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# YORK REGION TRANSIT MOBILITY PLUS REVIEW OF DEMAND AND SERVICE IMPACTS ON THE 2004 OPERATING BUDGET

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

## 1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that this report be received for information for Committee and Council.

## 2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to advise Transit Committee and Council of the challenges facing York Region Transit (YRT) Mobility Plus staff in meeting the rapidly growing trip demand, and the associated service impacts on the 2004 operating budget.

## 3. BACKGROUND

YRT Mobility Plus is a specialized door-to-door shared ride transportation service for persons with disabilities who are unable, due to physical and functional limitations, to use accessible conventional transit services.

Effective January 1, 2001, all municipally operated specialized transit services were amalgamated into a single Regional system called YRT Mobility Plus. It was anticipated that the demand for this service would increase by approximately 30% over the next five years. This anticipated increase was attributed to a number of factors including: an aging population; changes in the delivery of health services (centralization of programs); an increase in the number of long-term care facilities; the removal of cross-boundary travel restrictions between municipalities and an increase in programming offered within the Region for seniors and persons with disabilities. It was also noted at that time, that one of the greatest challenges would be to meet this growing trip demand in a cost effective and efficient manner.

Currently, YRT Mobility Plus makes use of a variety of service delivery options including in-house bus operation (YRT drivers using specialized transit vehicles accommodating 20% of the demand), contracted bus and minvans, and taxi sedan and minivan operations (handling the remaining 80% of service demand). Customers can choose from a variety of trip-making options, including booking trips by phone or e-mail through the YRT Mobility Plus dispatch office, using fixed route Community Bus or Connector Bus services, or booking trips directly with YRT Mobility Plus contractors who provide spontaneous Scrip Ride service. (Scrip Ride service enables users to directly book taxis using pre-purchased coupons. The cost to users is 50% of the coupon book value. For example, a $60.00 coupon book costs the customer $30.00).

## 4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Trip demand is a function of the average number of trips a registrant takes as well as actual growth in the registrant base. At the conclusion of 2003, the active Mobility Plus registrant base was 5,283 customers. These are individuals who took at least one trip since December 2002. This registrant base accounted for a total of 210,866 trips in 2003, or an average of 39.9 trips per registrant annually. A review of existing registrant base trips taken to date in 2004 indicates a projected annual trip rate of 41.1 trips, an increase of 2.8%.

Trip demand is also a function of a growing registrant base. Registrants are being added to the service at a rate of over 200 per month. It does not appear that this growth rate will flow in the near future based on continued growth in the Region's population and the expansion of long term care and other facilities. Based on current new registrant usage trends (approximately 50% make immediate use of the service), it is anticipated that the active registrant base will grow by approximately 1,140 registrants by year-end, an increase of 21.5%.

The 2004 operating budget projected an increased trip demand of 15 % (243,800 rides versus 210,866 in 2003). Experience to date shows demand running approximately 9.6% above budget or 24.6% above 2003. At this rate, year-end demand for rides in 2004 will be 263,513 versus the budgeted number of 243,800; an increase of 19,713 rides, resulting in increased funding pressures.

Also impacting the operating budget is the actual cost per trip which is based on two factors: the agreed upon contracted payment rate and the length of the trip. As indicated earlier, 80% of YRT Mobility Plus service is provided by contract operators. Also, 80% of the contracted service is provided at a taxi meter payment rate. The 2004 budget was predicated on no increase to the meter rate, however, effective late fall 2003, a 20% increase in the rate was provided to all Vaughan-based contractors as part of a revision to the Vaughan Municipal Taxi Bylaw. This 20% increase was subsequently approved by Richmond Hill and Markham Councils in April, 2004. This has resulted in almost all of the contracted meter rate trips receiving a 20% increase. The overall impact is an increase of 60% to all Mobility Plus contracted trips since April. The 2004 contracted passenger trip length to date has increased over the 2003 average of 7.59 kms to 8.66 kms, an increase of 14.1%. This is a direct result of service being provided across municipal boundaries in the Region and the centralization of health care facilities.

### 4.1 Actions Taken to Minimize Costs

To address the above unanticipated cost increases, YRT Mobility Plus staff have attempted to minimize expenditures wherever possible in other areas of the operation. This includes: reassigning trips to lower cost contractors (based on payment arrangements and where mobility requirements are not compromised); improving the scheduling of shared ride trips to reduce single one-way trip costs; improved overall vehicle productivity through various scheduling improvements; increased audits of contracted trip costs; renegotiated lower fuel rates for Region-owned and operated buses, etc. However, despite these efforts, the impact of the above trip demand and cost per trip increases will result in an increased requirement for additional funding to maintain the current direction and meet all anticipated trips requests for the balance of 2004.

### 4.2 Relationship to Vision 2026

Vision 2026 stresses the requirement to respond to the needs of residents within the Region by meeting their basic needs, one of which is to ensure mobility through accessible and affordable transportation. To address this need, YRT Mobility Plus staff continue to develop operating strategies to minimize cost increases and to improve overall system productivity. Increased demand for YRT Mobility Plus service is anticipated to continue through the near future as the Region continues its growth, and develops programs supporting other Regional goals dealing with promoting wellness and supporting health care needs. To ensure a continuation of this service, every effort will be directed to maximize trip availability within available system resources in order to provide optimal access for all residents.

## 5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The impact of the 20% meter rate increase to 60% of trips since April 2004, coupled with a 14.1% increase in overall average passenger trip distance, results in increased costs of approximately $400,000. The direct impact of the demand increase of 19,713 additional rides, at an average trip cost of $17.07 to date in 2004, will add an additional $336,500. The total anticipated impact of the above changes will add approximately $736,500 in operating costs. To recover this cost increase and return to budget would result in an unaccommodated customer trip request rate of 47% for the balance of the year effective September, 2004.

The overall YRT 2004 operating budget is comprised of costs and revenues associated with both conventional and Mobility Plus operations. It is projected that the overall transit operating budget (including the Mobility Plus projected increase) will be balanced at year end due to reduced net expenditures on the conventional transit side.

## 6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

There are no direct municipal impacts associated with this report.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The 2004 Mobility Plus operating budget was predicated on a 15% increase in trip demand with no major changes to service and operating parameters. Recent analysis indicates an anticipated increase of 24.6% for year-end trip demand. Registrants continue to be added at the rate of 200 monthly, creating additional trip pressures. Average passenger trip lengths have increased by 14.1% as a result of the centralization of medical and social programming within the Region. An unanticipated 20% increase in the taxi meter payment rate will affect 60% of the overall trip costs. These factors are combining to increase year end operating expenditures by $736,500.

YRT Mobility Plus staff continue to address these increased costs through various measures as detailed earlier in this report. However, to address this overage and return to the approved operating budget would result in an unaccommodated passenger trip rate of 47% for the balance of 2004. This would particularly affect the provision of medical trips, which account for approximately 60% of all trip requests.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.