – (800) 275-8777
- HSBC International Bank, British Columbia, Customer Service – (888) 310-4722
- Canadian National Railway, Quebec, Public Inquiries – (888) 888-5909

4.5 Relationship to Vision 2026

Vision 2026 includes a goal statement on technology relating to the transformation of communications, service delivery methods and how people will live and work in the future. Installation of the IVR system in the Mobility Plus area of York Region Transit will help provide enhanced quality of service across all of York Region. The IVR system will optimize the performance of the service and increase reliability, passenger safety and the economic viability of public transit services.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The cost of supply, installation, integration and testing of the IVR system and other associated equipment and training of staff is \$190,400. It is estimated that the operating cost would be approximately \$20,000 per year.

An IVR system can be supplied by many suppliers. In the case of Mobility Plus, the IVR system is required to have an interface with the existing TransView scheduling software. It is likely that the Region will be paying \$150,000 - \$250,000 for a capable and responsive IVR system by another supplier with uncertainties stemming from the integration with the existing software.

Sufficient capital funding was contained in the 2006 Business Plan and Budget to complete this project. Sufficient operating funding is contained in the draft 2007 Business Plan and Budget to support this project.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

There is no direct municipal impact associated with this project. It is anticipated that the quality of Mobility Plus services will significantly improve as a result of the project.

7. CONCLUSION

It is recommended that the Region enter into a contract with TranSched Systems Limited, for the supply, installation, integration and testing of an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system for Mobility Plus in the amount of \$190,400, plus applicable taxes, pursuant to the sole source provisions of the purchasing by-law.

For more information on this report, contact Rajeev Roy, Manager, Transit Management Systems (Ext. 5682), of the Transit Branch in the Transportation and Works Department.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.