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YORK REGION TRANSIT 2005-06 MARKETING PLAN

The Transit Committee recommends:

- 1. The presentation by Nathalie Thivierge, Acting Manager, Marketing & Customer Services and Lee Jacobson, Gee Jeffery & Partners Advertising & Design, be received; and**
- 2. The following report, September 23, 2004, from the Commissioner of Transportation and Works be referred back to Staff for a report to the November 11, 2004 Transit Committee meeting to include combined marketing strategies and costs for both York Region Transit and Rapid Transit.**

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. The York Region Transit 2005-06 Marketing Plan be approved in principle.
2. The financial aspects of the plan be referred to the 2005 Business Plan and Budget process for review.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Transit Committee and Regional Council with an overview of the proposed York Region Transit 2005-06 Marketing Plan and to seek approval in principle of the plan. This new Marketing Plan will focus on education, awareness and refreshing of the York Region Transit (YRT) brand.

3. BACKGROUND

In January 2004, Gee Jeffery and Partners were retained to produce a Marketing and Communications Plan for York Region Transit. Their work included:

- An audit and assessment of the YRT brand objectively against both customer perception and best practices.
- A detailed research plan, including both qualitative and quantitative elements, designed to fill information gaps and uncover deeper insights into our customers.
- An outline of the core elements of the YRT brand which will provide the foundation for all other marketing activities, communications objectives and the key messages to ensure an optimal vehicle to convey our message.

Each stage of the process involved input from the Transit Committee, Senior Management at the Region, transit customers and non-riders.

Over the past four years, staff have introduced an exciting YRT system identity to the public. Most of the buses now have our new logo and paint scheme. Route maps, 'MY Transit' newsletters and service updates are available on the buses and YRT attends about 40 special events a year. The call centre receives an average of 500 calls daily on weekdays. The YRT web site attracts an average of over 127,000 visits a month.

The next step is to look at marketing tools and talk to the population of York Region to ensure YRT effectively communicates and promotes public transit as a convenient transportation choice for the residents of York Region. The overriding objective, of course, is to increase ridership.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

York Region's population and employment growth is one of the highest in Canada. In order for the transportation network to keep pace with this growth, public transit must become an integral element in a balanced transportation system.

At this time, approximately 8% of peak period trips within York Region are made by public transit. To encourage greater public transit use, the level of transit service must be increased along with the development of a strong, complementary strategic marketing plan communicating the benefits of transit.

The York Region Transit 2005-06 Marketing Plan is based on the foundation of a series of research studies conducted with existing riders as well as non-riders in the Region. It is written as a business plan, and focuses upon three essential target markets:

- Existing customers.
- Potential customers who we can reasonably convert to transit use.
- Key influencers (people who need to support public transit even if they themselves do not use it i.e. businesses in the Region).

Each of these groups is fundamental to the growth and development of a strong and viable public transit system. For each of the groups, strategies or activities are provided which will communicate the benefits of public transit and encourage ridership growth. The strategies will strive to put the customer first and to position York Region Transit as the transportation choice of the future.

Our marketing plan focuses on using a variety of communications channels to build familiarity, and support of YRT. These include:

- Community outreach programs.

- Customer information.
- Stakeholder activities (i.e. promotions).
- Media activities.

A key factor in the development of YRT's 2005-2006 Marketing Plan is the introduction of bus rapid transit services in September 2005. The new rapid transit services are expected to have a positive impact not only on the quality of life in the Region but also on the perception of transit services provided by the Region. The introduction of the new rapid transit service brand makes this an appropriate time for YRT to refresh its marketing approach so that together the two services communicate effectively to target customers.

YRT and YRTP staff have been working together to develop marketing activities and communication messages that are synergistic, complimentary and use the resources of both services effectively.

While the YRTP Marketing Plan is focussing on the Brand launch, the YRT Marketing Plan will concentrate on the following:

- Informing current riders of service changes and improvements by producing on-street communication material such as Route Maps, Infoposts, Shelter Maps, etc., and updating the YRT web site.
- Building awareness by organizing marketing campaigns, participating in community events and initiating educational programs for schools, riders and non-riders.
- Developing strategies to "refresh" the YRT look to maximize the effectiveness and synergy of the YRT and YRTP brand.

4.1 Relationship to Vision 2026

As a part of Vision 2026, York Region has identified the need to improve transportation opportunities for residents and businesses in the Region. YRT is crucial for sustaining the healthy and vibrant environment required to meet the needs of business and residential growth in one of Canada's fastest growing communities. Marketing strategies such as these will encourage positive community relationships and build transit ridership opportunities in York Region.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Budget estimates have been included for each strategy or activity. The estimates shown in Table 1 below are based primarily upon 'external' costs and do not include YRT staff time. Given that we are marketing a fairly new system, many of the budget estimates include start-up costs. Much of the cost will allow for the establishment of programs which will become blueprints for the future. Therefore, it is anticipated the following years may require less staff time, effort and financial resources. Also, with the anticipation of the ridership growth for both Mobility Plus and conventional transit, as

well as the new riders attracted to the rapid transit service, the Marketing and Communication budget will need to increase to be able to effectively promote new services to the population of York Region. In 2004, costs were \$700,000; projected costs for 2005 are \$975,000.

Table 1
Estimates for Marketing Programs

Programs	Cost
Brand Design Refresh (Incl. Web site)	\$300,000
Existing and new Rider Communication/Information	\$300,000
Media	\$100,000
Special Events and Promotions	\$200,000
Customer Satisfaction Survey	\$75,000
TOTAL	\$975,000

This funding proposal will be referred to the 2005 Business Plan and Budget process for review.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The York Region Transit 2004-05 Marketing Plan will assist in furthering the transportation goals of the local municipalities, particularly by increasing public transit's market share. Most of the marketing strategies will be system wide, thus their effects will be felt across the entire Region.

7. CONCLUSION

A strong and convenient public transit system, which effectively targets the needs of its customers and potential customers, is required for 2005. In addition to improving transit service coverage and frequency, it is critical that the services be effectively communicated to the public. This marketing plan will provide the tools to convince the customer, or potential customer, that they are not buying public transit, but in fact are buying convenience, making a wise environmental choice and doing so economically.

The Executive Summary of the plan is attached to this report (*see Attachment 1*) and the complete plan is available for review from the YRT offices.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachment referred to in this clause is attached to this report.)