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YORK REGION TRANSIT TRANSIT SERVICE VIA ELLERY DRIVE, RICHMOND HILL

The Transit Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, August 26, 2004, from the Commissioner of Transportation and Works:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. The current Route 240 GO Shuttle and 440 School Special route configurations be maintained and that staff report back to Transit Committee in six months if changes to the routing are warranted.
2. York Region Transit staff review alternative routing and service options as part of the 2005 Annual Service Plan for Elgin West and Heritage Estates GO Train commuters.

2. PURPOSE

This report has been prepared in response to concerns raised by the residents of Ellery Drive, Richmond Hill, regarding the introduction of York Region Transit (YRT) Routes 240 Mill Pond GO Shuttle and 440 School Special.

3. BACKGROUND

Since the introduction of transit service on May 9, 2004, concerns have been raised by some residents on Ellery Drive. The routes in question are 240 and 440 which operate within the Elgin West and Heritage Estates subdivisions. Route 440 provides service to the local high schools, including Richmond Hill High, Alexander Mackenzie and St. Theresa. Route 240 provides commuters with direct access to the Richmond Hill GO train station. A map indicating the routing configurations and the associated schedules is appended to this report (*see Attachment 1*). Although, for the most part, residents have expressed support for public transit on Ellery Drive, some specific concerns have been raised regarding the routing configuration, bus stop spacing, service frequency, size of buses and transit operations on narrow streets.

3.1 Five-Year Service Plan

The York Region Transit Five-Year Service Plan, adopted by Regional Council in May 2002, has been designed to significantly improve levels of transit service across the entire Region. Improving service quality and quantity will result in new riders being attracted to public transit. By increasing the transit market share, residents will be provided with a more balanced transportation system and, in turn, a less congested road network. In order to reach this goal, YRT needs to improve public accessibility to its services. One key

strategy in the plan is to provide peak-hour bus connections to GO stations, timed to meet GO train services, from all significant residential areas throughout the urbanized part of the Region.

3.2 Annual Service Plan

As part of YRT's Five-Year Service Plan, an annual planning cycle and consultation approach was adopted. The annual planning cycle was based on well-defined service standards and objectives that were adopted by Regional Council. The recommended process included a needs identification stage, a ridership and financial performance review, a process for the development of draft proposals, and a stakeholder consultation process. YRT staff have followed the adopted approach, with the 2004 Annual Service Plan being the basis for 2004 planning activities and budget.

YRT conventional services consist of core routes (operating in major arterial corridors), feeder or local routes (operating in local neighbourhoods), high school specials (focusing on specific student demand), GO train shuttles, and one community bus route (operating in Richmond Hill). Each category of route serves a particular transit market and each plays an important role in the success of the overall system. Although each route is reviewed individually, YRT service planners also consider the overall system goals when evaluating service changes or improvements.

The 2004 Annual Service Plan was approved by Transit Committee and Regional Council in January 2004. The specific service objectives relating to the Richmond Hill service area are appended to this report (*see Attachment 2*).

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Route Configuration

Currently, transit service is provided approximately every 30 minutes during the weekday peak periods only. YRT operates a total of eight a.m. and eight p.m. trips. There is currently no mid-day service, nor is there service on Saturdays, Sundays or statutory holidays. In Heritage Estates, both Route 240 and 440 operate in both directions along Ellery Drive and Regent Street.

In order to achieve service coverage consistent with the objectives of the YRT service plans, the routes are designed to provide the best access for the majority of residents. Other factors, such as total trip travel time, road function and ease of operation were also taken into consideration during the service design.

Some residents along Ellery Drive have requested that service be removed and instead operate on Bathurst Street to Regent Street since they believe this routing would be more convenient to current riders and have better potential to attract new riders. YRT staff have reviewed this suggestion and have determined it would increase travel times for existing customers by approximately six minutes, resulting in the total one-direction trip time being increased to over 30 minutes. This is an especially important consideration

when GO shuttles are designed. YRT experience indicates that in order for GO shuttles to be effective and attractive, their total trip travel time should not exceed 20 minutes.

4.2 Service Level / Frequency Adjustments

Route 440 School Special is a service specifically tailored for students living in Heritage Estates and attending Richmond Hill High School, Alexander Mackenzie High School and St. Theresa Catholic High School. Students living in this area are considered to be within school board walking distance standards and therefore do not qualify for school busing. YRT operates a total of six school trips via Ellery Drive. Based on a review of May/June 2004 student ridership data, YRT will be reducing the number of school trips to a total of four effective September 2004.

Route 240 Mill Pond GO shuttle operates every 30 minutes in the peak direction only and the trips are designed to accommodate the arrival and departure times of the Richmond Hill GO train service. In the morning, YRT operates four southbound trips and in the afternoon, five northbound trips.

The current level of service accommodates students, commuters and the general public. As noted earlier, the routes currently operate only on weekdays between approximately 6:00 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. and again between 2:30 p.m. and 8:30 p.m. in the afternoon.

One early ridership survey has been conducted on the two routes in Heritage Estates since the inception of the services in May. It should be noted that, due to the expense and staff resources required, these types of detailed ridership surveys (stop specific on/off counts) would normally be conducted only once per year across the YRT system. The survey results for Routes 240 and 440 are appended to this report (*see Attachment 3*). As indicated in the survey results, the Ellery Drive/Regent Street portion of the routes is carrying on average 26 passengers per weekday, while the Ellery portion is carrying four per day.

4.3 Bus Size / Road Right-of-Way / Bus Stops

Currently, the majority of buses used for the Ellery Drive routes are of the 30-foot variety, which is the smallest size vehicle currently available in the YRT fleet. Since the routes connect with high schools and with the Richmond Hill GO train, this type of vehicle is adequate for current passenger demand. YRT staff have directed the service contractor to assign the 30-foot units whenever operationally feasible.

Ellery Drive is sufficiently wide for transit operations. However, when cars are parked along the street, a reduction in lane width does occur. YRT staff are working with the Town of Richmond Hill By-Law Enforcement Department to ensure that the Ellery Drive and Regent Street rights-of-way are maintained and accessible to all vehicles including transit buses, waste and emergency vehicles.

Some residents have suggested that YRT consider relocating and reducing the number of bus stops located along Ellery Drive. Currently there are two sets of bus stops. YRT staff have reviewed the four individual bus stop locations and have concluded that the stops

are located approximately 200 m apart which is consistent with YRT standards. Having only one set of stops would increase the walking distance for passengers; therefore, removal of one set of stops is not recommended.

4.4 Relationship to Vision 2026

Vision 2026 includes a goal statement relating to the provision of an integrated and accessible transit network. To support these goals, YRT has identified and implemented specific strategies to achieve a balanced transportation system and reduce traffic congestion. Part of this strategy includes optimal access for all residents to public transit. The recommendations of this report are consistent with the intent of these goal statements.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

According to the performance targets set out in the YRT Five-Year Service Plan, the minimum cost recovery target for local routes and GO shuttles is 25%. This cost recovery target assumes at least a one year period of operation. Following only three and one half months of operation, the total annual operating cost associated with the School Specials and Route 240 services is approximately \$104,000, with estimated revenues of \$65,000, resulting in an overall revenue/cost ratio of 63%. This cost recovery level is well within the Region's minimum standard for local YRT routes and has the potential to improve further over time. The annual cost to re-route the service off Ellery Drive and on to Bathurst Street would amount to an additional \$15,500, based on an additional 60 minutes of running time per day.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Re-routing of transit services in this area would undermine the strategic objectives for public transit services in York Region. YRT staff are of the opinion that the current routing provides the optimum service coverage and convenient access to residents in the area. Although there are some concerns regarding the specific routing, there is general support for public transit services in the Elgin West and Heritage Estates subdivisions. YRT staff will continue to review the effectiveness of the services within the context of the overall YRT network and recommend any changes in the Annual Service Planning process.

7. CONCLUSION

The introduction of public transit services to Ellery Drive followed the objectives of the York Region Transit Five-Year Service Plan. The Plan recommends a minimum one-year trial period for service in any new area in order to give the service an adequate chance to reach the performance targets. As can be seen by the data provided, YRT services in Heritage Estates, including Ellery Drive, are meeting the targets and will likely continue

to improve. YRT staff will continue to monitor the routes and fine-tune the services as deemed appropriate.

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.)