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YORK REGION TRANSIT
OFF-SITE IMPROVEMENTS - GO RAIL STATIONS

The Transit Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, October 21, 2004, from the Commissioner of Transportation and Works:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. The final report prepared by Earth Tech Canada Inc. entitled 'Off-Site Transit Improvements at GO Rail Station Locations' labelled *Attachment* 1 be received.

2. York Region Transit staff be directed to pursue cost-sharing opportunities with both GO Transit and local municipalities where appropriate in the implementation of these improvements.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to inform Transit Committee and Regional Council of a variety of potential off-site transit improvements proposed in the vicinity of GO rail stations in order to facilitate commuter demand for quick and convenient bus-to-rail connections. The report outlines initiatives which were consistent with the Provincial government's Golden Horseshoe Transit Investment Partnership (GTIP) objectives and builds on a funding submission to the Ministry of Transportation made in 2002. As funds become available and as general road construction projects are scheduled, this report will be used as a guide to incorporate improvements that would facilitate improved transit connections and bus-to-rail integration.

3. BACKGROUND

According to the 2001 Transportation Tomorrow Survey, it is estimated that approximately 50% of York Region's commuter trips destined to Toronto's central business district use the GO rail system. York Region Transit (YRT), along with other Greater Toronto Area (GTA) transit systems, are fully integrated with the GO system in terms of fare integration for bus-to-rail connections. By providing convenient local transit connections to GO stations, overall ridership increases, thus providing both general congestion relief and, in particular, improved traffic operations in the vicinity of GO stations. In addition, the better the transit connections, the fewer the number of commuters driving to the stations, thus decreasing the need for commuter parking.

In 2003, the Ministry of Transportation confirmed GTIP funding for a bus layover facility on McCowan Road at the Centennial GO Station in Markham. This was just one of several projects in our original submission to the Ministry of Transportation (MTO). However, it was apparent that many more such improvements were needed throughout the Region, and in anticipation of future GTIP-type programs, Regional transit staff hired Earth Tech Consultants to assess and identify other off-site improvements that would facilitate inter-regional transit integration.

3.1 Current GO Rail Service and YRT Connections

Currently, GO Transit provides 25 daily train trips to and from 13 rail stations in York Region:

- Bradford Line (Rutherford, Maple, King, Aurora, Newmarket).
- Richmond Hill Line (Richmond Hill, Langstaff).
- Stouffville Line (Stouffville, Mount Joy, Markham, Centennial, Unionville, Milliken).

According to GO Transit's most recent rail survey, about 65% of riders drive to the stations, another 15% are dropped off by auto and about 9% are walk-ins. On average, about 10% of commuters use local transit to access the stations. Local transit usage varies from station to station, with the Richmond Hill station experiencing the highest local transit use at 18%, whereas both King City and Stouffville had no connections, due to the lack of local transit services. (This has recently changed with the introduction of YRT service in Stouffville as of September, 2004.)

One of the primary factors contributing to the relatively low usage of local transit to access GO stations is the overall travel time to/from the station. Although, YRT's GO shuttles are designed to provide relatively short distance/time trips, the high level of traffic congestion in and around GO stations adds to the commuter's overall travel time. As a rule, YRT designs GO shuttle routes so as not to be more than 30 minutes in length, arriving at the stations within five minutes of the train's morning departure times. Conversely, the shuttle services are timed to be waiting for passengers as they disembark from the evening trains.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The objective of this study was to focus on off-site improvement opportunities, however, improvements within the GO station sites were also considered to ensure the benefits to local transit are maximized. As part of the assessment and review of transit operations in the vicinity of GO stations, Earth Tech consulted closely with GO Transit and all the local municipalities, with several meetings held throughout the course of the study. A copy of the draft report was provided to GO and the municipalities prior to the finalization of the study.

The study was conducted in seven stages, with each successive stage building on the previous work:

1. Physical Features & Users' Profile
2. Identification & Analysis of Issues
3. Identification of Possible Improvement Options
4. Preliminary Screening of Options
5. Final Screening of Options
6. Preliminary Costing Of Options
7. Recommendation and Implementation Plan

4.1 Individual Station Review and Improvement Options

Although each station was reviewed in the context of the seven stages noted above, a number of general conclusions were made including:

- Levels of transit service feeding GO stations should be improved to maximize potential for inter-modal connections.
- Considerations should be made have YRT connections during off-peak periods where GO bus services are available.
- YRT should increase liaison with other stakeholders to maximize the effectiveness of improvement projects (e.g. Vaughan City Centre, Markham Main Street Streetscape Project, relocation of Milliken Mills GO station, etc.).
- York Region should continue to seek funding support from senior levels of government, since the improvements provide interregional benefits and contribute to broader GTA/provincial objectives.

Specific station issues relating to traffic operations, pedestrian access and amenities, safety, and general transit access were identified and rated. Improvement options were then screened according to operational and cost effectiveness. Finally, the recommended improvement options were identified, preliminary costs were developed and the solutions were noted in either a short or longer term horizon. In the final report, each station is identified and described, along with maps, site improvement schematics and charts outlining each improvement and the associated cost estimates.

It should be noted that the Langstaff, Milliken and Unionville GO stations were not considered in the context of this study due to the improvements being considered as part of either the Quick Start Rapid Transit Project or due to a proposed station relocation (eg. Milliken station moving to south side of Steeles Avenue). Both Langstaff and Unionville stations are already identified as candidates for major changes as part of Quick Start and future full-build rapid transit scenarios.

4.2 Relationship to Vision 2026

The primary objective of this study is to improve integration opportunities between local transit and the GO rail system. YRT's longer term mandate also includes a major role in contributing to an increase in the Region's morning peak-hour modal share from 8 to 12 percent during the same period.

Vision 2026 includes a goal statement relating to the development of 'Infrastructure for a Growing Region', which states:

"In 2026, York Region will have effective, efficient and environmentally sensitive transportation, waste management and water systems."

To support this goal, the Region has identified specific action areas. The following action areas have been considered for this report:

- Continuing to improve service and infrastructure for successfully integrated transit services.
- Developing an optimal mix of transit service types.
- Promoting transit usage as a practical and wise alternative to private vehicle use.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

As noted earlier, a number of improvements have been identified for each station. It is envisioned that the study will be used as a guideline document for staff reference. For example, some improvements are considered minor, are of relatively low cost and could be constructed in the very near term. An example of such an improvement would be a new pedestrian access link at the Markham station to the adjacent residential area at a cost of $5,000. Some other improvements would be considered major projects and would be considered as part of a longer term initiative. An example of a longer term improvement would be the construction of an exclusive bus-only lane with transit signal priority at the Richmond Hill station which is estimated to cost approximately $3.8 million. The total for all of the recommended improvements amounts to $5.8 million. It is recommended that all of the improvements be considered during the reconstruction or improvement of general road projects in the area, thus leveraging construction costs.

The Off-Site Transit Improvements at GO Rail Station Locations study is a broadly based review intended to identify short and longer term improvement options. While all of the improvements identified in the study merit consideration, funding for each of the improvements will be considered separately from both a cost effectiveness and funding availability perspective. Approximately $600,000 of improvements have been identified for possible implementation in the near term (next 2 years), $1.2 million in the mid term (2-5 years) and approximately $4 million in the longer term (over the next 5-10 years). In addition to the actual capital costs, further analysis will be completed to assess the potential cost savings related to each individual improvement. Each project will then be included, as deemed appropriate, in the development of future annual capital budgets beginning with the 2006 budget year.

As with the original GTIP application/program, York Region staff will continue to pursue opportunities for financial contributions from both provincial and federal programs. This study will provide York Region staff with the necessary justification and background for

future subsidy applications. In addition, there may be potential for some cost sharing with the local municipality and GO Transit. Each project will need to be reviewed individually to assess the potential for financial partnerships. YRT staff will work closely with the appropriate agencies to ensure that cost sharing opportunities are actively pursued on a project specific basis. For example, where an improvement is deemed a direct benefit to either GO Transit operations or an improvement to overall traffic/pedestrian flow in the area, GO and/or the local municipality will be requested to cost share.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

As noted, local municipalities were consulted throughout the study in order to ensure support and understanding of the proposed improvements. Each improvement will be considered individually and further consultation with both local municipalities and GO Transit will occur as each improvement is considered for implementation.

7. CONCLUSION

This study provides YRT staff with an overall summary of off-site improvements required to optimize on-road transit operations in the vicinity of GO rail stations. The study will be used as a reference document when reviewing road construction plans and during the development of annual and 10-Year Capital Works Plans. The study will also be used as a reference document for future subsidy applications to the MTO, particularly for projects relating to inter-regional transit integration.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachment referred to in this clause was included in the Agenda for the November 11, 2004 Committee meeting.)