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TRANSPORTATION MASTER PLAN PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY RESULTS

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the following:

- 1. The presentation by Loy Cheah, Manager, Transportation Planning, be received; and**
- 2. The recommendation contained in the following report dated September 25, 2008, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services and Commissioner of Transportation Services, be adopted:**

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. The Regional Clerk forward copies of this report to the Clerks of the local municipalities in York Region.

2. PURPOSE

This report informs Regional Council of the public opinion survey results obtained as part of the Transportation Master Plan (TMP) Update study.

3. BACKGROUND

A statistically valid survey of York Region residents on transportation issues and potential solutions

Based on recent public reactions to a number of on-going road-related environmental assessment studies and the type of comments received, staff felt that a better understanding of the public opinion on traffic congestion and transportation issues was needed.

Staff approved a survey that was conducted by EKOS over June and July 2008. The survey is statistically valid for each of the southern local municipalities (Vaughan, Richmond Hill and Markham individually) and for the rest of York Region as a whole (the remaining six municipalities together).

The data is statistically significant $\pm 3.1\%$ for Region-wide data and $\pm 6.2\%$ for each of the four areas of the Region.

Information to be used as an input to the TMP Update to develop plans and policies to better address the Region's transportation needs

The information collected would greatly assist staff and the consultant team in formulating better solutions to meet the needs of our residents and to address the demands of growth.

A copy of the survey final report is attached (*Council Attachment 1*).

The study methodology and key reporting conventions are further explained in the attached report including the sampling framework and interview quotas achieved to ensure proportionate representation within the universe population in the Region.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS

Survey participants reflect a balanced profile of York Region residents and most of those surveyed believe the Region is moving in the right direction

The telephone survey was administered to 1,011 randomly selected residents of York Region who are at least 18 years old. The demographic profile of each participant was determined as part of the survey. The profiles reflect a balanced cross-sectional representation of York Region residents with the following participant characteristics:

- Age: 25% were less than 34 years old and 28% greater than 55 years old
- Annual household income: 14% earning greater than \$150,000 and 10% earning less than \$40,000
- Employment status: 49% worked full-time
- National origin: all ethnic groups are represented
- Residency: 40% have lived in York Region less than 10 years while 33% have lived in York Region for over 20 years

When asked for their opinion of the direction in which York Region is moving, almost 70% of the residents say the Region is moving in the right direction. Less than one in five think the Region is moving in the wrong direction and an equal number "don't know".

Markham residents are slightly more positive than residents of other municipalities with 73% indicating that York Region is headed in the right direction. Younger residents are more likely to think the Region is headed in the right direction while those who have lived in the Region for more than 10 years are less positive than new residents.

Transportation related issues were identified as the most important issues facing the Region

In an open-ended question, residents were asked to consider what they felt was the most important issue currently facing York Region. Transportation related issues stood out. Three of the top five issues mentioned directly related to transportation. Figure 1.2 on page 10 of *Attachment 1* summarizes where the transportation related issues fit relative to other issues identified by all York Region residents.

Table 1.2a on page 10 of *Attachment 1* provides a breakdown of the identified issues by local municipality. Markham residents are more likely than those from other municipalities to mention the transportation system in general.

Residents were also asked for their opinions on transportation issues and traffic congestion. Key findings include:

- Public transit accessibility and service was identified as the most important issue relating to transportation
- About 95% of residents consider traffic congestion to be somewhat or very serious in the Region
- About six in ten residents think the Region's major roads and highways are in good condition
- About half of residents think that York Region has done a good job in managing transportation in the face of growth

When faced with two options to address traffic congestion, more people favoured improving public transit over improving road capacity

Given only two choices, a slight majority of residents thinks that improving public transit should be the primary strategy in reducing traffic congestion versus improving road capacity for more cars. About 54% favour a public transit solution while 42% feel that improving road capacity is the way to go and 4% "don't know". The support for finding a solution through public transit is strongest in Markham and Richmond Hill, while Vaughan residents show a slight majority favouring a road capacity solution.

Building subways, improving transit, and widening major roads were considered the top three most effective strategies for reducing traffic congestion

In order to get greater resolution on what York Region residents think can address traffic congestion, respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which they were in favour or against 16 difference strategies and measures. As well, residents were asked what they thought would be the single most effective way of reducing traffic congestion. Some key findings include:

- Most residents preferred higher order transit to deal with traffic congestion

- Most residents are opposed to tolls or user pay methods
- Building subways and improving public transit services ranks as the top two strategies
- Widening major roads and building more roads and highways were also favoured as an effective way of reducing traffic congestion

Figure 3.4 on page 36 of *Attachment 1* provides the top 10 strategies and measures that residents thought would be the single most effective way in reducing traffic congestion.

INITIAL SURVEY RESULTS IMPACT ON TMP UPDATE STUDY

Validates “transit-first” approach to transportation network planning

The Region’s 2002 Transportation Master Plan (TMP) recommended initiatives that put transit and sustainable transportation elements in the forefront. The recommended initiatives included a transit priority network, rapid transit corridors, and pedestrian and cycling master planning which have come to fruition with the Viva bus system and the Region’s award winning Pedestrian and Cycling Master Plan.

In the current update to the TMP, transit network elements will be considered a priority in addressing sustainability and future transportation needs in the Region over road network elements. The results of the public opinion survey validates this “transit-first” approach.

Validates need to continue expansion of road network for economic vitality of York Region

Although transit strategies were favoured by a large number of residents, widening major roads and building more roads and highways were also thought to be effective strategies to address traffic congestion by a significant proportion of residents. Such opinions suggest that there is strong support for continued road network improvements needed to help enhance the economic vitality of the Region.

Importance of transportation issues prompts expansion of final round of public consultation centres planned in the Fall of 2008

The TMP Update study’s consultation process has already completed two rounds of Public Consultation Centres (PCCs) and is scheduled for a third round in Fall 2008. The third round of PCCs is to be held in the local municipalities of Newmarket, Richmond Hill, and Whitchurch-Stouffville, while the previous rounds were held in the other 6 local municipalities. In this way, all nine local municipalities within the Region would have been covered in the consultation process.

However, the importance of transportation issues among York Region residents has prompted an expansion of the third and final round of PCCs to more than 3 locations. It is anticipated that the expanded last round of PCCs will be held in Newmarket, Richmond Hill, Whitchurch-Stouffville, Markham and Vaughan.

Staff will also consider holding PCCs in other local municipalities if requested.

As part of the York Region Transit (YRT) annual service planning, a survey of transit users is conducted. For the 2009 Service Plan, PLAN09, approximately 600 respondents were polled. Seventy percent of the respondents indicated that more service (coverage, frequency and service span) would increase their use of the system. Another 21% indicated improved schedule adherence would increase their use, while 11% indicated improved pedestrian connections as the critical factor in their transit use decision making. These results will be reported at the October 16th Transit Committee.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

This public opinion survey was not part of the original scope of work for the TMP Update. However, as the study progressed and transportation issues became more prominent, it was deemed necessary. The total cost of the survey is approximately \$40,000. The budget requirement is the subject of another report in this agenda of Committee, which also examines several other cost increases in the study.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Differences in resident opinion between urban municipalities in York Region

The public opinion survey obtained statistically significant samples stratified in four areas: Markham, Richmond Hill, Vaughan, and the six remaining municipalities in the Region together. This sampling framework was designed to allow for separate analysis of each of the four areas as well as comparisons between them.

As noted in Section 4, the initial analysis of data collected indicate some differences in opinion between the various local municipalities as it pertains to transportation issues.

Understanding the difference of opinions between residents of various local municipalities provides better input for staff to accommodate the transportation needs of its residents.

Markham and Richmond Hill residents attach highest importance and most supportive of more transit

The support for finding a solution through public transit is strongest in Markham and Richmond Hill, where about six in ten respondents favour a public transit solution compared to five in ten in the “other municipalities” and only about four in ten in Vaughan.

Vaughan residents show highest support for more road capacity

Vaughan residents were distinct from others in the Region in a number of ways. Respondents there were more likely than others to choose a subway and less likely to choose a light rail solution. They were also more likely than those in other areas to favour widening roads to increase road capacity. When faced with only two options, improving public transit versus improving road capacity, Vaughan was the only area where a majority favour a road capacity solution (52%).

7. CONCLUSION

Highlights of a statistically significant public opinion survey conducted as part of the Transportation Master Plan (TMP) Update are presented. Results of the survey provide input for developing plans and policies to address the Region’s future transportation needs. The survey also provides a better understanding of residents’ opinions in various local municipalities regarding public transit and road improvement strategies.

These results are consistent with the survey conducted for PLAN09 and will be reported to Transit Committee on October 16, 2008.

The survey validates the Region’s “transit-first” approach to network planning and indicates that some road network improvements are still supported in addressing traffic congestion and maintaining economic vitality. The importance that residents attach to transportation issues has prompted staff to expand the final round of Public Consultation Centres to more local municipalities in Fall 2008.

For more information on this report, please contact Richard Hui, Program Manager in Transportation Planning, at 905-830-4444, Ext. 1578, or Loy Cheah, Manager, Transportation Planning at Ext. 5024.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachment referred to in this clause is enclosed separately with this report.)