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## **YORK REGION TRANSIT SMALL BUS STRATEGY AND COMMUNITY BUS PILOT PROJECT IN NEWMARKET – UPDATE**

**The Transit Committee recommend the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, March 31, 2006, from the Commissioner of Transportation and Works:**

### **1. RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that:

1. The current configuration and service frequency of Community Bus routes 520 and 521, serving the Newmarket area, be maintained and that the pilot project be continued for the remainder of the one-year pilot period, with staff reporting back to Transit Committee at the end of 2006.

### **2. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to update Transit Committee and Regional Council on the six-month ridership and revenue performance of York Region Transit (YRT) routes 520 and 521 operating in Newmarket.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

YRT introduced Community Bus service to Newmarket on June 26, 2005 as part of a small bus pilot project. Routes 520 and 521 provide customers with connections to a number of key destinations including Upper Canada Mall, Walmart, Price Choppers, Newmarket Senior Centre, 404 Plaza, Southlake District Health Centre and associated medical facilities along Davis Drive. In addition, the routes conveniently pick up residents at many of the local senior homes and apartments.

Route 520 currently operates a clockwise loop via Yonge Street (north to Green Lane), Davis Drive, Leslie St, Gorham and Eagle Street. Route 521 operates a counter-clockwise loop via Yonge Street (north to Green Lane). At present, the 520 service is operated Monday through Sunday and the 521 service Monday to Friday only. Service originally operated from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 midnight, but has since been changed to 6:00 p.m. The routes are operated by a 25-foot low-floor ELF vehicle. A map indicating the routing configurations and associated schedules is appended to this report (*Attachment 1*).

At the direction of Transit Committee, YRT staff were requested to provide a six-month update regarding the performance of these new transit routes. Normally, such a review would be conducted after a one-year period, however, in light of this new pilot project, an interim review was deemed appropriate.

It should be noted that currently all local routes in Newmarket, other than Davis Drive (Route 55) and Yonge North (Route 98), are operated with a vehicle 30 feet or less in size. It should also be noted that YRT staff met with Newmarket residents on numerous occasions over the past six months. These meetings were in various formats including small informal group meetings at senior residences, a formal facilitated presentation (held May 18, 2005 and attended by about 20 residents at the Newmarket Senior Centre) and a meeting held in late June with Newmarket councillors. An outstanding request from 20/40 William Roe residents to extend the Community Bus is still being evaluated at this time.

## **4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS**

### **4.1 Route Type and Performance Targets**

As part of the Five-Year Service Plan Update, all YRT routes have been reclassified into one of six different and distinct route types. Each route type has been linked to a set of operating standards deemed appropriate and based on industry standards. Route categories include:

- Base Grid (including Viva)
- Local
- Express
- Shuttles (GO/School Specials)
- Community Bus (Fixed/Demand-responsive).

Each route type addresses minimum ridership targets, operating standards and route design, and each category is tailored to specific demographic, geographic and customer needs.

Table 1 summarizes the performance targets for each route type and the relationship between the new standards and the performance of the current YRT (Newmarket area) routes.

On closer examination and comparison to the new ridership performance targets, all Newmarket routes, with the exception of the two new shuttle routes, are currently meeting or surpassing the minimum passenger per hour target for their respective route type.

**Table 1**  
Peak and Off-Peak Performance Targets

| <b>Route Type</b>            | <b>Weekday Peak</b>                                                                           | <b>Other Times</b>                                                                           |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Base and Local Routes</b> | All routes averaging 30 passengers per service hour, with a minimum of 10 boardings per hour. | All routes averaging 22 passengers per service hour, with a minimum of 7 boardings per hour. |
| <b>Express Route</b>         |                                                                                               |                                                                                              |
| Fixed Route                  | All routes averaging 30 passengers per service hour, with a minimum of 10 boardings per hour. |                                                                                              |
| Express                      |                                                                                               |                                                                                              |
| Business Express             | All routes averaging 35 passengers per service hour, with a minimum of 30 boardings per hour. |                                                                                              |
| <b>Shuttle</b>               | All routes averaging 25 passengers per service hour, with a minimum of 20 boardings per hour. |                                                                                              |
| <b>Community Bus</b>         |                                                                                               |                                                                                              |
| Fixed Route                  | All routes averaging 15 passengers per service hour, with a minimum of 5 boardings per hour.  | All routes averaging 12 passengers per service hour, with a minimum of 4 boardings per hour  |
| Demand-Responsive            | All routes averaging 10 passengers per hour, with a minimum of 5 boardings per hour.          | All routes averaging 8 passengers per hour, with a minimum of 3 boardings per hour.          |

Overlay Express Routes are subject to the following conditions: introduction of an Overlay Express Route must maintain the performance levels of the remaining route at current levels; and projected performance of the new Overlay Express Route must be better than that of the current route.

**Table 2**  
Town of Newmarket - YRT Route Boardings per Hour Summary

| Route                       | Avg. Total Daily Boardings | Avg. Total Saturday Boardings | Avg. Total Sunday Boardings | Avg. M-F Boardings/ Hour | Avg. Sat. Boardings/ Hour | Avg. Sun Boardings/ Hour | Route Type/ Comments                                    |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| 44                          | 163                        | 122                           | N/A                         | 10                       | 10                        | N/A                      | Local Route                                             |
| 54                          | 158                        | 79                            | N/A                         | 13                       | 6                         | N/A                      | Base Route                                              |
| 55                          | 1116                       | 503                           | 367                         | 29                       | 17                        | 14                       | Base Route                                              |
| 56                          | 446                        | 197                           | 45                          | 18                       | 11                        | 3                        | Local Route                                             |
| 57                          | 417                        | 150                           | 77                          | 10                       | 5                         | 6                        | Local Route                                             |
| 223<br>Sept 05<br>Start     | 14                         | N/A                           | N/A                         | 4                        | N/A                       | N/A                      | GO Shuttle<br>4am & 4pm<br>trips only                   |
| 225<br>Sept 05<br>Start     | 2                          | N/A                           | N/A                         | N/A                      | N/A                       | N/A                      | M-F Only<br>Bales<br>Shuttle<br>4am & 5pm<br>trips only |
| 520/521<br>July 05<br>Start | 61                         | 63                            | 48                          | 4                        | 8<br>Route 520<br>only    | 6<br>Route 520<br>Only   | Community<br>Bus – Fixed<br>Route                       |
| 98                          | 825                        | 356                           | 293                         | 13                       | 7                         | 6                        | Base Route                                              |

#### 4.2 Service Level/Frequency

Routes 520/521 are essentially two routes that operate independently of each other on a 90 minute frequency (weekdays), and 60 minute frequency (weekends). In order to effectively interline (i.e. blend) the routes, either a 60 or 90 minute frequency was deemed appropriate. When operated together, service frequency is approximately 45 minutes throughout the operating period. The YRT Service Plan standards recommend a service frequency no less than 60 minutes in the peak periods and no less than 120 minutes in off-peak and weekends. The current frequency provides more trip-planning options than the minimum 60-minute frequency would provide. As noted earlier, the routes currently operate every day except Holidays. Service begins at approximately 9:00 a.m. and runs until 6:00 p.m.

Daily detailed ridership surveys have been conducted since the inception of the services in June. Early December survey results are appended to this report. As indicated in the survey results, route 520 is carrying on average 35 trips per weekday, while route 521 is carrying, on average, 26 trips per day. The combined total daily ridership for the Newmarket Community Bus is 61 and is averaging 4 boardings per hour.

According to the performance targets set out in the YRT Five-Year Service Plan, the off-peak ridership standard for a community bus is an average of 12 passengers per service hour, with a minimum of four boardings per hour. Ridership on this service is trending well based on YRT standards and when compared to Route 89 Richmond Hill

Community Bus, a mature Community Bus route averaging 91 trips per day or seven passenger boarding per hour.

However, it was readily apparent after the first four months of operation that the late evening service was not attracting the minimum ridership target, and as such, late evening service was removed November 20, 2005.

#### **4.3 Small Bus Application**

Currently, the majority of buses in the Newmarket area are of the 30 and 40-foot variety, the standard size of vehicles typically found in a transit bus fleet. Since many of the Newmarket routes connect with either high schools, major transfer points or with GO train stations, the current fleet mix is required for greater passenger capacity on certain sections of the route and during various periods of daily operation.

As noted earlier, routes 520 and 521 currently utilize two 25-foot low floor Elf Buses. They are configured to accommodate two wheelchairs and eight non-ambulatory seats or a maximum of 11 seats (no wheelchairs). Ridership surveys indicated that current average maximum loads are at six passengers, however on occasion, full buses (11 passengers) have been experienced. At present, the 25-foot bus appears to be the appropriate vehicle for this service.

### **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

According to the performance targets set out in the YRT Five-Year Service Plan, the minimum cost recovery target for local routes operating in a Community Bus application is 25%. This cost recovery target assumes at least a one-year period of operation. Following only six months of operation, the annual operating costs associated with the Newmarket Community Bus services is approximately \$335,000, with anticipated revenues of \$30,000, resulting in an overall revenue/cost ratio of 9%.

Presently, the current contracted hourly operating rate is fixed at \$55.00 for both the 25-foot Elf bus and a standard 30 or 40-foot transit bus.

Based on the current average of 61 passengers per day, Newmarket Community Bus cost per trip is approximately \$16.00, compared with the \$18.00 Region-wide average for Mobility Plus service, or \$14.00 per trip for Newmarket area Mobility Plus trips. At present, the Community Bus pilot project is comparable to the Mobility Plus cost per trip and, at the same time, offers a relatively high level of customer service which is open to all riders (i.e. not exclusive to Mobility Plus registrants).

## **6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT**

Further reduction in transit service levels or route changes would undermine the objectives of the small bus pilot. Although there have been concerns raised with the specific routing and service level/frequency, there is general support from the public for Community Bus routes 520/521. YRT staff will continue to review the effectiveness of this small bus pilot project within the context of the overall YRT system network.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

The introduction of the Community Bus routes in Newmarket followed the objectives of the York Region Transit Five-Year Service Plan and Small Bus Strategy. The Plan recommends a minimum one-year trial period for new service in order to give the service an adequate chance to reach the set performance targets. As can be seen by the data provided, YRT Community Bus routes in Newmarket are meeting set standards and are trending in the right direction (cost recovery). It is expected that ridership will continue to increase and YRT staff will closely monitor the routes' effectiveness and efficiency. YRT staff will continue discussions with customers with the goal to refine the routing configuration and schedules as deemed appropriate.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

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