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YORK REGION TRANSIT MOBILITY PLUS BUS PURCHASE

The Transit Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, April 3, 2006, from the Commissioner of Transportation and Works:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. The Region enter into a contract with Overland Custom Coach Ltd. for the purchase of two new low-floor 25-foot Elf buses, in an amount not to exceed \$420,000, pursuant to the sole source provisions of the Purchasing By-law.
2. The Regional Chair and Regional Clerk be authorized to sign the necessary contract, subject to review by Legal Services.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to update Transit Committee and Regional Council regarding the current status of the York Region Transit (YRT) Mobility Plus specialized transit bus fleet, and to seek approval to proceed with the sole source procurement from Overland Custom Coach Ltd. of two buses in 2006 – one for replacement and one to address growth in trip demand.

3. BACKGROUND

Mobility Plus specialized transit service is provided through several bus, accessible minivan and sedan operations and maintenance contracts. It is anticipated that trip demand will continue to grow by some 7% over 2005, resulting in the provision of 279,887 trips in 2006. For every 5% demand growth, an additional bus is required to address non-ambulatory trip demand capacity and mobility aid requirements.

The contracted bus operation will accommodate 40% of the total trip demand in 2006, up from the 30% level in 2005. The bus service provides the vehicle capacity to accommodate growth in larger mobility devices (e.g. electric wheelchairs, scooters, etc.) that cannot be accommodated by the smaller accessible minivan service. Bus service also provides a more effective and efficient means to handle the transportation of a number of customers at the same time from the same location.

With the formation of York Region Transit in January, 2001, Mobility Plus inherited various bus types (low-floor and lift/ramp access) with various capacity configurations.

Efforts were undertaken in 2003 through to 2005 to standardize the vehicle type and capacity with the purchase of 16 25-foot ELF (Economical Low-Floor) buses from Overland Custom Coach Ltd. As a result, at the end of 2005, the average bus fleet age is only 1.8 years.

It should be noted that at the present time in the Canadian para-transit bus market, there is not another established low floor small bus product available that meets the YRT bus procurement requirements. While some new vehicles are entering into the marketplace, none have operated in service for a year in our climate, which would enable staff to assess their reliability, interior mobility device/customer accommodation, vehicle operating range, vehicle safety compliance, vehicle manageability, etc.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Current Fleet Status

The design life of an Elf purpose-built specialized service bus is seven to ten years. Actual operating life cycle is subject to factors such as hours of service, mileage incurred, geographical operating area, road congestion, etc. To meet projected service demand levels in 2006 (both door-to-door and community bus operation), 21 buses are required, 18 to meet typical peak business day operating requirements, with three additional buses allocated as spares (14% spare ratio) to address vehicle breakdowns, etc.

To date, the replacement of the older bus fleet by Elf buses has resulted in improved system performance and trip reliability Region-wide, while at the same time reducing the added costs associated with vehicle repairs and employing contracted services to handle bus service requests. Fleet standardization has also simplified maintenance, parts inventory, training and dispatching.

The requested two-vehicle bus order will enable the current Mobility Plus bus fleet of 20 buses to accommodate the replacement of the last inherited vehicle - a lift equipped Ford Girardin (model year 2000 with a life expectancy of five years), while addressing the need for an additional bus to handle anticipated trip demand to reach the 21 bus service requirement.

4.2 Planned 2006 Order and Delivery

The 2006 Mobility Plus Business Plan and Budget has allocated capital dollars for the purchase of the two buses. It is recommended that the bus purchase be undertaken as a sole source procurement, with Overland Custom Coach Ltd. selected as the vehicle supplier. As indicated earlier in this report, Overland Custom Coach Ltd. is the only low-floor small bus provider in Canada with a proven product, and is the current supplier of the Elf vehicle in the Mobility Plus bus fleet. This purchase will standardize the Mobility Plus vehicle fleet leading to certain maintenance and operating economies, while providing a more reliable vehicle operation. Overland Custom Coach Ltd. indicates a delivery schedule of approximately five months from the date of order.

It should be noted that due to the recent development of alternative bus products to handle the needs of the specialized transit market, any future bus purchases will involve a tendering process to ensure a competitive bid based on meeting the Mobility Plus bus requirements as detailed earlier in this report.

4.3 Relationship to Vision 2026

Continued improvement to Mobility Plus service, including the upgrading and replacement of the existing bus fleet, addresses many of the key principles in the Region's Vision 2026. The replacement of older buses contributes to the goal of an "enhanced environment". The provision of reliable service provides the disabled community the opportunity to share in the Region's vibrant economy and addresses residents' needs for transportation services to enhance quality of life. The reduction in maintenance costs allows limited financial resources to be redirected and reinvested in the provision of additional customer trips to meet an increasing customer demand for service.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Mobility Plus staff continue to pursue measures to improve service quality and cost effectiveness of specialized transit. Cost containment measures are planned for various aspects of the operation in 2006 which, as an example, include the continued replacement of the final inherited lift-equipped bus to further reduce vehicle maintenance costs and improve overall system reliability. In addition, one new bus is being requested to address growth in trip demand to meet client mobility needs.

The approved 2006 Mobility Plus Business Plan and Budget contains funding for the purchase of the two requested buses. The current cost of a 25-foot Elf bus is set at \$210,000 per unit, which includes applicable taxes. This price is the same unit price as those buses purchased in 2005 and represents a savings of \$16,700 over the original 2003 bus purchase. The holding of the 2005 price per unit reflects the improvement in the Canadian dollar exchange rate since the bus is constructed in the United States with final finish and preparation carried out at the Ontario-based Overland Custom Coach facility. The contract award to Overland Custom Coach Ltd. for the purchase of two buses will have an upset limit of \$420,000.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The replacement and addition of Mobility Plus buses to improve service reliability, reduce operating costs and address increased client demand will ensure residents of the various local municipalities with larger mobility devices are afforded an opportunity to obtain specialized transportation services.

7. CONCLUSION

Based on a review of Mobility Plus bus demand in 2006, and the need to continue the direction to reduce overall fleet maintenance costs while providing a more reliable on-time transit service with a purpose built vehicle (that accommodates larger mobility devices), it is recommended that approval be given for the sole source purchase of two new 25-foot Elf buses from Overland Custom Coach Ltd. for the reasons outlined in this report.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.