

3

SEPTEMBER SERVICE CHANGES COMMUNICATION PLAN

The Transportation Services Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report dated August 31, 2010, from the Commissioner of Transportation Services.

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that this report be received for information.

2. PURPOSE

This report updates Regional Council on York Region Transit (YRT)/Viva's initiatives to market and communicate service changes that went into effect on September 5, 2010. It addresses schedule adjustments that were made at the beginning of September to improve on-time performance. In addition to regular seasonal changes, the service changes for September were based on recommendations from the YRT Run Time Review Committee and in response to the cancellation of GO Transit routes in York Region.

3. BACKGROUND

Over 50 service changes took effect September 5, including schedule adjustment to 13 routes identified by the YRT Run Time Review Committee and the introduction of a new service to York University, Route 22A – King City

The YRT Run Time Review Committee is a staff committee established in January 2010 to address customer concerns regarding bus arrival times. The Committee analyzed data from YRT/Viva vehicles to identify problems affecting service reliability. In September, over 50 service changes took effect and the schedules of 13 routes were adjusted to improve service.

In response to the cancellation of GO Transit's Route 64 Newmarket-York University service, Route 22/22A – King City was introduced. Combined with the existing Route 22, Route 22A operates nine southbound and nine northbound trips between the Newmarket GO Bus Terminal and York University. This route travels through King City, during non-rush hour times, when GO Train service is unavailable.

Table 1 below outlines the routes identified by the Run Time Review Committee as requiring schedule changes on September 5, 2010

Table 1
September Run Time Review Committee Service Changes

Route	Municipalities Served	Schedule Changes
Viva blue	Newmarket, Aurora, Richmond Hill, Vaughan, Markham	Weekday and weekend schedules were adjusted to better reflect travel times. Service now begins at 4:50 a.m. Two additional buses were required to provide the advertised service.
Viva blue "A"	Newmarket, Aurora, Richmond Hill, Vaughan, Markham	Due to increased ridership, service now operates 11 southbound morning rush-hour trips, and 13 northbound afternoon rush-hour trips. Three additional buses were required to provide the advertised service.
Viva pink	Richmond Hill, Markham	Weekday schedules were adjusted to better reflect travel times. Weekday service frequency was improved. One additional bus was required to provide the advertised service.
Route 1 – Highway 7	Richmond Hill, Markham	Weekday and weekend schedules were adjusted to better reflect travel times. Improved connections with Viva blue took effect at Richmond Hill Centre Terminal. One additional bus was required to provide the advertised service.
Route 5 - Clark	Richmond Hill, Vaughan	Weekday schedules were adjusted to better reflect travel times, improving on-time performance and schedule adherence.
Route 18 – Bur Oak	Markham	Weekday schedules were adjusted to better reflect travel times, improving on-time performance and schedule adherence.
Route 22 – King City	King City, Richmond Hill, Vaughan	Weekday schedules were adjusted to better reflect travel times. Morning rush hour trips were changed and improved connections with GO Train service took effect. Two additional buses were required to provide the advertised service.

Route 77 - Highway 7 - Centre	Vaughan, Richmond Hill	Weekday schedules were adjusted as a result of the new integrated service between Züm and Viva orange. One additional bus was required to provide the advertised service.
Route 86 – Weldrick/Newkirk	Richmond Hill, Vaughan	Weekday schedules were adjusted to better reflect travel times, improving on-time performance and schedule adherence. Improved connections with GO Train service took effect.
Route 90/90B - Leslie	Richmond Hill	Weekday schedules were adjusted to better reflect travel times. Five additional buses were required to provide the advertised service.
Route 98 - Yonge	Newmarket, Aurora, Richmond Hill	Weekday and weekend schedules were adjusted to better reflect travel times, improving on-time performance and schedule adherence.
Route 99 - Yonge	Richmond Hill, Markham, Vaughan	Weekday and weekend schedules were adjusted to better reflect travel times. One additional bus was required to provide the advertised service.
Route 360 – Maple Express	Vaughan	Schedules were adjusted to better reflect travel times, improving on-time performance and schedule adherence.

A Marketing and Communications Plan, which is created eight weeks in advance of any service change, outlines all initiatives to be communicated to customers before the changes take effect

For the September 5 service changes, YRT communicated that the Run Time Review Committee has again identified schedule changes, benefiting customers and improving service reliability. As well, it was communicated that customer demand is being responded to by implementing a new service to York University, Route 22/22A – King City.

4. ANALYSIS

YRT advertised the September service changes on the entire YRT/Viva fleet, at transit shelters and terminals, on yrt.ca and through community outreach programs across York Region

Councillor Memos

During the week of August 16, a memo was sent to the Mayor, Regional and local councillors and CAO in each local municipality outlining the changes happening in their respective municipality. Accompanying the memo was a copy of *MyTransit* newsletter (YRT/Viva's on-bus newsletter) and a copy of the new route to York University, Route 22/22A – King City.

MyTransit Customer Newsletter

The fall edition of *MyTransit* was available to customers the week of August 16. It was made available on all YRT/Viva vehicles, at municipal displays, at community events, in transit shelters and at transit terminals.

Highlights in the fall edition included changes implemented by the Run Time Review Committee, seasonal service changes, the addition of more Viva Blue “A” service, information on new Route 22/22A – King City, and the integrated rapid transit service between Brampton Transit’s Züm and Viva orange.

YRT/Viva website - yrt.ca

Yrt.ca is the main resource used to communicate customer information. The website features the most up-to-date schedules, customized trip plans, real-time information, transit alerts and transit news.

The September service changes were updated on yrt.ca as follows:

- July 31 - Summary of the September service changes available.
- August 13 - Trip planning options for September 5 available.
- August 23 - Printable Route Navigators (maps/schedules) available.

System Map Updates and Bus Stop Notices

Three times per year YRT updates and installs new YRT/Viva shelter and terminal maps across the system. Beginning the week of August 23, 40 YRT shelter maps, 119 Viva station maps and five terminal information centres were updated to reflect the September service changes. The displays also provide fare and customer service information.

On August 23, the September YRT/Viva folded route map (which was recently updated to comply with York Region’s accessibility plan) was distributed on all YRT/Viva vehicles and at municipal displays. Maps were also delivered to the York Region public and Catholic school boards, various Welcome Wagon centres and taken to community events.

Beginning August 23, bus stop notices were installed on all routes where significant schedule adjustments took place. The notices outlined route/schedule changes, and directed customers to yrt.ca or the Customer Service Centre for more information. More than 250 bus stop notices were placed on-street for the September 5 service changes.

High School Specials

All school specials and route diversions to high schools were reinstated for the new school year. In addition to on-street notices, YRT staff created information packages to deliver to all 46 public and Catholic York Region high schools in September.

Advertisements in Local Community Newspapers

Paid advertisements and community page advertisements were placed in the local newspapers, throughout the nine municipalities, beginning the week of August 16.

Corporate Communications

Working with Corporate Communications, YRT developed a media release and key messages to advertise the September changes. Corporate Communications concentrated on highlighting the new service to York University and the additional trips on the Viva blue "A" service.

York University

With the introduction of new Route 22/22A – King City, the fare integration between Viva orange and Brampton Transit's Züm service, and the fare integration between Viva orange and the TTC to Downsview Station, YRT staff developed an outreach program to advertise these changes to the staff and students of York University.

Communications included: posting information on yrt.ca and various York University websites, emailing the new schedule and maps to a contact list of York University students, participating in three York University registration week events, placing paid advertisements in local York Region community newspapers, and having staff on-street at select locations along the routes with fare and schedule information. Information was also posted at York University and handed out to GO Train riders who take the train to/from the school.

Special Action Plans and Community Outreach

Extra initiatives are developed to communicate service changes affecting a large quantity of customers. In the week leading up to September 5, YRT staff were visibly present on-street and at terminals handing out information regarding adjustments to schedules. Special notices were also produced and distributed at Seniors Centres in both Newmarket and Stouffville.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

YRT/Viva service change communication plans are identified and planned for in the yearly budget process.

The cost implications to implement the service changes identified in Table 1, which have all been identified as corrective measures to existing service schedules, are estimated to be three to five million dollars annualized.

Sufficient funds are available in the 2010 operating budget.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

YRT/Viva staff and customers benefited from the services changes implemented on September 5. The changes improved on-time performance and increased overall service reliability throughout York Region.

Introducing new services to major transit destinations in York Region, and addressing service reliability, shows residents and customers that their needs and concerns are being responded to.

7. CONCLUSION

The YRT/Viva Run Time Review Committee recommended that in addition to regular seasonal service changes, 13 YRT/Viva routes required changes immediately to improve overall system reliability. These changes are a good news story.

With the on-going success of Viva blue “A”, and the introduction of Route 22/22A – King City, YRT has shown its customers, contractors and local municipalities that their suggestions are being heard and their concerns are being responded to.

It is the job of the YRT/Viva Marketing team to communicate to customers how these changes will affect them. The successful, timely and accurate execution of the September communications plan ensured that riders were aware of, and had time to plan their new travel schedules. A successful communications plan has the potential to gain rider loyalty and increase overall transit ridership.

For more information on this report, please contact Christine Terin, Marketing Supervisor at Ext. 5835.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.