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YORK REGION TRANSIT MOBILITY PLUS OPERATIONAL STRATEGIES

The Transit Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, May 1, 2007, from the Commissioner of Transportation and Works:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council approve the operational strategies identified in this report to reduce Mobility Plus operating costs while maintaining an overall high level of service quality.
2. The Regional Clerk forward this report to the Region's Accessibility Advisory Committee for their information.

2. PURPOSE

York Region Transit (YRT) staff is seeking approval from Transit Committee and Regional Council to adopt various operational strategies aimed at improving the effective and efficient operation of the Mobility Plus service.

3. BACKGROUND

The delivery of specialized public transit, such as that provided by Mobility Plus, creates strategic planning challenges and financial pressures. Mobility Plus is a shared-ride door-to-door transportation service for persons who are unable to use accessible conventional transit services because of a "functional limitation" and are pre-registered for use of the service. Following a trip booking process, registered customers are escorted to and from the first accessible door when dropped off and picked up.

At the end of 2006, there were approximately 6,000 customers registered for this service taking approximately 284,000 trips annually, an increase of 8.9 % over 2005. All trip requests are honoured, so unlike other specialized transit services, there is no un-accommodated rate. The average cost per passenger trip in 2006 was \$29.84. The increased trip demands and cost increases have led Mobility Plus staff to develop operational strategies as identified in this report to ensure the continued viability of this necessary transportation service.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The following analysis and options are presented to address the existing and ongoing service requirements for Mobility Plus service within the Region.

4.1 One Day Advance Booking

Upgrades have been undertaken through the computerized trip scheduling system to improve the efficiency of the daily trip schedules. This will further improve the opportunity to link customer trips or to share rides. In addition, it is proposed that customers will be able to book their trips one day in advance, seven days a week, rather than the current two business days, commencing on June 1, 2007. This proposed improvement to the booking system will address a key concern expressed by Mobility Plus customers.

4.2 Late Cancellation/No Show Process

The introduction of the Late Cancellation/No Show Process in 2005 was implemented to minimize the number of trips being cancelled by customers at the time of pick-up as well as to minimize customer no-shows. Mobility Plus is required to pay the contracted service provider for late trip cancellations and no-shows. The late cancellation also makes it very difficult to reschedule another trip request since the request must fit the cancelled trip time and general direction to enable the balance of the schedule to be performed.

With the implementation of one day advance booking, it is proposed that the Late Cancellation/No Show Process be amended such that customer trip cancellations are received by noon the day before the requested trip date, as scheduling will begin at noon for next day trips. Currently, trips can be cancelled until 12:00 midnight before the trip date without penalty. This proposed change will deter passengers from cancelling rides at the last minute and will allow others to take advantage of a time slot which may not have been available when originally requested. It will also help to prevent large gaps in the schedules as the majority of cancellations will now come in before the trips are put into the schedules.

In January and February of 2007, ten thousand trips (23% of all scheduled trips) were cancelled and, of those, thirty-six hundred (8%) were late cancellations at the door. The anticipated savings to the Region by reducing the number of late cancellations at the door and no-shows is estimated to be at least \$20,000 annually based on data from the first two months of 2007.

A scheduling system upgrade, noted above, has allowed the capability to record late cancellations and no-shows by individual customers. Following a written warning, repeat offenders will have service suspended based on the number and frequency of late cancellations and no-shows. The customer will have the ability to appeal.

It is recognized that occasional circumstances can arise such as an unplanned hospitalization, a declared snow emergency or a Mobility Plus vehicle arriving more than 20 minutes late. These circumstances will be taken into consideration.

4.3 Subscription Trip Policy

Subscription service is for passengers who travel to the same destination at the same time at least once a week for a period of four weeks. These rides account for 62.5% of all scheduled rides. More than one in five subscription rides are cancelled. It is proposed that a new process be introduced whereby riders who hold subscription trips and cancel 50% or more of those trips in a month will lose the subscription trip status and would have to request trips one at a time. The first step in reclaiming the unused subscription trips would be to contact the passenger to see if their needs have changed and to discuss their high cancellation rate. If the cancellation rate continues over the next month, all subscription trips would be cancelled and the passenger would need to call their request in as a demand trip as needed. This proposed change is expected to provide the service for others who were unable to travel at the time slot requested.

4.4 Booking Window

With approximately 1,000 rides per day and 80% percent of them requested for peak travel times, it is necessary to have a booking window to accommodate all trips. A booking window is the range of time that a ride can be scheduled by Mobility Plus which deviates from the customer requested pick up time. At present, Mobility Plus has a booking window of 30 minutes, (e.g. a 9:00 requested time can be scheduled between 8:45 and 9:15). To improve productivity, it is recommended that a 40-minute booking window be adopted. It would have minimal impact on the passengers but would allow the scheduling software to reduce single one-way trip costs by allowing more shared-ride trips. Based on test results, potential annual savings of \$200,000 could be achieved if the booking window was adjusted to 40 minutes from 30 minutes.

4.5 Travel Time

York Region's 1,756 sq. kilometres and population of 892,359 (2006 census) provide challenges for Mobility Plus. The Mobility Plus mandate is to provide shared ride transit service, recognizing passengers should not be required to be on a vehicle for an inordinate length of time. Time parameters are currently in the scheduling system to regulate this. Based on analysis of trip patterns, the greatest opportunity to share rides occurs in the Vaughan, Markham and Richmond Hill areas where maximum travel time is limited to 60 minutes. In order to balance travel time with improved productivity, staff are proposing that the trip time be increased to 75 minutes from 60 minutes for trips in this area.

A review of long distance trips between Vaughan and Markham indicates that a round trip costs approximately \$135 per trip. Further analysis indicates that there is more opportunity to link customer trips for travel to a common destination if an additional 15

minute travel time allowance is permitted. The estimated cost savings for this proposed initiative is \$140,000.

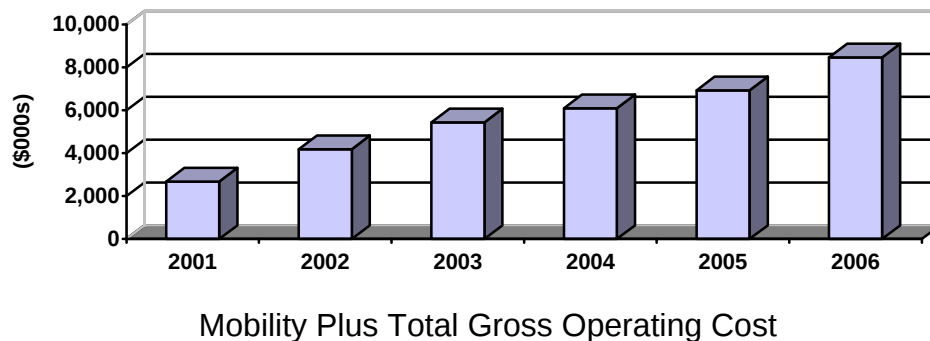
4.6 Relationship to Vision 2026

As part of Vision 2026, York Region identified under Goal 7 the need to have an effective, efficient and environmentally sensitive transportation system to improve transportation opportunities within the Region. The development and implementation of these operational strategies will improve the availability and service quality of transit service to Mobility Plus clients.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

This report presents a number of operational strategies to ensure the continued viability of the service. The above operational strategies provide a range of potential savings while maintaining an overall high level of service quality to those approved for Mobility Plus service. In total, it is estimated that they can achieve annual savings of approximately \$360,000. Figure 1 below shows the annual increase in operating costs since amalgamation of transit services in 2001.

Figure 1



6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The implementation of the various operational strategies presented in this report will improve the transportation accessibility to all areas of the Region and ensure the continued viability of Mobility Plus service to meet the needs of those who truly need the service.

7. CONCLUSION

The demand for Mobility Plus service continues to grow at a significant rate. It is important that ongoing measures be taken now to ensure the financial sustainability of this service both in the short and long term. This report presents a number of strategies aimed at maintaining an overall high level of service quality for our customers, while at the same time delivering this service in an effective and cost-efficient manner.

For more information on this report, contact Sharon Doyle, Acting Manager, Mobility Plus, (ext. 5634), Transit Branch of the Transportation and Works Department.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.