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**YORK REGION TRANSIT MOBILITY PLUS
SERVICE IMPLEMENTATION INITIATIVE**

(Regional Council at its meeting on September 23, 2004 amended this Clause to delete Recommendation 4 and replace it with the following and to add Recommendation 5:

- 4. Staff be requested to proceed with the implementation of cross-boundary Mobility Plus Service for all York Region students traveling to and from the main north campus of Humber College, York University and the Newnham Campus of Seneca College effective October 4, 2004.*
- 5. The Accessibility Advisory Committee be provided with a copy of this report for information.)*

The Transit Committee recommends:

- 1. The presentation by Irene McNeil, Manager, Service Planning and Brian Drew, Manager, Specialized Transit, be received;**
- 2. The deputation and written submission by Mr John Mazzella, Woodbridge resident, be received;**
- 3. The recommendations contained in the following report, September 8 , 2004, from the Commissioner of Transportation and Works be adopted; and**
- 4. Staff be requested to provide a report to the September 23, 2004 Regional Council meeting regarding the immediate implementation of cross-boundary service for students travelling to and from Humber College, York University and Seneca College, to include a cost analysis and financial implications.**

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- 1. The report prepared by ENTRA Consultants (attached separately) entitled “Mobility Plus Service Implementation Initiative” be received.**
- 2. The Mobility Plus program enhancements outlined in this report be referred to the 2005 Business Plan and Budget process for review.**

2. PURPOSE

In 2002, following the amalgamation of municipal transit services in the Region, Five-Year Service Plans were developed for both conventional and specialized (Mobility Plus) transit services. The Mobility Plus service plan set forth a 'mobility vision', making reference to guiding principles that would provide the foundation for the recommendations identified in the plan. The plan made a number of recommendations related to service structure, operations, eligibility criteria and service delivery strategies. The purpose of the Mobility Plus Service Implementation Initiative is to follow-up on the recommendations originally outlined in the Five-Year Plan and move forward with an implementation strategy.

3. BACKGROUND

York Region Transit (YRT) Mobility Plus is a specialized door-to-door transportation service for persons with disabilities who are unable to use accessible conventional transit services. The hours of service are similar to YRT conventional transit services, however, the service area is larger since it covers both urban and rural parts of the Region. At the end of 2003, there were approximately 10,600 persons with disabilities registered for YRT Mobility Plus, with an active registrant base of 5,283 registrants. Total trips taken on the service in 2003 was 210,866, an increase of 10% over 2002.

Currently, Mobility Plus makes use of a variety of service delivery options including in-house bus operation (YRT drivers using specialized transit vehicles), along with contracted bus and minivan, and sedan taxi operations. Customers can choose from a variety of trip-making options, including booking trips through the Mobility Plus dispatch office for door-to-door service, catching a bus on one of the Mobility Plus fixed routes, or booking directly with Mobility Plus contractors for Scrip Ride service using special discounted coupons.

Since June 2004, Mobility Plus riders have also been able to book their rides on-line, via YRT's website. Riders use their registration number and complete requested fields to book a ride. An e-mail confirming receipt of the trip request is sent to the rider.

As noted, the purpose of this follow-up study is to develop an action plan to implement the three main guiding principles set out in the Mobility Plus Five-Year Service Plan:

- **Universal access** including an accessible infrastructure.
- **Flexible mobility options** with a cost-effective mix of accessible shared-ride, public transportation services.
- **Maximize the utility and investment** in accessible conventional transit (mobility management strategies) to encourage a shift from specialized to accessible conventional public transit.

In order to implement an effective plan for Mobility Plus service, YRT needs to develop a corporate and community culture that recognizes and supports the strategic, social and economic benefits of the plan. This includes the acceptance and support by both the Region and Mobility Plus customers.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

In July 2003, ENTRA Consultants were hired to assist YRT staff in developing options for a number of specific service delivery issues including:

- Integration with accessible conventional transit services
- Free fare pilot project
- Cross-boundary service into Toronto
- Direct service to selected subway stations
- New Community Bus routes
- Community partnership initiatives

4.1 Integration with Conventional Transit Services

Mobility Plus customer access to accessible conventional YRT services will become easier as YRT moves towards full accessibility with low-floor wheelchair accessible buses and accessible on-street infrastructure. While 60% of the conventional fleet is currently wheelchair accessible, it is anticipated that a fully accessible fleet will be in place by 2011. In addition, with the introduction of fully accessible bus rapid transit services in late 2005, York Region will be able to further promote full accessibility within its main transit corridors.

The implementation initiative identifies specific strategies to increase accessible conventional transit use. This action plan includes:

1. Travel training
2. Accessible fleet deployment options
3. Free fare pilot project and associated marketing activities

YRT staff will implement a travel training program for targeted riders, (seniors, Mobility Plus registrants, etc.) to encourage them to use Community Bus routes or shift from Mobility Plus to accessible conventional services. To establish accessible transit corridors throughout the Region, YRT staff will carry out a study of peak and off-peak ridership on designated routes then pool the low-floor fleet buses on specific routes in order to meet demand.

In order to encourage Mobility Plus registrants to voluntarily use conventional transit (possibly for some of their trips, some of the time), YRT proposes to provide free use of accessible conventional transit services for a select group of Mobility Plus registrants for a one year pilot period. A process is being recommended for rider selection, monitoring trip making patterns, financial impact and qualitative review of the travel experience. YRT will assess the effectiveness of the program on a quarterly basis with a final review following one year.

YRT staff recommend implementing a travel training program, an accessible fleet deployment program and a free fare pilot for a period of one year, as proposed in the ENTRA report.

4.2 Cross Boundary Service to Toronto

Currently, within the Region (specifically the City of Vaughan) Mobility Plus cross-boundary service is provided into Toronto (Highway 401 to the south, Yonge Street to the east, and the Peel boundary on the west) on a single fare and without transfers. This situation is a continuation of a policy that existed in Vaughan prior to Regional transit amalgamation. Mobility Plus registrants from other parts of the Region cannot avail themselves of this service. The consultant's report outlines options which would provide for more equitable service delivery for all Mobility Plus customers taking into consideration customer demand, budget and service implications.

The options range from the provision of cross-boundary service for all Mobility Plus customers (similar to what Vaughan residents receive now), cross-boundary service for only selected Toronto destinations and finally, the provision of Mobility Plus service only to the Steeles Avenue boundary, where all customers would transfer to TTC Wheel-Trans services.

Discussions have been held with the Region's Accessibility Advisory Committee regarding the cross boundary issue. Comments indicated that the issue of "grandfathering" existing Mobility Plus riders just in the Vaughan area would cause an inequality across the Region. It was agreed that resources should go initially toward meeting trip requests within the Region but concern was also expressed regarding the possible removal of service from existing Vaughan users. It was felt there was a need to find a compromise, possibly through the provision of service to selected locations (i.e. hospitals/accessible subway stations).

Based on the options outlined in the ENTRA report and the above noted discussions, YRT staff recommend a one year trial project where all Mobility Plus registrants are offered cross-boundary service to selected Toronto destinations (with the southerly boundary being Highway 401). No additional fare would be required within the Toronto area. The selected destinations would include hospital and medical facilities, social service agencies, and major educational facilities. It should also be noted that it is estimated that the selected locations would encompass 60% of the current trip demand within Vaughan. A more comprehensive list of suggested destinations is found in *Attachment 1*. They are also shown on the map in *Attachment 2*.

4.3 Service in the Bathurst Corridor

York Region's First Annual Accessibility Plan identified the lack of coordinated transportation among health and social service agencies, and York Region Transit as a barrier to be addressed. The report indicated that barriers could be removed or minimized with improved access to inter-regional travel to Toronto and improved coordination of transportation to various programs offered by these agencies. The report suggests York

Region work with the TTC Wheel-Trans to implement a pilot project in the Bathurst Street corridor.

To address this, YRT would introduce, on a trial basis, a flexible-fixed route service operating on an hourly schedule. The service could initially extend from the Baycrest Hospital Complex in the south, to Promenade Mall in the north.

It is the recommendation of YRT staff that a trial project be implemented to coordinate services with TTC Wheel-Trans in the Bathurst corridor for Mobility Plus and Wheel-Trans riders travelling within the corridor.

4.4 Direct Service to Selected Subway Stations

A detailed analysis of selected TTC subway facilities has been completed to determine which facilities are accessible and therefore candidates for Mobility Plus service. As a result, it is recommended that Finch, Don Mills, and Downsview stations be identified as destinations for cross boundary trips originating in York Region. As with YRT's conventional service, service to subway stations will not require an additional fare. In addition to improved subway access for all Mobility Plus registrants, the existing cross boundary transfer points with TTC Wheel-Trans will be maintained along Steeles Avenue.

It is the recommendation of YRT staff that service be provided to Finch, Don Mills, and Downsview stations for improved access into Toronto for all Mobility Plus registrants.

4.5 New Community Bus Routes

Community Bus routes are an important component of the YRT Mobility Plus service and are primarily designed to serve the needs of seniors and persons with disabilities. They are characterized by the use of low floor, door-to-door accessible buses, operating on a fixed route, serving popular senior's residences, medical facilities, social service and commercial destinations. The service is available for both conventional and specialized transit riders.

Currently, YRT Mobility Plus operates a Community Bus route only in the Richmond Hill area. It is successful and well used by both Mobility Plus registrants and the general public. There are other fixed route services in Markham and Newmarket that would benefit if converted to Community Bus route operation. The ENTRA report outlines possible routing options, associated costs and an implementation strategy.

YRT staff recommends Newmarket, Maple, and Markham as possible areas for the introduction of community bus routes. Specific routing and service levels are to be determined based on final staff reviews and will be reported back to Transit Committee.

4.6 Community Partnership Initiatives

The structure of Mobility Plus service is changing due to shifts in provincial policy and funding scenarios for several agencies and organizations in the Region. There is a need to develop partnerships with social service agencies, the medical community and other care

centres in order to ensure access to programs and services, and to determine future growth in demand for Mobility Plus service. The study provides YRT staff with a process which will better facilitate dialogue between service providers, agencies and persons with disabilities. In addition, the continued sharing of information will increase the potential optimization of resources to more effectively meet the needs of the residents of the Region.

YRT staff recommends establishing partnerships with key community and social service agencies, health care providers, retail and commercial outlets, and planning agencies. Additionally, YRT will develop a memorandum of understanding for each partnership. The memorandum is a written document between the partners which establishes the benefits as well as the responsibilities of each of the parties. In addition, ongoing structured meetings will be held with the partners to update them on changes to Mobility Plus service.

4.7 Relationship to Vision 2026

The implementation of a 'mobility vision' is supportive of the Vision 2026 goal to "... have effective, efficient and environmentally sensitive transportation, waste management and water systems". Vision 2026 also includes a goal statement relating to the provision of an integrated and accessible transit network. To support these goals, YRT has identified and will implement specific strategies to assist the Region in achieving a balanced transportation system. Part of this strategy includes optimal access for all residents to public transit. The recommendations of this report are consistent with the intent of the foregoing goal statements.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The various items identified in this report are expected to add approximately \$786,000 in initial annual operating costs. The following is a breakdown of estimated costs by each initiative:

- Travel training is expected to add approximately \$50,000 to the annual operating cost to cover training materials, etc. Assuming participants can use the less expensive accessible conventional service for just half their Mobility Plus rides, a total of 105 participants would be required from the active registrant base of 5,283 to recover the training cost in one year at a savings of approximately \$12. per trip.
- The proposal to provide service to all residents of the Region to specific destinations south of Steeles Avenue and north of Highway 401 in Toronto, as detailed in *Attachments 1 and 2*, will result in an estimated reduction in the cost of providing the existing Vaughan cross-boundary trips from \$435,000 to \$261,000, plus an additional cost of \$460,000 to meet estimated demand from the balance of the Region. Thus, the additional net cost to the 2005 operating budget for the cross boundary trial is \$286,000, based on an estimated 17,368 cross boundary trips being provided.

- It is anticipated that the Bathurst Street Corridor trial service will see operating costs similar to those experienced on the Community Bus services (approximately \$150,000 annually). Since there is a higher demand for service in this corridor, revenues could be higher resulting in a higher revenue/cost ratio.
- Additional costs incurred as a result of picking-up and dropping-off Mobility Plus patrons at the Finch, Don Mills and Downsview accessible subway stations is considered to be minimal and will have little impact on the overall transit budget. Upon implementation, staff will monitor financial and operating impact.
- The recommended pilot projects for new Community Bus routes will add approximately \$300,000 in annual operating costs.
- The recommendations included in the community partnership initiatives have no direct financial implications. However, depending on future relationships and potential partnerships, there may be an opportunity to pool or redirect transportation resources.

The total financial impact of the various initiatives is \$786,000 which has been included in the draft 2005 Business Plan and Budget.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The implementation of the various Mobility Plus strategies will improve transportation accessibility to all areas of the Region by:

- Providing Mobility Plus customers with easier access to accessible conventional transit services
- Introducing a one year free fare trial project to encourage Mobility Plus passengers to ride conventional transit services
- Introducing new service to selected TTC accessible subway stations
- Providing a more equitable service delivery structure for cross-boundary trips into Toronto on a trial basis
- Introducing a pilot project for coordinated services with TTC Wheel-Trans in the Bathurst corridor
- Introducing new Community Bus routes within the Region (Newmarket, Maple, and Markham)
- Improving communication between Mobility Plus and community service providers and agencies

7. CONCLUSION

The “Mobility Plus Service Implementation Initiative” will move YRT closer to achieving its goal of a mobility vision wherein seniors and persons with disabilities will have convenient access to a variety of transportation options. Fully accessible conventional transit services, along with Community Bus routes and an equitable service

structure will benefit Mobility Plus customers while maintaining cost effective service delivery.

It is recommended that the report be received and YRT staff be authorized to carry out the recommendations listed, subject to the approval of the 2005 Business Plan and Budget.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(A copy of the attachments referred to in this Clause is included with this report and is also on file in the Regional Clerk's office.)