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YRT/VIVA MARKETING COMMUNICATION PLAN 2006

The Joint Transit Committee and Rapid Transit Public/Private Partnership Steering Committee recommends the following:

- 1. The presentation by Dan Miles, Communications' Specialist, York Region Rapid Transit Corporation, Mary Lou Johnston, Manager, Marketing and Customer Services, York Region Transit and Gavin Barrett, Rao Barrett and Welsh, Communications Consultants, be received;**
- 2. The recommendation contained in the following report November 29, 2005, from the Commissioner of Transportation and Works, and the Vice President, York Region Rapid Transit Corporation, be adopted; and**
- 3. Staff report back with suggestions to promote transit to customers in designated geographic areas.**

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council endorse the detailed "Connecting York - Marketing Communication and Public Education Plan 2006 - YRT /Viva", and approve expenditures for the period January to December 2006 at a cost not to exceed \$2.515 million subject to approval of the 2006 budget.

2. PURPOSE

This report seeks Committee and Regional Council approval to proceed with a comprehensive marketing and communications strategy that will build and retain ridership, at a cost not to exceed \$2.515 million for the period January to December 2006.

York Region has become a leader in public transit. While other jurisdictions struggle to develop their own traffic solutions, York Region has introduced Viva, the first rapid transit service of its kind in the country. Taking this bold vision from the drawing board to the roadside has taken considerable financial commitment along with the substantial investment to improve conventional York Region Transit (YRT) services since amalgamation in 2001

To protect this investment and build on it through subsequent phases the program must be successful. In transit, success is measured by ridership. To improve the image of public transit and attract a new generation of riders, the Region needs to continue reaching out to people. Through an ongoing marketing communications and education campaign, the

Region can highlight the positive aspects of YRT and Viva and convert an increasing number of residents from drivers to riders.

3. BACKGROUND

Over the past year, Viva has been the primary focus of transit marketing and communications in York Region. It was important to promote Viva in order to establish the new brand and create anticipation leading up to and following the initial service launch in September.

During this period, it made strategic sense for YRT to maintain a lower profile, with its primary focus on providing rider information, communicating service changes and refreshing the look of its marketing and communications materials. By taking this approach YRT and Viva were in no way competing for the limited space or time available in the community media.

With the refreshed new look, YRT and Viva now are ready to move to a new, strengthened marketing force.

Customer loyalty and awareness of YRT services need to be leveraged

YRT has experienced between 10% - 15% ridership growth in each of the past five years, outpacing population growth in the Region. While this is most encouraging, there have not been the financial resources to launch a comprehensive marketing campaign to promote YRT beyond basic day-to-day communications.

Overall, residents' responses indicate a near universal awareness of YRT, yet at the same time an extremely low familiarity with the service – meaning that they know it exists, but do not know what it does for them or how it will help them get around efficiently. However, among users, loyalty and satisfaction with the service are very high, suggesting that there is an opportunity for increased ridership among already converted users.

In general, a culture of driving permeates the Region and is reinforced by broad roads and free or affordable parking. The common consumer reaction to public transit has been “it’s not for me”; “I don’t need it”; or “it doesn’t meet my needs”.

The Viva marketing program has seen significant increases in ridership awareness

Viva marketing has been rolled out in three phases over the past year. Research conducted by Oxygen Research Inc. in August showed that unaided public awareness of Viva was 12% shortly before the launch of the advertising campaign that ran between August and October 2005.

Considerable progress has been made since the service launch in September. During the first three months of operation, ridership on Viva has been increasing as awareness grows throughout the community. During the rollout of the initial stages, received positive feedback from the public was received via the Viva website. See *Council Attachment 1* for examples of public comments received through the contact link on vivayork.com. Market research was again conducted by Oxygen Research Inc. in October 2005 to evaluate the effectiveness of the Viva advertising and marketing campaign. The results show that unaided public awareness of Viva grew from 12% (from 12% in August), and aided public awareness increased to a significant 85% (from 39% in August).

Twenty-seven percent of respondents (up from 9% in August) said they know “a fair amount” about Viva; an additional 27% (up from 11% in August) said that they know “a little” about Viva. These results suggest that while awareness is in its infancy, it is growing quickly.

The October research also shows that the overall transit mode share is increasing in York Region, with growing ridership on YRT as well as the connected TTC and GO Transit services. Service ratings indicate that Viva is exceeding initial perceptions and expectations with regard to reduced travel times, clean and comfortable service, and the look and design of the vehicles and stations. Since YRT and Viva have integrated their services into one convenient system, there is a tremendous opportunity to build on these positive results and move forward with a concerted marketing effort to achieve budgeted targets.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

In order to increase ridership growth and promote the family of services available in York Region, marketing and communications specialists Rao-Barrett and Welsh have developed a comprehensive Marketing, Communication and Public Education Plan. This plan utilizes the individual and distinct strengths of YRT and Viva, while promoting the benefit of connectivity.

A sustained and highly visible York Region transit market presence is needed

York Region has emerged as a leader in the development of public transit. Local leaders, faced with unprecedented growth and the resulting traffic congestion, have invested heavily in public transit. This forward-looking approach opened the door to ridership growth, but it is far from guaranteed and much work still needs to be done. Perceptions and attitudes do not change automatically. People need to be informed and persuaded. For that to happen, it is necessary to provide ongoing education about choices and options, and involvement in the decision-making process, and to demonstrate solutions, benefits and innovations.

Even famous brands do not become household names overnight, and once established still require ongoing marketing to ensure that appeal and advantage are maintained. YRT and Viva are at an early stage. YRT has been in existence for five years and Viva is new. Marketing efforts have only just begun. It is through active marketing and communications that the Region is going to achieve its goals of converting drivers to riders, building upon the solid core of transit supporters in York Region, and increasing the overall transit mode share to 17% in accordance with the Transportation Master Plan. According to the latest market research and ridership statistics, although most people in York Region are aware that public transit is available, the vast majority of trips in the Region are traveled by car. The challenge of making riders see public transit, whether by YRT or Viva, as a positive and viable alternative to driving will require sustained and on-going messaging to induce trial.

However, in an environment where most people have choices about the mode of travel they use, trial will not be induced without people knowing more about the services available, being convinced that the services will add to their convenience or quality of life, and feeling that the image of the service is consistent with how they see themselves.

For these reasons, a sustained and highly visible marketing presence needs to be maintained in order to get people's attention, pique their curiosity, create a positive image in their minds about the two services, and educate them about the benefits offered by Viva and YRT. Without a strategy aimed at building new riders and increasing usage among existing riders, there is a risk that ridership will not reach the projected targets.

The unifying transit message is “connectivity” to build on the strengths of two unique services—YRT and Viva

Like two separate products offered by one company (e.g. iPod and iMac products sold by Apple Computers) YRT and Viva each have unique benefits, user groups, and user attitudes. Therefore, two separate but connected communications approaches are recommended to build on the individual strengths of each service. However, the separate approaches will fit under the umbrella of one overall marketing strategy, and will also be supported by the development of a range of communications vehicles (e.g. route maps, onboard customer communications, etc.) which address all service offerings and emphasize the benefits offered by having two services connected into one system. The key benefit is “connectivity” – the ability of public transit in York Region to connect customers with where they need to go. The connectivity benefit will act as a unifying theme across all marketing campaigns and be emphasized in both Viva and YRT communications activities, as well as in communications across all service offerings.

The overall marketing objectives for Viva and YRT are the same:

- To attract new riders to public transit.
- To motivate occasional riders to make more trips.
- To change public attitudes towards public transit.

- To position York Region public transit as a viable choice by leveraging the individual and distinct strengths of Viva and YRT and the combined benefit of “connectivity”.

The proposed strategy will make use of both traditional and non-traditional, paid and unpaid, and multicultural media. Media will be chosen on the basis of its suitability to achieve the specific objectives of a particular activity, taking into account both the coverage of a particular target group as well as its qualitative value. As a general rule, activities that aim to switch behaviours (e.g., print advertisements to encourage non-riders to become riders) require more intensive efforts than activities that encourage people to continue an existing behaviour.

The use of e-communications will continue to form an important part of the strategy, especially to the student and youth market, which is a key target for public transit. The interactive vivayork.com web site, which received two prestigious marketing awards, averages over 30,000 hits a day and provides a growing contact database. The yrt.ca web site is an excellent source of up-to-date service and route information. Together, the two linked sites deliver extremely cost-effective communications with existing and potential riders.

Viva’s marketing thrust is to generate new riders by offering a fresh, new exciting service

The 2006 marketing objectives for Viva are to:

- Acquire new riders
- Act as a catalyst for growth in transit mode share.

Viva is perfectly positioned for the role of engaging new riders or non-riders, increasing usage among occasional riders, and building the transit habit in order that several target segments view the Region’s transit system as a viable alternative to automobile travel.

With its state-of-the-art buses, vivastations and supporting technology, Viva is already equipped to represent the highly improved overall image of public transit. Since Viva is an extremely experiential service, it is likely to be most effective in producing converts to the cause of public transit by persuading them to try it at least once.

The Viva communications strategy is to:

- Motivate trial and repeat usage through sustained, cohesive and compelling messaging.
- Create a base of advocates for Viva by using a fresh, modern and contemporary approach to reach and establish a dialogue with the riders.
- Reduce barriers to usage through consistent public education about the new technology and enhancements.

- Enhance Viva's image as a revolutionary transit service through activities and events that result in a steady flow of earned media.

See *Council Attachment 2* for a detailed description of the proposed Viva communications activities, targets and budget.

YRT's marketing thrust is to build and grow usage by existing riders

The 2006 marketing objectives for YRT are to:

- Retain riders.
- Encourage increased usage.

With its extensive network, YRT has a direct, almost personal connection with its customers. YRT is perfectly positioned to demonstrate how public transit effectively services the local communities.

The livery and image refresh programs proposed for YRT are timed and designed to sustain the core community services while harmonizing with Viva's image for co-branding impact and making the YRT brand more relevant to its target market.

Innovations and community-focused programs (i.e., 407 Express, Ride to GO, Mobility Plus, High School Specials, etc.) are attractive demonstrations of the value of public transit at the community level.

The YRT communications strategy is to:

- Heighten awareness of its service innovations.
- Focus on targeted communications and promotions that educate the public about its specialty programs and service enhancements.

See *Council Attachment 2* for a detailed description of the proposed YRT communications activities, targets and budget.

The strength of the individual YRT and Viva brands will be linked through a series of "connected" marketing activities

The 2006 marketing objectives for the connected Viva/YRT communications are to:

- Expand public education and awareness.
- Encourage increased transit mode share.

The targeted Viva and YRT communications activities will be supported by the development of additional communications activities designed to promote how the two services work together to provide a seamless, interconnected transit system. This connectivity will be incorporated in all communications materials for Viva and YRT as well as those that showcase the integrated service.

Taking a system-wide approach, this component of the strategy is intended to educate both existing and new riders about how to get the maximum benefit from the Region's public transit, with convenient connections to TTC, GO Transit and other transit services operating within the City of Toronto and neighbouring regions.

The connected Viva/YRT communications strategy is to:

- Promote system-wide benefits like two-hour tickets, trip planning and end-to-end connectivity.
- Increase awareness of overall features through communications about routes, board changes and schedules.
- Focus on public education through advertorials, user guides, on-board newsletters and infomercials, brochures and other collateral materials that can be distributed throughout the Region.

For a detailed description of the connected Viva/YRT activities, refer to *Council Attachment 2*.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The total upset fee to deliver the next stage of the YRT/Viva marketing, communications and public education plan is \$2,515,000 and is subject to approval of the 2006 Regional budget. Table 1 sets out the costs for the entire budget. Costs include allocations for the multimedia components required to develop effective and efficient interactive communication vehicles, marketing communications, print materials, public events, and a significant education and training component.

Table 1
Budget Summary

Budget	2005	2006 (proposed)
YRT	\$700,000	\$292,500
Viva	\$2,500,000	\$1,548,000
York Connected		\$674,500
Total	\$3,200,000	\$2,515,000

The delivery of the 2006 marketing program for YRT and Viva will be delivered under YRT management at 50 High Tech, allowing for maximum use of staff resources, and the ability to take advantage of bulk printing opportunities, combined educational events, etc.

York Region Rapid Transit Corporation will provide strategic oversight of the Viva program and will work with YRT Communications and Marketing staff to ensure the

Viva brand is used consistently and according to the rules set out in the Viva style guide. Rapid transit staff will approve and sign off on all Viva/York Connected communications and marketing materials. They will also meet with YRT staff on a monthly basis to evaluate the implementation of this Marketing, Communications and Public Education Plan.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The Region is growing at a rate of approximately 35,000 people per year. This terrific influx of people, while positive for the economy, is leading to increased traffic congestion, worsening air quality and a diminished quality of life.

In order to get people out of their cars and grow ridership, the Region must not only provide a great alternative to driving, it must also actively promote it. Build it and they won't necessarily come. YRT and Viva together offer customers an array of benefits, but it's imperative to tell people at every opportunity. By promoting public transit, the Region will attract new riders, remove more vehicles from the roads, and keep the local economy moving forward.

7. CONCLUSION

This Marketing, Communication and Public Education Plan includes both an emotive role that will create a desire to ride the system, and an informative role that will help people understand how public transit works and what it can do for them. The benefits of public transit may be obvious, but it is essential that marketing and communications continue to spread the word, maintaining a positive "buzz" in businesses, local coffee shops, and community centres in every corner of the Region. The Region has a great story to tell, and the approach outlined in the Marketing, Communication and Public Education Plan is fundamental to the future success of public transit.

Maintaining a high profile is also beneficial to the future phases of Viva. Communicating Viva's successes and benefits will help the Region meet its commitments as laid out in the Provincial and Federal Viva Phase One funding agreements, and will provide a constant reminder to senior government funding partners that there is still much more to do in York Region.

It is recommended that the Steering Committee and Regional Council endorse the financing of the Connecting York YRT/Viva 2006 Marketing, Communication and Public Education Plan to continue to inform the people of York Region.

This report has been reviewed by the Senior Management Group.

(The attachments referred to in this clause are included with this report.)